

An Interview with Dick Bennett

Canby, OR

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**0:00:05.2 James Wall:** Could you tell me when and where you were born?

**0:00:07.0 Dick Bennett:** I was born on July 30th, 1933, in Seattle at the height of the Depression.

**0:00:12.6 James Wall:** Wow, a perfect time to enter the world.

**0:00:16.7 Dick Bennett:** But fortunately, my father was an executive with the power company, and so he was really not affected that much by the Depression.

**0:00:29.8 James Wall:** I guess people will always need power.

**0:00:31.1 Dick Bennett:** Right. Right.

**0:00:33.4 James Wall:** What was his name?

**0:00:34.5 Dick Bennett:** Oscar William Bennett.

**0:00:37.1 James Wall:** Oscar William Bennett. And your mother?

**0:00:40.2 Dick Bennett:** She was Anna Shay Johnson Bennett.

**0:00:43.2 James Wall:** And so, growing up in the Depression in Seattle and then World War II and all that, you were a bit insulated from it, but did you see how it affected the city and people?

**0:00:56.2 Dick Bennett:** Yes, I remember the people coming around begging for handouts, you know, for food. But there were no tent cities like we have now. And I can remember during the war, the blackouts, when we had put blackout curtains on our windows, and we had blackout drills where everybody in the whole city of Seattle had to turn their lights out.

**0:01:29.2 James Wall:** Wow. Yeah. Yeah, because Seattle was always kind of one of those cities where if the Japanese were going to attack, then they would probably do it there or LA or places like that. There were even ideas that they might set fire to national forests for a while. So that was interesting.

**0:01:48.1 Dick Bennett:** And we never went anywhere because gasoline was rationed, and my dad took the bus to work downtown and...

**0:02:00.9 James Wall:** So, your dad was in business, so he was probably very business-minded.

**0:02:04.5 Dick Bennett:** Yes.

**0:02:07.0 James Wall:** And then you became a man of business as well?

**0:02:08.3 Dick Bennett:** Right.

**0:02:09.6 James Wall:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**0:02:11.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, I had two older sisters and one younger sister. There was a 21-year difference between my oldest and my youngest sister. My mother was the president of the sorority mothers' club when she was pregnant with my youngest sister.

**0:02:34.3 James Wall:** So, she was a bit of a socialite, you would say?

**0:02:37.7 Dick Bennett:** Yes. Yeah, yeah.

**0:02:39.2 James Wall:** Did she have what my dad would call "the gift of gab?"

**0:02:42.4 Dick Bennett:** Yes. Yeah.

**0:02:44.5 James Wall:** So, she was a socialite, was your dad a bit more reserved? That makes sense. That's usually how it goes.

**0:02:51.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:02:55.0 James Wall:** Now, Seattle is of course deep within the Pacific Northwest, but did you know anything about the Forest Service when you were growing up?

**0:03:04.8 Dick Bennett:** No. Not in Seattle. My dad died when I was 11 and we moved down to Southern California so my mother could be close to her sister who lived in Pasadena. And she bought a house in Pasadena and that's where I spent my high school years. And I can remember Pasadena is right at the foot of the mountains of Angeles National Forest and I used to go up there and go hiking all the time. And I got to know Forest Service lands that way.

**0:03:41.9 James Wall:** Yeah, well that house she bought in Pasadena would be a pretty good investment today, probably.

**0:03:46.3 Dick Bennett:** Yes, yes.

**0:03:48.2 James Wall:** Now what was Pasadena and Los Angeles like at that time? Must have been a much different city.

**0:03:55.0 Dick Bennett:** Yes, it was. Yeah, it was very laid-back and...

**0:04:00.9 James Wall:** I remember there were...

**0:04:01.0 Dick Bennett:** There was lots of orange groves all around. We'd drive down to Knott's Berry Farm and you'd drive through miles and miles and miles of orange groves. [chuckle]

**0:04:10.9 James Wall:** Wow. That's not too far from Richard Nixon country.

**0:04:15.1 Dick Bennett:** Right.

**0:04:16.2 James Wall:** I think his family owned a lemon farm somewhere around there. Yeah. And also, it was a much more industrial city than it is now. I mean there used to be a big GM [General Motors] factory in LA and it was a bit more working class, I think. So how did you get from

Pasadena, you know, Los Angeles, Southern California to even sort of knowing about forestry? When was the first time you learned about the Forest Service as an option?

**0:04:50.6 Dick Bennett:** It wasn't until I was in college in Sacramento, and I was getting ready to graduate. I didn't really know what... I was getting a degree in business. I didn't know who I wanted to work for. I was thinking about the state of California, they were hiring. But there was a federal program also that they were hiring business management people. And I applied and went to San Francisco and got interviewed and they hired me as a business management trainee.

**0:05:27.0 James Wall:** Wow.

**0:05:30.9 Dick Bennett:** But that was really the only thing... That was my going to work as a trainee. That was the first time I really got to know the Forest Service.

**0:05:41.0 James Wall:** This is fun because you're different than most of the foresters.

**0:05:44.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**0:05:45.7 James Wall:** You know that a lot of them, either their parents were foresters and... Or they grew up and they always wanted to be a district ranger. They knew it really early and then there's like, you know, you went into the Forest Service as a job out of college. At the time, was there an option that you might go into private industry and... Or were you always looking to sort of be a public servant?

**0:06:16.1 Dick Bennett:** I was always interested in being a public servant.

**0:06:19.7 James Wall:** And when was this that you graduated from Sacramento State?

**0:06:23.2 Dick Bennett:** It was 1963.

**0:06:26.5 James Wall:** So yeah, right in the idealistic JFK, LBJ, "New Frontier," "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," time?

**0:06:38.8 Dick Bennett:** Yep.

**0:06:40.5 James Wall:** Was that part of the... I know a lot of people went into public service in those years because it was the spirit of the time. Was that part of it for you?

**0:06:51.2 Dick Bennett:** A little bit, but not much. I was very interested in the security. Knowing a government job, you know, you would have protection of the Civil Service Commission and they couldn't just turn around and fire you anytime they wanted to. And they had a good retirement.

**0:07:17.4 James Wall:** So, I can confirm that it is very hard to get fired from the Forest Service. You can get punished and torpedoed, and you can get stuck on an assignment, but it's very hard to get fired, which is always kind of interesting. So you went to San Francisco, you interviewed and then you got the job? And what was your first listing?

**0:07:42.9 Dick Bennett:** It was a trainee on the Klamath National Forest. And I spent time with the

various business sections, personnel and purchasing and budget and accounting. And that's what my first year was.

**0:08:04.5 James Wall:** So, they didn't make you go mark timber or be a hotshot for a summer or anything like that?

**0:08:10.3 Dick Bennett:** No. I did I spent a year following a ranger around in one of the ranger districts so I could get a little bit. And I had some training in fire, you know, basics of fire control.

**0:08:27.2 James Wall:** So that first year, first couple of years, you know, were you sold on the idea of the Forest Service as a place that you were going to be for a long time? Or were you feeling it out?

**0:08:43.3 Dick Bennett:** I really liked it to begin with. But there were some places that I could have gone to in California that I wouldn't have been very happy in. And so when it got time for me to get a permanent assignment, I had my fingers crossed that I'd be going someplace that I really liked. Because some of the forests, like Los Angeles, I didn't want to go to the Angeles National Forest or the Los Padres or even the Southern California forest.

**0:09:28.2 James Wall:** Now was that the landscape or were people... Was there a rumor mill about, "Oh, you don't want to go to that forest. That's a real... "

**0:09:36.8 Dick Bennett:** No, no. It's just that I didn't particularly like... I had lived in Southern California. I didn't want to go back.

**0:09:41.0 James Wall:** Too sunny.

**0:09:44.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Yeah. Too many people. I liked the idea of living in a small town.

**0:09:51.8 James Wall:** Yeah. Yeah. And so the... When you were on the Klamath, that was your first job, where was the town that you were living in, or stationed in?

**0:10:00.4 Dick Bennett:** Yreka.

**0:10:00.6 James Wall:** Yreka?

**0:10:01.6 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, it's just south of the Oregon border.

**0:10:03.4 James Wall:** I see. And what type of town was that? What do you remember about it when you first ended up there?

**0:10:08.3 Dick Bennett:** We had a little apartment, a four-plex. And I remember my oldest son started kindergarten there.

**0:10:20.1 James Wall:** Oh, so you had already met your wife?

**0:10:22.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:10:23.0 James Wall:** What was your wife's name?

**0:10:24.5 Dick Bennett:** Myra.

**0:10:25.7 James Wall:** Myra. So you had already met Myra and you were married and you already had a kid on the way?

**0:10:30.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Well, we had... Actually, I met her when I was going to school in Pasadena. And we got married there and lived in Southern California for a couple of years after I got married and I worked in a factory in production control...

**0:10:50.7 James Wall:** What type of factory?

**0:10:52.2 Dick Bennett:** They made industrial tie-down equipment.

[laughter]

**0:10:57.1 James Wall:** And so that didn't do it for you, huh?

**0:10:58.7 Dick Bennett:** No.

**0:10:58.9 James Wall:** That didn't get your motor going?

**0:11:01.3 Dick Bennett:** Well, they closed the plant. They had a big consolidation, and they were moving their operations back to Ohio, where the company had its headquarters. And they didn't offer me a job there [chuckle]. They just laid me off. And I thought, "Well, you know, I've got to do something."

**0:11:19.9 James Wall:** It's interesting. Would you have taken the job if they offered it to you to move?

**0:11:26.4 Dick Bennett:** Well, probably.

**0:11:28.2 James Wall:** That's weird. And then maybe you might not have gotten into the Forest Service. It's always funny, the little twists and turns.

**0:11:33.3 Dick Bennett:** But we looked around at various colleges in California. I didn't want to go to Berkeley. And my grades were not really that good to get into the universities. But I could qualify to go to the colleges. In Sacramento State, there was a housing complex that the rent was based on your income. And I was living off the GI Bill with two kids, a wife and two kids.

**0:12:15.3 James Wall:** You already had two kids?

**0:12:16.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:12:16.2 James Wall:** How old were you when you had your first kid, your first child?

**0:12:21.6 Dick Bennett:** Oh, I was 25, I think.

**0:12:28.4 James Wall:** Oh, wow. So, by the time you entered the Forest Service, you were a full-blown family man?

**0:12:32.5 Dick Bennett:** Oh, yes. Yeah.

**0:12:35.2 James Wall:** Well, it must have been nice then to settle into a district and know that you were on the way to getting your years in and up.

**0:12:42.6 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. I guess by having a family, that was why I was looking at the security.

**0:12:48.0 James Wall:** Yeah, of course, of course. And what did Myra know about the Forest Service? What was her opinion on you getting into that field?

**0:12:57.6 Dick Bennett:** Well, she loved camping. We used to... Camped on Forest Service campgrounds for years after we got married. That was our recreation because we couldn't afford much of anything else. [chuckle] We had a tent.

**0:13:15.4 James Wall:** It's always a good value to camp on national forest land. And then you could tell you got the employee discount at that point.

**0:13:22.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:13:25.5 James Wall:** So, you're on the Oregon-California border, and you're on the Klamath. But I imagine you're working in the office, right?

**0:13:34.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:13:37.4 James Wall:** Pretty much was that the case throughout most of your career?

**0:13:39.4 Dick Bennett:** Yep.

**0:13:42.8 James Wall:** And what did they start you out doing on a day-to-day basis? What was an average day as a introductory Business Administration Forest Service employee?

**0:13:54.7 Dick Bennett:** Just go to one of the sections and talk to the section head. And then generally they would have some task that you could do that would be a little bit productive.

**0:14:12.3 James Wall:** So, do you remember your first boss?

**0:14:15.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Angelo Lavenino.

**0:14:19.4 James Wall:** Angelo Lavenino.

**0:14:20.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:14:23.5 James Wall:** Wow, I don't even know if I could spell that. So, he was Italian, I'm

assuming.

**0:14:29.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:14:29.7 James Wall:** Of Italian extraction.

**0:14:33.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:14:34.3 James Wall:** And was he a taskmaster or was he a good guy?

**0:14:38.2 Dick Bennett:** He was a pretty good guy, yeah.

**0:14:43.7 James Wall:** And so at that point did... Was there a part of the country you thought would be great to work in or was Northern California a really great place to be?

**0:14:55.6 Dick Bennett:** Northern California is where I wanted to work.

**0:14:57.5 James Wall:** Yeah. And here you are in Oregon, so there must be a story there. Deep in Region 6 now. So how long were you on the Klamath?

**0:15:07.2 Dick Bennett:** For a year.

**0:15:08.5 James Wall:** Oh, just a year. And where did they shuffle you around to after that?

**0:15:11.4 Dick Bennett:** Then I met my first really permanent assignment on Stanislaus [National Forest], which was Sonora, which is in the foothills of the Sierras.

**0:15:26.6 James Wall:** Wow.

**0:15:26.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:15:31.1 James Wall:** So how far away is that for the non-Californians, from where you live?

**0:15:37.9 Dick Bennett:** It's about forty miles north of Yosemite National Park.

**0:15:43.1 James Wall:** Wow, a real pretty, real pretty country. Wow, so you're forty miles from Yosemite.

**0:15:50.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, we used to go there quite often.

**0:15:54.5 James Wall:** Yeah, I'd be there as much as I could. So that was your first permanent assignment. It was on the Stanislaus.

**0:16:01.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. And I was the Budget and Finance Officer.

**0:16:01.7 James Wall:** Oh, okay. So, people were either happy with you or unhappy with you, probably, depending on what you told them they could do.

**0:16:10.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**0:16:12.4 James Wall:** Now the Stanislaus, was that a big timber forest? What was the type of budget there?

**0:16:21.4 Dick Bennett:** It had a decent timber program, yeah.

**0:16:24.4 James Wall:** And so, you were in charge of sort of managing the budget and making sure that it was all in good shape.

**0:16:30.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:16:31.7 James Wall:** So, what was the hardest part of that job? Who was the person you least wanted to see walk into your office?

**0:16:41.8 Dick Bennett:** [chuckle] The forest supervisor, he was a real stickler for wearing uniforms and being full uniform.

**0:16:50.4 James Wall:** Oh, really? What was his name?

**0:17:00.1 Dick Bennett:** God, you know, I remember the supervisor on the Klamath, but I can't remember right off hand. I can't remember the one on the Stanislaus.

**0:17:13.2 James Wall:** We can look him up. But he sounds like a typical forest supervisor of the era.

**0:17:21.6 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, yeah.

**0:17:22.0 James Wall:** Now, when you say full uniform, for you to come into the office, he wanted you to wear the full Forest Service getup, or did he just mean like a suit and tie?

**0:17:35.4 Dick Bennett:** A Forest Service shirt with a tie and an Eisenhower jacket and...

**0:17:44.3 James Wall:** Name tag and everything?

**0:17:44.3 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Yeah.

**0:17:45.5 James Wall:** Wow, so he was a bit of a taskmaster?

**0:17:49.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:17:49.2 James Wall:** Wow. But for the most part, did you run your own ship? You had your own sort of...

**0:17:53.3 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, I had clerks working for me to do the payments and the payroll and all that.

**0:18:07.4 James Wall:** Wow. And what's the family thinking of the first move? Did they think this

is going to be the norm? Did you think it was going to be the norm moving around? Did you know about all the moving?

**0:18:19.3 Dick Bennett:** Well, I told her that we probably would move around quite a bit. I told her that Yreka was just a temporary, but that we could stay in Sonora for longer.

**0:18:32.0 James Wall:** Was there anywhere that Myra said, "I'm not going to move there. Under no circumstances will you move me to...?"

**0:18:39.6 Dick Bennett:** Fresno. [chuckle] She wouldn't move to Fresno.

**0:18:42.4 James Wall:** Fresno. Well, who could blame her? I don't think anybody's ever wanted to move to Fresno or Carson City or something.

**0:18:51.1 Dick Bennett:** That's the Sierra, Sierra National Forest.

**0:18:54.6 James Wall:** Yeah. Well, that's good that you didn't get stuck there. And so how long were you on the Stanislaus?

**0:19:03.2 Dick Bennett:** I was there four years.

**0:19:07.9 James Wall:** All right. So a decent stint. Now, did they explain to you when you started out how often you were going to be moving, or did they just sort of shuffle...

**0:19:16.0 Dick Bennett:** No.

**0:19:16.1 James Wall:** Tell you when it was time to move? And for business administration...

**0:19:21.1 Dick Bennett:** Generally, you could stay pretty much as long as you wanted.

**0:19:23.4 James Wall:** So, it wasn't like being a ranger, trying to become a ranger, where you got to move around or else you get stuck?

**0:19:29.6 Dick Bennett:** No.

**0:19:32.4 James Wall:** Oh, okay. So, what was it that sent you on your next move after those four years?

**0:19:39.0 Dick Bennett:** Sort of wanderlust, wanting to go someplace that I've never been before.

**0:19:44.9 James Wall:** And so where did that take you?

**0:19:47.2 Dick Bennett:** I put in for a job in the Washington office.

**0:19:54.8 James Wall:** Oh, DC, right. This is one of your first two DC Stints, you had said?

**0:20:04.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. We talked it over with my wife, and she said, "Well, I've always wanted to go back east. Well, neither one of us had ever been to the East Coast. Even in my Navy

career, I'd spent it all in the Pacific and West Coast and Alaska.

**0:20:23.8 James Wall:** Yeah, clearly you had not spent too much time in Washington, DC if you wanted to go move there. I don't think that's usually the case. When people get sent to DC, it's like, "Oh no. Well, let's get through it." So what year was this that you went to DC, ballpark?

**0:20:42.3 Dick Bennett:** I ran their Payments Office in the Washington office.

**0:20:50.8 James Wall:** Wow. And what part of DC Did you live in?

**0:20:53.9 Dick Bennett:** Actually, we lived in Fairfax, Virginia.

**0:20:55.4 James Wall:** Really?

**0:20:57.8 Dick Bennett:** And our office was in a leased office space in Arlington, Virginia. So I was...

**0:21:08.1 James Wall:** So, you didn't have to mess with the DC Transit system or the roads.

**0:21:14.8 Dick Bennett:** No, no.

**0:21:15.2 James Wall:** Oh, well, no wonder you had a better experience than most, because usually it's the commute that kills everybody there because that city doesn't make any sense transit-wise, and still doesn't. So, you're in Fairfax, you got a decent commute to Alexandria.

**0:21:30.0 Dick Bennett:** And we deliberately decided we would live in an apartment, so that we would have plenty of time to take the kids, because our boys were like eight, nine, something like that. So, we could take them to all the historical places, the museums, and all the touristy-type things. And we would have plenty of time on weekends to do this.

**0:22:00.8 James Wall:** Well, that would have been it for me. I would have loved to do that.

**0:22:02.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. And we did.

**0:22:03.7 James Wall:** What was your favorite museum and tourist spot in DC?

**0:22:23.0 Dick Bennett:** We loved all the Smithsonian museums, but we loved Monticello, Jefferson's place.

**0:22:33.4 James Wall:** It's a good spot. A lot of work went into that spot. I don't think he ever finished it. He was always working on it.

**0:22:45.1 Dick Bennett:** And Gettysburg.

**0:22:46.7 James Wall:** Yeah, Gettysburg's not too far away. So, you had an appreciation for history.

**0:22:52.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:22:55.5 James Wall:** Growing up. Now, your kids, though, were they as history-focused?

**0:23:00.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, they enjoyed it.

**0:23:01.3 James Wall:** Because eight-year-olds are usually not necessarily museum goers.

**0:23:04.8 Dick Bennett:** They enjoyed it. They enjoyed it, yeah.

**0:23:04.8 James Wall:** Wow. So, you're one of the rare folks who really enjoyed their time in DC when you went back. So how long was this first DC stint?

**0:23:15.7 Dick Bennett:** Four years.

**0:23:17.2 James Wall:** All right. So four years, four years.

**0:23:18.6 Dick Bennett:** It was an interesting time to be there, because that's when they had the riots in DC.

**0:23:27.0 James Wall:** When was that? This time period?

**0:23:29.5 Dick Bennett:** 1970. Yeah.

**0:23:30.9 James Wall:** You were in DC For Watergate. Or probably you were about to leave right when it was finishing up.

**0:23:38.3 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:23:41.2 James Wall:** How was that? Did that overpower the city and the area, all the chatter?

**0:23:47.4 Dick Bennett:** Well, I can remember going to the Fourth of July celebration on the [National] Mall and getting tear-gassed because there were riots going on. That was scary.

**0:24:04.8 James Wall:** That was a tumultuous time, the early seventies. And Nixon was a character, obviously. So you were there for the first and only resignation of a president.

**0:24:19.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:24:21.1 James Wall:** I mean, was that unsettling, I would assume? Or what was the thought when you're a federal bureaucrat and then all of a sudden, the head of your branch just resigns?

**0:24:37.7 Dick Bennett:** I don't know. I had a lot of faith in our democracy that we would come out of it okay. I never really worried.

**0:24:47.4 James Wall:** Yeah. Putting a lot of faith in Jerry Ford.

**0:24:52.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:24:53.0 James Wall:** Well, yeah, they did. And then after that you have the "Watergate Babies" and Carter. So that was a, wow. Yeah, the seventies is a really underrated decade in terms of all the... I still don't think people appreciate how dynamic it was and just how weird it was. So, it seems like after about four years you were ready to move on to a new thing.

**0:25:17.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. My wife says, "Okay, we've seen all historic stuff we want to see now." [chuckle]

**0:25:23.6 James Wall:** "We're good with the museums."

**0:25:24.4 Dick Bennett:** "Now it's time to go back to the West." [chuckle]

**0:25:29.9 James Wall:** Was nature missing as an element, obviously, living in Fairfax?

**0:25:35.3 Dick Bennett:** We went camping. We went to the Delaware beaches, Rehoboth, and I can't remember. We didn't go to Atlantic City, but it was another one of those New Jersey beaches that we went to. And we went camping. Oh, I remember floating the Shenandoah River in inner tubes, camping on the National Forest up there.

**0:26:12.6 James Wall:** Right but were you ready to go back to the West Coast?

**0:26:17.6 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. We were about ready to go back to the West, yeah.

**0:26:19.7 James Wall:** DC, the East Coast has an energy to it that you really got to be a little bit more neurotic, I think, to really survive there. So what part of the West Coast, when you were thinking, "All right, we've got to get back to the West Coast," did you want to go back to Northern California?

**0:26:38.0 Dick Bennett:** No, not particularly. By then I was ready to go to the regional office, so I came to Portland.

**0:26:50.6 James Wall:** Oh, so that's how we arrived in Portland.

**0:26:54.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:26:55.1 James Wall:** So, what was Portland like in the seventies? I know the Trail Blazers were good. That was probably the last time they were really good.

**0:27:03.4 Dick Bennett:** Right, right. I can remember going to...

**0:27:06.0 James Wall:** Bill Walton was doing his thing.

**0:27:09.1 Dick Bennett:** Going to games in the standing room only, and standing, watching them play.

**0:27:12.1 James Wall:** Yeah. Oh, I mean, they were an ABA [American Basketball Association] team for a while. And then, of course, they got into the NBA [National Basketball Association].

**0:27:21.8 Dick Bennett:** That was before we came here.

**0:27:22.5 James Wall:** Yeah, but that was the high tide of '76 or '77. So now it seems like it's gentrified a bit, but I always thought of Portland as kind of this very Pacific Northwest, almost hippie, granola type of place. Was that somewhat accurate? What type of city was it at the time?

**0:27:56.2 Dick Bennett:** I find it very hard to characterize it. It was just a city. We didn't live in it. We lived out in the suburbs in Beaverton, and I commuted. I rode the bus because this was the time of the gas crisis.

**0:28:16.6 James Wall:** The gas lines.

**0:28:18.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, gas lines.

**0:28:19.4 James Wall:** I'm assuming the traffic was probably bad even back then.

**0:28:23.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, the traffic was bad. I didn't care much for the drive. I lived where I could take a bus three blocks from my house, so I did that.

**0:28:41.3 James Wall:** Wow. Well, that's a pretty good commute.

**0:28:45.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:28:45.5 James Wall:** And you had said that you never wanted to live in a really big city. And then you were in DC And then Portland. But I guess Portland is, though, it seems, even driving around, it is a big city, but it doesn't really seem like a huge city. You can get lost and feel like you're in a small town.

**0:29:05.3 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. And we didn't go to... Other than me working downtown, we didn't go downtown all that much.

**0:29:12.2 James Wall:** And there's all kinds of national forests and things to do around here.

**0:29:17.5 Dick Bennett:** Oh yeah. My boys and I, we had a guidebook on the trails of the Columbia Gorge. And boy, every opportunity we had, we'd go out. We'd go hiking on the weekends.

**0:29:29.6 James Wall:** Oh, wow. Yeah, it's a beautiful country. Now, at that point, did you think that this was a place you were going to really put down roots? In Portland?

**0:29:41.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, I did. But after about ten years, yeah, eight or nine years, I guess. I had an opportunity to get into a program that would give me a promotion, but it involved moving back to the Washington office. And my wife was not happy about that. [chuckle]

**0:30:11.8 James Wall:** Wow. Oh, okay. So, she had had her fill of DC. So, at that point, your kids were probably about grown.

**0:30:22.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:30:24.0 James Wall:** Were they out of high school at that point?

**0:30:27.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Yeah, they were. They did not move with us. Our daughter was still in high school. But my oldest son was married, and my younger son was at Oregon State, I think, or was it at Caltech? I'm not too sure. Anyway, he wasn't at home anymore.

**0:30:49.1 James Wall:** So it must have been some promotion to rip you away from Portland. That must have been a tough move.

**0:30:57.5 Dick Bennett:** Well, I liked the people that I was working with. And we had a beautiful home in the suburbs of Virginia again. But it was an even longer commute.

**0:31:10.3 James Wall:** So, did you move back to Fairfax?

**0:31:12.0 Dick Bennett:** No, we were in Prince William County.

**0:31:14.7 James Wall:** Oh, okay.

**0:31:17.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, which is further out. We were on the back side of Quantico.

**0:31:28.9 James Wall:** Oh, over by the FBI, huh?

**0:31:30.5 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. In fact, there were times when we'd drive down the road that went back into town, and you could see the Marines out there, and they're doing their thing in the woods at Quantico.

**0:31:48.4 James Wall:** Yeah, you were probably near that secret CIA training site, too, or wherever they trained folks.

**0:31:53.0 Dick Bennett:** We didn't do that.

**0:31:57.6 James Wall:** Wow. So, what was this new job or this promotion that you took?

**0:32:01.4 Dick Bennett:** There was a new accounting system that they developed that was supposed to merge the financial accounting with accountability for work accountability. And they completely changed the way you kept track of your time. And it was a pretty complex system, and it involved a lot of travel. I can remember going up to Alaska and putting on a training session for the region. This was in the days before they didn't really know... I don't know, how do I say it? They sent me over to a state office, which had the equipment where I give my presentation that went up to the forests in Anchorage and Fairbanks and Southeast. What I didn't know is, actually, they broadcast it on the whole Alaska network. Everybody in Alaska was seeing my presentation. It was supposed to just be in the Forest Service. [laughter]

**0:33:37.5 James Wall:** So, people in Alaska would turn on their TV sets, and then they would just see you training on a Byzantine software accounting system. They must have been so confused. Were they calling into the station saying, "What in the hell is this programming?" So, somebody must have hit a wrong button or something.

**0:34:03.4 Dick Bennett:** Yes, it was only supposed to go to the Forest Service offices.

**0:34:08.4 James Wall:** Oh no. You flew from Washington, DC to Alaska just to give that training session?

**0:34:19.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:34:19.7 James Wall:** Wow. You were flying almost halfway across the world at that point. You would fly to Seattle, I guess, and then fly up to Juneau?

**0:34:29.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:34:32.6 James Wall:** Wow. Man.

**0:34:33.8 Dick Bennett:** That was my first taste of Alaska. I liked it.

**0:34:37.8 James Wall:** Wow. So you got to spend some time there on that trip? Did you get out and see the country?

**0:34:42.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, a little bit.

**0:34:44.1 James Wall:** Wow. And everybody's always kind of, that first trip to Alaska always seems to get people. What was it about the landscape that hit you most?

**0:34:58.9 Dick Bennett:** Just the wild country. You drive just a couple miles out of Juneau and you're in a wilderness.

**0:35:09.9 James Wall:** Wow. Yeah, it's a pretty... Even still, I think, untapped country. The vastness of it, like the Tongass is what? It's several national forests' size. It's maybe the biggest, I think.

**0:35:26.2 Dick Bennett:** Right. It is the biggest.

**0:35:27.8 James Wall:** And it's just a gigantic place. So on that little training visit, did you think, "Well, maybe this is someplace I could live, and if a job comes up, I'm going to put in for it?"

**0:35:43.4 Dick Bennett:** Yes.

**0:35:44.7 James Wall:** Now, your wife, Myra, had not seen Alaska at that point.

**0:35:46.9 Dick Bennett:** No.

**0:35:47.0 James Wall:** So, you probably came back and were gushing about it?

**0:35:51.1 Dick Bennett:** Yep.

**0:35:53.4 James Wall:** Interesting. Well, I guess we'll come back to that. So, this DC job kind of

sounds like a nightmare. Anytime I hear "We're merging, we're switching to a new system," it never ends well.

**0:36:09.9 Dick Bennett:** No.

**0:36:10.6 James Wall:** So, this was accounting for people's time with their pay accounting.

**0:36:18.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:36:19.2 James Wall:** Well, how did it work? Did it work out?

**0:36:24.2 Dick Bennett:** It did not. [laughter] After several years, they abandoned it.

**0:36:30.6 James Wall:** Was it some sort of... They wanted to award a contract to some company or something and didn't work out?

**0:36:44.8 Dick Bennett:** You know, I'm really not too sure what the politics was, but they got a lot of bad press about it.

**0:36:56.0 James Wall:** And were you the front man? Were you taking some of the flak for or complaints from employees about it?

**0:37:03.6 Dick Bennett:** No. Well, not really. I was one of the right-hand man of the guy in charge. I think he's the one that took the...

**0:37:15.1 James Wall:** Yeah. They knew it wasn't your idea. You probably said, "I'm sorry, we have to do this."

**0:37:18.6 Dick Bennett:** I'm just doing... Just implementing what I've been told it's going to be.

**0:37:24.1 James Wall:** Wow. Well, so was that the bulk of your second stint in DC? Was working on that rollout?

**0:37:30.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:37:32.2 James Wall:** And when it flopped, did you say, "Now it's a good time to go?"

**0:37:36.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. In the meantime, one of the people I'd worked with there had already transferred to Alaska, and he said he wanted me up there, and so he talked the Regional Forester into assigning me there.

**0:37:58.6 James Wall:** Wow. So, you made it happen. Yep. Now, when you got the offer to go to Juneau, I'm assuming, yeah, what did Myra think about that?

**0:38:10.8 Dick Bennett:** Oh, she was excited. Yeah.

**0:38:13.3 James Wall:** So, you had sold it pretty well?

**0:38:15.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Yeah. But my daughter wasn't happy about it.

**0:38:18.5 James Wall:** Yeah, I was about to say.

**0:38:19.7 Dick Bennett:** Because she was in high school. And she had a boyfriend, and it was tough.

**0:38:24.1 James Wall:** Yeah, that's not a distance relationship you can probably keep going.

**0:38:29.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:38:29.2 James Wall:** Oh, wow. Yeah, it's always those high school moves are the times when, for a brief period, Forest Service parents are a bit reviled, but they get over it. So, you moved with Myra and your daughter all the way to Alaska?

**0:38:49.3 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:38:51.7 James Wall:** Now, did Myra continue to love it after she got to Alaska?

**0:38:56.4 Dick Bennett:** Yes.

**0:38:57.6 James Wall:** All right. So how long was the Juneau stint?

**0:39:05.6 Dick Bennett:** It was, I think, eight years until I retired.

**0:39:10.4 James Wall:** Oh, so that was your last posting, was in Juneau?

**0:39:11.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:39:15.6 James Wall:** Did you ever think you would stay there after you were done?

**0:39:18.6 Dick Bennett:** We thought about it. We had a nice little house. We had a hot tub on the deck. We loved that hot tub. [chuckle]

**0:39:27.4 James Wall:** When is it nice to be in Alaska? What time of year is the best time of year in Juneau?

**0:39:33.1 Dick Bennett:** Oh, summer times are the nicest time. Yeah.

**0:39:37.7 James Wall:** Because I've heard it rains all the time in Juneau, and I heard that from you, too.

**0:39:43.3 Dick Bennett:** Well, they say that there's better than a fifty percent chance of rain every day, you know.

**0:39:50.4 James Wall:** So, you just always have to be prepared. Well, you grew up in Seattle, so it was not news to you.

**0:39:55.5 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. It's Seattle, only more so.

**0:40:00.0 James Wall:** It's just Seattle, a little... Keep going north and it's, yeah. Wow. So was there a project that you wanted to finish before you turned in your key card? Had you decided on a certain amount of years, and at that point you would hang it up?

**0:40:18.7 Dick Bennett:** Not really. I was going to keep working. And then they had one of these special they offered you an incentive to retire, and I was eligible. So, I took them up on it.

**0:40:35.8 James Wall:** And what year was this?

**0:40:40.3 Dick Bennett:** It was 1990. And I worked as a re-employed annuitant for a while because I really wasn't all that anxious to move right then. So, they let me do that. I just kept working for another almost a year as a re-employed annuitant.

**0:41:07.9 James Wall:** Wow, you just came back for more?

**0:41:11.5 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. And then I said, "Well, it's time." And we took a trip down to Oregon. We wanted to go back to Oregon, because our oldest son was still here, and we didn't want to live in the city. So, we got a real estate agent, and she showed us around all sorts of places out in the far, far suburbs, and ended up buying a place outside, nine miles outside of Willamina, in the east side of the Coast Range, in the middle of a tree farm, on a stream. [chuckle]

**0:42:00.7 James Wall:** Wow, so this was...

**0:42:01.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. We were really out.

**0:42:04.2 James Wall:** The exurbs, or the real rough, you were out way past the suburbs.

**0:42:08.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. And before we moved, we had a chance to get a beautiful dog. He was a Husky-German Shepherd mix, a beautiful big dog.

**0:42:21.7 James Wall:** Wow. I haven't seen that crossbreed, I don't think, ever. Must have had a lot of energy.

**0:42:29.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, it was an ideal place for him. He had a lot of fur, and he didn't like being in the house. So, he was an outside dog. And we'd go hiking almost every day.

**0:42:47.6 James Wall:** Wow. So that sounds like living the dream. Retired, you were probably what? In your fifties? Late fifties when you retired?

**0:42:55.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:42:57.1 James Wall:** Living on a tree farm, huh?

**0:43:00.3 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, and it was an ideal place. Our grandkids were fairly young then, and they all loved to come out to see Nana and Papa when they're home. And they used to play in the creek and catch crawdads and they had a great time.

**0:43:19.3 James Wall:** Wow.

**0:43:22.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:43:22.9 James Wall:** So that was a fitting... It's almost like at that point you really, really became a Forest Service guy. You were in the forest.

**0:43:34.8 Dick Bennett:** In the forest, right.

**0:43:37.2 James Wall:** Really for a good time.

**0:43:38.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:43:39.8 James Wall:** So looking back on it, what was your favorite place that you were at? Was it Alaska or was it... Probably not DC. But what was your favorite district posting where you were having the most fun?

**0:43:56.9 Dick Bennett:** Well, you know, that's hard to say. We loved Alaska, and we would have stayed there if our kids were up there. We'd still be there probably.

**0:44:05.8 James Wall:** Yeah, it's so far, I guess that's what gets a lot of people. Because a lot of people I interviewed, they go to Alaska and they probably are there about ten years, is the usual time period, and then they kind of have to make it back to family and things like that.

**0:44:22.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:44:25.1 James Wall:** Did you have a favorite boss, a favorite co-worker that you missed the most when you left the office?

**0:44:34.4 Dick Bennett:** Probably my boss, Bob Wilson, he was a fiscal director. We kept in touch afterwards, and we visited him. He lived in Utah for a while, and then he moved to Idaho. In fact, just two years ago, right after my wife died, my son and I decided to take a road trip and visit family. Because I had that car that I hadn't driven very much because my wife wasn't able to travel. And we took a long road trip visiting family in California and Utah and Texas. And then on the way back, we stopped in Idaho to visit Bob, my ex-boss. Got a chance to see him, and then shortly after that, we heard that he was not well, and he passed away. So, I'm really glad we got to see him when we did.

**0:45:46.4 James Wall:** Wow. That's interesting timing, you know. That you had that thought to take that road trip at that particular time and got to see him before he got sick. Wow. Now what was it about him that... You worked a long time in the agency. What was it about this particular boss that stuck with you?

**0:46:09.8 Dick Bennett:** Oh, his sense of humor and his storytelling. He could tell stories that keep you interested all the time. He was just a real good talker, and I'm a good listener. [chuckle]

**0:46:26.9 James Wall:** Yeah, I hear you. Was there somebody that came after you, somebody that

was younger than you in the agency that you were able to bring up or mentor, look after, who entered into your field?

**0:46:56.3 Dick Bennett:** Let's see. I'm trying to think. I can't think of her name. There was... On my last tour in Washington, there was a young black woman that came to work for us, and she was right out of a special training program for disadvantaged people, and she was really sharp, and she went on after I left, rose through the ranks there in the Washington office in the business section.

**0:47:38.3 James Wall:** Wow.

**0:47:39.5 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:47:41.8 James Wall:** Well, that's good, yeah.

**0:47:43.7 Dick Bennett:** But I can't think of...

**0:47:45.2 James Wall:** That is, in a nutshell, the big change of the Forest Service is the bringing in of new people that wouldn't have been allowed to work there before. When you started, obviously, when you finished, computers must have been changing your daily tasks, right? You already were on the sense of trying to merge these systems and things like that.

**0:48:11.5 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:48:12.9 James Wall:** Did you decide to hang it up when the talk about computers taking over systems came in?

**0:48:19.8 Dick Bennett:** Well, not really. It didn't have an effect on my decision to retire, but we were definitely going to...

**0:48:32.7 James Wall:** The digital world?

**0:48:36.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Because they had the Data General, the Forest Service had the Data General. I loved it.

**0:48:42.0 James Wall:** Did you?

**0:48:43.5 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. [laughter]

**0:48:43.7 James Wall:** This is the first good thing I've ever heard about Data General, because everybody talks about it. Because I guess that was the first big computer contract that they got in the Forest Service.

**0:48:57.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Well, I learned to work with it. And...

**0:49:01.2 James Wall:** It certainly didn't survive the tech boom.

**0:49:03.3 Dick Bennett:** No, no.

**0:49:05.7 James Wall:** You don't see any Data General computers going around.

**0:49:08.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. But for its day, I think it was pretty good.

**0:49:13.8 James Wall:** Did they run a spreadsheet program on it?

**0:49:16.0 Dick Bennett:** Oh, yeah.

**0:49:16.2 James Wall:** Or was it just the accounting software?

**0:49:20.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:49:21.3 James Wall:** Wow. And you got to learn that on the ground floor?

**0:49:24.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, yeah.

**0:49:27.3 James Wall:** So yeah, you probably would have stuck with it and become part of the digital crowd.

**0:49:32.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:49:34.7 James Wall:** Wow. So, besides computers, was there any other sort of big change from the time you began in the outfit to the time you finished, where you could say, "Gosh, people starting today, they have this. Their job's a lot different in this way or that way."?

**0:49:51.7 Dick Bennett:** Well, the centralization that they've done now is so different.

**0:49:57.3 James Wall:** Now, when you say centralization, what does that mean?

**0:50:00.0 Dick Bennett:** Well, I don't think the National Forests have... They don't have a payment section that processes payments. And they don't have a personnel officer that handles all the hiring and firing. It's all done centralized.

**0:50:20.3 James Wall:** Oh, I see. So, is it now sort of so in DC?

**0:50:23.1 Dick Bennett:** And all the accounting is done in Albuquerque.

**0:50:28.9 James Wall:** So back then, every...

**0:50:30.6 Dick Bennett:** Every region had their...

**0:50:31.2 James Wall:** Region had its own apparatus. And so now, if you were in your job, I guess you'd be in Albuquerque or you would be in DC or wherever, and you wouldn't really be moving around, which is kind of the fun part of, I guess, if you're into it, that lifestyle.

**0:50:49.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. Like when we were on the forest in California, there was a mainframe computer in San Francisco. We'd have to send payments in to be processed.

**0:51:02.5 James Wall:** Wow. You would physically send punch cards into the mainframe computer and then they'd run them?

**0:51:11.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:51:11.2 James Wall:** Wow, wow, wow. Yeah, I didn't realize that. I knew that they had combined a bunch of National Forests and they'd all combined jobs and things like that. And I forgot that there's that other part of it, that they also centralize everything. Well, it sounds like you got out at the right time.

**0:51:28.4 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, I think I did.

**0:51:29.7 James Wall:** Yeah, a pretty good time. And so, since then, you're active in the Old Smokies, I'm assuming, right? You're the treasurer.

**0:51:38.1 Dick Bennett:** I was the treasurer. I was the treasurer, yeah.

**0:51:41.1 James Wall:** I've seen that. Now, who roped you into that? Who was the person who got you involved in Old Smokies?

**0:51:54.3 Dick Bennett:** I'm trying to think. One of the people that I used to work with in Portland when I was working there. He's an Old Smokey. And when they were looking for somebody, they said, "Oh yeah, Dick, he's around. Why don't you ask him if he'll be treasurer?"

**0:52:22.4 James Wall:** Wow. And you're still active with that group and see them every now and again?

**0:52:28.0 Dick Bennett:** Yeah, we go to breakfast once a month with the people that I used to work with there in that office. The ones that are still left. It's terrible getting old, you know? All of your friends are dying.

**0:52:45.4 James Wall:** Yeah, it's just part of the game, I guess.

**0:52:49.2 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:52:50.1 James Wall:** The Forest Service is a healthy crowd, though. I feel like a lot of folks live pretty long lives, probably because they get to retire fairly early. That can't hurt.

**0:53:02.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. In my retirement project, after I retired, we bought a Roadtrek Campervan. And we visited every county in the United States. [chuckle]

**0:53:18.8 James Wall:** Really?

**0:53:21.2 Dick Bennett:** When I sold it, it had 315,000 miles on it.

**0:53:25.3 James Wall:** I would have guessed more than that. What was your favorite one? [chuckle]

**0:53:31.3 Dick Bennett:** My favorite county? Oh, I can't say that.

**0:53:34.2 James Wall:** Wow. How do you even do that?

**0:53:36.1 Dick Bennett:** Juneau.

**0:53:38.7 James Wall:** Yeah, I guess. So were there times when you were on that trek where you're like, "All right, we just got to drive twenty minutes and then we'll cross into that county line and then we'll just double back?"

**0:53:49.0 Dick Bennett:** No. Every county we visited...

**0:53:52.9 James Wall:** So, you spent some time...

**0:53:53.3 Dick Bennett:** I went to the county seat. I got a picture in front of a county sign.

**0:53:56.7 James Wall:** In front of the courthouse?

**0:54:00.0 Dick Bennett:** I had a postmark from the post office at the county seat.

**0:54:02.9 James Wall:** I feel like you should get a medal or something for doing that. I don't know anybody that's ever done that. I know people that have visited every national park. I don't know every county.

**0:54:10.5 Dick Bennett:** I've got twenty albums of all the counties that I visited and a little description of the town or the county or something about it.

**0:54:23.3 James Wall:** Wow. And you still got all that together?

**0:54:26.9 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:54:28.9 James Wall:** Wow. That'll be a time capsule for sure. Well, that is super impressive.

**0:54:34.3 Dick Bennett:** It was great fun.

**0:54:35.4 James Wall:** Yeah. 315,000 miles.

**0:54:37.1 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

**0:54:37.7 James Wall:** Huh, interesting.

**0:54:38.5 Dick Bennett:** And my wife, she went along. She was my photographer. She took my picture. Every one of these.

**0:54:46.6 James Wall:** What a good sport.

**0:54:47.7 Dick Bennett:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**0:54:50.5 James Wall:** Well, I guess you could say your road tripping days, you got your fill of that. You got to see...

**0:54:57.1 Dick Bennett:** Not really. I still love to drive.

**0:55:00.3 James Wall:** You still get out and about?

**0:55:01.2 Dick Bennett:** I still love to drive.

**0:55:01.3 James Wall:** Well, maybe you can go visit every county in Canada now.

**0:55:03.8 Dick Bennett:** Yeah. No, that part I'm through with. But I'm a volunteer driver, driving people to medical appointments.

**0:55:17.4 James Wall:** Wow. Well, that's good. Now I feel better about having the same car as you. You must be a guy who knows his way around an engine. Well, let's see. What have I not asked? I've asked you what your favorite district was and favorite boss. Oh, I always ask if you could go back to when you first started out in the Forest Service, knowing what you know now, and give yourself a piece of advice about how to survive in the Forest Service or something to do or don't do this. Is there anything you might go and sort of tell young you?

**0:56:03.2 Dick Bennett:** Be open-minded and go with the flow.

**0:56:12.7 James Wall:** And make sure that they're not sending this out on every Alaska television.

**0:56:17.9 Dick Bennett:** Right. Right.

**0:56:21.2 James Wall:** And move to Alaska. Yeah. Well, that's good advice. Well, thanks for sharing your time with me and your memories. I've enjoyed it. I learned a lot. Well, I'll just press this little button if we have any other stories? All right. Well, then you're off the clock.

**0:56:40.7 Dick Bennett:** Okay.

