

ROBY, George FS 19__ - 1990
06-04-07
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**U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Region Five History Project**

Interview with: George A. Roby
Interviewed by: Gail Strachn
Location: Claremont, California
Date: June 25, 2007
Transcribed by: Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft; September 2007

[Begin CD File 1.]

[Transcriber's note: The recording, done outdoors, is hissy and there is the frequent sound of wind chimes and other background noises. Also, Ms. Strachn was not sitting near the microphone, and Mr. Roby was suffering from allergies.]

GAIL STRACHN: It's June 25th, 2007. I'm in Claremont, California, with George Roby.

George, would you spell your name for us?

GEORGE ROBY: Okay, George. A is my middle initial. And R-o-b-y is my last name.

STRACHN: And this is Gail Strachn conducting the interview, G-a-i-l S-t-r-a-c-h-n. George, I note that you were born in 1940 and you joined the Forest Service in 1959. Tell me about those first nineteen years of your life.

ROBY: Wow. Well, I spent a lot of time—I was born in Chicago, Illinois, and lived there for a short period of time. My dad worked for the railroad there. We transferred to Missouri, so I spent a lot of time mostly in Missouri, a little bit in California and then Oklahoma, and I graduated from Will Rogers High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1958. And during that time, I did miscellaneous work, farm work. Strawberry picking was one of the primary ones, fruit picking. And then I also sacked groceries in the supermarkets. I became a lifeguard, got my lifesaving card. I was on the high school swim team, got my card, and got my Social Security

number when I was eleven years old, setting pins in a bowling alley. Then when I graduated from high school in Tulsa, a friend of mine and I took off on our own and drove to California to get rich and find a good job.

STRACHN: You were nineteen at the time?

ROBY: I was eighteen.

STRACHN: Eighteen at the time.

ROBY: Eighteen, 1958. And so I had never heard of the Forest Service or didn't even know what the Forest Service was. I did do a little job with the Department of Agriculture when I was in high school. The Soil—no, SCS—I forget what the acronym stands for. [Transcriber's note: Soil Conservation Service, now NRCS, National Resources Conservation Service] But we were responsible to go out and measure wheat on wheat allotments for the farmers, and they didn't like seeing us coming because we had large aerial photos of their farms, and we had to measure those wheat fields, and if they were [sic; there was] more wheat than what they were allotted, then they would get fined by the Department of Agriculture, so they would sic their dogs on us, and we had all sorts of—I got dog bit once doing that.

But then when we came out to California to get a job, there was [sic; were] no jobs available. They weren't hiring anywhere. So my dad talked—my dad and mom lived in Palmdale. They had moved out just months before I graduated, to get a job with Lockheed. So I decided to go to junior college, since I couldn't get a job, at least do something that was worthwhile. So I went into junior college at Antelope Valley Junior College in Lancaster.

And in my chemistry class, a gentleman setting [sic; sitting] next to me—his name was David—was doing an experiment, and he didn't follow the instructions like everybody else was, and he did something that he wasn't supposed to do, and he yelled at me, and he says, "G.A.,"

he says—I go [sic; went] by the initials G.A. up until recently—and he says, “Look at mine. Mine’s doing”—and it exploded in my face and burnt me pretty bad. I had marks all over my face. So I was about ready to carry him out the back door and tell him what I thought.

Well, it turned out that David was the son of a district ranger on the Valyermo District [of the Angeles National Forest], and he felt bad about what he did after I [unintelligible] him off outside and was going to punch him out because he did a stupid thing. I cooled down, and started worrying about my burns a little more, and then—so after a couple of days, after going to the doctor and getting treatment, I missed a few days’ school. I came into class the first day, and—David Beardsley was his name, and David Beardsley was [Donald] “Don” Beardsley’s brother and [Charles] “Charlie” Beardsley’s son, who was the district ranger at Valyermo.

He knew I had been looking for a job because he heard me and my buddy from Oklahoma talking about it, and he said, “I’ll tell you what: Why don’t you—I work for the Forest Service in the summer, myself, on the San Bernardino. Why don’t you go down, talk to my dad and get a job as a firefighter? In fact, they’re hiring right now.” So, boy, the first crack out of the bag, on the weekend we drive to Valyermo, the two of us do, and we knock on the front door—I mean, we walk in the front door, and knock on the counter. Nobody’s there. It’s a Saturday.

Finally an engine foreman, [Donald] “Don” Biederbach [pronounced BEE-der-baw] comes walking out, and he says, “Hello, can I help you guys?” And so we tell him we’re there for a job. So to make a long story short, we interviewed. He liked both of us, would hire both of us, but he said, “I’m sorry, we filled every fire job, but let me check with the assistant ranger and see if he has any vacancies.” So he calls the assistant ranger, who lived on the compound there, and [Jeffrey] “Jeff” Coleman was his name.

Jeff comes walking over in his shorts and a T-shirt and walked in and interviewed us again, went through—we heard Don Biederbach talking to him in the back room. We were out in the lobby still. And he said, “Boy, these guys—I’d hire both of them right now, but I just don’t have any vacancies.” Well, we could hear him talking. He didn’t know we were hearing it. And he said, “Well, let me talk to them.”

So he calls us in in [sic; calls us into] his office, and we sat down, and he doesn’t have anything for us, either. And the one thing we forgot to put on our application was our—we put our driver’s license—we didn’t put our lifesaving card. So Dave was also a lifeguard. Anyway, so after he thanks us for coming in, “I’m keeping your application on file,” he’s escorting us out the front door, and we’re out on the front porch of the Valyermo Ranger Station, and he said in passing, as he’s saying goodbye to us, “No, the only thing I have is a lifeguard job.”

STRACHN: Was this the summer of 1959?

ROBY: This was the summer of 1959. And so we spun around and looked at him, and he says, “No, don’t tell me you guys are lifeguards.” And we said, “Yes, we are.” And so he says, “Show me your cards,” so we pull out valid, current lifesaving cards, and he just shook his head and said, “I can’t believe this.” He said, “I’ve been trying to get a lifeguard for six months, and I can’t fill one,” so he said, “I’ll hire either one of you. You decide which one it’s going to be.”

So we went on and went outside, sat on the porch and talked, and Dave was in worst [sic; worse] shape than I was financially because his parents were still in Oklahoma, and at worse [sic; worst], I could live with my folks, so I said, “Dave, you take the job. You need it worse than I do.” So he says, “God, are you sure?” And I said, “Yeah, I’ll find something else.”

So we went back in and told Mr. Coleman that Dave’s going to take the lifeguard job. He said, “Okay, give me your phone number.” So I did. And he called me about a week later and

said, “Mr. Roby, one thing I didn’t think too much about.” He said, “We need a backup lifeguard to cover on his days off. Would you be willing to work two days a week, and if I can find you anything else as a forestry tech I’ll put you on the rolls?” And I said, “I’ll take anything.” I felt getting my foot in the door was what I had to do.

So I took it, and so I would cover Dave’s day off, and then shortly after, a couple of months later, a firefighter job came open, and they put me in the firefighter job, and that’s how I—and then I got a [unintelligible] appointment of some kind, temporary. I can’t remember exactly what they did in those days. But then that started my job with the Forest Service.

STRACHN: So you were hired for the summer in 1959. I’m just a little bit curious. They hired lifeguards at that time?

ROBY: Yes, there was [sic; were] three lifeguards on the Angeles. There was one at Crystal Lake on the Baldy District, there was one at Jackson Lake on the Valyermo, and one at Little Rock Reservoir on the Valyermo.

STRACHN: Were these considered developed recreational sites? Is that why they had lifeguards on them?

ROBY: Yes, mm-hm.

STRACHN: Interesting.

ROBY: To my knowledge, they were the only national forest that we were aware of that had lifeguards.

STRACHN: So you did that on the weekend, and then they found a fire position for you?

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: And how long did you work at that? Was that a steady job or was that just a summer job?

ROBY: It was a seasonal job, but they had winter work for us all the time. We would work pre-attack in those days, putting in firebreaks and working on the pre-attack plan: water sources, access, helispots and that kind of thing, and so we would map these out and put them on the pre-attack plan for the district FMO [fire management officer], and that was a big project in those days. Pre-attack is not done on the forest anymore like [sic; as] it probably should be.

STRACHN: Were you working, then, basically full time? Is that correct?

ROBY: Well, we still had the 180-day appointment, but there was [sic; were] ways they would manipulate that if we wanted to and they had the money, there was [sic; were] ways they could keep us on a little bit longer. But we would usually break off on our own—we didn't do this every winter—and pick up credits at the junior college, thinking we wanted to get a degree someday. I was starting in electrical engineering. I had no interest in making a career with the Forest Service at that time. So I would go get engineering classes and drafting, a few other things that was [sic; were] going to lead toward my profession that I thought I was going to have someday.

Take a pause.

[End CD File 1. Begin CD File 2.]

STRACHN: Continuing on with George Roby. George, you were talking about your summer work, your 180-day appointment, and you did a number of things, including brush clearing and firefighting and any number of forestry tech jobs, and those were all on sort of a temporary appointment, I understand.

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: When did you actually begin with Forest Service? You were saying you were not looking to a career. When did you actually go full time with Forest Service?

ROBY: Well, let's see. I did a variety of jobs. I went from firefighter to TTO [tank truck operator], which is engineer today. And then I went to assistant FPT at Buckhorn Station upon the Angeles Crest Highway, up in the high country. And some time in early 1962, as I remember, I got a career appointment as an FPT, fire prevention technician. And during that time, I got my draft notice to go the Army draft.

So I call my FMO, who was Tex Strange at the time, and said, "Tex, I've gotten my draft papers. I'm going to go down to [sic; for] my physical on Saturday." And so he said, "Aw, no!" He was all upset because he thought I might be leaving. [Background noise starts.] Well, I get down there and go through the physical, and find out that I'm physically unfit for military service. I was 4-F because of a football knee that I had, and I had two surgeries on it already.

So I flunked the physical. I got into a little argument with the doctors about it, because I told them there was nothing I couldn't do physically. Just because I had the surgery didn't mean anything. They didn't agree with me, so after a lot of bad words, I walked out of there sort of dejected and afraid to tell anybody I was 4-F.

So I get back to the station the next day and call in my lineup for the morning lineup, and Tex Strange always took the lineup early in the morning, and he said, "Well, G.A., when we losin' ya?" And I said, "Well, Tex, I hate to say it, but you're not losing me." Fortunately I was already career conditional. And I said, "I'm going to stay with the Forest Service, it looks like. I flunked the military physical."

And he says, "What in the hell is wrong with you, Roby?" And I told him and told him [about] my football knee and a couple of surgeries, and he said, "Well, God, I'm the happiest

man in the world right now,” he says, “that you’re not leaving me.” He said, “I don’t know how [unintelligible] replace you up there in the high country.”

STRACHN: And you were still going to Antelope Valley College at this time?

ROBY: Then I had started going to Glendale College.

STRACHN: Okay.

ROBY: And my folks moved to Burbank, so I had a little bit of a connection over there on that side of the mountain, so Dave and I started going to Glendale Junior College to pick up credits in the wintertime there.

STRACHN: You were still looking at engineering?

ROBY: I was looking at engineering, and then one of my professors was trying to interest me in engineering drawing because my drafting was pretty good, and he saw all the drafting I was doing in the engineering classes, and he said, “You know, I’ve got some scholarships here, and some jobs available, large drafting organizations that would hire you guys tomorrow.” So I started leaning a little toward drafting because I thought I had a possible job, with a career. But after being in the drafting classes and watching the smog roll in and out of the buildings and setting [sic; sitting] at the drafting table, I realized that that wasn’t anything I really wanted to do.

About that time is when I made the decision, due to the 4-F in the military and the fact that I didn’t think I could be in a drafting office all day—and that all came about because of my experience in the farms and with the Forest Service. So then I made a decision in 1962 to make a career of the Forest Service.

The forest supervisor at the time was “Sim” [Jarvey?], and Sim happened to be a graduate of Oregon State University, so Sim was up on my patrol unit talking with me, and the ranger, Charlie Beardsley, was trying to convince me to go to college and get a degree in forestry. This

was before I ever decided to go to school again. So he and Jarvey were standing on the hood of my truck, by the hood of my truck, having lunch, talking about my career and how I'm one of the guys that he's been trying to convince me to go to college and get a degree in forestry and stay with the Forest Service.

Well, Jarvey picked up on it and said, "Well," he said, "are you considering going to college?" And I says, "I've thought about it, but I haven't really—I'm thinking about making a career of the Forest Service as a technician. I was told that I might make district FMO, even." I said, "If I can make district FMO, why would I want anything else?"

So they told me some wise advice there about how much farther I could go with a degree, and he said, "Have you thought about what school you might go to?" And I said, "No, I've got a list of seven or eight of them." And Charlie Beardsley, the ranger, perked up and said, "Hey, how about Berkeley?" That's where he had gone. I said, "Yeah, that's on my list, but I'm not too sure about Berkeley. There's too many hippies there in Berkeley." That was the real time when it was pretty much their reputation. And Jarvey said, "Oh, [is] there a school in Berkeley? I didn't know anything about that there's a school in Berkeley." He said, "I'd go to Oregon State, if I were you." So it turned out that Oregon State accepted me when I applied, and so I went to Oregon State.

STRACHN: And when was that?

ROBY: That was in 1962, September of '62.

STRACHN: You started at Oregon State in September of '62?

ROBY: Right, in forest management, uh-huh.

STRACHN: And did you go on your own, or was there some sponsorship through Forest Service?

ROBY: The Forest Service kept me on the rolls as an employee, so my school time counted toward my seniority, and they also helped me with medical benefits and carried me through school and allowed me to have my insurance, but I went on a government loan. I got my own loans, and my folks supported me, too, so between my mom and dad and my government loans, I got through Oregon State, and I graduated in 1965.

STRACHN: In 1965 with what kind of degree?

ROBY: A BS in forest management.

STRACHN: I see. Now, during the summers between 1962 and '65, did you come back and work for the Forest Service?

ROBY: Yes, in fact that's one of the reasons I picked Oregon State. It wasn't only because that's where Sim Jarvey went; it was because they didn't require summer school as long as you worked for a forestry-related organization in the summer, so I didn't have to go to summer school, so it allowed me to work, fight fire, save money and help pay for my next school year. So one year, in 1963, I came back to the Angeles as the Buckhorn patrolman at Buckhorn in the summer. And then in '64 I went to the Shasta-Trinity [National Forest] as assistant foreman on an engine at Big Bend Station on the Shasta Lake District.

Then, of course, in '65 I graduated. And fortunately I came out as a junior forester on the newly-formed Tujunga District on the Angeles, and Jess Barton was the ranger, and [Susan?] "Suzie" Wood was the district clerk, and they processed all my paperwork to bring me back to the Angeles for the fourth time.

STRACHN: Tell me what a junior forester, what that title meant.

ROBY: Well, basically what it was, it was a trainee position for recently graduated foresters to do just anything that was necessary to be done on a district. You became a jack of all trades, sort

of. In my case—and you worked sort of under the direction of the district ranger, occasionally the district FMO, because they're the ones that usually had all the projects. So Jess Barton had met me back on the Valyermo when he was assistant ranger. He replaced Jeff Coleman when Coleman left. He talked me into coming to the Angeles because I had job offer also on the east side of the Cascades in Region Six. And he said, "You know, I'd love to have you back on the Angeles because of your fire background, and you're interested in fire, aren't you, not timber, right?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I've got a job for you." And so he established a junior forester for me.

And so I came down to that, and then my primary project was tree planting, put in plantation work with Los Angeles County inmate crews basically, and we put plantations all over parts of the district. And then the other primary job was firefighting. Any time there was a fire, they would put me on a crew, with a Hotshot crew or an engine crew, just to help with my salary and give me more fire experience, so I would take any job they gave me. Especially fire, I liked. So they would send me off forest, which—I wasn't there very long before I moved, but they wanted to maximize my fire experience since that was the direction I was trying to go.

STRACHN: Let me ask you a little bit about that. You were in school for basically about three years, and you were at Oregon State, timber management a heavy emphasis.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: How did you know it was fire that was your interest?

ROBY: Well, I got sort of hooked on fire in those first six years with the Forest Service.

STRACHN: When you were a temporary?

ROBY: Yes, my seasonal time and then when I got my career conditional. I became a sector boss under the old system and served on several fires as sector boss. And I'd been given some

advice from some people, some of my rangers about being careful about getting locked too much into timber because it can be a very unsatisfying job. You go out and establish a plantation and then you won't see any benefits of your work probably for eighty years, and that's because of the harvesting of timber at that time. A lot of people are frustrated because they never—they move on to a new planting job and never harvest what they planted because they'd have two or three careers in that period of time, so I was worried about getting locked into timber.

And then a couple of buddies of mine that were in my fraternity at Oregon State were foresters, and they went out a year or two ahead of me, and they got timber jobs, and they just felt like they were a number in a tree-planting project and never, ever got any management experience. A couple of years later, I'd see them back at the university there, telling me, "You know, I did the wrong thing. I'm not happy with timber." But because of my love of firefighting and my concerns about getting locked into a timber job, I tended to specialize in fire, and that was true through my whole career.

STRACHN: So coming back to the Angeles made lots of sense because of the fire prone area.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Just a quick question: You came back in '65 as a junior forester. Can I ask you what your salary, your grade was at that time?

ROBY: I was a GS-5.

STRACHN: They brought you back with a degree as a GS-5.

ROBY: I was a GS-5 when I went to college, as an FPT, which Jess—when he talked to me on the phone, he said he'd get me a GS-7 if I'd come back as a junior forester there. I said, "Fine. That sounds good to me." So I come back, and then he gets involved with Personnel, and

Personnel says, “No, we can’t justify a -7. We can only give him a -5.” So Jess was hurt by it, I was hurt by it, but we continued on and did the job anyway.

STRACHN: So you went to college as a GS-5, and you came out of college a GS-5.

ROBY: That’s right, yes, which wasn’t what I was told would happen at the time.

STRACHN: So you did a variety of jobs as a junior forester, still picking up as much fire experience as you could. When did you actually get into fire as your career?

ROBY: The first fire job happened to be the one I left—when I left the Tujunga as junior forester, Jess Barton counseled me on this one. They had established two assistant FMO jobs in California. The regional forester at the time and a couple of forest supervisors did this because they were tired of getting rangers that were only crew boss qualified. They wanted sector, division boss qualified rangers. So when they saw somebody that was a forester that might qualify for a ranger someday, they locked two positions, one in Northern California and one in Southern California, and the one in Southern California was the Descanso District on the Cleveland [National Forest]. So one of the normally technician jobs were held for a professional only, which was great for those few that were able to get in that job, but it was tough on the technicians, knowing that they couldn’t compete.

STRACHN: Did you face some resentment?

ROBY: Yes, I did. I got through it because I was a sector boss. Had I not been a sector boss, when they found out what my fire background actually was, they backed off a little, and then we became a real good organization. But anyway, I took the job. The ranger called Barton and said, “I heard you got a JF up there that’s got good fire background. Would he be interested in coming to the Cleveland?” And Jess counseled me and he said, “I hate to lose you, George,

because you've been here a year, but I couldn't give you your -7, but you're going to get a -7 down there. That AFMO job is a -7."

So I took it. Well, it turned out it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I had several engines under my authority. I had a Job Corps crew on my side. I had Mount Laguna, and I had the Laguna Mountain side of the district, which was a good side to have. So I got a lot of fire experience down there. That's, of course, when I met my—I met my wife before that, but we got married when I was in that job on the Cleveland.

STRACHN: And you stayed in that job for a couple of years?

ROBY: It was over a year and a half, as I recall.

STRACHN: And did you see a lot of large fires at that time?

ROBY: Quite a few. Nothing that was of any major significance, but to me they were pretty major because I was the initial attack fire boss in those days on several of them, and got a lot of good fire experience and did so and nobody ever got hurt, and so I really left there feeling good about the experience I did have.

STRACHN: In that job as AFMO, did you go to a lot of other locations, or did you stay pretty much in Southern California?

ROBY: Let's see, I think I—yes, I went to the [Rough?] Fire in the Sierra [National Forest], which was really a tough fire, and I went on as part of a sector team. And then I went to a couple of others, but I can't think of the name of them. One that I remember probably the most, though, was the Wellman Fire on the Los Padres. I went up as a tractor boss, which today would be strike team tractors, building road in a canyon bottom to get fire equipment up Wellman Canyon, and that was a very dangerous, stressing operation, so that was probably the one that sticks in my mind the most.

STRACHN: And you mentioned that was up on the Los Padres.

ROBY: Yes, I think it was on the Santa Barbara District, as I recall.

STRACHN: And then, in just looking a little bit at your biographical sketch, you ended up going to the Los Padres after you AFMO job. Did that have any connection?

ROBY: I don't know if it did or not. [Allan] "Al" West was the ranger at Ojai, and he wanted a good fire person to staff his district. He had heard about me, and when I put my application in, he saw what my fire background really was, and my ranger on the Descanso really counseled me well. His name was [Thomas] "Tom" Gregory. "Skip" [Benediction?] was the ranger when I hired on with that AFMO job, and then later Tom Gregory came down, and he encouraged me to apply for this job because he knew that I really wanted to stay in Southern California, and I would still be able to get some fire experience even though I was going into a lands and minerals forestry job. And so that was before firefighter retirement and all that.

So when I went to Los Padres from the Cleveland, I went into a job that I think was sort of one of a kind. That was managing the Sespe oil field on the Los Padres Forest.

STRACHN: Tell me a little bit about that.

ROBY: Yes. At the time, it was *the* most active and largest oil field, active oil field on national forest land. Three major oil companies were in there, just tearing the country up. And Al West established a lands and minerals forester to handle all the lands and minerals issues on the district but with primary emphasis on managing the Sespe oil field.

So I had to get in there and deal with all the roughnecks from Oklahoma, Texas, and try to manage them in a way where they're not tearing up the resource so bad on real steep, unstable country surrounded by the Sespe condor sanctuary.

STRACHN: Was the Sespe condor sanctuary in effect at that time?

ROBY: Yes, it was, yes, yes. But all the oil and gas leases were valid, even though the Sespe condor sanctuary had been set aside. They couldn't do any surface disturbance on the Sespe condor sanctuary, but they could directional drill from the sides and go under the sanctuary, so there were drilling derricks all around the edge of the sanctuary. And so Al West and I pretty much wrote the manual on "Special-Use Permits: Surface Disturbance in Oil Fields on National Forest Land." [Transcriber's note: Please verify if that is the exact name of the manual.] I understand some of the directives that we drafted up for the regional office are still in the manual today.

STRACHN: I'm just a little curious. Where you were born and grew up, were you pretty comfortable with the environment as far as the people go that you were working with?

ROBY: Yes, I got along with them quite well, surprisingly. That was the last thing I ever thought I'd manage when I went to Oregon State, dealing with petroleum engineers and mechanical engineers—it was really an interesting experience. But I still had my Oklahoma accent at that time, which I still have a little now and then. But I was a lot stronger then, and when I told them I graduated from Will Rogers High School and OSU, they all thought I was from Oklahoma State University, but I wasn't.

So we clicked pretty well, but it was a hard row to hoe because everything we asked them to do cost them a lot more money, and so when they saw my little green truck coming up onto the oil field, I could see them scrambling up there, trying to hide something sometimes because they knew if I saw that, I was going to make them clean it up. So Al and I had some tough times with the Sespe oil field for the first couple of years.

And finally, once we got the permits lined out properly—every well pad required an access road, a telephone line, water line, oil line and natural gas line, so every pad required all

that, so I finally convinced them to go into an island concept like they were doing off Santa Barbara Channel, out in the channel. They just threw their arms up, and I said, “Well, if they can do it there, why can’t you do it here and put ten wells here? You have one road to ten wells, one pipeline, one telephone line, where [sic; whereas] here we’re having to build these roads all over the forest.

Well, finally after I did a little economic analysis for them on what it was costing them to build those roads, rehab those roads and build all the lines, the petroleum engineer that I was working with for this one company in particular figured it out, and he said, “You know, I’m going to save money if I do what you’re saying.” And so we disturbed less land and got their wells they wanted in. So this became part of the manual also, using islands instead of single pads.

STRACHN: Now, you were there for about five years?

ROBY: I was at Ojai for seven years, but I was in the oil field for about five years.

STRACHN: And that was your primary job,—

ROBY: Yes

STRACHN: —was working with that. And then [unintelligible] the last couple of years? What did you do at Ojai?

ROBY: Because I had pretty well gotten the oil field in relatively good shape—Al had a vacancy there. The district resource officer position was open, and so he and I talked about me just reassigning over and doing the resources, handling recreation and all the watershed stuff and he’d hire someone new for the oil field, so that’s what we did. So it gave me a little different experience, and I had pretty well done my thing in the oil field and he was pleased with what

we'd done, so he thought it would be good for my career to now get closer to become a ranger.

He wanted me to get more resource experience, so that's—my final two years I was in that job.

STRACHN: Let me just ask you: You mentioned getting married when you were on the Cleveland National Forest. I know I hear about different family life situations from Forest Service people who have lived in remote areas and areas where you're almost a community of Forest Service people. Did you face that down here? Did your wife have to make a major move, and were you kind of isolated from cities, that kind of thing?

ROBY: Yes. In my case, it was quite different because my wife was from Costa Rica, and just living in the United States was a major change for her. We met on a blind date when I was JF on the Tujunga. My assistant ranger got a blind date for me through his wife to go to a major social function in the San Fernando Valley, and that's how I met Marguerita.

Well, then, we dated for a while, and then I transferred to the Cleveland, so we were trying to date from a long ways away, she being in San Fernando and me being east of San Diego, so we continued to date on and off, and finally it got serious, and [we] decided to marry, and she moved down to the Cleveland with me. And she had been there not more than three months—and she worked for the Bank of America at the same time, because she got her degree in business from Santa Monica College. She came up from Costa Rica to get her degree. And so she was working for the Bank of America when I met her, so the Bank of America transferred her to the San Diego area so we could live together down there.

And so about there or four months at the most, probably three months, I get sent to the eastern Washington—[Coughs.] Excuse me. To the [Antiat?]-Mitchell Creek fire complexes on eastern Oregon, along the Columbia River. And I was gone for three weeks, and I never was able to call my wife. They wouldn't let us use government phones to call home. She had no idea

where I was. All she knew was there was a bunch of fire going up in the Pacific Northwest and I had been sent up there. And so she was wondering what she had gotten herself into.

And so that was the first experience. This was back when there was [sic; were] no limitations on assignment links and the fourteen- and twenty-one-day—you stayed until the fire was out. I still think that's a policy we should follow today, but I think we're so inefficient when we change firefighters and teams.

So anyway, after a few incidents like that, she started understanding what fires and the life with Forest Service was going to be like. And I talked to her about this for some time before we even got married. Fortunately we had done that, and she knew that she could expect that, but she didn't really know what it was going to be like till she experienced it. So I have to hand it to her, for those first ten or fifteen years of our marriage, when I was in fire constantly—I mean, I went—even when I was at Ojai in the minerals job, I was sent off all the time on sector teams, and Al used me as another FMO on his district.

STRACHN: Had she moved to Ojai with you?

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: And did she continue working?

ROBY: Yes, she transferred with the Bank of America to Ojai and continued to do that until we had our first child, which [sic; who] is Tammy. Both Tammy and Gina were born in Ojai, and she worked right up until a month before she had Tammy.

STRACHN: But she was able to continue her career, and she wasn't in an isolated situation with only Forest Service people.

ROBY: That's right. I did interview—or we haven't gotten that far yet, when I became ranger. I interviewed for the ranger job at Ukonom [Ranger District] on the Klamath [National Forest].

Because of the isolation of that job, the forest supervisor up there recommended that the wife comes along during the interview and to visit the site. And thank God they allowed that, because getting a ranger job was so hard do that you'd almost accept one sight unseen, and a lot of people were being forced into some of those jobs without realizing that it's [sic; it was] going to destroy their families.

And so I took Marguerita up there. We spent a long weekend driving up there and seeing the country, [I was] interviewed by the supervisor and the deputy, and then we went to the district, and the ranger that was leaving was still there, so he interviewed us and gave us some good advice. And his bottom line was, "You'll be crazy if you take this job." He said "You'll lose your family." That meant a lot to me. That was the hardest phone call I ever had to make in my life, to call the forest supervisor and tell him, "I'm sorry, but I'm not interested in the job."

I figured that was going to put me out of the ranger ranks for sure because in the past, the rumor is if you turn one down, you're not going to get another one. So I told him the reasons why. I had two young girls that had to go to school, and they had a one-room schoolhouse with a hippie teaching it, smoking pot in the school. And the ranger shared all this with me, and [unintelligible] he had in his barracks because of the living conditions, and a few other things.

The supervisor—it turned out he didn't put a black mark on my name because of it, and the person that did take that job that also interviewed, that took it—in two years, he had a divorce. He lost his family. So then I knew I had done the right thing.

STRACHN: Before that interview, how much [sic; How much longer was it after that interview] before you took the ranger job on the Arroyo Seco [Ranger District of the Angeles National Forest]?

ROBY: that's interesting. I can't remember the exact date, but the timing was much shorter than I ever dreamed it was going to be. I think it was less than a year. The Arroyo Seco, the Baldy, the Tujunga, and—the Arroyo Seco, the Baldy and the Tujunga. Three or four ranger jobs came open on the Angeles at the same time, and [Richard] "Dick" Montague was the FMO on the forest. [William] "Bill" Dresser was the supervisor, and they made a pact that of the new rangers they hire [sic; hired], there will [sic; would] be at least one that can be a Type 1 fireman on a team. And so when they interviewed, they asked your fire experience, and so less than a year later after that interview, I get a job offer for the Arroyo Seco job because I was a firefighter with a Type 1 rating.

STRACHN: Now, at that point in time, just focusing on fire a little bit, as I understand with the incident command system, it was almost all—it was court ordered that we start working together after the serious fires in 1970—

ROBY: Seventy, yes.

STRACHN: —in Southern California. So a lot of the groundwork was beginning with the whole incident command system.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: I notice you mentioned Type 1.

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: You had been a sector boss?

ROBY: I was a Type 1 planning section chief at Ojai.

STRACHN: And that Type 1 planning chief came about, that title came about with the incident command system.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Is that correct?

ROBY: They just called it a planning section chief. But we had fire boss one, two, three in those days under the old system, and so I would have been fire boss one qualified—I mean fire team one qualified as a planning section chief. And I was a division chief qualified on the line. So being a division chief in those days would be equivalent, almost equivalent to a[n] ops chief today. It was line boss that was equivalent to the ops chief, and the division boss was just over probably what would be called a branch director today.

STRACHN: So when you went as district ranger to the Arroyo Seco, you went with the full knowledge of the work involved as a district ranger, but you still had the emphasis in fire?

ROBY: Yes. Yes. And they immediately put me on the local fire team, the Angeles fire team, as the planning section chief on the fire team. And in 1974, maybe '75 but I think it was '74, a fire started on my district, a combination of the Tujunga and the Arroyo, in Pacoima Canyon. It was actually the back side of the Tujunga, and before this day, because of the unsurety of the ICS system, through FIRESCOPE [**F**irefighting **R**ESources of **C**alifornia **O**rganized for **P**otential **E**mergencies], people were a little uneasy about it yet, because they hadn't mastered it. So we would go into the fire and we'd build up, do all of our ordering of resources under the old system, and then after we got the organization in place and everything rolling and we're doing good suppression action, we would change to the ICS nomenclature and ICS organization which after doing that a few times, you realize how screwed up that is and how hard it was to flip positions and do things differently than what you did in the first place. Once you get an organization in place, it's more difficult to change it.

STRACHN: Are you saying you would just set up and do the initial attack under the old system, and then once twenty-four, thirty-six—

ROBY: Forty-eight hours, yes.

STRACHN: —you would switch over to the new ICS system—

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: —that was just getting up in operation.

ROBY: Right. So we made a decision on the Angeles—Dick Montague was the forest FMO. I was the ranger at Arroyo. And our team said on the next fire, we're going to start ICS from the beginning. And that was with the CDF [California Division of Forestry], the Forest Service, L.A. County, and all agencies agreed. Montague was the incident commander. Lo and behold, we found that the screw-ups and the problems that we had were no different than we had with the large-fire organization at the start-up of a fire, so we all said, "Hey, wait a minute. We might as well just be starting with ICS and go, and not go through that stage of confusion, of transforming it to another organization."

STRACHN: There was always the chaos at the beginning, no matter what system.

ROBY: Yes, that's right. And so the problems were no different or no worse than the large-fire system.

STRACHN: So you worked as assistant ranger. Tell me a little bit about what you did there in addition to fire work.

ROBY: Well, that was the resource officer's job, on the Ojai.

STRACHN: I'm sorry, the district ranger on the Arroyo Seco.

ROBY: Okay, and what was your question again?

STRACHN: Tell me a little bit of what you did as the district ranger. What were your responsibilities?

ROBY: Oh, wow. I had some large responsibilities there. I had two Hotshot crews on the district. We had multiple engines: twenty-five, twenty-six. I can't remember exactly the number now. But we also had Helitack crews. We managed the Los Angeles River watershed, managed that program, project, stabilization of canyon bottoms and the stabilizing the flood control channels, and then also we had Mount Wilson, which was the largest [electronic?] site in the world. And that was a real handful, to stay on top of all the activity going on at Mount Wilson.

And also just about the time I came into the job, the Angeles High Country had been established officially by the forest, by Bill Dresser, who was the primary driver on that. And so we had the Angeles High Country with a new visitor center and all that, and then the Mount Wilson facility that was being taken over due to an acquisition, so there was a lot of recreation activity, watershed management activity, wildlife projects. It was a district you just loved to be on because there was so much going on at the time I went in there.

STRACHN: Let me ask you a little bit about the Arroyo Seco and the recreation aspect. When you were in school, was there any focus on recreation in the forests? Classes? Certainly Southern California probably has one of the highest-use forest area[s].

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Talk to me a little bit about that.

ROBY: Well, it's hard to believe, but you can almost put the amount of recreation training and fire training at that curriculum on the head of a needle. It's [sic; It was] just a few lecture courses, no practical experience, so that's where the summer school that I had at Oregon State proved to be very, very valuable to me because I did get recreation experience and fire experience, on-the-ground experience during my summer school, which the people that had to go to summer school at the other universities didn't get.

STRACHN: So you had hands-on experience.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: So the recreation needs on the forest were not foreign to you when you came as a district ranger.

ROBY: But it wasn't because of my education at Oregon State.

STRACHN: Right.

ROBY: Yes, that's correct.

STRACHN: Talk to me a little bit more about what you did, what you were able to accomplish as district ranger.

ROBY: Well, under a lot of resistance, we started the prescribed burning program in the Angeles front, which was probably one of the most sensitive projects to undertake in that basin. We were walking before we ran; we were going very slow [sic; slowly], in cooperation with L.A. County. We had to reeducation ourself [sic; ourselves] on fire management, knowing the risks we were taking. And the forest supervisor was very uneasy with it, didn't like it at all. But we convinced him that "we have to start moving in this direction, and we're gonna do it slow [sic; slowly], and we're gonna do it deliberate [sic; deliberately] and we're not gonna have any major incidents as a result of it." So reluctantly he would give permission for us to continue on, but he watched it like a hawk. So I watched it like a hawk because I didn't want to lose that ability.

STRACHN: You mentioned the front country of the Angeles. Are you talking about right where the wildland hits the houses? Is that where you were looking at prescribed burn?

ROBY: We were right in behind them. We were very close. In fact, people were very nervous because of what we were doing. Sometimes we were farther up, where it was sometimes even hard for them to see the smoke, but sometimes it was right down amongst condos and single-

family homes, out behind Jet Propulsion Laboratory. They were very concerned. But we pulled it off and never had a major incident, and people started accepting it.

STRACHN: Was the public involved at all in this project? Did you do the pre-introduction of things, public meetings, that kind of thing?

ROBY: Yes, we did. We probably didn't do it in such a complete way as we're probably doing it today, but we did start that process. We met with people. We had public meetings. We'd put signing up, what was happening along the road or if they see [sic; saw] it on a ridge at vista points and things, we would put notification out there as to what we were doing. We notified the local media—newspapers, radio, television—and let them know we were doing prescribed burning, especially if we thought it was going to be in a sensitive area. So that's what allowed us to get it accepted over time, but there was always a little resistance there, even when [sic; after] I left, both from the Forest Service and from the communities.

STRACHN: And this was the mid seventies. Is that correct?

ROBY: That's right.

STRACHN: Were there any benchmarks or targets set by the region or the Washington office for prescribed burn at that time?

ROBY: Yes, they were coming down with targets in terms of acres, to the forest, and then the forest would try to disseminate that through the districts.

STRACHN: So Washington office was looking at the prescribed burning issue and the need for it.

ROBY: I assume it was coming from the Washington office, but perhaps it might have been just coming from the regional office, but we were getting regional direction to get wildlife and range and watershed targets.

STRACHN: Okay. After your district ranger job, where did you—you did a lot of fire in your district ranger job.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: And then you moved to San Bernardino?

ROBY: Yes. Bill Dresser was the supervisor on the Angeles, and his deputy was [Douglas] “Doug” McWilliams. Doug McWilliams, while I was ranger there, got the forest supervisor job on the San Bernardino. And Doug remembered me, a lot from one incident. I’m not sure if it was the Pacoima, but I think it was, or maybe not. [Coughs.] We had a wildfire that was creating a lot of problems for us, and we made a decision we had to backfire fast. Montague was there. And I said, “Dick, I think we ought to plan on firing this ridge real fast or it’s gonna be right on top of us.” And he said, “You’re right. Let’s get it going.”

So we built line and started firing. Well, a big fire whirl started down the canyon and started to come out, and it looked—no telling where it was going to go. We had people all over the ridge up there. And I happened to be up in my car, up toward the upper end, the saddle part of that canyon that was coming up to a road. And there’s [sic; there was] a radio tech standing there, and his name is—whatever. He was the radio tech on the Angeles for years and then went to the South Zone. I’ll think of his name in a minute. [Coughs.] But he was relatively new to the forest, and he was standing up in this saddle with his back to everything going on, looking for repeater sites.

And I yelled at him, and the sound of this whirl coming down this canyon was so loud, he couldn’t hear me. I finally just took off, and I hit him from the back and took him down over the hill, down on the lee side of the ridge. I tackled him just like a football tackle. He wondered what the hell I was doing. About that time, this whirl came right across the road and right up—

and took out a few more acres on the other side. He'd have been right in the middle of that whirl.

STRACHN: Mmm.

ROBY: Well, McWilliams was there when I did that, and he remembered that, and so when his fire staff came vacant on the San Bernardino—that was not all he remembered, I don't think, but he knew that I had done something up there, so he knew what my name was then. Well, when his job opened up, I get [sic; got] a phone call from him. "George, I'm getting ready to advertise. I wonder if you'd be interested if I advertise," and I said "Yes, I would be." And so that's what happened. He was doing a little outreach and talking to a few others. And so I wound up on the cert, and I got the job. In those days, it was the A-B-A, triple A rating system, under the old system, so if you were an A rated, you were considered the top of the list, and that was the old rating system. So I went to the San Bernardino as forest fire staff for Doug McWilliams.

STRACHN: Now, through all of this, you went over to fire as the FMO, but you kept your hand in fire when you were on the Ojai District and then certainly with Arroyo Seco District.

ROBY: Mm-hm.

STRACHN: With FIRESCOPE and all that took on, how intimately were you involved in that?

ROBY: I became more intimately involved on the San Bernardino because everybody then was starting to see what was happening with FIRESCOPE and the ICS system. Unfortunately, a lot of the FIRESCOPE program was never implemented, but the key component was the ICS system that was. They formed a task force, a FIRESCOPE task force, housed in Riverside, at the fire lab. Bob was the leader of that program, Irwin, [Robert L.] Bob Irwin. They had a task force, interagency task force, from L.A. County, L.A. City, Forest Service, state, and our rep was my

deputy on the San Bernardino. I supported him going as the task force member to help with the implementation of the FIRESCOPE program. His name was [Charles] “Chuck” Mills. Gene Kimball was before him. [Coughs.] And when Chuck Mills came in after Kimball retired, I told Irwin, “I’d like to have Chuck Mills on the task force.” [Coughs.] So we were intimately involved in the FIRESCOPE program on the San Bernardino, and I supported it all the way.

And then we started converting our teams from old fire organization, large-fire organization teams to ICS teams. And I think—I’m not sure—I think I was the second or third team to be converted to ICS. [Coughs.] I think Gene Kimball was number one. His team was converted, trained, and then somebody would shoulder behind their team and learn ICS, and then we kept doing that till all the teams in California were qualified under ICS, because we had made the decision after the experience on the Angeles that we’re [sic; we were] going to start going 100 percent ICS, from start to finish.

STRACHN: And that was the Pacoima Fire, is when you think—

ROBY: [Coughs.]

STRACHN: [unintelligible].

ROBY: I think it was the Pacoima Fire.

STRACHN: And that would have been?

ROBY: In ’74 or ’75.

STRACHN: Okay.

ROBY: We had implemented some components of ICS before that.

STRACHN: Were you at all—

ROBY: [Coughs.]

STRACHN: —involved with that before '74, '75? The fires in the early seventies, '70, '71?
Were you involved at all in those?

ROBY: No.

STRACHN: You were on Ojai.

ROBY: Yes. The big fire that really sort of capped it off and probably resulted in the FIRESCOPE program was the Laguna Fire on the Cleveland National Forest. And that was a fire that I did not get to go to. I wanted to go to it, but they sent me off to another, smaller fire somewhere north, and I can't remember exactly what fire it was, but I was still at Ojai.

[Coughs.] And then I started hearing all—we had fires everywhere in Southern California at that time.

STRACHN: And that's a little bit of what I wanted to focus on and why I asked, because I understand—and please correct me if I'm wrong—but in those fires in 1970 people like you from Ojai were going to Northern California or Washington, and they were bringing [unintelligible] crews from all over.

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: And there was no coordination in Southern California crews covering Southern California fires. Is that kind of correct?

ROBY: That's correct.

STRACHN: And why the mandate came around that we had to—

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: —[unintelligible].

ROBY: One of the major reasons that FIRESCOPE was born is because of the lack of communications between [sic; among] multiple agencies, which—you know, they couldn't talk

on the radio together, their equipment wasn't compatible. Some had personal protective equipment; some didn't. And it opened a lot of eyes about "Wait a minute"—especially in Southern California. And that's what it was originally intended for, was to organize Southern California. But what's happened is it has done such a good job in Southern California that now it's grown world wide. In fact, there's other countries using components of the ICS system in some form or another.

And so that led to establishing this group that was put together at the Riverside Fire Lab to start developing the FIRESCOPE program, and ICS was the key component that everybody could put their fingers on, and without major changes you could almost step right into ICS, where [sic; whereas] the other components of the FIRESCOPE program took a lot of money and a lot of effort and some scientific work and R&D to perfect it, like downloading infrared from aircraft and all the things that they recommended. It's being done now, but it's still got its limitations.

So the communications was one of the major clear text for one. "Say what you're saying. Don't give me any codes," you know. "Everybody needs to understand what you're saying, not just me." So clear text was a major step forward and the radio electronic communications, to talk to firefighters.

STRACHN: Nineteen seventy-four was your first real introduction to that.

ROBY: That's correct.

STRACHN: Correct?

ROBY: That's correct.

STRACHN: And then you went over to San Bernardino, so now you were fully involved with all the changes. Talk to me a little bit about what that meant as the FMO on the San Bernardino. This is now 1977.

ROBY: Seventy-seven, that's correct. Well, it took training. We had to bring all of our troops to central training, standardization of training. Basic handbooks were being formed now that— ICS guidelines for, like, fireline notebooks. And you had to make sure all your people were fully versed on the new terminology, the requirements of accepting other agencies. If some agency— at that time, if they didn't have protective equipment as part of their agency policy, then you couldn't force them to have protective equipment on, even though it was the right thing to do.

So we had to start training people on how to meld and blend all these organizations together in a way to minimize liabilities, minimize potential for injury and to maximize the full intent of the ICS system.

STRACHN: Did you do a lot of interagency coordination?

ROBY: That was probably—my first couple of years on the San Bernardino, either I was in their office or they were in my office, with CDF headquarters, the City of San Bernardino, Los Angeles County, in multi-agency meetings constantly. And that's one of the things that my deputy helped with that workload, being so fully involved in the FIRESCOPE program as a task force member. Between he and I [sic; him and me], we could cover all the bases, and sometimes together we would do some of them, but sometimes we'd split off and have our meetings with these other agency people to see which way we're [sic; we were] going. So the City of San Bernardino wasn't in the mix at the time, but they wanted to know what we were doing, so we had to inform them, "Hey, here's where we're going and here's the state, L.A. County, L.A.

City. You'll probably want to come on with this someday, too." And guess what: It wasn't very long, and the City of San Bernardino was understanding and getting the same raining.

STRACHN: There were certain agencies that were identified initially, I know, but in your job with San Bernardino, I'm assuming bringing those that were not included in the initial seven was a critical part. Did you meet any resistance or were there any sort of egos involved as you moved forward with some of these?

ROBY: Yes, there were. There was a lot of resistance from some of the other agencies, but there was a lot of resistance within the Forest Service, especially those that would come down to assist us on fires. It was confusing them. They would come down from the Klamath, and [ask], "What the hell is an incident commander?", you know? So we'd get fire team members or resources come down to help us on fires. We'd almost have to set them aside, in their briefings and everything, and say, "Here, we're in a new system" and brief them on new operational plans and how we line out the work instructions and terminology they're going to hear, and "[If] you hear this, this is what it means. It's no longer a tanker, it's an engine," on and on, little things like that.

And so there was a lot of resistance within the agency, probably as much as from any other agency, and after they started seeing it work and how efficient it could be, they started growing, and before you know it, they're [sic; they were] saying up there, and the regional office is [sic; was] saying, "This is not going to work. Everybody is going to have to go to this system." And so before you know [sic; knew] it, the Rocky Mountains were thinking about it, and then Region Three, Arizona, and so before you knew it, it grew and grew and became a national thing.

STRACHN: Did the regional office in Region Five—did they support you from the very beginning on the changes?

ROBY: Yes. I don't ever recall any resistance. There's [sic; There are] always a few old-school people perhaps in every organization that were leery and weren't 100 percent, but the organization as a whole, by the regional directors—

STRACHN: They recognized the need for this change.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: And how long did it take before they realized that it couldn't just live in Southern California; it had to be broader than that?

ROBY: Well, I think after a few experiences, a few years of people sort of being reluctant to come down and not know how they're operating [and] say, "Boy, I don't know. I don't know whether I can come down and work in that environment now. You guys don't even talk the same language we're talking." So there was [sic; were] concerns voiced by the people outside of Southern California that they either need [sic; needed] to be brought along and be part of this or somebody's [sic; somebody was] going to get hurt, and that was basically my biggest concern, was getting somebody [sic; somebody getting] hurt. So we started encouraging it to grow, grow, grow.

And had it not been a good system, it would have never sold. You wouldn't have converted people for a system that was not any better. So I think they all saw that it had its advantages. So the sell and the transformation from old fire organization to ICS was faster than I ever expected it would happen.

STRACHN: You mentioned on the San Bernardino is [sic; was] when you got much more deeply involved with the FIRESCOPE, and I'm assuming that's still from the application

process, actually putting some of the mandates to use, you were also on the development side?
Is that correct?

ROBY: Yes, we had input all the time through the task force of things that we—for example, one of the changes we made, and some of the other agencies didn't like it—the first line boss position that replaced the old line boss was called S&R chief, search and rescue chief. Well, the search and rescue chief nomenclature just didn't go over, and people were having trouble with it, and so the ops chief came out of that, and that was due to input from the field and from other agencies, that it confused people. “Search and rescue? Now, wait a minute. They're not out there to search and rescue for [sic; search and rescue or search for and rescue] people; they're out there for operations to make sure this thing is run [properly] when there's nobody to search and rescue for [sic; to search for and rescue].” So that's an example of changes, and that's a minor one. There's [sic; There are] major changes that have taken place due to input from the field, fire staffs on forests and agency chiefs in the counties and the cities.

STRACHN: And you've mentioned several times the communication aspect, of being able to speak clearly and [unintelligible]. And different agencies do bring in the different terminologies. Were there any turf battles on terminology?

ROBY: Oh, yes, there was [sic; were] a lot of turf battles, and there's [sic; there are] still some going on today, but none of them crippled the system. There was [sic; were] a lot of tradeoffs. Pacification was part of it. they'd just say, “Okay, just get off the dime here. I'll agree with that change. It's going to cause you headaches, and I can live with it.” So there was a lot of that going on constantly.

The problem with these little, overnight changes is it changes [sic; changed] all the handbooks and the documentation, and so that's where there's [sic; there was] a lot of resistance.

It has to be either a single, major problem to change it or a whole series of little problems that you fix whenever you do the next training plan and the next lesson plans and the next manuals for it. So that's one of the biggest problems with minor changes.

STRACHN: And during your time on the San Bernardino, did you feel like you were always in a state of flux?

ROBY: From the standpoint of ICS?

STRACHN: Yes.

ROBY: No, we settled down and stabilized, and it became second nature, and I went through my whole tenure there, after the first year, feeling very comfortable with where we were at, and everybody else, pretty much, on the forest felt the same way.

STRACHN: How about things like protective gear, things like that? Did you see things change?

ROBY: Yes, and a lot of controversial things came out of it. While I was on the San Bernardino, extrication gear—you know, being able to—jaws of life, things that were being carried on our engines, and it was very controversial, and it still is today, but when you have Cojon Pass—and I think of the I-5 corridor [as] very similar—we're the first unit in, usually, on traffic accidents, train wrecks. And so our crews were walking up—

The one that comes to my mind was a family getting caught by a train between a bridge and crushed up beside the bridge, and the train still going by the car. As soon as the train passes [sic; passed], they're [sic; there were] locked in this car and can't [sic; couldn't] get out. They were seriously injured, but [there were] no fatalities. Well, our crew, our engine crew was the first one in. They stood there for two hours and couldn't get those people out of that car, till the CDF finally got a rig up there, and then they started tearing the doors off the car and cutting the top off and pulling the bodies out—the people; it wasn't bodies.

So we'd had several incidents like this, where we would stand there for an hour or two, not really being able to do anything, and we felt helpless. No fire involved. It could have been a fire, but it wasn't. And so I authorized the first set of jaws of life on an engine. And I reluctantly did it because I didn't want to set a precedent where everybody had to be experts on jaws of life. But I felt that those people in the Cojon Pass corridor, or the initial attack in there—they don't know whether they're going to a fire, a traffic accident or both, [or] a train wreck.

So I caught a lot of flak from the region. First inspection down there, they found out we had them on there. They gave me a bad time. But I didn't take them off. It's like the structure protection issue in the Forest Service. It's such a controversial situation, and you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. When I was incident commander on the Panorama Fire in 1980, all ICS—it was unified command, with CDF, San Bernardino City and the Forest Service—you know, we—

Take a break a second here. I'm losing my voice.

[Recording interruption.]

STRACHN: Okay, we're back with George, and we were discussing the various controversial issues, and we talked about the jaws of life on the engines, and George had just mentioned the Panorama Fire, which was in 1980, and I guess, George, you had just begun your new job at the fire lab, but under the incident command system you were also still incident commander?

ROBY: Yes, I was incident commander, but I was on [David] "Dave" Nelson's team as his deputy while I was at the fire lab. Anyway, when the fire looked like it was going to threaten the city of San Bernardino, we contacted the city, the dispatcher, and told him to notify the chief that

within an hour or two, it's [sic; it was] going to be in the city, so he better gear up to protect structures in the city of San Bernardino.

So the city of San Bernardino dispatched all their engines, available engines to that fire, and they tied up the hydrants all along the chaparral front, of all the subdivisions in that area where it was coming toward, and committed all their engines to that first line of houses. And so I'm on my way down the hill to assist Newcomb [sic; he said Nelson above] any way I could, because that's where the priority was, that people were going to be affected, it looked like, and maybe fatalities.

And so I came on down the hill, kept my troops working on the flanks, and first thing Newcomb asked me is, "Do you have any green engines that can help me down here? I need help." I says [sic; said], "No, we're all committed up there. Can't do it." And so after all these engines were lined up with all their hoses out—I think he had sixty engines in there.

STRACHN: This was city fire.

ROBY: City of San Bernardino, protecting the city. And so here I am in my green staff car, with the red city, down there helping Newcomb and giving him moral support more than anything. And then through the incident command system I said, "You know, Newk, you better order more resources through South Zone." So he did. So he starts—well, he thought sixty—[all sixty of his] city engines are down there. Figured that would be adequate, but it wasn't.

So what happens [sic; happened] is [that] as that fire came into the front down there, right behind these structures, the spotting was so—the long-distance spotting. All of a sudden, they start [sic; started] getting reports. Here's [sic; Here are] all their firemen lined up along the first row of houses, and he's [sic; he was] getting reports of structure fires behind him. So what was happening is [sic; was] the spots were on these shake roofs, and they had 300 simultaneous

homes burning behind them, and here, they're tied up to all the hydrants. No hose rolled up, ready to roll back to where the houses were burning. And none of the houses had caught along here yet.

STRACHN: But they were burning behind the line now.

ROBY: They were behind the yards of those houses, and spotting before it got even to those houses, and those houses along there had Class A roofs. A lot of them had put the right roofs on. But the people behind them, in the older part of the subdivisions hadn't. So here Newcomb has found out that, "Oh, my God, now I've got another report of a fire." So here he is, trying to get all of his troops to pull their hose [sic; hoses] off the hydrants, roll them up in some fashion so they could be mobile, and then try to drive a few blocks to where the homes were actually burning.

And so we get [sic; got] down there, and I went down with him, and at the same time, I'm still keeping in contact with our troops on the forest, and telling them what's [sic; what was] happening down there, and they could see some of it from up on the hill. They could see houses were burning. And so we get over there, and here, the families out in the—hadn't even been evacuated. And here, the families with kids stacked like this in their driveway [sic; driveways], watching their houses burn. And here I am in this green car, and they're running up to my car, wanting me to get a fire engine to their house because some of them were just starting. You could have knocked them down. I've never had such a helpless feeling in all my life. Just people, adults balling their eyes out, watching everything they own [sic; owned] burn right there in front of you.

So that opened my whole head up again about structure protection in the Forest Service: how we can keep ourself [sic; ourselves] out of it is going to be very difficult. I don't think it's

the right thing to do yet. I don't think it's the right thing to ignore it if you have some resources to do something about it, if you can do it safely. Now, then you see a situation like the Esperanza Fire, and it opens up that whole series of doubt in your mind about wanting to get into that kind of a situation again. So school is still out for it for me as to what's right and what's wrong.

One, it has [sic; you have] to have the right training. You have to know the situation you're facing. I don't care what it is, if you're stepping into a trap, I don't care if it's on a wildland fire or a structure fire, you've got to be able to identify that trap and not let it happen to you. It's amazing that we're still in that controversy, and it's been that way for the last thirty, forty years that I know of, in my career—fifty years. Ever since I was a firefighter it's been an issue.

STRACHN: On the Panorama Fire, the Forest Service just did not have resources to provide—

ROBY: That's right.

STRACHN: —[unintelligible] protection.

ROBY: That's right. Now, if we'd have had extra resources, we would have probably sent them.

STRACHN: Were we trained in [stuff to?] protection of that kind?

ROBY: Only external action. Never enter a house, never enter a building. We were trained to only do what you could do from the outside, and that is we were trained on being careful with power lines, making sure power is off before you hit a straight stream on a power line or a transformer. It was basic training to keep people out of trouble, basically. And don't get trapped in [sic; one] one-way roads where you can't turn around. This whole scenario. We had minimal training, but training that you felt comfortable with going in helping a fellow agency.

But in this case, we didn't have any green trucks to send down because they were all committed on a major, major wildfire up in the high country, and so we didn't send any green trucks down to help him. I don't know if it would have been one of those things that—you know, if something goes wrong, you're terribly wrong. If something goes right, "Oh, my God, thank God for the Forest Service." And we've done it before. We've saved homes up here on the Angeles fronts.

[Richard] "Rich" Hawkins, the district FMO, on the Arroyo, decided to put foam on all of his engines, one of the most forward-thinking things to do at that time. Nobody else had it. L.A. County didn't have it. So he's [sic; he was] out there foaming structures. L.A. County—they agree [sic; agreed]: "Okay, you take this side of the road, I'll take this side of the road."

[Coughs.] Hawkins and his engines foam all these houses over here. L.A. County is using water as they go down. All the homes on this side burned; none of the foamed houses burned.

STRACHN: So it becomes quite controversial.

ROBY: Yes. And so the Forest Service was looked at with a very high regard. Fortunately nobody was hurt. It was just one of those situations. And guess what: It wasn't the next fire season that L.A. County had foam on all their engines.

STRACHN: Do we use foam on all of our engines now?

ROBY: I don't think so.

STRACHN: —in Southern California?

ROBY: Pretty much Southern California, I think they do. [Coughs.] I think the new engines that the Forest Service is building everywhere are coming with foam proportioners. That's my understanding. But I don't know that for a fact. I would hope so.

STRACHN: In the Paramount Fire, how many houses were lost?

ROBY: Panorama Fire.

STRACHN: Pardon me, Panorama Fire.

ROBY: Three hundred homes. And they were lost almost within the same—they were ignited almost the same second. In other words, it was simultaneous. Those sixty engines of the San Bernardino couldn't have begun to protect 300 burning homes. A lot of them were too heavily involved to even take action, but the ones that were scattered out, that were just getting start and not fully involved, it could have been maybe knocked down. They did knock down a lot of them. They did save a lot of homes. But they lost 300.

STRACHN: How about citizens?

ROBY: I don't recall. As I recall, there might have been one fatality as a result of that, and I think it was a heart attack.

STRACHN: Very fortunate.

ROBY: Yes. I don't recall multiple fatalities, but it's been so long ago—it's been [sic; it was] twenty-seven years ago.

STRACHN: That kind of brings us to 1980, and you went over to the fire lab.

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: Tell me about how that came about.

ROBY: Pacific Southwest Range and Experiment Station, Forest and Range Experiment Station. That was really interesting. I got to know [Charles W.] "Charlie" Philpot, who was the assistant director at the fire lab, and I got to know him mostly through FIRESCOPE. And he got to know me with the projects we were doing on the San Bernardino. We started the fire planning process, the original. We were one of the pilot forests that had to do fire planning for big impact. We

had to set a special task group together just to work on that. You know how those things go. And we're getting dragged into—

STRACHN: Do you want to talk [for] a minute about what came from that fire planning before we get to the fire lab?

ROBY: Well, you know, I probably remember that the least, but I can say that it was a process that we went through that we felt we were forced to go through, and shortly after we completed it, we get [sic; got] all these accolades about, "Wow, what a great job you guys did in the planning process there," and then before we know it—and then two or three others forests are going through it at the same time, too, I think one in Region Three and—[coughs]—following some of the same guidelines. And then we're told, "Well, it's sort of not really important because there's not enough budget to do anything with that anyway."

STRACHN: Was this for prescribed burn and looking out ahead of [cross-talk; unintelligible]?

ROBY: It included veg management needs but not very seriously, because it wasn't being considered very seriously in the Forest Service at that time, especially in the front country, but we did say, "We need to get a twenty-year rotation going in these fuels under controlled conditions." [Coughs.] But then it died on the vine, and then it came up in the new generation, and then we---you know, we'd gone through so many of things. We gear up, and then all of a sudden we lose the budget. It was just another cycle of getting everybody all fired up to do a better job, and then they pull the rug out from under you and say, "I'm sorry." So I don't know. With four-term presidents, I don't know that we'll ever stop that. I mean two-term, four-year [sic; eight-year] presidents. We're never going to stop that cycle of the poor planning and management. We waste a lot of resources preparing for it, and then if the next administration doesn't support it, you might as well forget it.

STRACHN: So you had gotten involved with folks at the fire lab through the forest's fire plan.

ROBY: Yes. [James] "Jimmy" Hickman started the project and got promoted to—I forget where he went. He left the job, and Philpot was looking for a manager, a forest manager, not a scientist. That's why they got Jimmy. What happened is you have a whole staff of scientists there that work for you, and a whole bunch of technicians. I forget. At times, I had thirty-five, forty people, eight scientists, which take [sic; takes] a lot of technicians to support them, to do their research. So they established this program, the chaparral R&D program, to try to get scientists to put their knowledge in ground-oriented, laymen language where people like me and other FMOs, and rangers can implement it and understand the science. So management-oriented publications which did not help a scientist get promoted under the paneling system—the panel appears determined, if they were going to be a -13 or a -14, based on their science that they accomplish and the publications they get published. [sic; I don't know how to fix this.]

So Jimmy's job and my job was to get our scientists, at the same time try to support them in their science needs and get them to do these handbooks and get science—more or less technology transfer.

STRACHN: To the ground.

ROBY: To the ground.

STRACHN: So it's operational.

ROBY: So it was a challenging job, and the scientists are tough to understand. They sort of understand the need for it, but they don't understand why what they've written isn't really acceptable to the field. And so some were harder than others to get them to do their writing. Sometimes you had to set [sic; sit] down and rewrite it for them and then let them agree on whether that was a good job of rewriting what they said.

STRACHN: Bring me up to speed a little bit. You were chaparral research and development manager.

ROBY: Chaparral management research and development.

STRACHN: So what you're saying is at the lab they were doing all these experiments on chaparral?

ROBY: The effects of fire in chaparral. Yes, the effects of fire in chaparral: its effect on soils, streams, wildlife, effects on fire behavior. Just about a multitude of impacts on fire in chaparral, we were trying to measure and give people a feeling for—if you have burrowing animals out there, like you're worried about the rats, the mice and these rare and endangered species of rats and mice—the kangaroo rat comes to mind—here's what you can expect if a chaparral fire burns over their burrows or over their nests. And we found that burrowing animals with two to four inches of soil above their burrow can survive every wildlife we can give them, average wildfire. Little things like that. And so we put that into publications. Like the pack rat nests are a major problem because they live up in the chaparral, and [with] dead material they build a nest, and it's one of the primary spots for a spot fire, is a rat's nest. And if they have young in that nest, then they're done. They can't escape because they don't have a burrow to go into. They live more or less on top of the ground.

And snakes, things like that. And then the effects of [sic; on] soil [of] high-intensity fire, a medium-intensity fire. How much soil damage does it do to the forest mantle, soil mantle? So it was such an interesting job. I tell you, it was probably one of the more interesting jobs, and I didn't know that I was going to enjoy it as much as I did, knowing I was going to have to convince scientists to write in [a] different language.

But after being in there a while and knowing—again, my fire background made the difference. I was pretty well received shortly after I get [sic; got] there and have [sic; had] a few meetings with them and a few fist-pounding sessions occasionally on things that I want [sic; wanted] them to do, and—“Darn it! I’ll help you do it if you can’t do it.”

As I recall, we did over [sic; more than] forty publications while I was there, and one of the most prolific publication projects that the PSW has ever put out in the period of time we had and the number of publications that we got out to the field. They could actually understand them and read them. They could understand the graphs. You know how complicated some of these scientific journals or documents can be.

STRACHN: Basically putting it into lay language and making it a useful tool for firefighters?

ROBY: That’s correct, yes, yes. So anyway, Charlie thought I was the guy that helped do that, and so I replaced Jimmy Hickman and did that job. One of my objectives was to close the project, finish it and find jobs for everybody in the project. That was one of my charges when I was given the job. “Now, I want it to end in two years. I want you to find a job for everybody you have working for you. I want you to finish all those publications that are hanging,” and I’m saying, *Oh, boy, this is gonna be a task.* Well, we got it done. [Coughs.] And then that led me to Washington, D.C. [Laughs.]

STRACHN: So you had left the San Bernardino, left the FMO job and went over there to PSW research laboratory.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Were you getting ready to leave Southern California? Your career mostly had been on Southern California forests.

ROBY: Yes, except for one season on the Shasta-Trinity, I was Southern California. No, I was happy being in Southern California. I had no desire to move out of Southern California, but I was never closed to moving other places as well.

STRACHN: Tell me how the Washington office job came about.

ROBY: Well, Al West was the director of fire, and as you remember, he was my ranger at Ojai. When he had a vacancy, a Boise vacancy, at the fire center in Boise, NIFC [National Interagency Fire Center, pronounced NIFF-see]—it was BIFC at that time—there was a job there that vacated that I really wanted. It was a job that was in charge of all fire equipment, specifications for the Forest Service building their equipment, and fire chemicals: retardants, foam and, later, gel. And I sort of figured that *Damn, that would be a good job for me.* But I didn't say much about it. I was waiting for the announcement to come.

So all of a sudden, outreach starts, and people start calling people about “Who’s interesting in this job? Who might apply? Who might not?” I get a phone call one day in the office there at the fire lab from Al West. “G.A.,” he says [sic; said], “have you ever thought about taking a Washington job?” And I said, “You mean the fire equipment and the fire chemicals job?” He says [sic; said], “That’s it. Would you apply when I advertise it?” I said, “You’re darn right I’ll apply.”

So one thing he didn't tell me is when the announcement came out, it was in Washington, not in Boise. They said, “There are too many chiefs and no Indians in Washington. We gotta move some of these satellite jobs back to help the chief out on the Hill.” I said, “Oh, no! Don't do this to me!” Now today, guess what: I could have fought for it and got it in Boise. So here, my wife—the coldest climate she's ever been in is Southern California. She's afraid to freeze to death. Anytime she sees a snowstorm or—she'd never seen snow. The first time she saw it was

when we were in Pine Valley on the Cleveland, on the Descanso District. It snowed about two inches on us one day there, and she's standing out there in the yard just watching the snow come down. It was, like, unbelievable. She couldn't believe it. But when she was in Costa Rica, all she heard about was people freezing to death in the United States in the northern country, freeways—a car crashes—and getting caught in blizzards and freezing to death in their car [sic; cars].

So anyway, I reluctantly went home and told her the change in the plan. As the trooper she is, we thought about it—I said, “Al, give me some time.”

STRACHN: You hadn't already applied.

ROBY: No.

STRACHN: Okay.

ROBY: He was still asking me if I was going to apply, but it's going to be in Washington now, not in Boise. I hadn't filed the papers yet. And so I convinced her we would buy—“The first thing we'll do when we get back there, we're going to buy down jackets, down clothes, wool blankets,” everything she wants [sic; wanted]. “Your trunk in your car could be full of those things.” She finally comes around and said, “Let's give it a try.”

So here we go, both heels—four heels, actually, because I wasn't sure I wanted Washington, D.C. Well, anyway, after we were there a while—I had been there—we got there in December. One of the worst snowstorms in the history of Washington, D.C., twenty inches at our house, after all this story, “Well, it doesn't last long.” It was the most snow they had in twenty years, I think. I'm setting [sic; sitting] there, saying, *I can't believe this. It just keeps coming down, and I can't get the car out of the driveway.*

First we're moving in, and we had just moved in, and the boxes were still unpacked [sic; unopened] in the garage, and stacked in the living rooms in the houses [sic; in the living room in the house], and the moving van finally leaves, and then it starts snowing. And I get a call from Al West. No, the sheriff's pounding on our door. We have no phone, no telephone. Had electricity. But anyway—and the telephone company said we would not have our phone till the following Monday because of workload.

Finally the sheriff's [sic; sheriff was] knocking on my door at three in the morning. I'm laying [sic; I was lying] on mattresses [sic; a mattress] in the living room. We hadn't even put the beds up. And I opened the door, and it's a sheriff outside. "Yes, sir?" He says, "Are you George Roby or G.A. Roby?" And I said, "Yes, I am." He says [sic; said], "You need to call your sister immediately." And I said, "Oh, God!"—I didn't have a phone. He says [sic; said], "Well, there's a shopping center about three blocks down. They got a pay phone in the shopping center." And I said, "Thank you very much." This was, like, a Friday. So we're not going to have a phone till Monday.

So I wake [sic; woke] Marguerita up, and I tell [sic; told] her what's [sic; what was] going on, and so I'm [sic; I was] getting dressed and I start [sic; started] to get the car keys and see if I can get the car out of the driveway, and I said—just for the hell of it, I walked by the phone in the kitchen, I picked it up, and I get [sic; got] a dial tone. The phone's [sic; phone was] on. *Jesus!* So I dial [sic; dialed] my sister, and my dad had had a massive heart attack in Missouri. We had just driven through with the moving van and stopped and spent a couple of days with my dad and mom. Still laying [sic; lying] on the floor, and that's why I'll never forget that assignment to Washington. The first night in the house, my dad—he died—
STRACHN: [unintelligible].

ROBY: He was still alive when I got there, but he was not conscious and when I got a hold of his hand, he responded just a little bit, so I knew he knew I was there, but—so that was the start of it.

And then it wasn't two months later, another big snowstorm. I think it was February. Big snowstorm. And I get [sic; got] a call from Al West, "George, we need an incident commander with experience in Latin America to take a team to the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean to fight a fire for them." And here's Marguerita [chuckles] with two feet of snow outside, and I head [sic; headed] off for the Dulles Airport the next morning to get me a flight out, and I plowed the truck into a snowbank in the parking lot because you couldn't see any of the parking spaces. It turned out I was parked in the middle of one of the main access roads, and they towed my car [sic; truck] off to a—when I get [sic; got] back, I couldn't find my truck anywhere. They had hauled it to a damn impound yard somewhere. The police had wondered whose truck that was. [Laughs.] So I was down in the Dominican on that one, and she said—I was there for over [sic; more than] two weeks. First crack out of the bag in Washington. Two storms. I tell you, she—

STRACHN: And you had the two small girls at that time.

ROBY: And she stuck it out like a trooper. I thank God and smiled all the way about it, but she wondered what she'd stepped into up there, I'll tell you. But it turned out we both—after we were there a while, we both said it was the best five years we've [sic; we'd] ever had in the Forest Service. We're [sic; We were] sorry—we were reluctant to even go there, and I would recommend to anybody to spend three to five years in Washington, D.C.

STRACHN: What did your job entail there?

ROBY: It was really a hodge-podge of a job. I worked for John Chambers, who was the assistant director of operations. Now the title of it—it was called agency liaison, the position I took, but now it's branch director, fire chemicals and fire equipment. But the agency liaison or the liaison officer position included chemicals and interagency work on chemicals.

STRACHN: Was this still part of the FIRESCOPE or the whole outcome of that? Was this position established because of that?

ROBY: No, it had been a long-standing position. I think the gentleman before me had been in it about seven years, five to seven years. That might have been when it was established. But, no, it didn't have anything to do with FIRESCOPE, and the Washington office was pretty dumb about FIRESCOPE. That's another resource they brought in with me, is they started having somebody in there—[Michael] "Mike" Rogers and me [sic; I] knew something about FIRESCOPE. And then later we brought Jerry [Monosmith?] in from Region Six. No, he was the FIRESCOPE staff—he was Bob Irwin's assistant at Riverside on the FIRESCOPE program, and he came in to a staff job there, so we had three guys that really knew FIRESCOPE well, and so we started educating the Washington people. And there was [sic; were] a bunch of bull-headed people there, I'll tell you.

STRACHN: Had they gone nationally to the incident command system by that time?

ROBY: No, I don't believe so. No, I'm pretty sure it was just starting to move west—I mean—.

STRACHN: So you really had an education.

ROBY: Yes, it was starting to move a little north, and it was starting to move east, but I got the Dominican Republic started on it when I went down to that fire.

STRACHN: You were the incident commander on that fire?

ROBY: Yes, and it was a 6,000-acre fire, the largest in the history of the Dominican, in pine trees. And it was threatening their “Mount Wilson,” their largest electronic site. They had all their military protection—you know, electronics up there and their civilian electronics, and that was what they were worried about, so we had to protect that electronic site, was [sic; so protecting that electronic site was] our primary mission, and not getting anybody killed. That was my biggest concern.

But after it was all over—there’s a story in itself. I could do a two-hour interview on just that Dominican Republic experience, but the president of the Dominican called me in [sic; into] his palace, which—in the second-poorest country in the world, I think, second to Haiti. Silver and gold and platinum. You walk into this palace, and all the people are starving to death on the streets. And he calls [sic; called] me in [sic; into] his office for a fifteen-minute talk. Two hours later, we’re [sic; we were] still in his office.

I drew out an ICS organization—because that was their primary problem: They had two or three agencies working up there, and none of them would talk to each other. Military was one of them. And so I drew out the incident command system on a piece of scratch paper. I said, “If we had had this in place, we would have saved acres and we would have saved money, and we would have been in better control of our people.” He looked at that, and he says [sic; said], “Mr. Roby”—spoke perfect English—“Mr. Roby, that’s the way we fight war.” I said, “Exactly. The incident command system, the large-fire organization all came out of military organizations.”

Well, anyway, he said, “Will you come back and train my people?” I said, “Well, you got to get that clearance through the chief of the Forest Service.” So I’ll be darned, he went through AID [Agency for International Development], the office of AID and sent a message to the chief, and the chief calls [sic; called] me into the chief’s office and says [sic; said], “Is it

possible to do such a thing?” And I said, “Yes, it’s possible.” And I said, “But there’s [sic; there are] a lot of Spanish-speaking countries down there that could use the same help.” I said, “How about maybe bringing them up and instead of us [sic; our] going down there, let’s train them up here.”

So we trained twenty-two Spanish-speaking countries the first year. So that was one of my big jobs.

STRACHN: And when was that?

ROBY: [Coughs.] That was 1983, is [sic; Nineteen eighty-three is] when I started. That’s when I went down, February of ’83. And then a couple of months later, the locomotive was going: We’re going to train as many Spanish-speaking countries as AID could pull together, and AID is Agency for International Development, and they wound up with twenty-two, and we trained them at [the National Advanced Resource Technology Center (formerly National Fire Training Center) in Marana [Arizona], set up a full Spanish curriculum. And I’m not a Spanish speaker or writer, myself, but I know who are, that have the skills, so I brought that cadre together with— Dick Henry was the director of Marana at the time, and thank God for Dick Henry. He was a good organizer, made it happen, and we pulled that off and then did it for two or three more years in a row, brought more people in. So it was—

STRACHN: And you were training foreign countries, and yet we weren’t up to speed completely in [cross-talk; unintelligible].

ROBY: Oh, oh. Oh, no. But they were hooked. Once they saw how it would work and gone through the training, they’re [sic; they were] all trying to implement—

STRACHN: Did your actions with the foreign countries help to open Washington’s eyes to the need of training for own folks?

ROBY: Probably so, because they established another position after that that Chuck Mills came into that was partially funded by the Forest Service and AID, the State Department, to help with that kind of training, and that's why—Chuck was my deputy on the San Bernardino, so he came in under a detail. I said, "Chuck, you come in under the detail for"—they were talking about three months, ninety days. "If you like the job and you do the job I think you'll do, guess what? I think you'll have a full-time job." Guess what? They offered a full-time job, so he stayed with AID for three or four years and then retired. Now he has his own company, going around teaching ICS all over the world.

STRACHN: Interesting.

ROBY: Mm-hm.

STRACHN: So he really helped to get the U.S. and other countries set up with it.

ROBY: Yes. Well, everybody started getting the fever. Police departments started hearing about it. Here, a police department would come in, and highway patrol would come into our organization, and they wouldn't understand anything. "What's an incident commander, and what's this?" Before you know [sic; knew] it, we were saying, "You know, you need to be trained that way. We're all speaking the same language." And now, and the communications, the whole thing.

STRACHN: This is about ten years after it really kind of came—the development came about in Southern California.

ROBY: The conception of the idea.

STRACHN: Of FIRESCOPE and of the beginning of the whole [cross-talk; unintelligible].

ROBY: It was 1970, yes.

STRACHN: So now it's ten years later.

ROBY: So now it's in a few other countries already, not in all the United States, but now I think it's pretty well over the United States. There's [sic; There are] probably some departments that haven't changed, but who knows? I really don't know that answer.

STRACHN: Tell me a little bit about the chemical and fire equipment side.

ROBY: I was responsible for—the problem we were having for years with the Forest Service is [sic; was a] mom-and-pop operation would develop a chemical that was supposed to be the silver bullet for fighting fire, no [considerations for] health and safety, no corrosion testing, and they were out trying to sell this to our field people, and so we developed specifications, things that before we will [sic; would] approve a chemical to be put on national forest land or to be handled by our people, they had to follow or meet these specification requirements.

So we developed—oh, gosh, what was the term? Anyway, it's how a company could start the testing process. So then we'd have to go through all these specs with that product and see if one doesn't retard [sic; see if one retarded] fire first, and we put it through the burn chamber. We actually have a wind tunnel in Missoula, and we had another fire chamber down in Macon, Georgia. [Coughs.] But it was not—I don't think they had a wind tunnel, but Missoula had the wind tunnel and fire chamber, and so we'd make sure they would retard fire in our types of cellulose fuels. So then if they met all these requirements and went through the operational testing in the field, then they would be approved. That was probably 80 percent of my job.

And then we did the same for foams, and now they're doing the same for gel, because it's amazing how harmless some of these chemicals can look. Some of them, you can put a piece of magnesium four inches long, an inch wide and about a quarter—not quarter but three-sixteenths wide, drop it in a chemical, and almost overnight it would disappear. So people would say, “Wait a minute, there's nothing in there that's corrosive to metals or anything.” So we proved

them wrong, and people were having problems with their aircraft coating, and contractors were suing the government. And so anyway, that's why that was all required, and we had to test all those things before they could be used in the field. And we wrote the manual, said, "Hey, our chemicals all have to be approved and on a qualified products list prior to be used in the field."

And then I had a fire danger rating system, and I had the automatic lightning detection system, training and implementing that. And then—

STRACHN: What was that?

ROBY: That's where you put sensors out and you detect lightning by longitude [and] latitude], know right where the strike was. It's fed immediately into dispatch. And you tell whether it's a type of strike that's going to start a fire or a type of strike that won't start a fire.

STRACHN: And do we use this, does Forest Service use this—

ROBY: Oh, it's pretty much—

STRACHN: —everywhere?

ROBY: Yes, it's pretty much well used everywhere now, yes. And then we had—the fire danger rating system's been going for a long time. And then I was the national liaison officer with the Pentagon on the MAFFS [Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System] program, MAFFS aircraft activation and implementation.

STRACHN: Tell me a little bit about what that entailed.

ROBY: MAFFS is Military [sic; Modular] Airborne Fire Fighting System. It's made to slip into the back, through the cargo door of a C-130, [a] standard military C-130, without changing the configuration of the aircraft one bit, so within a few hours you can convert a C-130 to a 3,000-gallon air tanker. And we have eight of them in the Forest Service. They're building new ones now, but the old ones are still the ones they had when I was in there.

STRACHN: And did your job entail convincing the Pentagon to go with this?

ROBY: Make them available or make sure that they attended the training.

STRACHN: Were they open and agreeable to the [cross-talk; unintelligible] of operations [cross-talk; unintelligible]?

ROBY: Oh, yes. Yes. It's been hot and cold, but the local missions, the local guard bases that have them—their commanding officers are just gung-ho, because it's the nearest mission they can have to military operations, to train and get their people up to speed. So they like it because it breaks boredom and gives them an avenue to train under a real-world situation. So from that standpoint, it makes a lot of sense, but it's an expensive operation. It takes about three C-130s of support to support one C-130. [Laughs.]

So it's a good program. It has its limitations. Many people have felt that it was activated only for political reasons. That's not always true but I know it has happened sometimes. The coordination with the Pentagon was sort of not a big deal because I usually dealt with other levels of the organization to make it happen, and if there was [sic; were] any major problems, then it was elevated to the Pentagon. But I was just down the street from the Pentagon. So that was an interesting assignment. And when I left the job and became supervisor on the Angeles, they moved that responsibility to the assistant director at Boise.

STRACHN: And that's what I was going to ask you. You actually had to move to Washington for the job. Did you spend a lot of time in Boise?

ROBY: I was in Boise probably more than any other city in the United States, and in Missoula, [the] equipment development center, and San Dimas. Those were my primary responsibility

STRACHN: So your family had moved to Washington, D.C., and you were still—

ROBY: I was spending a lot of money flying to Boise and Missoula [telephone rings] and—I'll let it ring. Then I was in a lot of other cities, but it was only for meetings and things, but for actual fixed business locations, it's Boise, Missoula and San Dimas, which if I was [sic; were] in Boise, I'd have been closer to both of them.

STRACHN: Okay.

ROBY: But I wouldn't have been in Washington helping the chief answer letters to the congressmen. That was before cyberspace, you know. We didn't have the electronic capability we have today, so [there was] a lot of hard-copy stuff. DG was just getting started. We were just getting indoctrinated.

STRACHN: I would guess there were a lot of political things that came from that job as far as education and [cross-talk; unintelligible].

ROBY: Oh, my God, it broadened me like you wouldn't believe, and my contact[s] world wide. It's [sic; It] made my consulting business what it is, because I just have contacts everywhere, and they know what I do, and they call me—

STRACHN: You actually met them through your time in Washington?

ROBY: Yes. You know, I did assignments in Argentina, Brazil. Dominican Republic started it all, and then Ecuador, Chile—my goodness, I can't think of them. Even included the Galápagos, with Ecuador. Did that all by phone. I did all the advising by phone. That was amazing.

STRACHN: Now, did your job there kind of wrap up what was going on, or how did the transition back to Southern California happen? What brought that about?

ROBY: Well, I just kept applying for forest supervisor jobs. That's what I wanted to do.

STRACHN: You had spent five years there and decided it was time for a change for you.

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: You felt like you had accomplished what you had set out to do there.

ROBY: Right, right. I had accomplished what I had set out to do, and the agency was comfortable that I had done what they expected me to do. At that time, there was an unwritten policy that if you give [sic; gave] them five years in D.C., they will [sic; would] do their best—and you're [sic; you were] not happy to stay or for some reason you don't [sic; didn't] want to stay—they will [sic; would] do what they can [sic; could] to move you back west or north or wherever you wanted to try to be. Now, I get [sic; got] in there, and I find [sic; found] a lot of people that that didn't happen to. They say [sic; said], "Well, that's what I was told, too."

But as a general rule, the chiefs were pretty good about it, starting with [R.] Max Peterson and [F. Dale] Robertson. You get on a one-to-one with the chief back there. I don't care what job you're in. They do get to know who you are, especially if you participate in the functions and the social events, and they get to know who you are. So it really opened my eyes, so I kept applying for supervisor jobs. I think the twentieth supervisor cert was the Angeles. I got it.

Now, if anybody had have [sic; had] told me I'd get the Angeles, I would have told them they're crazy. In fact, I was counseled that "you will never get a job assignment as a supervisor on a forest you've been ranger."

STRACHN: Were you looking primarily at Southern California, or were you just looking for a supervisor's job?

ROBY: I was looking for a supervisor's job in the West. I did get an offer for the supervisor the Caribbean forest, which at that time, with our kids just starting elementary school—they were in fourth, fifth grade—I called over there and talked to them about education, and they said, "Now, that's a little bit of a problem here." So I gracefully got out of that one. But other than that, I

applied for twenty. Chambers, my boss, said, “You know, George, I know you like Southern California. I don’t know how you can stand that place. I don’t know how you can stand the smog and the traffic and all that, but, boy, I just can’t believe you’d want to go back.” I said, “I don’t necessarily want to go back there, but I wouldn’t refuse a good job there.”

And so I’ll be darned, I had the flu, and I’m [sic; I was] in bed, and my phone rings [sic; rang]. Marguerita’s [sic; Marguerita was] at work. She worked for the schools there. And the phone rings [sic; rang]. I pick [sic; picked] up the phone, and it’s [sic; it was] Chambers, and he says [sic; said], “George, how’s your daughter gonna survive in that Southern California smog with her asthma?” We discovered [that she had] asthma in D.C. That’s the only negative thing about—allergies there are pretty bad. And I’ve got some allergies, as you can tell. [Blows nose.]

And I’m half asleep and half groggy, you know, and I said, “What did you say, John? What?” And he said, “How is your daughter gonna that smog now that you know she has asthma?” I said, “John, what”—he says [sic; said], “George, I’m offering you the supervisor of the Angeles National Forest.” [Laughs.] And I was sick as a dog. So it was funny, how that all came about, after I’d been counseled, “Don’t plan on going back—you’ve been on the Angeles three times already. You started there, came back as a JF there, and you were a ranger there.”

Very seldom will you ever see a ranger go back—

STRACHN: You weren’t necessarily looking for Southern California.

ROBY: No, no, but I was applying basically for every forest job in the West. I mean, some in Colorado, some in Oregon and Washington. I can’t even remember the certs I was on. But I like to think that—I know Zane Gray Smith, the regional forester, told me that he wanted a fireman to go to the Angeles or a fire person. In those days, he might actually have said “fireman”; I

can't remember. So I have a feeling some people were sort of keeping me in mind if the Cleveland, San Bernardino or Angeles and Los Padres opened while I was back there, and they didn't.

Mike Rogers got—see, Mike was back a year before me, so guess what? Mike gets the Cleveland. A year later, I get the Angeles. We both [had] been back there five years. And so, you know, there was an unwritten rule [that] they'll [sic; they would] take care of you if there's [sic; there was] some opportunity and you don't break your pick while you're back there. And a lot of people did. A lot of people got so negative when they got back there, they couldn't handle it. They didn't look at it with open eyes and see what it does [sic; what it could do] for their career [sic; careers] and things they bring to that organization, because they needed—a lot of those people have [sic; had] panel vision from way back, setting [sic; sitting] in an office, you know?

STRACHN: The other thing that it sounds like to me or anybody who knows the Southern California forests, a primary responsibility is fire.

ROBY: Yes, yes, it was a perfect fit for me. In fact, I even wrote a letter with my application, stating how suited that job really was for me. It wasn't even part of the application. I just put a cover letter with it and said, "There's one thing: Now that I've been in D.C., I'm not worried about the smog. I know what the smog's all about. I know the traffic," and I just wrote those things that Chambers rattled off to me when I first went to Washington. And I said, "And one other thing: Because I've owned a home in D.C., I can afford to live in Southern California." And I think that might have had a lot to do with it.

STRACHN: You knew the circumstances.

ROBY: I knew what I was facing at every end.

STRACHN: And you had kept your hand clearly in the incident command system and the training and all the advancements that were being made.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: So it sounds as though you were coming in right up to speed for Southern California.

ROBY: Yes, I kept up on it as much as I could with all the other stuff going on. The interesting thing is I was able—part of my accepting that job at the fire lab was that I could keep my fire team, and the region wanted—they talked to PSW and Berkeley about keeping me as an incident commander, because they didn't have a whole bunch of them ready to go, and so I had made a request when I interviewed and then said, "I would like to keep my fire team."

STRACHN: This was at the Washington office?

ROBY: At the fire lab.

STRACHN: At the fire lab. But when I left for the fire lab, I had to completely disconnect from the fire team which I loved. I was the incident commander probably for twelve or fourteen years, and I had to really disconnect. Then the first crack out of the bag, I get sent as incident commander to the Dominican Republic, so all of a sudden I'm thinking about it as *now I've got an international possibility of exercising my skills as an incident commander*, so that's what I did in a lot of those assignments, was I performed as an incident commander. I didn't necessary [sic; necessarily] have a fire team under me, but I helped them train their people and gave them advice on how to fight the fire, so I—

STRACHN: You were still providing the role that you did as an incident commander.

ROBY: I gave them fuels advice, fuels management advice. That was all part of the package. And I got called back to some of them on [sic; for] the second and third time.

STRACHN: When you came to the Angeles, that was 19—

ROBY: Eighty-seven.

STRACHN: Nineteen eighty-seven.

ROBY: I was shocked.

STRACHN: Tell me a little bit about that.

ROBY: One, I was shocked that I got that forest, because it is such a challenge. Well, you know the challenge. And I was sort of shocked that they thought I could handle a big job like that. Zane had had a lot of problems on the forest, with the forest prior to me [sic; my] getting there. So I had a couple of days' lecture of things I had to straighten out, try to do while I was there. There was [sic; were] issues with L.A. County, you know, things that I thought I could really help on, and I did. I did turn that around.

Thinking that they thought enough of me to handle a big job like that, I figured I might wind up with the Modoc [National Forest] or something, a lower workload and not a lot of activities going on. I just didn't want to get a sleepy old forest. And so to get the Angeles was just that much more gravy.

STRACHN: You had of course got on the political side of things, being in Washington.

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: The Angeles was a political forest.

ROBY: Right, right, yes. The first thing, [Robert] Swinford and I—of course, I knew Bob from before, and Bob and I sat down and go [sic; went] over all the political contacts lists, and I'm saying, "Wow, I remember. I remember there was [sic; were] a lot of them." Probably more than any other forest in the United States. And thank God for a public affairs officer. I mean, when you say somebody doesn't really support their public affairs job, if you have that problem

on a forest like the Angeles or the San Bernardino or Los Padres or the Coronado [National Forest], you know, those forests that have a lot of public and political contacts, you've got to have a strong public affairs person.

STRACHN: Did you Washington experience give you confidence in that area?

ROBY: Yes, yes. Yes, I had to help out with congressmen's staffers and go in there and help them with drafting stuff and respond to a lot of the letters and submit for the director's signature or the chief's signature. Things like that really got me opened up a little bit more. But my ranger time on the Arroyo—we had a lot of political contacts there, too, so that helped me.

So anyway, it was probably one of the most tingling experiences I've ever had in taking a new job, is [sic; was] walking into the supervisor's office the first time.

STRACHN: You knew you were the person responsible.

ROBY: Yes. And I said, *Is this really happening?* [Laughs.] As I'm walking out of my car into the front door. And then everybody's been waiting for me, and that was nice.

STRACHN: Were there a lot of folks that you had left—

ROBY: Yes, surprisingly enough, yes. Suzie was one of them in the hallway. The first thing—I got down toward recreation, I see her standing in the hallway down there, you know?

STRACHN: Now, when you returned, did you have specific things that you wanted to accomplish? Did you have a legacy you wanted to leave for the forest?

ROBY: Well, yes, I had a lot of them. One was to get a decent supervisor's office for the Angeles, and that's one that I never was able to pull off. And nobody else has been able to do it, either. Temporary buildings that were supposed to be there for a two- or three-year period are still there, still being patched up. So that was probably my biggest downfall [sic; shortcoming?].

The other was to try to bring a cost of living allowance to Southern California, and I was

going to start on the Angeles. There's [sic; There are] some people that'll probably disagree or be upset for me [sic; with my] saying this, but I got together with the board of supervisors in Southern California, which was the Los Padres, the Angeles, the Cleveland and the San Bernardino—because we had board meetings—because I had managed the South Zone contracting unit, the South Zone air unit from the Angeles, but we ran it sort of as a board of directors, and I was sort of the chairman of the board, and so I'd get input from all the supervisors, and we'd meet and make changes if necessary.

And so I brought this up at one of our board meetings, that “we've got to do something. I've got foremen, engine captains on welfare.” And they said, “Don't tell me this. George, that's not true.” And then I said, “You guys check. I'll bet you might find *you* have some.” And so especially in the Santa Barbara [unintelligible] area, they were hurting. And so finally I said, “We need to start an effort, get a team going, and let's deal with OPM [Office of Personnel Management]. Let's do what we need to do. I'll take the lead on it or whatever.”

They all go [sic; went] around the table and said, “George, it's not important enough. We got too many other alligators.” I said, “Well, okay, if that's the case, then the Angeles will do it by itself.” I said, “Fine. Do you want to come along, come along.” So I got with [Deborah] “Debbie” Rutherford, who happened to be a pretty capable person in driving things forward, as you know, a very capable individual, very knowledgeable, and with her help and some people on her staff, we started the process.

I went to the regional office because I knew if I didn't have Paul Barker's support it would never happen. And Personnel. I got the personnel officer—I can't think of his name—and her name [,who] was the assistant.

ROBY: Shirley [Moore?] and another guy.

STRACHN: White?

ROBY: What is it? Anyway—can't think of all the names, but [Sheri?] White was one of them. And the regional forester said, "George, I understand your sit—"—I gave him the situation we were facing down here, and he said, "I know, and I'm aware of it, and more power to you." I [sic; He] said, "I think it's a futile effort, but if you want to take it on and try and [sic; to] see how far you can go, I'm behind your 100 percent." So thanks to Debbie Rutherford and her support of me, and me making I don't know how many trips to D.C. with the OPM office—I had a lot of disappointing trips, but they started getting better and better. And then all of a sudden, guess what: We started making progress for the Angeles.

And so then on [sic; at] my retirement party, Paul Barker is [sic; was] giving me the regional gift and saying the final words for me on my retirement, and he says [sic; said], "Oh, by the way, George, I have another letter here for you." [Chuckles.] He says [sic; said], "From OPM. Guess what: They have approved a cost of living [allowance] for Southern California." So what happened, it grew from the Angeles, and they started looking at the picture, but nobody else was really pushing for it, but it grew to San Francisco and—you know. So I think that's one of the biggest accomplishments I made.

STRACHN: Yes.

ROBY: It was one that I was told I'd never have a chance.

STRACHN: And you didn't actually see it implemented.

ROBY: No, and I didn't benefit from it.

STRACHN: You didn't benefit from it, but it was approved by the time you retired.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Had recruitment been difficult because of the cost of living down here?

ROBY: Oh, it was unbelievable. GS-11, -12, -13 jobs—even at that grade, it was impossible to get more than one- or two-name certs, and sometimes [there were] no-name certs. And the GS-5, -7, 9 was absolutely—unless they were local resource that was here in the local area or had some kind of roots here, family home or something, it was just impossible to get people. And then you get chastised and blamed for promoting your own, you know—this kind of thing. But to get certs, names on certs even at the high grade levels was a real handicap for the Angeles.

STRACHN: Tell me about promoting your own. You were in the region, you came back to the region, and we had a consent decree going on. Was that in full gear when you returned, or were you involved much in that whole change?

ROBY: Yes, I was. I was in it because I went to Washington, a little bit, because I was at the fire lab. It all started in the fire lab, at PSW, not the fire lab but PSW. So I was exposed to it. I had to adjust my management style to it, and then Washington—it was almost an unheard of issue, and that frustrated Mike and I [sic; me] in particular. “Jesus Criminy,” you know, “has there been a 5,000-foot wall between here and Washington over the last five or six years?” So I was really shocked by that and [by] the lack of support for the region when I knew how it all happened, and that’s what made it tough.

STRACHN: Initially it was going to be nation wide, wasn’t it?

ROBY: That’s right. That’s exactly right, and that’s what the Forest Service tried to prevent, which in many ways was a good move at the time, but the thing that I wanted to make sure didn’t happen again is that by [sic; that] any actions that I took or any actions that people around me took could lead to the need for something like that again. I felt that we were smart enough and good enough managers that we can [sic; could] manage without forcing something like that to

ever happen again. It's not necessarily true, but I still believe that's the objective, is not to generate the need for another consent decree of any kind.

STRACHN: Do you feel you helped Washington office recognize their role?

ROBY: Oh, yes. I don't think we ever did as much as we wanted, because we were only there five years [chuckles], and that was a slow process, but Mike and I—we had to stand very firm and stern [sic; firmly and sternly] at times to try to explain what the region is [sic; was] dealing with and how they're [sic; they were] trying to deal with it, and that I believe—you know, quite [sic; I believe that they didn't quite ?] understand how serious this problem is. This is [sic; was] something that is [sic; was] very serious, and it's [sic; it was] going to require management support from every level of the organization. Mike and I sometimes broke our pick in a day, and we'd have to come back the next morning and start all over again to try to get them to understand what we'd experienced.

STRACHN: In doing that, were you discussing issues of women in employment and equipment and training and all of that?

ROBY: Oh, definitely, yes, yes.

STRACHN: It focused on bringing women into fire?

ROBY: Yes, into training at Marana, because Monosmith had the training program, Mike had fuels management and I had fire equipment, and we were operating as a staff all the time, consulting with each other and the director at Marana worked for the staff there, so we was [sic; were] encouraged to get more outreach, get more minorities and women in these national training [sic; trainings]. So it took pretty well in some areas, but then I had to go around to some regions—they were still dragging their feet and still not seeing the light, in my opinion. I think it's too bad that there's still not as much emphasis on it nation wide as there is in California, but

if they can manage and prevent those things from happening and still meet the objectives of diversity, more power to them. But at the rate they're going, I don't know that they're going to meet the targets that I would think would be required.

STRACHN: When you came back to California, did you see a lot of changes within the fire personnel?

ROBY: Oh, yes.

STRACHN: Were there a lot of women? Were there changes in that [sic; those] five years you were gone?

ROBY: Yes, there were more women than I remembered when I was ranger here, but there was a tremendous group of white males that were obviously very, very disturbed. I mean, I'd read it in between the lines, I'd see it when I'd meet with them, I'd visit an engine, I'd go to a Hotshot crew barracks and it would come out now and then. For one [sic; One] thing that I've always been proud of [is that] as a manager, I'm a good listener. I tend to talk when I shouldn't sometimes, but over all, I listen and I can listen at all levels of the organization. And I was hearing it from all levels of the organization. I was hearing it on my staff, potential ranger candidates on the districts, potential fire staffers on the districts and engine captains. So that was probably one of the biggest challenges I had, was to try to deal with the white male [sic; males] when they would come to me and question why we were doing what we were doing. And that was probably the most challenging thing, to try to quiet things down. And I think I did, to a degree.

STRACHN: Was there anything in particular that you used to address the situation? I know it was a very difficult time.

ROBY: Yes. Well, I sort of defused a couple by explaining how many certs I was on before I ever got a forest supervisor job, and I used that to say, “Hey, don’t get disappointed, and you should never stop applying.” They were to a point where they’d say, “Well, hell, I’m not even going to go to the trouble of filling out the paperwork,” and I said, “If I had said that, I wouldn’t be setting [sic; sitting] in this chair where we are right now.” So a lot of them said, “Well, twenty certs you were on?” I said, “Yes.” And I said, “But it was what had to happen. It was what needed to be done. Some of the women got my jobs, and some minorities got those jobs, but I didn’t lose faith in the organization, and I kept plugging on. And guess what: Look what happened to me. So let’s plug on. I’ll support you when the time is right.” So that helped some of them, but not all of them.

Now, another thing that I never told anybody, and I did that for a reason: I’m a Native American, and nobody knew it. I didn’t want anybody to know it, because I had seen too many things happen and [people would] say, “Oh, I know why you got *that* job,” you know? And I said to myself, *Now I know what women go through when they have to face a job*. So I’m saying to myself, *Hmm, they can’t say they’re not a woman*. [Laughter.]

STRACHN: As you had to fill out the various boxes and whatever, especially under the consent decree, you always put yourself as—

ROBY: White male, yes, yes. I never told anybody. Of course, Marguerita knew, and my kids know. They’re Indian. And they’re Hispanic, too. You know, Marguerita is from Costa Rica. Like, in the jobs I do now, my consulting, I’m happy to tell them I’m a Native American. In fact if you look at my business card [takes one out to show her], it’s an arrowhead in the shape of a fire triangle.

STRACHN: That’s very nice.

ROBY: And so when I left the Angeles, I started my own consulting business.

STRACHN: Let's bring us up to date now. You left in 1990. You'd been there a few years?

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Obviously an agency in turmoil in 1990, still going through the consent decree, getting an awful lot of static from the judge—

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: —for not meeting certain things

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: What was your initiative to [sic; Why did you] leave when you did?

ROBY: I have a belief, and I always have, from the first job I was ever in: A person can be in a job too long, and no matter how hard you try and how good you are, there's [sic; there are] elements out there that can beat you down. I wasn't in a position to solve all the problems that the Angeles faced, and I saw it was going to be a great opportunity for someone else to come in that wasn't—the three years on the Angeles was [sic; were] probably the toughest three years I've ever had in the Forest Service.

STRACHN: Why do you say that?

ROBY: All the political, personnel issues that I had to deal with, the environmental issues that were heavy, heavy stuff: appeals, lawsuits. I had \$260 million worth of lawsuits against me when I was supervisor. I had my own liability insurance, on my own. And I was advised—I went to some SES [Senior Executive Service] training when I was supervisor, thinking that I may want [sic; may have wanted] to go to SES someday. Barker encouraged me to do it. So I got started in it.

At one of these SES courses in Denver, a U.S. attorney stood in front of all of us and said, “You know, we are very, very, very honored to be in the presence of this meeting, because I want you all to know that the person in the government with the most lawsuits against him is setting [sic; sitting] in this room.” And I about slipped down into—I mean, I just turned red as a beet. I started to slip down in [sic; onto] the floor, and I’m looking around, and everybody else is doing the same thing. They’re all [thinking], *Is he gonna make an example of me or something?* And he looks around the room, and he goes like this [demonstrates], and he points around the room, and he focuses on this guy, whose name was Buck. “Stand up, Buck.”

My heart went clear down into my belly and up into my chest again, and I’m saying, *Oh, God, thank God it wasn’t me*, you know? He says [sic; said], “Folks, meet Such-and-such.” We became good friends, and I can’t think of his name. He was a warden in a federal prison in Long Island—I mean Long Beach, right out here. “He has more lawsuits against him than any other federal employee in the government.” And we talked about him a lot during this course.

And after his [sic; the U.S. attorney’s] presentation, he [sic; Buck] and I went to lunch, because I was number two or three. I was pretty high up on the list. And over on the site of the room is [sic; were] a whole bunch of pamphlets and booklets and paper, so when the U.S. attorney quit his presentation and thanked every[body, he said], “By the way, I have forms over here from two or three liability insurance companies. I’d recommend every one of you grab some of them and do something with it.” [Laughs, then coughs.] “Because,” he says [sic; said], “in every case so far that’s [unintelligible] everybody in this room, none of them are being held personally liable yet. But, but,” he says [sic; said], “as long as Uncle Sam is in your court and everything is fine and honky-dory, but if there’s any little detail or any glitch in what you did or

in a decision you made and they can't support that, you've got to"—so I immediately filled those forms out when I got home.

STRACHN: What were the lawsuits?

ROBY: Oh, gosh.

STRACHN: Environmental groups?

ROBY: A whole bunch of them. No, these are [sic; were] mostly injuries.

STRACHN: Employees?

ROBY: No, publics on the forest. One, I recall going off Switzer Falls, on the moss up at the top and not having a fence around it, [a] broken back in that situation, as I recall. And [he was] lucky he wasn't killed. I mean, I went up there long before this accident and since, just to check it out.

The other was—the biggest one was a \$50 million suit. It was either \$50 [million] or \$50 [million]. That was the biggest one. And that was a car full of young teenagers, all drinking, cut down one of our gates, broke through one of our gates up on the Baldy District, as I recall, went up on one of the old truck trails and drove off the road and killed one or two of them, and one of them is a paraplegic—quadriplegic—I can't remember. Four or five in that car. Well, they're [sic; they were] suing me, the supervisor of the Angeles, fortunately, for not having guard rails along that road. It was still active when I left. I don't know what ever happened to it. I asked Mike about it [unintelligible] a year or two, and it was still there, still fighting it in court, and our attorneys are still saying—

And then another one: A guy was up in another one of our recreation sites. I think it was on the Arroyo. Dove off of a bridge into six inches of water, head first. Dove. And he'd been on drugs up there. We had good documentation and witness interviews about how crazy he was

acting up there. He decided he was going to be Superman, and he was going to dive into this river. Well, the river was six inches deep with boulders everywhere. Well, he broke his neck and—quadriplegic. Well, his family was suing me for \$25 million—\$25 [million], \$30 [million] for not having “shallow water” signs all along the stream.

STRACHN: So basically—

ROBY: [Coughs.]

STRACHN: —these suits that were facing you were suits from forest users and the fact that the forest was not being signed as a public park or that there was not—

ROBY: Right.

STRACHN: —the awareness of the ruggedness of the area.

ROBY: Right. There weren't guard rails here or there weren't [sic; wasn't] fencing in proper areas, that kind of stuff.

STRACHN: Did it amaze you to see these suits coming in?

ROBY: Oh, yes. I remember one day my AO [administrative officer] walked in—boy! Rick.

STRACHN: [Richard] “Rick” [Strand?].

ROBY: Strand came in. “George,” he said, “do you realize you have \$250 [million] or \$260 million worth of suits against the forest supervisor?” And I said “Are you kiddin' me?” And he had had some list somewhere that [sic; from which] he had added everything up, claims that were coming in from the attorney's office up in San Francisco. But I don't know what's ever come of them.

STRACHN: You knew if you hung around to see the end of those, you might be there forever.

ROBY: Yes, that's right, exactly. And I maintained [coughs] my insurance policy for three years after I retired.

STRACHN: So you had gone to the SES training, thinking, *Okay, I may make another move?*

ROBY: [Coughs.] Yes, I was thinking about it. Well, I was being encouraged by Barker. He had been looking at some of his people in the region, and he and the deputy—one of the deputies had identified me as possibly one they'd want to get into the SES program, and figured I'd be very open to it. [Coughs.] Well, I thought about it. So here's [sic; here was] a course coming up that's [sic; that was] going to start some of this off. "See what you think," and I said, "Okay, let's do it." It was a two-week course, and I was the only Forest Service employee in the room.

So I went through all of that, and I was thinking about my future. I was a licensed forester in California, and I was faced with the issues that were facing me every day on the forest and that I had made some accomplishments that I was happy with. And I knew that there were some of those things that if I was going to make major changes, then I might have to stick around for another five years, and I didn't think it was going to be fair to my family because they didn't see anything of me while I was super[visor]. I was gone on the road, I was fighting issues, I was, you know, constantly gone, and occasionally over weekends and everything else. And I was cussing on the freeway when I normally didn't cuss on the freeway.

STRACHN: [Chuckles softly.]

ROBY: And so when I got back from that SES course, Barker called me and asked me what I thought. "How did it go?" And I said, "Oh, it went great. Well, but, you know, I need to talk to you. I've got some personnel issues down here," and that's what I used as my excuse to go up and talk to him. I was having a problem with someone on the forest that we were having to remove from his duties, so I needed Shirley's help on some things, and I said "I've got to go up and meet with Personnel, and while I'm up there, I'd like to come in. Do you have any time on

such-and-such day?” And he said, “Oh, yes. Come in at the end of business, four thirty. That way, I don’t have to rush.”

[Coughs.] So I got all my personnel stuff done, and the reason I really went in there was to talk to Barker; I had everything taken care of in Personnel, but I wanted to run some things by her just to make sure. I could have done it by phone. So I told him, “You know, I think you’ve got me pegged wrong for SES. I wouldn’t want to cost the taxpayer to go through that training. And you probably don’t remember, Paul, but when you did my first career development plan with me, I told you I was a firefighter qualified person.” And you should have seen that look on his face. He had completely forgot [sic; forgotten] that I had qualified for [sic; as a] firefighter. I don’t know of any other forest supervisor that retired as a firefighter. There might have been a lot, but I don’t know of any. I thought Mike was going to, but he decided he didn’t want to go through all the documentation process. He could have probably done it, but—because we had similar fire backgrounds.

Anyway, he looked at me, and he says [sic; said], “Oh, God, George, I forgot all—I remember it now. I remember.” But, you know, he’d been up against alligator after alligator for the last few years, himself, so he didn’t remember.

STRACHN: So being firefighter qualified brought you under the firefighter retirement plan?

ROBY: Mm-hm.

STRACHN: Okay.

ROBY: Yes, and nobody knew that.

STRACHN: Even as forest supervisor, that was still holding true for you.

ROBY: Well, I’d already had my—I had twenty-two or twenty-three covered years before I got back into administration. I got my twenty-two years in Washington, D.C., and that was a fire-

covered job that I took back there. That was another reason I took that job. One of the conditions I took it is [sic; was] that it would be a firefighting job, and they wanted a firefighting person in there, so they said, “Well, it is and will be. Don’t worry.” I said, “Okay.”

Well, I told Zane Gray Smith the same thing when I first came back, and he [sic; it] sort of shocked him a little bit. “Oh, boy! Well, you’re not thinking about retiring early, are you?” And I said “No, no, not at all.” And I wasn’t. And then when Barker took his job later, then I told him the same thing. I’d have felt terrible if I hadn’t have told him, if all of a sudden I sprung [sic; sprang] it on him, you know?

So I was eligible for full benefits at fifty. And the other thing is I had other options on the outside that I had already been approached by, so I wasn’t stepping out into Never Never Land completely; I knew what I was doing, and I wanted to leave the Forest Service with the feeling of the Forest Service that I had when I started as a lifeguard.

STRACHN: That’s a very interesting comment.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: Could you feel Forest Service, as you knew it, changing?

ROBY: Oh, yes, yes, no doubt. When I was ranger, I was frustrated because of my lack of spending time on resource management, and it was [sic; and] maybe 50 percent of my time I was doing resource management, and I was still frustrated that it wasn’t enough. Rangers today—I’ll be they’re not doing 10 percent resource management, and I know supervisors—when I got in there, I’m [sic; I was] saying to myself, *Wait a minute. When am I going to be able to get out there and look at this landslide or this flooding going on or something? I just can’t even get out of this damn office because of all the meetings.* And if I did, it was going to a damn meeting.

So I bet you, other than just indirect activities, we weren't spending 15, 20 percent on resource management issues. We were dealing with personnel issues, environmental issues, political issues. So that was the other thing, is I'm [sic; the other thing: I was] saying, *Wait a minute. This isn't the job it was*, you know? It's unfortunate because that's what brought most of us into those jobs originally, but a lot of them that have come in lately don't know what it's like to do a full resource management job.

STRACHN: What [unintelligible] be like.

ROBY: Yes, and they never will know.

STRACHN: It's a new generation.

ROBY: They never will know, and for good reasons that's probably a good thing because if they knew the differences, with all the problems involved, even, they would have a hard time trying to work 110 percent in the job they have today. But since they don't know that difference, it's a relative thing. They're proud of that job, and they're going to do it the best way they can, but the thing that I think they don't realize is they're in a resource management position, but unless you include humans in that resource nomenclature, you're not dealing with the land, caring for the land. And that's sort of where I was coming from, and since I knew I could start my own business, I had a lot of contacts—I loved the Forest Service and my kids work for the Forest Service, and my son-in-laws [sic; sons-in-law] work for the Forest Service—I just felt that it was time for me to let someone else come in, someone that will [sic; would] have the energy to focus on the things that I didn't have the time for.

Like, for example, a manager has [sic; managers have] to pick the areas that they're going to try to be effective [in]. Even though you want to do all these other things, you can do that in a different way, get your staff moving forward, your rangers working on that the best they

can—I can take a [sic; can give] personal attention to this, personal attention to here [sic; attention here]. Now, when I get here, then I can start taking some personal attention to other places.

But now, with the change in people, like a new supervisor—Mike Rogers had a completely different focus on things, so Mike was able to go for things that I sort of didn't spend a lot of energy on, and I still got by, and I did the minimum to get through whatever was required, but these other things, I focused [on] and did. And so every time a job changes, in every three to five years, that's why focuses change.

STRACHN: [unintelligible].

ROBY: Eventually all the job gets attention. My pet peeve with the Forest Service is how they treat deputy forest supervisors. Thank God I never became a deputy forest supervisor. Very few have benefited from it the way they should have. Some have, but it's been few. Al West is a good example. But if we set deputy supervisors up to be in a job more than three years before moving them to a new job, we're doing a disservice to the forest and we're doing a disservice to the individual. I've seen it happen so many times. If we think a person is good enough to be a deputy for three to five years at the most, and we haven't got a plan to move them in three to five years after they've pretty well got a pretty good handle on what a deputy does, we're doing everybody a disservice, and it's a waste of resources.

If a deputy is just to be someone there to take all the undesirable jobs for the supervisor, then don't call him a deputy. A deputy infers that that person is going to be a supervisor someday, and the agency has to find a way to make sure—and if that person isn't going to become a supervisor after—and they know that, based on performance they've seen as a deputy—then they should be upfront, like [sic; as] I was with my deputy, and advise them that,

“Hey, you know, I know this is the thing you’ve wanted worst in your life, in your career.

However, I have to level with you. You do not have the support for that job in the agency, and I have to counsel you that way, and I will help you find a job, a staff job, and we’ll even try to select some of the areas that you would be willing to go [to].”

It was the hardest thing I ever did. He’d been a deputy for eight years.

STRACHN: A deputy is a training ground for supervisor.

ROBY: Yes. Yes, a deputy fire staff is a training ground to be a fire staff. And so I think if [sic; if there were] any advice I could ever give to anybody in the Forest Service, in the regional and Washington level, is [sic; it would be]: “Don’t put these people down the black hole of a deputy forest supervisor. They’re either going to make it or they’re not, and if they’re not, please be honest with them and tell them and have the backbone to tell them up front.”

Well, after that meeting, my deputy came to me after work—I’m [sic; I was] still in my office, like [sic; as] I was a lot, and he was always in his, you know, late. He comes [sic; came] in and says [sic; said], “George,” he says [sic; said], “you have just done me one of the biggest favors of my life.” He almost went to tears. He said, “I’ve known what you’re telling me, but nobody else is telling me. I’ve been told all the time by these people that hey, I’m gonna be a forest supervisor. You’re the first person to tell me that.” And he said, “You can’t believe how happy you’re making me and how happy you’re gonna make my family.”

So it took a while. It took me six months. I found him a job in Region Six, a staff job. He came out better financially. He came out better physically. He came out better mentally. He came out better emotionally. And he went on to his retirement.

STRACHN: Speaking of retirements, what was your retirement date?

ROBY: My retirement date was February 2nd, I think, 1990.

STRACHN: Nineteen ninety. And did you go right into your new business?

ROBY: No, I took two months off, did things I wanted to do around here, thought about what I was going to do in a couple of months, didn't really do much, and then after a couple of months I went out and started the process of establishing Arrowhead Wildfire. [Coughs.]

STRACHN: Talk a little bit about what that is now. That's a full-time job for you?

ROBY: It's turning out to be pretty much full time. The difference is I can call my shots when I work, when I don't work, unless I'm under a contract or something like that. I first did a lot of work for US AID, Office of Disaster Preparedness. Did a lot of projects for them in Africa and did it through friends. I subcontracted a lot. I would get the contracts, and I would subcontract to some other retirees. I knew they had those skills. Afghanistan. And did a lot of that.

STRACHN: Is this all in the area of fire preparedness?

ROBY: No, this as emergency preparedness.

STRACHN: Emergency preparedness.

ROBY: Like, for example, the Afghanistan one was a major earthquake that hit Afghanistan.

Russia volunteered a bunch of big helicopters to go look for bodies and survivors, and AID

didn't know anything about helicopters and managing them. I don't know how many they had.

They had hundreds of them. And so they needed someone to manage—like a helicopter manager

to go over there and coordinate all that activity. And so I happened to know a gentleman that

retired from the Forest Service. He used to work for me at Ojai. Retired from Region Eight.

Excellent helitack, excellent logistics guy. So I hired him to work for me, and he did a project

for me, and he went over there and organized AID and managed those helicopters with no

incident, and so that was just one example.

I've done some incident command training, a [sic; training. I've worked with a] lot of flooding problems, famine problems, feeding thousands, hundreds of thousands of people in makeshift villages that [sic; villages, people who] were run out of their village [sic; villages] by these terrorist groups. This is going on right now. In fact, he would still be working on that—and, see, he couldn't do this on his own because when he retired, he had five years before he could contract to the government, so I'd say, "Well, how about contracting with me?" So Arrowhead—

STRACHN: Could get the contract.

ROBY: So I did the bidding and filling out the proposals and doing all the paperwork, writing the reports, and then advising him how I want [sic; wanted] him to proceed. And I had been well established with AID when I was D.C. because I did a lot of projects for them in Central and South America. And so they called me and asked me if I had anybody—"Are you still consulting, George?" And I said, "Yes." "Do you have anybody that could help me with this helicopter project in Afghanistan?" I said, "Yes." So that's how we did it.

He would still be doing that kind of work right now except he just found out he had [sic; has] to have a kidney transplant, unfortunately, so he's waiting for that and can't do much until he—but, yes—[Coughs.]

STRACHN: You're self-employed [sic; self-employment] business has been [in existence for] a about seventeen years now?

ROBY: Oh, yes, yes, a little over seventeen now.

STRACHN: And you've enjoyed that?

ROBY: Less two months, yes, so about seventeen. Oh, yes! Now I have a contract with [Foscheck?] Fire Retardants. That's his card. I have a part-time agreement with them. I advise

them on fire chemicals and retardants, foams and gels and firefighting tactics, and strategy and tactics, so I go around to the customers of Foscheck and do training sessions for them and show them how to get 100 percent out of the product and not waste it. I do that. I'm getting ready to leave for Australia in September to train a couple of states in Australia on the use of fire retardant properly [sic; on the proper use of fire retardant], and aircraft. So it's been a busy time.

And Marguerita is still working, and I have enough flexibility—if I want to take a week or two off, I just don't schedule any contracts or any work for that period of time and go take vacation. I've got a lot of use-or-lose leave.

STRACHN: On your own time, huh?

If you compared the two careers from the standpoint of job satisfaction—Forest Service, self-employed—

ROBY: Wow, that's a good question. I have to say that my Forest Service was the most [sic; more] satisfying over all.

STRACHN: And what was the most enjoyable part of that career?

ROBY: The thing that I enjoyed the most, and it's something that some people discourage—I enjoyed training and developing people to promote to the next level for them, because I found that by doing that, you're indirectly promoting yourself. I had rangers and supervisors tell me that "such-and-such job has opened up and Such-and-such [sic; So-and-so] on my staff wants to apply for it, and, God, I just don't know what I'll do without that person. I don't think—I'm gonna try to discourage it." And I couldn't believe what I was hearing. And I'm saying [sic; I said], "You're joking, of course." And no, they weren't joking. I said, "Wait a minute." I said, "You can't do that." I said, "You know, you'll be doing yourself good and your career good by

promoting your people.” And I said, “My God, I get more satisfaction out of that part of the job than I do out of holding people in place.”

And that’s why I got so frustrated about deputies. And I knew so many deputies had been there too long, and they knew they were there too long, but nobody would level with them. So that’s [sic; that was] one of the biggest satisfactions, was people that I supervised, that I could help get to another level.

STRACHN: Have you ever looked back at the time you entered the Forest Service and [noticed] the change in fire, fire management, FIRESCOPE, incident command?

ROBY: Wow. [Coughs.]

STRACHN: Putting that all [unintelligible], does it amaze you of what’s happened over this period of time [sic; does what’s happened over this period of time amaze you]?

ROBY: Yes, and that’s another pet peeve and concern I have. I hear it every day from my family. Because of the situation the Forest Service has found itself in, I honestly believe we’re putting people in positions that they’re not fully qualified for, not only administrative positions but firefighting positions, and the firefighting positions are the ones that concern me the most, because there’s life and death involved there. I think the Forest Service in going to have to decide whether they’re going to be a firefighting organization or hand it off and defer it to some other agency, because the way we’re going—I say “we”—they way they’re going now, as I see it, we’re an eight-hour-a-day fire department in a twenty-four-hour firefighting challenge, and we have people that have been thrust into positions that you can’t blame them for not accepting them. And we’re putting people in harm’s way as a result.

I would rather take the brunt of not staffing an area or not trying to do 100 percent somewhere and do it right and have some vacant positions and just let everybody in the world

know that we can't stretch ourself [sic; ourselves] any thinner. If that particular area burns, it burns, and it's going to create major problems politically, but we have to generate a twenty-four-hour fire department in the Forest Service, with qualified people. The state's facing some of the same things, but they don't have an eight-hour fire department, but they have some voids in their organization of qualified people, but they're getting some of them from the Forest Service now.

I've gone through that cycle a couple of times in the Forest Service, a lot to L.A. County, a lot to the state. And now the state's got a bunch of holes, and they're filling their holes with the Forest Service. And now the Forest Service—who will they go to fill their holes? They're going to accelerate training, and you can accelerate training all you want, but if you don't accelerate the experience to go along with it, you're going to get people in trouble. Firefighting is a science and an art, and you can teach the science but you have to learn the art. And that comes with hardcore experience and working with people that know what they're doing. And I think in ten years—I shudder to think what the Forest Service fire organization is going to look like.

STRACHN: The Forest Service was known as the premier wildland firefighting agency.

ROBY: Worldwide, worldwide.

STRACHN: Worldwide. That's not the case anymore.

ROBY: No, I don't believe so.

STRACHN: Is there anyone you handed off to in the agency that you see?

ROBY: Well, the State of California has wanted to protect the national forest for a long time. Now, I never supported it, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised, as this organization appears to be on its demise, that somebody's going to have to come down and say, "Wait a minute. We can do

that job for you. We'll meld the organizations. We'll do something, bring your experienced people, and the State of California will contract to protect the national forest."

STRACHN: Do you see firefighting going under the contracting-out provision?

ROBY: If it does, I think it will cost the agencies more, and I think it's going to be a situation that I think has happened to our law enforcement organization, that the line officers' hands are taken off of the process, and with line officer control and management of those programs, I think there's a chance, but if it goes the way I see some other programs going and it's contracted similar [sic; similarly] to what they've done with the fleet—and you saw how bad an experience the fleet was—well, try to get those fleet mechanics out on a fire twenty-four hours a day or longer, or two o'clock in the morning to support a fire operation. I saw that coming a mile away.

So I think that if it goes to a contracted fire department, it's going to be more of a caste system. It's going to be hard to work with, and it's going to be more expensive for the government. It'll cost more to protect the national forest than if it was [sic; were] done by in-service. There's something about a firefighting organization that—there's [sic; there are] inherent problems with contracting, and even though—I contract all the time with fire, on fires, but not in a decision-making role. I think it's opening everybody up for liability issues.

I think the Forest Service has to decide whether it's going to have a fire department, internal one, the Forest Service program and decide they're going to have to change the way they're managing it and make it a fire department and staff it accordingly, or just completely get out of that business and let some other agency—I would recommend an agency, not a private contractor, even though some private contractors could do a fair job with components of it. To take a holistic approach and taking resource management into consideration while they're doing it—I think that's going to be the limitation. And that's going to take a lot of direction from the

line officer if another agency comes in to do it, even. The resource management aspects are going to be very difficult to deal with. That's why I think it's got to be the Forest Service, with a staffed-up organization that runs twenty-four hours a day.

I got tired of being called by CDF, "Hey, by the way, did [sic; do] you guys know you had [sic; have] a fire up in Such-and-such? Can you get anybody there?" "Oh, God! Yeah, we'll get 'em there." Then we got [sic; had] to find where they are [sic; were], you know?

STRACHN: You've seen great changes, then, in fire.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: I mean, truly when you came in, it was a premier firefighting agency.

ROBY: Yes. I truly believe that it was. In fact, I was told that by a lot of other countries. Australia—they would love to have an organization like the Forest Service. At least they used to. Now they're seeing the weaknesses that we developed. We used to be visible worldwide. We used to be helping people out and going there. We still do, but it's on such a small scale now. And bringing them here and doing interagency, international stuff. We were looked upon—and I was proud of it. But what I see now, I'm not real proud of, and I just hope that we open our eyes and do something about it. And then to think we're coming into a year like they're predicting this year? I just shudder to think about what it's going to be like in a few years.

So anyway, that's sort of another pet peeve of mine.

STRACHN: Right. That's kind of a somber note.

ROBY: Yes.

STRACHN: We're about ready to wrap up, I think. Is there anything that you would like to add to it or emphasize, any final thoughts you might have?

ROBY: One thing that I would say in closing, basically, is I have to say I had a very, very fulfilling and satisfying career. And I wish I could have done more in that job, and all the jobs I had, but I can honestly say that every situation I was put in, of all the jobs that I had, I honestly gave 110 percent, but it wasn't always as much as I would have liked to have given. The forest supervisor's job is a real good case in point. I knew other things that had to have attention, but there's no way a human being is going to be able to do it.

And it's very difficult to manage when you get your marching orders of what's expected of you: "Now, you just figure out how to do that. Now, here's what we need to do." Oh, great. That's fair. That's the way every job should be. And then they tie both hands behind your back and say, "Okay, now do it."

STRACHN: I know that the agency—you probably left before your time. Do you feel you left at your time?

ROBY: Do you think the agency thought I left before my time? [Laughs.]

STRACHN: I have a feeling they [unintelligible] a few more of your years they were going to take.

ROBY: Well, I know personally, for G.A. Roby, I left at the right time. And I'm so happy. I worried about it, that I might not be doing it at the right time, but I was so satisfied within a few weeks to know that I had done the right thing.

STRACHN: I think that's a wonderful note to end on, George. I appreciate the interview.

ROBY: It's my pleasure.

STRACHN: And it's been delightful. Thank you.

ROBY: Sorry it took so long to get to this.

STRACHN: Thank you.

[End of interview.]