

Creating Alaska Oral History Interview

George Sundborg

Conducted by Dr. Terrence Cole, UAF Office of Public History

George: All under cover.

Ter: Yeah.

George: Because in public they act like they were best friends.

Ter: Yeah, yeah.

George: And at one time when Gruening and Bartlett were very close and for many years.

Ter: Yeah, yeah.

Man: Need some tone over there.

Robert: Are we on Tape 44 now?

Ter: I wonder if it is true of all states, George? I mean did you ever notice that with other

(Skipped) - Something before and I wanted to write it down, but I wanted to ask George about it and now I can't remember what it is, doggone it.

Man: It will come back.

Ter: What were we talking about, well anyway, shoot? My memory - I think - so what day is today?

Man: It's the 7th.

Ter: 7th of October.

George: 2003.

Ter: 2003. The day Arnold is running for governor, so it's a notable day in American political history. And we're in Seattle at the home of George and Mary Sonborg out in Magnolia, beautiful sunny day. And George thanks first of all for welcoming us into your home.

George: Thank you.

Ter: And I thought we'd just start about if you just maybe tell us a little bit about your early life, where you were born, and where you went to school and your early experiences.

George: Well I was born in the great city of San Francisco in 1913 and lived there for a few years and then we moved in 1914 to Berkeley, California, which is famous as the site of University of California main campus. And when I was 10 years old my father and mother with their two children, the older of whom was I, moved to Seattle. He was a salesman for United States Glass Company, which didn't deal with windows, but it dealt with pictures and plates and you know vases and that kind of thing. So anyway I lived here for - through the last two years of grade school and through the high school, Queen Ann High School here and through the University of Washington. And then I lived for four years in Hoquiam, Washington, which is on the coast at Gray's Harbor, as a reporter on a daily newspaper.

Ter: George, how did you get interested in journalism? What was your start in that -

Man: I apologize.

George: Oh, you know this is garbage pickup day and they have these great big trucks going around and at every house they stop and they have a mechanical thing that lifts up the garbage and dumps it and that has got to be happening.

Man: That's when we'll take our break. But I think we can continue.

Ter: George, when the sirens come, the first siren - I never noticed this but there is often a second one cause - there is seldom just one truck you know, so the timing is good. But so how did you - but you went to grade school and University here at Seattle.

George: Yes.

Ter: Grade school, high school, and University of Washington?

George: Yes.

Ter: What year did you graduate, George?

George: From the University?

Ter: Yeah.

George: 1934.

Ter: Okay. Oh right in the middle of the depression.

George: Oh, it was a deep depression, yes. I had had all kinds of short-term jobs you know just to try to keep alive. I had been a logger and I had gone to sea on a ship, and I had worked in a print shop and that kind of stuff, but they were just - they were never considered career moves.

Ter: Where did you go to sea, what was that, what was -

George: I was on the crew of a ship called the Keanni, which was an oil tanker and it went up and down the - it belonged to the Associated Oil Company, which has since been probably bought out by others and it doesn't exist any more. It was a large one at the time and it - the ship was what they call a product ship. That is it didn't carry crude. It carried gasoline and kerosene and all kinds of fuels that had been through a - anyway we went up and down the coast and we also went across to Hawaii. And I was in Hawaii and we delivered a whole load of stuff to Pearl Harbor in 1933. That was eight years before Pearl Harbor became a common known name all over every house in the United States.

Ter: Yeah, no kidding, well, so and in the depression you basically had to do anything to survive, that was it right?

George: I was an usher at the Paramount Theater for about a year for one thing I did. I worked in a super market called Piggly Wiggly and as you say we did anything that we were - we felt very lucky to get any kind of a job.

Now you started to ask me well how did you happen to get a journalism career. My mother was I think largely responsible for that. She said oh George you write so well, you would write, you should be a writer you know. And got that in my head when I was very little. And so I always had only that in mind and I did get a degree with a major in journalism from the University of Washington.

And the University was very useful to its graduates in finding jobs for them. That is how I got my job on the Gray's Harbor Daily Washingtonian at Hoquiam and I became - I had an employee there - I became the city editor and I had an employee named Murray Morgan, who had just graduated from the University and he became quite a famous author here as you know. And another one that worked there with me was a great basketball player Pete Anginsich. A great big tall giant of a man.

But anyway in 1938 I was contacted by the owner of the Daily Alaska Empire in Juneau. The owner of the newspaper at that time was the Governor John W. Troy and the paper was in the hands of his daughter Helen Troy. And she came to Seattle to interview several people who had been recommended to her by the University, which I was one. And they decided for some reason to employ me. I don't know whether it was a really great move at the time. I had been making \$80 a month working for the Washingtonian and I was able to go to Alaska because they offered the magnificent salary of \$50 a week you know and that was a big step up in the world. And so I went to Juneau and worked on that newspaper for several years.

Ter: Is that all right with the airplane?

Man: I could just barely hear a little bit of an airplane, but it was not objectionable really.

Ter: That's great, yeah, that's real interesting. So you went from \$80 a month to \$50 a week, huh?

George: Yeah.

Ter: What was it - did the old governor have any hand at all in the paper when you got there anymore, I mean did he -

George: No. Plain answer is no. He was ill and he was far past his prime. He had been a very active publisher and he had been a very active politician. And Franklin Roosevelt had appointed him governor on the recommendation of the Democratic Party in Alaska. But he was an invalid.

Ter: Was he in a wheelchair, George. I mean in other words did he - was he able to walk around and stuff still? I know he had a drinking problem is what everyone says.

George: Oh I don't know that. Everybody in Alaska had a drinking problem. John Troy I don't think he was a lush. Anyway Helen was sort of running things and it became obvious and a point was made of it that John Troy every time he took an oath or signed anything he had to sign a statement that he would not benefit individually from whatever the contract was. And the fact was that all of the printing of the territory of Alaska was being done by the Daily Alaska Empire, which he owned. And so Harold Ichies made a point of this and was going to fire him and they were going to prosecute him. And Ernest Gruening at that time was the Director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions in the Interior Department. And he intervened on behalf of Troy and said just why don't we just let him retire. Don't make a big fuss about it. Well they did that. It was good advice and then Harold Ichies who didn't get along with Gruening and vice versa thought oh I know what I'll do with Gruening. I'll send him to Alaska to be governor and that is how Gruening arrived there in December of 1938.

Ter: '38 - '39 you mean or is it '39?

George: Yeah '39.

Ter: '39 I think is right.

George: Yeah '39, yeah '39.

Ter: So did the Troy was he, cause he still stayed after - around town I guess did he or did he move outside? I don't know if you - he had anything?

George: John Troy?

Ter: Yeah, yeah.

George: Well he died soon after.

Ter: He did. Okay. Yeah. No, that's really amazing George cause actually I didn't know that Gruening intervened on Troy's behalf, especially considering -

George: Yes.

Ter: - the way relations went later I guess you know.

George: The subsequent history showed that the Empire was very anti-Gruening, but became that over a period of time and it was because of his policies and his efforts to change things governmentally in Alaska, which they didn't think were appropriate.

Ter: Do you think - so, we'll talk more about Gruening in a second, but you - how long did you stay on the Empire then after what happened after?

George: I stayed on the Empire about two years.

Ter: And what kind of things did you cover? We were talking before about Bob Henning - oh, that was it, yeah.

George: All right.

Ter: Yeah, about Bob.

George: The two principal reporters for the Empire were Henning and Sonborg. Bob Henning, who later became publisher you know of note and I. And I covered the what was called then the Federal Building, which is now called the State Capitol. It was transferred to the ownership of the state in the statehood act. I covered -

End of Side A

Side B

George: It had all of the government buildings. It had all the federal offices and it had all the territorial offices in it and I made a daily round of all of them and got to know all the people and gathered a lot of stories out of there.

Ter: What was your deadline, George? How did you - what was your -

George: It was a daily paper, an afternoon paper, and the deadline was one o'clock in the afternoon, which was not real handy because you'd have to go out early and find an office that was open and go in and talk awhile with the official in there, get some kind of a story and then you'd have half a dozen of these and you'd have to dash down to the newspaper and put them into print. And so it was difficult.

Ter: Now what was Henning's beat? You covered the Federal Building, what did Bob Henning cover?

George: He covered the rest of the town. He was in you know with the sawmill and with the hotel and other places that generate news.

Ter: So how long then did you stay at the Empire, George? What was your -

George: I stayed there until September of 1941. That was a period of about three years. Why did I leave? Well again I was offered an increase in salary and my whole career has been sort of an upper, upper spiral from job to job, each one a little better. But there was a deeper reason and that was that I found that the Empire was then, I don't think it is anymore, but it was very much a tool of the vested interests and I'm talking about mostly nonresident interests, the so-called Alaska Salmon Industry, which was consisted of a lot of men who lived here in Seattle and in Bellington and in Astoria. And the mining interests, the Alaska Juneau Mine, which was a big mine in Juneau. And the Alaska Steamship Company, which had very high rates and so on. Well I became fed up with the way the economy was going and I was told by Helen Monson at the time she notified me that I was to be the man that they wanted up there that if I ever had any kind of a question or a problem about affairs in Juneau or Alaska, I should just go to the office of H. L. Faulkner, Bert Faulkner, who was the most powerful lawyer in Alaska I would say in those days and he would straighten me out on things you know. And what I really found was that he was just an apologist for the status quo and for not changing anything in Alaska, not putting more money into health care and into education and things that Gruening very much championed and felt were necessary. And then that's why the terrible chiasm arose. I think the biggest issue in Alaska in all the years I lived there you could say it was Ernest Gruening. There was a pro-Gruening group of people in Alaska and there was an anti-Gruening and he fought in the middle of that. I became involved in it.

Ter: Cause he was so - he was a polarizing figure to say the least, right?

George: Yes, he was.

Ter: What was it about him that - well maybe before we get to that maybe we should in September '41 where did you go from there?

George: All right. The National Resources Planning Board, which was part of the executive office of the President and was run by the uncle of Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to open a regional office in Alaska and they began to set it up and Gruening said well you can't just send up a bunch of economists here to run this thing. You should have somebody in there that knows something about Alaska. And so he made the case to the Chairman of the National Resources Planning Board and I was appointed as a senior planning technician for them. My first salary was \$3,800 a year in the federal. And after that time until my retirement in 1963, could that be right? No.

Ter: '73.

George: '73, about half my time was spent on newspapers and the other half of the time was spent in various government offices.

Man: About time for our first change.

Ter: Okay. They're going to change.

George: Or we had the same amount of authority and the same amount of salary. It was a very small office. There were only three men in it and a couple of girls you know stenographers. So it wasn't a big deal.

Man: Just about ready here.

Ter: About the Natural Resources Planning Board, maybe you could say a little bit about - is it John Reddy, did I see his name?

George: Jim Reddy, yeah. Jim Reddy was a great big fellow, very erudite, fine man, great public servant. And when he left Alaska he eventually was employed at the Interior Department as one of the top men there.

Ter: And did he have an economics background you were saying?

George: Yes. He was an economist. He was - I don't know what his undergraduate school was, but London School of Economics, where everybody who wanted to be an economist would like to go.

Ter: That's the garbage it sounds like.

Man: I was wondering what that was.

Ter: Okay, we were talking a little bit, George, about the Natural Resources Planning Board.

George: National Resources.

Ter: National Resources Planning Board and your experience with that.

George: Yes, and after World War II involved the United States with the attack on Pearl Harbor it was decided by the Alaska War Council, which was mostly a military personnel that federal employees whose work did not require them to physically be in Alaska to do it should be moved outside of Alaska. And that also the families of federal employees ought to be moved out of Alaska. And the reason for that was to lessen the burden on transportation facilities because in those days at least and very likely still most of what Alaska consumes originates somewhere else and they have to maintain quite a transportation system to get materials and food even to Alaska. And so by that time I had

three children. We lived in Juneau and we were notified that we were going to be moved Outside and they didn't know when, but some day a boat would appear and we'd be taken out. And eventually after a couple of months of being on the hot seat and wondering about it the boat did appear. It was a very ancient wooden Army transport and we went aboard and because of a series of special trips that it had to make between ports in southeast Alaska it took us 10 days to get to Seattle. And we had a little baby, our eldest daughter, was at that time only six months old. She and my wife were the only females aboard. And it was an interesting trip.

Ter: No kidding, on a wooden ship.

George: Yeah, right.

Ter: Little kids.

~~George: It was very old too. There was no railing around the deck. And so either Mary or I had to mount guard at the door of our stateroom which just opened right out onto the deck, to keep two little boys and a toddler.~~

Ter: Oh, man, what an exhausting trip.

George: Well anyway we were moved to Portland, Oregon. Reddy and Fisher and the rest of the office were too. And at that time the joint - what do they call it, Joint Economic Board of the United States and Canada decided that there should be a study made of problems that were going to arise when the war ended. And what would we do with the ports that were being built and the Alaska Highway and Canold (?) Pipeline and a string of airports that were taking airplanes from where they were manufactured in the middle of the United States and flying them by stages to Nome from where they were transferred to Russians after - toward the end of the war when they were an ally and they became active on the western front in France.

Ter: So the Joint Economic Committee you were doing the research.

George: Yeah and I was the assistant director of the United States portion of that board and study. And we did a number of reports, some of which I think you have mentioned. We may - one thing that we studied was the feasibility of having a what has since happened a ferry system throughout southeast Alaska where it is really unlikely or almost impossible to build roads to connect the towns. And the territory after it became a state took that in hand and made it happen.

Ter: Did the - so when you went to the National Resources Planning Board, and then those studies and so when did you come back to Alaska or what was the -

George: All right. In 1946, the Secretary of the Interior made a trip to Alaska and he had a large group of assistants with him. And I was working at that time for the Bonneville Power Administration. Our study of postwar needs for Alaska had ended and I was working for

the Bonneville Power Administration. I received a call from Ernest Gruening in Juneau saying that Henry W. Clark, who had been the first General Manager of the Alaska Development Board, had much to Gruening's dismay resigned. And the reason he had is that he had courting a woman who finally agreed to marry him but she said provided that we don't have to live in Alaska. And so he you know explained that to Gruening and he quit.

And they were looking all over for someone to be the general manager. And there weren't a whole lot of candidates at that time and they offered the job to me and I said well I'll come up there, but you're going to have to pay me the same salary that you were paying Henry Clark. Oh boy that was \$12,000 a year and they tried to get me to come up for less and I said, well I'm well fixed here and I just don't feel that I should come up there unless I get the same pay as the man I'm replacing. And so they finally agreed to it. And the result of it was, except for the governor and the four federal judges, I was the highest paid federal employee in Alaska while I was head of the Development Board. And that created a lot of antipathy you know. You know how in a small town like Juneau everybody is measuring people against one another you know. What did they make and how come and so on and so, it became difficult.

But anyway I came up with that and I mentioned to you that the biggest problem if you want to put it into just a couple of words for half a dozen years in territorial Alaska was Gruening. Not that he was a problem, but the struggle between Gruening and his ideals and the situation, which preceded Gruening. And he was trying to make a place that - where people would want to live and remain. It used to have such a turnover of population, almost annually. Most of the people in Alaska, aside from the Eskimos and Indians and Aleuts, used to just go up there and work in the summer and move out. And it didn't encourage a stable lasting economy, which he knew would be necessary for Alaska, if it were to be a state.

Ter: Did - some people sort of say that the big issue, sort of the resident versus nonresident interests right, could you maybe say something about that George about the -

George: Yes, there was that problem. All - practically all of the employees of the salmon industry were nonresidents. They used to go up to isolated points on Bristol Bay and throughout southeast Alaska where there would be nothing on shore except a cannery. There would be no town there except for that. And all of those people were participating in the work and using the resources of Alaska and not paying any taxes at all.

Ter: What were the taxes that they would have paid?

George: There was a - they called it a school tax. It was \$10 a year per person who was employed in Alaska. Well, that didn't support any kind of programs up there. And that was what the struggle was about mainly.

Ter: And so in a way the struggle was about enacting a tax system?

George: Yeah. And of course the real objective was statehood. And the legislature repeatedly defeated efforts by Gruening to do any of these things. It was a long struggle.

Ter: What was he sort of maybe like we should - we could talk a little bit about Gruening personally - when was the first - you must have met him obviously when you were working on the Empire when he first came I suppose?

George: Well I met him right at the gangplank of the ship he came to Alaska on. I think it was the Baranoff. He and Dorothy arrived one evening in December of 1939. And I interviewed him briefly as he stepped off the boat. And then I saw him daily thereafter. He was on my beat for the Empire. I was still working for the Empire. And it wasn't until several years after that that I left the Empire.

Ter: Was it clear to you from the start though that he was a you know different kind of guy from you know -

George: Well he was very different. He was - he had a classical education. He was really a very - he was not only a learned man, but he was a man that had a whole lot of get up and go about him you know. And he stirred things up considerably in Alaska.

Ter: And wherever he went.

George: And wherever he went, yeah. I don't think we would have had statehood as early as we did without him. He just kept plugging away for it.

Ter: George, in your opinion is he - I mean if one imagines that he is not there, would statehood have eventually come, I mean is it possible that we might have never gotten statehood if -

George: It is possible. You know every area of the United States, which once was what they call -

Ter: I know what you're trying to think of the name.

George: Yeah.

Ter: Go ahead and you can say that again, every area -

George: Every area that was ever an organized territory became a state and so I think it was probably inevitable that Alaska sometime would be a state, but he sure helped it along in the timing. And it became the 49th state, the first state ever since I think 1918 or something like that.

Ter: Maybe like 1912 - I can't remember. It's Arizona or New Mexico. I don't remember what years it is, yeah. That's right, yeah. So now did you know when you first met him too his newspaper experience was very important to him. Did he talk about that at all or -

George: Well, he did some, yeah, he did. But his - I saw him daily and he became a good friend and he was always very good to me. He did things for me that you just wouldn't believe. For instance, after I became his assistant when he was senator I went with him and a group of senators on a trip to Europe and we went to Scandinavia -

Man: Can we start this story over, my battery just -

George: I guess he's happy in his University of Alaska Press position, huh?

Ter: He's going to step down next year.

George: Is he?

Ter: It's good for him. Oh, yeah, he has got to get out of there, so he can travel more. They love to travel and he is still healthy enough to do that.

George: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Ter: He's in good shape you know and he has had those health problems but he is taking care of himself so.

Setting up again.

George: I don't know where we were.

Ter: Where were we at?

~~Robert: I don't know. Talking about Gruening, a lot of get up and go.~~

Ter: Oh, yeah, okay.

Robert: We would have had statehood soon.

Ter: Without him, okay.

Robert: And it's possible but it was you think eventually it was inevitable.

Ter: Right, okay. But George let's talk a little bit about the road to the constitution and - cause we have heard from several people, including Tom Stewart who say that the - speaks very highly of you and the style committee and that in fact it is because of your ability as a wordsmith that the constitution reads as well as it does.

George: Well that's nice of Tom. I really think Tom Stewart is the guy that ought to have the big credit for the successful Constitutional Convention. He worked for several years to get it

set up and get it right you know and have the right people there as advisors and all. So he's very generous if he gives me much credit, but.

Well I worked hard there in it you know. When I was living in Juneau and I had a small weekly newspaper called the Juneau Independent of which I had become editor because the other ones that were co-editors with me they all fled because it didn't make any money and it was costing money you know. And I borrowed on my insurance, maximum I could, and I put it into the paper sort of week by week to keep it going right. And I did that mainly to have a voice in Juneau which would be pro-statehood. Because the Daily Alaska Empire was so bitterly against and the Sitka newspaper was against it. And Sid Charles' newspaper in Ketchikan was very anti-statehood. And the Anchorage Daily News was very anti-statehood. I was almost unbelieving when I heard that the Times was going to give up and retreat from the field you know and that the News would take over. There was a time when that would be just on thought of. The Anchorage Times was so dominant. Well anyway -

Ter: For the whole territory, wasn't it? I mean it was the dominant paper that's right, yeah.

George: Yeah. So anyway -

Ter: So you were running the Independent?

George: I was running the Independent and I was doing the whole thing.

Ter: George did that start after Gruening left office cause did you - were you out with the Development Board when Gruening -

George: Oh yeah.

Ter: - was dumped okay or when he was replaced?

George: Frank Heintzleman became the governor and he sent down one day a word to my office, which was in the same building, that he wanted to talk to me and I went up there. And he said he was kind of very ill at ease about this, but he said George, I'm sure you're going to understand, but I have to have you retire, have to have you resign as General Manager of the Alaska Development Board. He says you can probably understand that. You're such a well-known Democrat and now we're in a Republican administration here and I just can't have you doing that you know. I said well I do understand Frank and yeah, I'll quit and I did.

Let's see that was the question you asked?

Ter: Yeah, that was in '53 or so when -

George: Was that '53?

Ter: I think so, yeah.

George: Something like that, so anyway there were three other guys who had started a little newspaper called the Juneau Independent. And they had big ideas. They thought they were going to build it into a big newspaper and they did pretty well to get it going well and so one of them dropped out and I joined up. And I became, as I just explained not only active in it but I was practically keeping it going with my money.

Ter: And that was generous of you, George.

George: So eventually and not after too long the other two quit and one of them was Jack Doyle, who was the head of the I don't know what the agency was called, but it was - well it was the legislative - anyway it was a year round -

Ter: Oh, the Research Council - the Legislative Council, is that what they called it?

George: No, but anyway it had to do with the legislature. Anyway they were all gone and I was there alone and the (phone ringing) opportunity.

Ter: Well, so we were talking about the Independent and the other two so basically you're funding it out of your savings basically.

George: I had gone into the Independent because I had to have a living from something and I wanted to stay in Juneau and anyway I got into the Independent and I kept it going. And the problem - the opportunity came up to be a delegate to the Constitution Convention. And I eyed that very eagerly and I decided that I could get a whole lot of publicity by being the first one to sign up as a candidate to be a delegate.

And I deliberately picked the particular office that I wanted. As you probably know it was the first time that they had ever had people elected from areas according to the population thereof. But they had one group of seven delegates that were elected from the territory as a whole. There were seven of us elected and I picked that race to be in and I had to get sign up sheets signed by so many people from each of the judicial divisions and so on and anyway I got my papers in and I did get some publicity from the fact that I was the first one.

On that - on the run for that my total expenditures were less than \$100 you know and nobody runs for anything in Alaska any more for anything like that. And I bought an ad in the Anchorage Times and I bought an ad in Jessin's Weekly in Fairbanks and I put a free ad from myself in the Juneau Independent. And that was about the extent of my electioneering. And I was fortunate enough to be one of the seven who were elected. I think something like I think 53 people ran for one of those seven offices then, but I was one of the ones elected. And I went to the convention.

Ter: Do you remember George where you came in -

George: Yeah, I came in sixth.

Ter: Oh that was good. Close enough in horseshoes.

George: The only one who had fewer votes than me was Army Armstrong, who was a Presbyterian minister, who had - he had been a minister at churches in three or four places and that's how you would get a bigger vote for yourself then if you had just been in Juneau all the time, well -

Ter: But you were a Juneau - mostly you were centered in Juneau so you really hadn't lived in Anchorage/Fairbanks?

George: No.

Ter: But they probably knew you from the Development Board a little bit I guess?

George: Yeah, I was in the paper quite a bit you know.

Ter: Who were -

George: Usually being cursed or cussed.

Ter: Who were some of the other people who were -

George: Well the people that ran best were - the best one by far was Ralph Rivers. Ralph Rivers was a lawyer in Fairbanks and had lived his whole life in Alaska in various towns with his family and then he ran for Attorney General and became Attorney General of Alaska. So he was well known in Juneau and he had a good following. He was number two.

Number three was Mildred Herman who was a lawyer in Juneau who had been active in women's clubs throughout the territory. And let me see, I don't know, well I don't remember just off hand now who the others were.

Ter: That's okay. That's all right. It's okay.

George: We're getting down to her.

Ter: Yeah, that's too specific anyway. So you were elected and were making the preparations. So what happened after the election, what was - well were you surprised at I mean -

George: At being elected?

Ter: Yeah, yeah.

George: No, I was expecting it. Anyway it happened and I was very hard up financially at that time and I had trouble getting somebody to take over the paper while I was going to be

out of town for 75 days, but it all worked out and I went to the convention and I was buttoned holed on my arrival by not Ralph Rivers, but his brother Vic, who was an architect who lived in Anchorage. And he said he wanted to be the President of the Constitutional Convention and would I support him? And I said well, yeah, you've always been good to me I'll support you.

So anyway we got into the electing of a governor and I didn't vote for Bill Egan, which I should have done. Bill Egan proved to be a wonderful presiding officer. He was so thoughtful of everybody there and all of his decisions were right and I was so impressed with him. But even though I hadn't supported him for president, he appointed me chairman of the committee on style and drafting. And I'm sure it was because I've had a journalistic background and could put words together. And it proved to be a very enjoyable role. It was hard work that we did. We worked long hours through a very bitter winter and we worked Sundays and holidays and all other times because we were running out of time. And we finally succeeded and signed the constitution in February of 1956.

Ter: Where were you living that winter George? Where did you stay at?

George: Okay. I was living in the attic of gee I should remember his name better than this. The Democratic chairman of Alaska who was part owner of a hotel right across the street from Wally Hickel's hotel in Fairbanks. Oh, anyway, it's terrible to be old.

Ter: Yeah, I can't remember his name either.

Man: We need to do a reel change anyway. We can stop for 30 seconds.

Ter: Alex Miller.

George: Alex Miller.

Ter: Yeah, right, okay, yeah.

George: He had a big family. They had a big house.

Ter: Okay, we'll do that -

Man: Aaron needs about 20 seconds

Setting up again.

Ter: Where did you live that winter George, where were you staying at?

George: Well I was living in the attic of the home of Alex Miller. Alex Miller was sort of the Democratic boss of Alaska, very influential guy politically. I stayed there rent free, which was practically it had to be because I had no money. And I used to walk over to the Nordale Hotel every morning in order to catch the bus, special bus, which took the

delegates from there to the University of Alaska where we met in what they now call Constitution Hall.

Ter: Was there any sort of work done. Did you get together with the delegates after hours and stuff like that? Did you know I mean in hotel rooms or you know -

George: Well the committees had sort of a life of their own and they had to have time to meet as a committee. There was a daily what they called a plenary session which is a session where all 55 delegates are together and took up things that were the business of the convention and then they would work as separate committees and we did a lot of that most of it out on the grounds of the University, but there was some of it done I suppose, yes I know there was. I remember one weekend when our committee met practically night and day to finish up some - on some of the articles of the constitution.

Ter: What was the procedure George a committee would - one of the other committees would draft a proposal and then get it to you - how would they?

George: No. What happened was that there were - we had great advisors. We had people who knew about state government and what they ought to provide you know and so anyway the committees that were set up were a committee on the legislature, committee on executive, committee on the judiciary, committee on public lands and so on. And they all met as committees for several months and drew up an article for that part of the constitution. And they would bring it before the plenary session when it was finished and we would discuss it upstairs and downstairs and all around and finally pass it. And we - after we had passed all of the articles. I think there are 12 of them of the constitution, they turned the whole thing over to the committee on style and drafting and our instructions were to make this a unified document and go through it and improve it but don't change anything, which a hard task but it can be done you know.

Ter: So you basically didn't get anything - you didn't get one article at a time or did you?

George: Well we had already had one article at a time in the plenary session.

Ter: Oh, okay.

George: So we knew what it was going to contain, but then we were handed the whole thing and we just plain - we went through it article by article and we reported it back to the whole group as we finished each one and then we would have plenary session of several days in which I would explain the changes we had made and why we did it and so on and there was a lot of discussion of that. We usually prevailed and eventually they had the whole thing finished up. It was quite unified. It was like something that had been written by Thomas Jefferson you know and it held together and it has served Alaska well.

Ter: George did you - do you think - can you remember any instances where they didn't go along with the drafting committee and that you know you wish they did or ones where you were particularly delighted that they went along with you either way on that?

George: Well I would say we by the time we had finished with several articles we had whipped them into submission and they realized that what we were doing was a necessary thing and it really did improve the constitution.

One criticism I've had of it now is that the amendments which have been made to the constitution. There have been I don't know how many of them, about twenty or something like that, they are not as well written. They are kind of shaggy, compared to the constitution.

Ter: Well that speaks well of the constitution doesn't it or poorly of the amendments I guess.

George: We were well organized to accomplish that.

Ter: Yeah, cause it is like you said, I mean Tom Stewart was out there beating the bushes at these PAS guys, what was your impression of the - did you have contact with any of those consultants or any of them?

George: Oh, yeah. We had a consultant to our committee who was a wonderful guy named Kim Olin. He lived in New Orleans and he was I guess suggested to the Constitutional Convention by you know the guy who developed or suggested -

Ter: Oh Lehleitner.

George: George Lehleitner.

Ter: Lehleitner, yeah.

George: Who lived in - who lived many years in New Orleans to be a consultant. And he was just a great help, wonderful man. He had worked for several states which had had amending conventions and the poor guy I think it was within a day or two of the ratification of the Alaska Constitution that he was killed in an airplane crash in Louisiana.

Ter: I didn't know that, huh, well that's but he did live to see the passage?

George: Oh yeah.

Ter: He did, oh that's great.

George: I think he was there for the final signing.

Ter: Yeah, did - what was the procedure just take us through when you had either the article or the whole thing - did you use a chalk board, how did you - what did you do this? You know did you just pass out copies?

George: Yeah, oh, yes, we passed out - we did it as I mentioned article by article and we would of course pass out the article showing the amendments that were proposed by the committee on style and drafting to the original language.

Ter: But I mean that when you were in your committee.

George: Oh.

Ter: How did you - I mean was it necessary to use like a blackboard or a chalk board or I was just curious on were you just sitting around a table basically or?

George: Yeah, sitting around a table and we did that not with the whole committee only consisted I think of six or eight people, but we usually worked in groups of about three and we would work it through and all you know discuss it and finally agree on something we would recommend to the plenary session.

Ter: So then when you got to the plenary session you passed out -

George: We passed out and I was on my feet I would say 95 percent of the time of the convention in its less month. You know getting agreement on this language.

Ter: Cause isn't that - George I can't remember this now. Is the picture of you when you fell asleep is that - do you know that picture?

George: Yeah, I know it well.

Ter: That's you.

George: That was -

Ter: They all saw that picture - who took that?

George: Steve McCutcheon, who was a professional photographer and he sat in the front row of delegates there. I was in the front row too. And one lazy afternoon I fell asleep in the chair and he took great delight in standing up and he got everybody's attention and I kept on slumbering and he took a picture of me sound asleep at the session, but I got even with him. We had several reunions of the Constitutional Convention delegates and at a reunion in Juneau I caught him asleep in the row of delegates that were - was supposedly working on some weighty matter and I sent him a copy of it and he responded with good humor.

Ter: Well, it's a great pict - cause I think in the background of that picture Egan is also smiling and everybody - it's a great - I think it's my favorite photograph of the entire thing.

George: Not mine.

Ter: No I'm sure it's not yours, but it shows you were working. You know a guy doesn't fall asleep unless he's working so - so it's a pretty - it speaks well for you George not the other way around. So what about the consultants, any of the other ones that you had dealings with or -

George: Oh, yeah. There was sort of the leader of the consultant was a man named John Bebout - B-E-B-O-U-T and he was on the staff of the state governors. They have a governor's council or something that works for all the states and he was great. He made a statement that the Alaska Constitution is by far the best of all state constitutions and it - for its area and its time it is the greatest state constitution. He died about a year ago.

Almost everybody has died you know. There are still five of our delegates alive. They were among the younger delegates. I was the eldest - I'm the eldest of the five who survive. I'm 90 and a half.

Ter: Who was the - who was the youngest at the time even I don't know.

George: At the time. I'd have to look at that.

Ter: That's okay.

George: I know him well and I picture him but I can't pick up his name, but he was a young guy and he was the first to die. And one of the first to die was a young lawyer in Anchorage who - oh, he was so wonderful in the convention, especially in the development of the article on the judiciary. But they were dying like flies for several years and we have gotten down to where there are only five embittered old men you know. And we have had three meetings within the past year where we got together you know at the request of some - two in Anchorage and one in Juneau.

Ter: Did you go to that thing of Hickel's?

George: I didn't go because I had another engagement - I was in New Hampshire at the time and I just sent him my regrets. Did you hear anything about that?

Ter: Heard it was really great and Vince Ostrum was there and we want to talk to him. He's still alive and he send a nice note to Tom Stewart about you know hoping that Tom would sort of write a mem - and write something to about his thing so.

George: You don't mean a delegate?

Ter: No, I don't mean delegate but I mean Stewart was there as he was the secretary.

George: Tom was there of course.

Ter: But who now George who were the delegates still alive are?

George: Okay. There is Judge in Anchorage whose name is - he's a southerner with a strange name I'll think of it in a minute. There is pain with palpation

Ter: Vic Fisher.

George: Vic Fisher, who was very influential in the convention. You know it is sort of his field. He was a city planner.

There is a preacher who lives in St. Paul I believe. He's the only one except - besides me who lives outside of Alaska now.

And there was Seabord J. Bucheleu is the lawyer and the preacher's name is almost like mine - Londborg - Maynard Londborg. I believe he lives in St. Paul.

Let's see is there one other.

Ter: Burke -

George: Burke Riley, yeah Burke Riley, who lives in Juneau.

Ter: Oh, and Coghill was -

George: Oh yeah, Coghill.

Ter: Jack.

George: Jack Coghill.

Ter: Yeah.

George: That makes five. He lives now in Fairbanks.

Ter: Yeah.

George. He did live in Nenana at the time.

Ter: Yeah. We're hoping through the course of the project anyway to interview - obviously we should have done this a long time ago, but we didn't in a formal way even though there are other -

George: You don't have any good ones left you know. They've all died. Slim pickings.

Ter: That's not true. That's not true. Okay and so if - what about Vic Fisher? His role was on the local government article - that's what he -

George: He was and he was also a member of the style and drafting committee and very active on it. He was a great guy. Mildred Herman -

End of Side A

Side B

George: Go on in our committee. Our cast were numbered to Al Lusana, Judge Davis, I guess that was about it. They were all hard workers.

Ter: Well if we had let's see - let's talk a little George about writing the book and the Opportunity in Alaska book anyway. The Hail Columbia that was before or after - which book came first in your -

George: Opportunity in Alaska was -

Ter: Okay. How did you come to write that? What was the -

George: Well the war had just ended and I was in Portland as I mentioned working for the Bonneville Power Administration and I had the impulse to write a book that would tell about things that people could do if they wanted to move to Alaska. And I called it Opportunity in Alaska and it is just sort of a - it's a discussion of the resources there and things about Alaska that are different and so on. It went very well. It sold out at a time when publishers could not get paper. Right after the war there was a great shortest of paper and it was limited by the government how much they could have and so on and so I think they published only 10,000 copies and they sold out right away. And by the time the paper situation eased up the demand for it had evaporated.

And then I wrote a book about the Columbia Basin Project and the Grand Coulee Dam, called Hail Columbia.

Ter: How did - in writing Opportunity Alaska that was before you became head of the Development Board right?

George: Yes, I had been in Alaska working first for the Empire and then for the National Resources Planning Board. And we were moved outside department I worked for the giant committee United States and Canada and then I looked for employment and I found it with Bonneville. And I was very happy there. I was doing serious work, trying to find a market for the federal dams that were coming on to use. A whole series of them you know. It was called Bonneville, but the big one was Grand Coulee Dam. And then there were others like Hungry Horse Dam up on the Kalis - Kalispell and so on. And I was out trying to develop power markets.

Ter: And during that time you got the idea because obviously you had been captivated by Alaska I mean to write this book.

George: Right. I wrote it evenings and weekends.

Ter: And did it - was it something that you had hoped to even when you were doing it hoped to go back. I mean did you think or did you think you'd stay outside?

George: Oh I thought I'd go back yeah. I always thought that. And I finally did as head of the Development Board. It was sort of a stalking horse for me for the Development Board job because that is what it talks about you know. And it made me a natural candidate to be the general manager.

Ter: And I think as a sort of summary that was really written before the income tax was passed in 1949. So maybe I don't know if you -

George: No, you mean in Alaska?

Ter: The state income tax - the territorial income tax yeah.

George: In '49, well -

Ter: I think your book came out in '46, I'm not sure.

George: Oh did it?

Ter: Yeah, yeah.

George: Okay.

Ter: Well it doesn't matter George - how about the basic thing I was thinking about the I don't know if you have any memories from the tax -

George: The tax struggle?

Ter: Fight, yeah.

George: Yes, I do indeed. I was working for the Empire then. And Gruening, Ernest Gruening, he persuaded several experts on taxation to come to Alaska at various times and to meet with the legislature and to urge that Alaska develop some kind of a tax system which would tax people according to their means and so on, get a good system going. And I covered those meetings for the Empire and I was flattered to have one of the experts, the most important one, call me the very day that I wrote the story and it was published about what his suggestions were and he said he had never heard of anybody who was able to put down on paper in a concise way the proposals that he made and get into publication the same day, which was kind of flattering.

Frank Heintzleman, you want me to just - you want to do on with just most anything?

Ter: Frank, yeah, yeah.

George: All right. Frank Heintzleman of course when he was governor he was in a very difficult position because there was a large group at Anchorage, which had most of the population of Alaska. It was all for statehood. And they were just beating the drums for it you know. And Frank was trying to soft pedal that. And Eisenhower, the President, came out with a proposal to partition Alaska and only let certain part of Alaska be admitted as a state. And people blamed Heintzleman for this and so on.

Well the Juneau Independent was deep into these things and we were making fun of Heintzleman and kind of making his life miserable while he was governor. And he had been a bureaucrat all his life. He was a very able man and he ran things well, but he had his own way of doing things. And one day while I was running the Independent my former boss from the Bonneville Power Administration came to Juneau and he - his name was Ivan Block. He was the son of the famous composer named Block, who was probably the greatest composer of modern music of all Americans. But anyway Ivan was a very jolly fellow and very able. He came in and he went to see the governor. And he stayed and talked with Frank until noontime. And Frank said let's go down to Baranoff Hotel and have lunch. And so they were walking down Seward Street in Juneau and I was walking up toward the Federal Building. And I saw them about a block ahead and I was looking forward to greeting Block when Heintzleman, as reported to me later by Block, who was a great personal friend of mine, Heintzleman said oh there's that dam George Sonborg coming up the hill, let's cross the street so we don't have to encounter him. And they did.

I attended Frank Heintzleman's funeral. There were only two people there who knew anything about Frank Heintzleman and his career and that was Mary Lee Council, who was the Administrative Assistant of Bob Bartlett and me, Administrative Assistant of Ernest Gruening. And we drove up from Washington, DC, where we were both working then to a part of Pennsylvania which is inhabited by what kind of Dutch do they call them?

Ter: Oh, Memonites or -

George: Anyway -

Ter: Pennsylvania Dutch?

George: Yeah, Pennsylvania Dutch people, which Frank was from. He was born into a Pennsylvania Dutch family and all the people in charge of his funeral and present there were people who only knew him as a little boy you know many, many years previously. And Mary Lee and I knew what a great influence he had been in Alaska and what he had accomplished. Fired me for instance. One thing in his favor.

Ter: Yeah, everybody has got to do something right, huh?

George: Right.

Ter: Well did - what about the sort of knock on him of being anti - oh, go ahead were you going to say something?

George: I remember what it was we dropped.

Ter: What was that, okay go ahead?

George: I was telling about how Gruening - he was so friendly with me and one time we went with a subcommittee of the senate to Scandinavia and we went all around Norway visiting power plants. And the reason for doing that was that Gruening was proposing the development of a power site at Rampart on the Yukon River. And he thought it would be useful to find out how - what they did in the same latitudes in another continent. And so we were in Stockholm and we're about to leave to fly. We had an Air Force plane, which was taking the committee around Europe and we were about to fly to Paris and the other senators who were along on the trip. There were about, oh maybe 10 of them, and they could care less about power plant at Rampart in Alaska you know and they used to sort of make fun of Gruening. They said oh, he said Gruening has a funny look on his face, it looks like he has just smelled another fertilizer plant. You know, anyway, their hearts were not very much on the - or their heads on the business. They were in Europe for a good time and boy they were most of all anxious to get to Paris. And the US Embassy in I don't know maybe it was consulate, it was an embassy in Stockholm who was supposed to pick us up at our respective hotels and take us to the plane. And somehow they overlooked me and I was waiting - I was the only one in the particular hotel where I was staying of the group. And so they all got at the field and they were anxious to get flying to Paris and so Gruening didn't know why I hadn't arrived, but I just hadn't. And so he stood at the bottom of the ladder that you climb to get into the airplane in those times with his foot on the rung of the ladder and he engaged the chairman of the committee who was a tough old guy from Indiana I believe in conversation and kept his foot there so that they couldn't take the plane away before I got there. And I got there and got aboard and all was well. And he said he would have stood there for a week in order to be sure that I would be taken out of town.

Ter: That's a great story.

Man: Can we stop for just a minute?

George: Committee on Judiciary would read 48 other constitutions, what they said about the legislature or judiciary.

Robert: What I hear is some of those constitutions are epics like Michener novels?

George: That's right, yeah. The great thick books.

Robert: Yeah. And what I understand from people like I know Jerry McBeth -

George: Experience with him. He was always very supportive and very wonderful to me. Somebody once said that that well George you must realize you're about the only one in Juneau that Gruening can converse with on his own terms. I don't know if that was - it wasn't a kind thing to say.

Ter: Not overloaded with minutia I guess.

George: Oh, yes. We didn't really get into that did we before we went off?

Ter: No.

George: Well the fault of many state constitutions and they have suffered from this is that they have locked into place provisions that the people have never been able to change. They say in states - a state constitution is of the quality it is quite as much as from it is left out as for what is left in. And it should be just a basic document for the formation of a state so that the state can change its provisions without having to get a two-thirds vote of the people and so on, as is required in most constitutions to get through an amendment. And so we kept away from all of those traps and it is really just a really great basic document.

Ter: George, did - this is switching gears a little bit because that is a very good answer.

Robert: Can I ask one question follow-up? And look at Terrence when you answer because he is the guy that -

George: All right.

Robert: But you know you said something about making it sing. How did you as a writer feel about the final document?

Ter: Now just pretend I asked that question.

George: Yeah, all right. Yes, in fact one of - I mentioned one of our advisors as a young man named Kim Olin, the one who was killed in an airplane accident. And very early on when he was meeting with our committee, he said your assignment is not to just write something that has in provisions of this agency and that agency and so one, but you should make this constitution sing by means of its language. And so we kept that in view and we tried to use straightforward and simple and still elegant language.

Ter: It's like I heard this old joke one time about John C. Calhoun, you know the great southern orator and he wrote poetry well I mean the joke was and one of his famous poems said whereas, and start whereas you know, that was the poem.

George: There's the baby.

Ter: There's the baby.

George: I think he has been exported.

Ter: Yeah, he has been, whereas. Okay, that is what you wanted to get Robert.

Robert: Yeah, yeah, I mean it was just cause you're a writer and I think you know the chance to work on a document that will stand through time must be really gratifying in a way books don't, this will be a document that you know.

Ter: Or it is right now.

George: Well it has succeeded up to this time. It has been you know 48 years now and it has proved to be a very workable document. There are many states whose for instance the judges in the states they have told people from Alaska who attend the conventions boy if we only had a state constitution like yours that would make it so much easier to govern and operate.

Ter: Is that your stomach Ken? Is that your stomach?

Man: No.

Ter: Okay, George sort of a general overview of the newspapers and statehood. I know Gruening in his correspondence I don't know if you ever heard him use this term or if you did, referring to the axis press he used to say in this letter between him and Bartlett about the anti-statehood papers. And the importance of the newspapers in the fight you know the campaign?

George: Well it was very important. I mentioned a number of newspapers that were anti-statehood and they were - their total circulation was by far the larger than that of the newspapers that were - did I say proceeded, anti-statehood, it was larger than those that were for statehood. The three newspapers in Alaska that were most influential for statehood were the Anchorage Times, the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, and the Juneau Independent. And their role was critical. There was a vote taken among Alaskans, I believe it was in 1946 for the first time they voted on do we want statehood? And the Alaska Statehood Committee, which was not an official body of the territory but was a voluntary committee they employed me for a thousand dollars to write a critique or write a thing that would be called the truth about statehood. And anyway I was supposed to summarize the arguments for and against and I've been told by many people that I was much more eloquent in talking about those that were for than for those that were against. But anyway I worked hard on it and I had the help of Tony Dimond, who was then the delegated congress and others and that was published as a supplement of every newspaper in Alaska. And they all agreed to circulate it. It was an insert. You know it was like a tableau in their papers. And that went out to every subscriber of any newspaper in Alaska. That was in 1946 and the outcome of the vote was in favor of statehood, not overwhelmingly but sufficiently.

Ter: It was like three to two at least.

George: Three to two I think.

Ter: Yeah, that's right.

George: And then subsequently there have been several other. There was for instance in the ratification we had to approve the constitution and it was approved by a very good vote.

Ter: George what about a little bit like about fish traps? Why were fish traps so - such an issue, such a big -

George: Well everybody who fished for a living on a boat hated fish traps because they were very efficient, cheap method of providing salmon for canning. And so other states do not - of course there are not a lot of states that have salmon but the State of Washington, Oregon, California and so on, they don't allow fish traps and they never did. Alaska had most of its salmon at the time caught in fish traps and so it became a very sore subject for instance in southeast Alaska and the public was against fish traps because most of them were fisherman or many of them were or they knew fisherman or they knew the effects of the fish traps on the runs. The runs of the salmon were really going down, down, down, down every year in that era. And so this man named George Lehlitner from New Orleans he had the idea and he got it first when he was a Naval officer stationed in Hawaii. And he said you know this territory ought to be a state and he had the idea that first Hawaii and then he got into same thing for Alaska. Should go right ahead and elect two senators and a congressman the way Tennessee when they came in. They did it without any approval by the Congress. And so we adopted as one of the - it is not a part of the constitution but it was voted on at the same election. What we call the Alaska Tennessee Plan where we did that. And we did elect those officials and sent them down there. They were not seated officially but they were able to do a whole lot of talking in favor of statehood in Washington, DC and they were influential.

Ter: What did Bartlett think of the Tennessee Plan, what his view on that, did he see them as a hindrance to his efforts, a help, what do you -

George: Well I can't really speak for him, but sure he was fearful of it you know. He was Alaska's man in Washington. What would be the effect of sending down three more you know? Would they be working at cross-purposes and so on and so it is only human to have that fear. But he didn't make any public criticism of it.

Ter: And it ends up being a Democratic slate anyway I mean.

George: Yeah, it was pure Democratic.

Ter: With Gruening, Egan, and Rivers, right?

George: Rivers, Gruening, and Egan.

Ter: Yeah, what did I say, yeah. Did you know how do you think that they said this I guess a little bit that Egan sort of leadership was so important. And everybody always comments on his phenomenal memory and maybe George you want to make - I don't know if you have any anecdotes about him or particular memories of him or things that come to mind?

George: Well he was just great. I was told by one of the delegates and I can't remember now who it was but when they got into something that he was espousing a certain way of doing things that Bill Egan in the chair who didn't like to speak. He was going to be a presiding officer and not somebody who is speaking on the matters. He recognized that the fellow was getting into territory which was delicate and so he called a - what's the word I want - to stop the proceedings.

Ter: A recess of -

George: He called for a recess and he talked - he went down and talked with this delegate and told him about the danger of going on with that and the fellow instantly realized that he was right and he changed his direction. But he was just right - he was wonderful in every respect. And he was trying hard to make it be the best constitution there ever was.

Man: Stop -

Ter: You know one thing just occurred to me too George and anything else, cause I'm going to remind you - you said you were going to tell a story afterwards, but one thing that Lou Williams, Jr. had told me he said and he didn't remember when this started but that for years Helen Monson refused to mention Gruening's name in the paper. I don't know if you - but anyway he said the story would say the governor and wouldn't even say his name.

George: Oh, yeah, I suppose that happened yeah. Similarly, you know I had a falling out with the publisher of the News-Miner.

Ter: Oh, Smeden.

George: Bill Smeden. After I was long gone and they refused to mention me. I was working at that time for Gruening and they would try very hard to avoid mentioning me.

Ter: Not repeating your name at all huh? Not even mentioning it?

George: No mention.

Robert: Well didn't you work for the News-Miner though?

George: I was the editor and I got along fine with him, but what happened well it's an interesting story and I don't know if you want it.

Ter: Yeah, yeah, cause this is important, yeah. Yeah.

George: Are we on again?

Ter: Yeah.

George: Okay. Came a time a few years after statehood when I'm not getting into this very well, but anyway.

Ter: George about the lawsuit, the Pierson thing or is it not?

George: Well that was one part of it.

Ter: Well I think you went to work for Smeden before statehood though, right or after the constitution?

George: Oh, yeah, before. I was working for him when statehood arrived.

Ter: Okay. So let's start there maybe in a way if you - because - but he was a Republican. I mean that is part even though you're both pro-statehood I guess maybe.

George: Yeah.

Ter: You know.

George: Well Bill Smeden was a great asset to the cause of statehood. He was a hard-nosed Republican, very party motivated, but he was all for statehood, which many Republicans were not and so the influence of the News-Miner in favor of statehood was great. I was working for the News-Miner as editor when statehood was voted by the Congress on June 30, 1958. And Bill telephoned me from Washington, DC where he was and he said the Senate has just voted for statehood and now we're going to be a state and so on so you know get it in the paper. Which we had it, I had it all prepared. I had written and edited a whole section that would be put in the paper of the day that we got statehood and it had the history of Alaska up to that time and something about all of the territorial governors and so on. But we got it in there and all was well.

Well the situation at the time was that the division between the Democrats and the Republicans in the Congress was like today - very close. And here were two new Senators coming in and would they be Republicans or Democrats and not only that but right behind them it is obvious that a Hawaii has got to come in and there will be four more Senators and some more Congressmen. And so it became a matter of great contest between the two parties as to who was going to be elected Senator and in that fight Gruening was persuaded by Republicans most of whom lived in Fairbanks, but also by people like the then Secretary of the Interior -

Ter: Seeton.

George: Eaton.

Ter: Seeton

George: Seeton, Seeton.

Ter: Now you mean Smeden was -

George: Smeden, who did it say?

Ter: You said Gruening.

George: Oh, no, no. Smeden was well you know you shouldn't have George Sonborg editing your paper at this time. We want to elect what's his name?

Ter: Stepovich.

George: Huh?

Ter: Stepovich.

George: Stepovich, yeah and we're building him up and so on. So anyway Stepovich persuaded and he called me into his office one day and like Heintzleman had done some years earlier, he said George I don't like the way you're running the paper. And I want you to resign. This was shocking to me because I didn't sense anything like that and I had had nothing but praise from him about the way I was running the paper. But he was trying to have a way of getting rid of me and he was very - he said I'll let you make up the reason that you're leaving. I'll let you set the timing for it, but do it within a couple of months and so one.

Well, he was getting ready for a campaign to elect Stepovich at the behest mostly of Seaton and of Ted Stevens, who was an assistant to Seaton. He's now the senator you know. And so I had no choice but to do it and about a week after I had assured Smeden that I was going to leave, Gruening came to town and he said George I wish you would resign from the paper and run my campaign for the U. S. Senate.

Well that worked out fine you know. And so I did and I went to work and Smeden said to me, oh don't go to work for Gruening. Gruening is not going to make it you know. He'll never be elected senator. Why don't you work for Butrovich, who is running for governor at that time? And I couldn't see that and I said no, I'm - you've told me to leave and I'm going to leave and I'm going to pick whatever job I want and I want to work for Gruening. And that infuriated him. And he thought it was not important really at the time because he didn't think Gruening had a chance. But when Gruening finally beat Stepovich, he became very bitter toward me personally. And the first time I came to

Fairbanks after the election I went up there to attend the graduation ceremonies of high school, what's the name of it? It's named for Cap - Lathrop. And my daughter, who had just moved there within the last year was the number one graduating student in the senior class, highest average.

Ter: The valedictorian, right?

George: Valedictorian and I was up there for that purpose. Well I came into the hall at the Lathrop High School and I saw Bill Smeden across the floor and I walked over and I put up my hand to shake with him. He wouldn't take my hand and then he turned his back on me you know. And that was it and they didn't mention my name for years in the paper and he was very bitter toward me. He blamed me for having - I think he had a guilty feeling himself for having fired me and having me go over and work for Gruening you know. And that was more than he could stand. Well, but he was great for statehood.

Ter: I mean it meant a lot when he switched the paper's position, didn't it? I mean from Fairbanks being a Bastian -

George: Of Cap Lathrop, yeah, which was anti. Yeah, he was good. Eventually got you know into the lawsuit.

Ter: Oh, yeah, we should maybe, well -

Robert: Can I just get you to life your leg a little -

Ter: Oh, George pick up your foot there, no the other foot, under the wire.

Man: Sure you're not tangled up there.

Ter: Maybe we should say a little bit about the lawsuit cause that's pretty important, cause that was the Johnny Come Lately right - it was Drew Pearson, right, wasn't that it?

George: Drew Pearson, yeah.

Ter: Yeah.

George: Well are we on?

Ter: Yeah.

George: Before the election where Gruening beat Stepovich again Smeden was in Washington, DC and he phoned me one day, another time, and he said this was before he fired me obviously. And he said I want you to cancel the Drew Pearson column. It used to appear on the front page of the News-Miner every day. And I said well, why do you want to do that? It's the most popular column nationally from Washington, DC and it is very - it is a great asset to the paper to have it. He said no, I want you to cancel it and I want you to

write an editorial which will be headed "Drew Pearson, Garbage Man of the Fourth Estate". And I didn't know what this was all about. But I looked up the dispatch of Drew Pearson which was going to appear the next day and it was so congrat - it built up Gruening. It says the man who is really - you know responsible for statehood for Alaska which has just been voted by the United States Senate is Ernest Gruening and he has done this and he has done that. Well that was more than Smeden wanted to say on the front page of his paper where he was supporting Stepovich.

So anyway I called him back. Oh, I sent him a telegram. And I said of course I will do what you order Bill, but as a loyal employee I think I should warn you that canceling the Drew Pearson column under those circumstances will have an opposite affect to what you would like and it is going to be a big story that Smeden canceled the Drew Pearson column because he said something nice about Gruening. And Bill thought it over and he sent me a telegram later that day saying all right, but cancel it at the end of the month, which I did.

The - where am I?

Ter: Did you write that column about the garbage man what was the -

George: Yeah, I wrote a column and he had told me what to put in it you know and how to head it and so on and it appeared. And after a few years Pearson sued the News-Miner for liable calling him the garbage man of the fourth estate. And so I was working away in Washington, DC as Gruening's assistant and I had a telephone call from Drew Pearson. And he said we're subpoenaing you to go up as a witness in this lawsuit that is going to be held on a certain day and so on. Well I was served with a subpoena and I flew as far as Seattle and they were calling my name in the airport. And again it was Drew Pearson and he said the judge has just postponed the lawsuit for a month or something, so don't go on to Fairbanks at this time, come back to Washington, DC and I did.

But eventually I did go up there and I was a witness. And I told the story of how we came by that phrase garbage man of the fourth estate and that it was in a telegram to me from Mr. Smeden. And oh he was - he was terribly bitter toward me for that. And they claimed - their side claimed that there never had been any exchange of telegrams. There was no record in the files of the News-Miner of any such telegrams going back and forth between Sonborg and Smeden and they kept that up for days. And Smeden may have really believed that there weren't telegrams or he persuaded his lawyer that there had not been and they finally said - they questioned me at length you know about it. And they said isn't it true that there were no such telegrams and that you're just making this up for political purposes for an election that is about to occur in which Gruening was running against Stepovich. And I said no that wasn't true. And so well they had it all over the News-Miner for a week. This stuff kept up about Sonborg's is lying about this stuff and so I returned to Washington, DC and went to my job.

And I had another call from Drew Pearson or no, from his lawyer in Juneau and he said isn't there someone else who could corroborate your story that there were these

telegrams. And I said well, yes, there is a young woman who worked on the staff of the News-Miner and she was the one that used to mark up the Pearson column for appearance every day and she would remember our getting that telegram and so on. So they subpoenaed her.

Man: Can we stop right there, we have to change tapes.

George: Bass voice.

Ter: Do you sing George?

George: I try.

Ter: Really.

George: But I've never had any training.

Ter: Does Steven sing? I wonder a lot of time priests have to sing, I mean they have to, does he?

George: Yeah, well. Steve has a voice just like mine.

Ter: Does he, yeah.

George: My wife can't tell which of us is on the telephone for instance.

Ter: Is that right, huh.

Man: We're ready.

Ter: And we were up to -

Robert: Up to Drew Pearson.

Ter: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, the secretary, the lady who marked up the Pearson column.

George: Yeah, a young woman whose name was - I can't think of it.

Ter: Okay.

George: Anyway they subpoenaed her and when she came into the court and they saw her about to take the stand the lawyer for Smeden popped up and he said we have just found in our files the two telegrams about the garbage man of the fourth estate. And it was Mr. Smeden who sent a telephone to George Sonborg ordering that be done. And they were very quiet in there you know - they had had columns of stuff about it, my lying, lying,

lying. I wrote to the judge about - I wrote to the presiding - the chairman of the state - what's the high court?

Ter: Oh, Supreme Court.

George: Supreme Court about it and he said that we just have no provision for the protection of witnesses. And that is just something they have to withstand and so on, but anyway.

Ter: Well George how did that I mean you must have been very how did you feel about this whole thing being ensnared with him in these things. That must have been pretty tough.

George: To be honest with you I felt vindicated, which made me feel good. And I was kind and I was mad at Bill Smeden for his attitude toward me because he had been so supportive of me all through my tenure there, poor Bill. There was something else you wanted to get into.

Ter: Yeah, let's see.

George: Oh, let me say one more thing about the trial. They found in favor of the News-Miner in the suit on the grounds that Drew Pearson was a man who had made himself a public figure and so he had - there was a right of people to criticize him, which I believe is a good decision. But they said that the News-Miner will not be paid any lawyer's fees in the suit and the lawyer's fees must have been terrific because of the matter of the telegrams, which made Bill Smeden ever madder at me. Oh, boy.

Ter: Well did he - was Pearson - did he file this suit in a way to help out Gruening I mean is that - did he think this would help Gruening or what was his -

George: This was long after Gruening was serving in the senate. No, I don't know why he did it. I guess he just wanted to.

Ter: I just wonder if it was the later campaign that was all.

George: No, it wasn't near a campaign I mean.

Ter: Let's see we did the paper.

Robert:Resources.

Ter: Oh, yeah, George, the general sort of idea of the - maybe as expressed in the constitution too, the resident versus the nonresident interests of who would gain from the exploitation of Alaska resources. I don't know if there is anything you could say about that.

George: I'm not up to date on that.

Ter: Okay.

George: I'm not up to speed.

Robert: And you know now we of course enjoy the Permanent Fund Dividend check and I know oil development wasn't as high a profile resource element as it is today, but would you speculate a little bit on what if statehood had been delayed, what the outcome might have been in terms of our oil and gas resources?

George: It would be hard for me. Of course all of the land, practically all the land in Alaska was federally owned and controlled and there would never have been a North Slope discovery of petroleum had we not obtained statehood and be given the right to select from the federal holdings in Alaska a specified number of acres or townships of land. And so they had a director of resources in the state government named Phil Holzworth and he deliberately picked out areas up there on the North Slope which were oil bearing, he thought, hadn't been discovered yet. But it has paid the way for statehood you know by the money they get from the pipeline.

Ter: The oil discovery, sure, yeah. I mean even because Alaska it was really a tenuous economic situation in a way wasn't it I mean?

George: Yes.

Robert: Well people said well when Bob D'Armand was mentioned there were people who at the time said well it's a broke territory and if we make it a state, it will be a broke state.

George: Yeah. Did you -

Ter: We talked to D'Armand, yeah.

George: That's interesting.

Ter: Yeah, he's doing well, you know, Gail, his wife, she has Alzheimer's so she's -

George: He's older than I am I believe.

Ter: Yeah. I think he's 92.

George: Uh-huh.

Ter: 92 and a half and you know he's still sort of skeptical about statehood I guess you know.

George: Well it was a fortunate thing that they discovered oil when they did. It has paid the way. Well, -

Ter: George, do you think though it's a thing that if I guess that's sort of the question that it was really an act of faith creating this state, wasn't it?

George: Yes, it was.

Ter: That something was going to happen.

George: Right.

Ter: Even if you couldn't see it right now, something will happen I mean.

George: Sure.

Ter: So, it was really quite an idealistic the whole act of making the constitution and everything, did you come away - I mean how did you feel like on that date you signed the constitution? That must have been pretty special?

George: It was very special. And I think everybody who had served as a delegate was emotionally moved by it. We were all crying you know as we went up to sign the constitution. It was a great victory. But I believe just on its - the grounds of self-government, statehood was a tremendous worthwhile goal and had they not discovered petroleum up there, we would have made it by somehow. We'd be the poorest state but what of it you know. We'd be able to run our own show, which we weren't able to do under territorialism. It was a big step.

Ter: What - was that meant like cause even in your book I think you talk about that in there at least the problems and you certainly must have faced it as head of the development board the problems of getting development going.

George: Yeah.

Ter: I mean what was - was there any like one or two big real difficulties? I mean what were the biggest obstacles that you faced in running the board, what was the - getting people to invest in Alaska? I don't know was there any way of summarizing what the biggest issues were?

George: No territory has ever operated successfully. It is only after they became states that they amounted to something. And most of them had very small populations at the time they got statehood and they have all you might say succeeded. We're going through a hard time now but at least we're in command of our legislatures and if we go broke it is going to be our own fault. And that's very good for a democratic society.

So it was a great state and I think statehood has proved itself in Alaska. Gosh, we only had - when I went to Alaska in 1938 they took a census the next year and they found that Alaska had 72,000 inhabitants. And I remember being at a meeting of the Juneau Chamber of Commerce where this was announced by the director of the census. And there was great applause broke out. That was a big improvement. And you know of those 72,000 an overwhelming majority of them were Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts you know.

We hadn't really done much with settling Alaska and that only came with statehood. What do you have now 650,000 or so?

Ter: Yeah between 600 and 700,000 yeah, so it is ten times grown.

George: Yeah.

Ter: Of course the war had a big impact too though didn't it.

George: Oh, yeah.

Ter: War economically I guess changed a lot of things.

George: Yeah.

Ter: And this outside control of resources that was something that you known was a major issue I suppose?

George: Yes, it was. The fisheries were really hurting and they had been revived quite well. Of course salmon isn't worth anything any more, but that's a different - that's not statehood's fault.

Ter: That's right. That's a different issue. What was the - cause you going to tell - say something else - you were going to say was there something else Robert that we should?

Robert: No, I think we've got yeah.

Ter: Okay. Well, George, there was another thing you said you wanted to say and I interrupted you.

George: Yeah. I just wanted to say a few little things.

Ter: Sure.

George: About when I first went to Alaska. I knew Frank Waskey, who was the first delegate in Congress from Alaska. They had an election I think in 1912.

Ter: 1906.

George: 1906 and he ran for what they called the short term, which would just be a matter of several months serving Alaska in the Congress and somebody else ran for the long term and was elected. But Frank Waskey, at the time that I lived in Washington, DC, lived in rural Maryland just out across the DC border and often Gruening or Bartlett wanted to have Waskey come in and have lunch with them. And you know and talk about old times. So I was always the chauffeur. I had a Volkswagen Bug and I ran out into the country

and picked up Frank and we'd visit about old times you know all the way both ways. He was a great guy and very old - older than I am now.

I wanted to say when I first went to Alaska one of the first things that happened I was living in the Gastineau Hotel in Juneau. The Baranoff had not yet been built and the Gastineau was the best hotel, it wasn't very good. I woke up one morning and to my surprise when I got down to the street here was a great commotion and there were fire hoses everywhere and in the night a fire had broken out in the Gold - what was - it was a Jewish name - Charlie Goldsmith - Goldsmith Building.

Ter: Goldsmith or Goldstein?

George: Goldstein - Goldstein Building and it burned it up. You know had destroyed it and all the fire engines had been there all night and I slept soundly. There was this wide-awake reporter, didn't know anything about it. That was just one little thing.

Ter: That was when you were the reporter?

George: Yeah.

Ter: You were a reporter George with a clear conscience.

George: I got up early to go over to the paper and up to the Federal Building to try to see if I could find some news and here it - any way.

Robert: Burning right behind you.

George: About a year after that something happened that impressed me very much. I was sent an invitation, my wife said it was an engraved invitation. It really wasn't engraved, it just was fancily printing invitation to be an official witness at the first hanging that had been held in Alaska in a many, many years -

End of Side A

Side B

George: A Native from Ketchikan named Nelson Charles, who had been tried and found guilty of killing his stepmother - his mother-in-law, his wife's mother while everybody was drunk. And he was going to be hanged and the Marshall's office there was - they were, oh, boy, they were greatly upset by the fact that they were going to have to stage a hanging and they didn't know what to do. And they had to get books out of you know from somewhere and read up on it. And they finally made all the preparations and the day of the hanging I and other witnesses were enclosed below a stairway in the then court building. It was an old wooden building that stood where the state office building is now, across from the library and across from the State Capitol Building as they call it. And they nailed up sides there. They had them all made and they nailed him there and they

finally brought in this poor Native and he was duly executed with some difficulty because they couldn't get the cap to go on over his ears and so on. And it was sort of a mess. But they succeeded in dropping him in a way that it did break his neck and killed him instantly. And when they took off the plywood and we got out into the open air, it was by that time daylight. This was in the winter and the days were short. And to our surprise every point all around the whole area was occupied by Natives who had come there to witness the execution of one of their members. I don't know why I told that, but anyway.

Ter: No, that's an interesting story. That's amazing.

George: And I ran right down to the paper and told the story.

Ter: Told the story, yeah, yeah. Cause I don't think they - I guess that is a problem sometimes when they would hang people and they wouldn't die right away or something.

George: That is right. Sometimes they just kind of strangled you know.

Ter: Yeah, yeah, so that's.

George: And they were very afraid of that. They did a number of tests. They didn't test it on any living person, but they tested it on sand bags and so on and -

Robert: But they didn't get any volunteers?

George: No.

Robert: You can test it on me, yeah, that would be fine.

Ter: I think one thing George one thing we haven't talked about though is working with Gruening as administrative assistant. What were those years like? That was from '50, well after the election was '58?

George: '58 yeah.

Ter: To '68 basically.

George: The statehood act was signed by the President on January 3, 1959 and by that time I was in Washington, DC and we were in business. It caused quite a disturbance in the senate because there had been only 48 states for all these years since about 1912 when Arizona and New Mexico came in and there were only really office spaces in the building for 48 senators. So what are you going to with the 49th you know? And so they made a kind of a temporary provision for us and we were in very cramped quarters for quite a while.

Ter: You must have been pretty exciting though wasn't it? I mean.

George: Oh, it was great. It was marvelous. We had a lot of work to do in passing laws to bring all the statutes up to be workable in Alaska, as well as the other 48 states. And this was at a time when they were building a new senate office building and so it was no problem after that.

I'll tell you another little story that most people don't know about. Along about the middle of Gruening's tenure there, two men came up from the State Department and they said we have discovered the desk which William Seward stood at and where he signed the article - the check to Russia for \$7,200,000 or whatever it was when we bought Alaska and that it is in some famous painting that was made at the time and here was the very desk and would Senator Gruening like to have that for use as his desk. And I asked Gruening, oh well, by all means you know. So they did send it up and it was a beautiful big old desk. And he coped with it for a few months but he found it wasn't very modern and useful and it didn't have quite what he wanted to be able to use nowadays.

So he said well I'm going to send this one down to the whatever the fellow that was in charge of the furnishing of the office buildings and have him send up a modern desk and we did. And so the desk for years stood in a corridor, which was full of old desks, underneath the old Senate Office Building. And about the time that Gruening was leaving there we had a request somebody wanted to get a hold of this desk. And they initiated a search and they were never able to find it. It was somehow discarded and probably taken out to the dump and burned you know. And that was a priceless you know antique, which we should have in Alaska. And I feel very guilty about it myself, although I wasn't responsible for its destruction.

Ter: Yeah, cause they probably wanted it for the centennial in 1867 you know, somebody was wanted it at the museum or -

George: Sure.

Ter: That painting Voce is very famous, like the guy who did Washington Crossing The Delaware, same guy. Well that's - so what was it like the first time you went - cause you with Gruening the first time he - when he was sworn in?

George: Oh, yeah.

Ter: What was that day like? Was that right on January 3rd - was it right after?

George: I think it was January 3rd, maybe the night of the 4th. It was the day that Congress convened after the holidays. That was an interesting thing because there were several questions to be decided. One was which of the two senators from Alaska that had been elected was going to be the senior senator. And Gruening expected that Bartlett would step aside and said well you're really very much senior to me and you can be the senior. But I suppose Bartlett in his mind thought well Gruening ought to step aside because I've been serving here in the house you know for 15 years as delegate and I should be. So

anyway they went into a closet, a coat closet, in Gruening's office, just the two of them, and they drew lots and it turned out that Bartlett was the senior senator.

Then on the day that they were, which had happened really before that, the day that it was - they were going to be sworn into the U. S. Senate it turned out - there had been 48 senators -

Ter: Or 96 you mean.

George: 96 senators from 48 states that that's a number that is divisible by six. So every senator had a six-year term you see and it came out even and they were in three classes. There was a class that would be elected this year, then six years later be another class, or maybe two years later, two years and two years. And they didn't know which class to put these guys in. So they had a drawing right on the floor of the senate down in the well of the senate where Bartlett and Gruening went and each of them reached into an antique box and pulled out a slip of paper. And Bartlett got into what they call the class of 1962, 72, wait a minute.

Ter: It was '62 I mean.

George: Yeah '62, yes.

Ter: When he would come up for re-election you mean?

George: Yeah, yeah.

Ter: Oh, I see.

George: Class of '62 and Gruening got the slip that said class of '64. Nobody got the long term of '66. So in the first election as a result of the first elections, Bartlett served two years, Gruening served four years and then they had to run again. And I ran all three statewide campaigns for Gruening. One in '58, one in '62, and one in '68. And we won the first two of them and we lost the third one in the primary to Mike Gravel.

Ter: What was Gruening like as a campaigner or for you as the guy running the -

George: Well, he was great. He was a very eloquent speaker. I don't know if you ever heard him. Oh, he was just great. And he was so good at it you know and he would just keep everybody spellbound. And I found that I was traveling around with him all over Alaska you know and we would go into a place like Kenai and he'd be invited to a luncheon and he'd give a great speech you know. And I find he was changing the speech at every place we stopped for my sake. He didn't want to bore me with just giving a set speech you know. And he was able to - he was so good at it that he was able to make it a little different.

He was a great employer. Never bothered me. Only one time did he criticize me. He went to the Army Hospital in Washington, DC, what's the name of it? They're bringing -

Ter: Walter Reed?

George: Walker Reed. And he was going to have an operation. And I had a call from the Washington Post and they said we noticed that Senator Gruening has entered Washington - Walter Reed Hospital. What's it for? Is he seriously ill? What is it? And I said no, he is just having an operation for correction of a -

Ter: Hernia.

George: Hernia and they published that. Gruening said George you shouldn't have revealed that. That is personal you know. You just shouldn't have mentioned it. You should have just said he went in for an operation, that would be all right, but don't say it was for a hernia. That's the only time he ever criticized me for anything I did or didn't do.

But when he ran the third time he was already 81 years old and he was running for a (phone rang).

Ter: I mean it was falling in and they tore the house down and she rebuilt it.

George: I see.

Ter: Almost exactly like it was.

George: Yeah.

Ter: Except brand new.

George: I'll be darn. Does she live in Fairbanks now?

Ter: She's still living there now, yeah, yeah.

George: How about that?

Ter: But I thought you know this house meant so much to her and it was kind of sad, he didn't know - it meant so much to her that she'd go back after she was dead.

Setting up.

Ter: What were we in the middle of?

George: I can tell you.

Ter: Okay, go ahead.

George: Are we running yet?

Man: Yes, we are.

George: All right. I was in the middle of saying the third campaign of Gruening. He was 81 years old and he was running for a six-year term and the people just wouldn't go for that. So he was defeated by this young guy in the primary. And he took it very hard. Had he been elected he would have died in office, which would not be a good thing you know. Alaska did well by really not electing him again. I can't imagine a guy of 81 running for a six-year term. Although look what Strom Thurmond did, 100. Okay, now we're through.

Ter: And even Ted Stevens now is 80.

George: Is he?

Ter: Isn't that something?

George: That's amazing. Ted Stevens did a wonderful thing for me and he shouldn't have because he ran against Gruening in 1962 and it was - Gruening was ahead for the whole campaign, but Ted was the nominee and we of course were doing everything we could to try to make him look bad.

And one thing that happened was that he and two other Republican, I think they were members of the legislature, were in the city of Craig down in southeast Alaska and they were over there campaigning and some loyal Democrat saw them tear down a poster that Gruening had put up in Craig. You know tear it down and destroy it. And he phoned me; this man did who saw it. And we made a big story out of that you know. Told the newspaper about it and oh Ted was wild you know. And he just hated me for years really.

I never did him any favors, but after Gruening was defeated, Wally Hickel appointed me to a good job in the Interior Department. And before too long he was fired by President Nixon for speaking out of turn or something. And then a Republican group in the administration went to work to try to discover all the people that had been brought to Washington, DC and given jobs by Hickel. And they found me, among others and so I received orders to - well they said we would like you to retire. You've had enough years you know you have a pretty good pension and I said well I don't want to retire. I have rights under the Civil Service Act to continue working. I've worked for the federal government - I had had all the experience when I was assistant to the governor of Alaska. It was a federal job at that time and Bonneville Power Administration and so on. I said I don't want to do it and they said well, we're going to get rid of you somehow. And so they ordered me transferred to a regional office of the agency. It was called the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. And they looked up and found the farthest one away from Washington, DC was in Seattle. So I was transferred to Seattle, where I had spent my boyhood and I just loved it you know.

And anyway, oh, and the reason they stood still for this and continued me at my high salary and all was that Ted got into it. And Ted said you're getting in the way of all the Alaskans who came down there with Wally and you're especially you're trying to make life tough for Sonborg and I won't stand for it. He was a powerful member of the Senate and so they made it possible for me to continue at my salary for I think two years and then I retired. And it was a much better retirement than I would have had had I done it earlier. I had quite enough years in to have a good annuity and Ted did that.

And I thanked him and he was good enough to - he invited me to a lunch in my honor at the time the Gruening statue was unveiled and I was the presiding officer in the Great Rotunda of the great Capitol you know where they had this ceremony. And about a dozen senators spoke and I was the one who introduced these gentlemen and so on. It was a great honor. Had all my family there.

So Ted he doesn't have a heart. I mean he does have a heart. He doesn't not have a heart.

Ter: He does have a heart is what you mean, yes.

George: Yeah, right.

Ter: Yeah. Did -

George: He didn't owe me anything really.

Ter: Yeah. All you had been doing was trying to make him look bad in 1962.

George: Sure and he really resented that.

Ter: Yeah.

George: You know something that happened in Anchorage that year during the campaign, there was a guy I can't think of his name now, but he was a renegade lawyer there. And he had I think been suspended by the Bar, but anyway we had \$100 a plate dinner for Gruening and we had sold all out of tickets to it and built it up. It was the first \$100 dollar a plate ticket ever held in Alaska. This was in 1962 and -

Ter: Where was it held at George, do you remember what at the Westmark or

George: It was the Westward, yeah. And Ted was - he was not able to do anything like that but he had the bright idea that on the very same evening he was going to have a cook-out at his place where he would serve dinners free, hamburgers or hot dogs or something to anybody who wanted to come. It was a pretty good campaign thing you know and it got in the papers and all. And this lawyer he had run afoul of Ted Stevens somehow or other. And he said he went downtown and got a taxi and he went around and picked up all the bums he could find, people that were real drunks you know, troublemakers and he filled the taxi with them and sent them out to Ted's place to get a free dinner. And he did it

with several taxis. I didn't have anything to do with that. I never heard about it until long afterwards.

Robert:(Inaudible) thank you much you know.

Man: And you wish you had thought of it, huh?

George: Yeah.

Man: It was a good idea.

George: Oh, no I wouldn't have done that.

Ter: Well do you think that - do you remember the first time you saw Stevens? Did you ever see him when he was working for Seaton I don't know if that -

George: Oh yeah.

Ter: Yeah.

George: I saw him in Fairbanks. He was practicing law in Fairbanks when I went there as Editor of the News-Miner. And I was on you know pretty good terms with him. I was a red hot Democrat and he was a red hot Republican, but we were speaking to each other.

Ter: You know it was clear from talking to (inaudible) that they had a special - CW had a special relationship with -

George: Ted.

Ter: Ted.

George: Yeah.

Ter: Don't you think? I mean it was really -

George: Oh absolutely. They gave him their yacht you know. Did you know that? As a gift, yeah. He thought the world of Ted. Ted was a good Smeden supporter in the Interior Department with Seaton and thereafter when he got into congress.

Ter: Do you think that it is possible that one of the reasons that - I mean CW was a big backer of Stevens, urging Hickel to appoint him, and so on, I mean does that - did it ever I don't know if that ever you know was ever any scuttlebutt of that, but -

George: Well it didn't come to me. They didn't consult me.

Ter: I guess not.

George: They really should have appointed Elmer Rasmussen you know who was the nominee and who had defeated by -

Ter: Gruening.

George: Gruening.

Ter: By Gravel.

George: By Gravel yeah.

Ter: I think Gruening came in third. I can't remember now in '68, right? Did he come in third or second? I don't know.

George: Oh he came in second in the primary.

Ter: Second in the primary, but I mean after the write-in didn't he -

George: Oh, he, yeah, after -

Ter: Did you work on the write-in George?

George: No, I didn't I -

Ter: Did you urge Gruening not to do it?

George: Yes.

Ter: Yeah.

George: And I got his word that he would not do it and I said I want to call Mike Gravel and congratulate him and tell him we'll do anything we can to help get him elected in the general election. And Gruening thought it over and said all right do that George. Go down to Juneau tomorrow and Gravel was there. And he said call him ahead of time and tell him you're going to do it. And I called and told him we're going to support you in the general election and I'm coming down to shake your hand and congratulate you and so on. And then Gruening was persuaded by people well you ought to run as a write-in you know. And I told him that he shouldn't do that. You're not going to run - you weren't able to get nominated in the primary, how can you hope to be elected in the write-in when you're going to have two people running against you. And so anyway he did it. And I said I don't want to have anything to do with it and I didn't. And he took Herb Beaser, who was his legislative assistant, went to Alaska and kind of hunched the write-in, but it didn't get anywhere.

Ter: Did you think - what about the Tonkin Gulf? I know written to Klaus about this the Tonkin Gulf decision.

George: Yeah.

Ter: That's something we should probably talk about a little bit. What was that - did he discuss that at all with you or did you -

George: Oh yeah, he talked about it. Of course he talked on the floor almost every day about it, floor of the senate, he and Wayne Morris were - they were death on our involvement in Vietnam. And he incurred the wrath of President Johnson I'll tell you. He always thought that President Johnson had a hand in his defeat by Mike Gravel, had some money or something. Could be.

Ter: Just because of the Tonkin Gulf, well obviously he was furious at the time.

George: Yeah that's why he didn't care for Gruening.

Ter: Well did you notice though George over the years did the Tonkin Gulf - did LBJ seem to take it out on - for Alaskan projects? Because I know that's what Alaskans complained about or those who opposed him on that issue.

George: Well it didn't make love Alaskans better, but he distinguished between Gruening for instance and Bartlett. He was all for Bartlett, so he was doing things for Alaska. He became the majority leader of the senate when I was first there. And I was walking down the corridor of the Capitol one day and here came Johnson with about three assistants you know and he came up to me and put his arms around me you know and he said we think the world of your leader Senator Gruening and we're going to do everything we can for him you know. You tell him that I greatly esteem him and you know we're going to support him all the way. Well I went back and told Gruening that and Gruening said oh, that great big faker. He says you can't believe anything he says.

I was with Gruening when he got the word that President Kennedy had been assassinated. We were watching the television and -

Ter: Where were you at George, where were you?

George: We were in his office in the Senate Office Building and the first thing he said - he said oh, my God, there haven't been enough months have gone by that Johnson won't be eligible for a third term. He was already looking ahead to that. The constitution was amended to provide that you could run - you could be a senator for two terms, but you could only be for one term and a long -

Ter: Well the two terms, right, the two presidential terms you mean?

George: Yeah you could be two terms but you couldn't always be elected for two terms if you had served more than so many months of the President who has been assassinated you know. And that was the situation and he immediately said, first thing he came up and said - oh, my God, Johnson is going to be able to serve for three terms you know.

Ter: That's immediately, yeah. Well it certainly proved out - I mean Gruening's relationship with him I guess it couldn't have been good after Tonkin Gulf, I mean it couldn't be.

George: Oh, no.

Ter: He you know.

George: No, he had no use for Gruening and vice versa.

Ter: Did - was there any after that vote the Tonkin Gulf vote was there any kind of outpouring or any response or was it just you know?

George: No, it was subtle.

Ter: Yeah.

George: And it happened over a long period of time, but you know the Tonkin Gulf resolution was passed by every single member of the house voted for it and 98 senators voted for it and the only two persons in the world who voted against it were Gruening and Wayne Morris. It wasn't a great threat to Johnson, you know. It wasn't any kind of like a hanging in the balance or anything. He just couldn't see Gruening being as opposed to the war in Vietnam as he was.

Ter: I need just one more thing, George, and then I'll let you go. What about the relationship between Bartlett and Gruening as senators, I mean when they were there. I know they had a difficult time. I mean what was the -

George: Well it was a long relationship. Bartlett was already Secretary of Alaska at the time Gruening came as governor in 1939 and they got along swimmingly. They were great buddies and workers together. And Gruening said I'm going to make you - I'm going to give you real assignments to do. You're not just going to be a you know somebody who takes a salary here and has a position. I'm going to build you up and he did. And they worked together on everything. And Gruening was clearly the leader of the two during that time. Well now after Bartlett had been - Gruening had to talk him into filing for delegate you know. He didn't think he could beat Henry Rowdin, who was an opponent of his in the primary. He thought Rowdin would wipe him out and Gruening did everything he could to help Bartlett and he especially persuaded him to please run you know.

And Bartlett did and to his surprise I suppose he won the primary and he won the general election. And from the time he got back to Washington, DC you know he began to feel

more and more important as they all do when they get there. And he grew away from Gruening a little. And he finally came to resent Gruening. He called me several times and complained about things that Gruening was taking credit for that were something that happened for Alaska and Gruening had telephoned the newspapers up there with a story about it and Bartlett felt he should have had the publicity.

But the two of them agreed that they would always give way to the next one who was coming up for election. And Gruening could have all the favorable publicity from federal actions during the time that he was heading into. But Bartlett broke that agreement and became quite anti-Gruening toward the end. Gruening thought that Bartlett was helping Mike Gravel to some extent. I don't know that it was true. I hope it wasn't.

Bartlett was a great guy. He was always great with me. He finally broke his pick with me but it was years later. He - I aspired to be appointed Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Public Land Management late in Gruening's term and I went - first one I went to was Bartlett and I said will you support me in this. And he said well do you think there is any possibility that you might be appointed? He said President Johnson, who will make the appointment is death on Gruening. And I said well I have been told I have already six senators from the senate interior committee who are supporting my bid to be appointed to that and I think I can make it. He said well I'll be for you he said and he publicly came out for me. And lo and behold when we got up close to the appointment to be made I read in the Alaska newspapers that Gruening was - Sonborg was aspiring to be appointed to this, but Bartlett said well also a contender for it and I support them equally is Hugh Wade.

Hugh Wade was a great personal friend of Bob's and he was a nice guy. And I went to Bob after that and said you said you would support me and here you're saying you'd be for either one of us. How can you do that? And he kind of glossed it over, but I felt he had let me down, but I wasn't appointed.

Ter: Well it just sounds like -

George: Instead they fired me.

Ter: George, it sounds like in a way you've just been such a blessed in your life though I tell you of the things that happened to you.

George: Yeah, right.

Ter: It really is amazing to me, but I think it's your attitude that I can see why you had such a good attitude about things that it was a natural kind of positive thing. You know I did have one more question and I know Robert is looking at the clock.

Robert: Making the three o'clock schedule, rearrange.

George: Are we on?

Ter: We are still on now. I have one more question. In this big picture, it was really an idealistic time, wasn't it, of the writing of the constitution?

George: Oh, it was.

Ter: The granting of statehood and in a way I guess some of that fell apart didn't it after statehood was achieved. Maybe you could talk a little bit about - because now we kind of don't - we forget that feeling of the 1950's because of the reality of on the you know like the Bartlett and Gruening falling apart and because they wouldn't have fallen apart probably during the fight when they had a common enemy you know.

George: Well it was true. It was a great time to be in Alaska. Things were improving. Statehood was coming. It was in sight you know. We were winning. And it was marvelous to be that. I have long ago said that as a nonresident I'm not going to be about to tell Alaska what they ought to be doing with their government. I shouldn't criticize the legislature, although I have some thoughts about that and so on. So I don't like to get into that. I think Alaska has done reasonably well.

Ter: Well what about if you were going to say the legis - what were your thoughts be about it, just tell me then. What would they be?

George: What would my thoughts be?

Ter: About the legis - and the way they have operated I mean.

George: Well I think they have become sort of a bought legislature by the petroleum industry. And there haven't been any great heroes as legislators, you know who are like Gruening or like Bartlett who were men that could really stand up and do things. But I'm not - I don't want to make that - I don't want to make a criticism of them. I know they have their problems.

Ter: But you'd say that - well personally George looking back on this, how does the - all those various experiences, working in the senate you know being aide to the governor or the convention, is any of that stand out - is it the convention that stands out really as kind of the peak or is it something that you can't really say?

George: Well it was certainly a high point the day that we signed the Alaska State Constitution. There have been other high points. I've had a marvelous life. I've had a very busy successful life you know and it has been up, up, up pretty much and my health has been good and I've been a very fortunate fellow.

Ter: And you have been married for how long now?

George: Sixty-six years.

Ter: When did you get married, where was that?

George: We were married in February of 1938 in Hoquiam. She was the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce there and I was a cub reporter. And her office was on my beat and I used to go in there every day and get a few notes on who was in town visiting and so on. And after a few years - she was a very popular young lady and I didn't have much of a chance with her, but she finally - just recently she said to me she explained it. She said I just said to myself I'm either going to marry one of these dumb heads and live down here for the rest of my life in the rain of Gray's Harbor County or I could marry George Sonborg you know and maybe get out of here. And he is smarter than any of them she said, which was my real criteria for choosing to marry you. She is seven and a half years older than I am, that's why we're still alive both of us now.

Ter: Because of what George, because of -

George: Because of the difference in age you know. Boy there are so many widows who outlive their husbands. I don't believe I'm going to last another seven and a half years you see. I feel good, but I'm weakening.

Ter: But one thing it is so wonderful. You're so blessed that you had all these years. That's really a terrific thing, isn't it?

George: Oh, yeah.

Ter: And what did she think about - I know I said only one more question, but what did she think about going to Alaska with you in 1938?

George: Well she wouldn't have chosen it, but she was for anything that I thought would promote my career and she was quite content up there. God we had five children and -

Ter: Were the kids all born in - where were they born?

George: Not a one of them was born in Alaska. They were all conceived there. And then she would come down and stay with her mother and her sister. Here's the first one. He was born in Hoquiam.

Ter: And then but so cause when you went first to (inaudible), I didn't ask you this, but were you thinking probably that the Juneau Empire was a short-term stop probably right or did you think -

George: No I thought I was going to be there quite a while.

Ter: Oh, you did, okay.

George: The circumstance that I left was based upon what I had found about their stand on various issues and based on the offer I had from the National Resources Planning Board.

Ter: Well, George I want to thank you very much for us taking all this time of yours and this has been just wonderful. It is a real personal pleasure for me. You're such just a great inspiration here. You really made my -

George: Well thank you.

Ter: Made my day, so thanks very much.

Man: We'll turn these off.