

INTERVIEW OF HOWARD KNUTSON  
INTERVIEWER IS KAREN BREWSTER  
SEPTEMBER 7, 2016  
IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA  
PART 1

KAREN BREWSTER: 2016. Is that right?

HOWARD KNUTSON: That's correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and this is Karen Brewster here with Howard Knutson. Is that how you say it?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Knutson.

KAREN BREWSTER: Knutson in Anchorage, Alaska at his apartment overlooking Lake Spenard and we are going to talk about his experiences in the Wrangell Mountains. Thank you, Howard for making the time this morning.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Okay.

KAREN BREWSTER: So to get us started if you can just tell me a little bit about yourself. When and where you were born and your growing up.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I was born in Minnesota on a farm and I left there after high school and I spent some time in California and then prepared to go to Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what year did you come to Alaska?

HOWARD KNUTSON: 1953, in the spring of 1953.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and why did you decide you wanted to come here?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I studied about Alaska in seventh grade in geography class and I knew that I wanted to go to Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what were you doing in California?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, I was an iron worker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and were you in the military?

HOWARD KNUTSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: I came right between World War II and the Korean War which hadn't really started yet. So when I got drafted, which they didn't need my services.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, well, lucky you.

HOWARD KNUTSON: I guess.

KAREN BREWSTER: I guess. Okay, so when you came to Alaska in 1953, how did you get here?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Automobile.

KAREN BREWSTER: You drove the Alaska Highway.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And where did you end up?

HOWARD KNUTSON: In Anchorage. The day after I arrived here I went to work for Wally Hickel building the Traveler's Inn on Gambell Street.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: And I worked for Wally for a year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Maintaining -- doing the maintenance at the Traveler's Inn and doing construction work.

KAREN BREWSTER: And were you married and had a family at that point?

HOWARD KNUTSON: I just got married. I brought my wife with me to Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what was her name?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Adeana.

KAREN BREWSTER: Adeana. And so what did you guys think of Alaska when you got here?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I am not sure what we thought. We were happy to get here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So how did you get into flying?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I recognized immediately after I got here that you had to have an airplane to do anything. So I traded -- I didn't need the car anymore. I had purchased a Jeep to get around town. So I traded a car for an airplane in 1953 and I had my first license by the end of 1953.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So did you take flying classes or did you teach yourself or?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I just hired an instructor. I later on went to a -- American Flyers in Fort Worth, Texas and got my multiengine and instrument rating.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you needed those extra ratings and certifications?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I was flying for Cordova Airlines at the time so I did need those certificates.

KAREN BREWSTER: What kind of airplane was that first plane?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, I guess an Aeronca Champ.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that is a pretty small plane?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, it is a two place. It is a good training airplane and then I -- my next airplane was a PA-12 and then 170 -- a Cessna 170.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did you end up flying out in the Wrangell's? You got this plane and you were just doing it for yourself.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I had been working for Cordova Airlines in Anchorage and I was the pilot that used to fly for Cordova lines out of Chitina -- was killed in an airplane accident. So I was -- by this time I had my commercial license and so on and so forth so I was requested to go to work as a pilot out of Chitina. So I flew for Cordova Airlines until 1965. At that point it was taking up too much of my time cause I had other things to do and so I resigned in March in 1965.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. When did you start for -- you said you worked for Cordova Airlines here in Anchorage.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were you a pilot for them?

HOWARD KNUTSON: No, no. I was baggage smasher.

KAREN BREWSTER: Baggage smasher? Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: That is what we were known as in those days.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you loaded and unloaded planes?

HOWARD KNUTSON: And also loadmaster for the C-46 and DC-3. We were doing charter work for DEW Line.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay. Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: So I kept busy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Loading those C-46's and DC-3, that is a lot of stuff to load up.

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HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, you have to know where to put the cargo with the weights and so on and so forth. And people loading the airplane don't know these things. They're laborers and so I just -- I was supervising the loading.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, but that is what the loadmaster knows. He knows where to put the stuff.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Right, exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: You tell -- okay, go put that there?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, okay. Yeah, I didn't realize Cordova Airlines had done those DEW Line charters.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what year did you start that job here in Anchorage for Cordova Airlines?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Actually in late fall of '54.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And then when did you go out to Chitina?

HOWARD KNUTSON: In '56.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So it was 1956 to 1965 in Chitina?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And who was the pilot that was killed that you replaced?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Herb Haley.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: He was an old time friend of Merle Smith's from Kansas.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. Okay. Is that H-A-L-E-Y?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, that's correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So tell me about living in Chitina and flying out of there. What was that like?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, it is just normal bush flying. Whatever, do whatever is necessary.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you were flying freight?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Mail, passengers, freight, whatever, charters.

KAREN BREWSTER: So where were you flying people to?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Wherever they wanted to go. You know, sometimes it was a charter flight from Anchorage to some place out there or someplace else. We were flexible.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were there very many people living out in Chitina and McCarthy in that valley out there?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, there was probably permanent residents in McCarthy it was probably 10 or 12 or something like that. I don't know what the population of Chitina was, but it was a community, about half Native and half white. Mostly, probably more Natives than white people.

KAREN BREWSTER: At that time, yeah.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: And how did the Natives and non-Natives get along in the community?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, just fine. Yeah, no problem.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. What was I -- oh, we had mentioned Martin Ratavan earlier.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how many people were living way out like him, you know, still prospecting?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, there were several trappers and prospectors that would maybe come to Chitina once or twice a year and buy groceries and then get flown back out to wherever they were living

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember either names or where they were living?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, there was Alex Grant and Mark Goodman was in and out. He was mostly trapping usually up in the May Creek/Chitina River area.

KAREN BREWSTER: What was the first name you said before Mark?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, Alex Grant.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay, and where was he?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, he had a long trapline so he was scattered out over -- he had about maybe five cabins that he lived in. You never knew for sure which cabin he was going to living in. He just moved periodically.

KAREN BREWSTER: But where was his range between?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, the upper Chitina and Chitina.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Mostly on the south side of the Chitina River.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and anybody else up May Creek, Dan Creek?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, there was Walter Holmes at May Creek and his wife Tess.

KAREN BREWSTER: And they were prospecting or trapping or?

HOWARD KNUTSON: He was -- Walter was a prospector, but he was also mining at Dan Creek on a small scale, but mining the old Dan Creek Mine.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. Did he ever find anything?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah. He produced some gold.

KAREN BREWSTER: I never knew if those things -- those old mines were productive or not.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah, that was a very productive mine.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. And then Martin Ratavan was farther up?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, he was just over the ridge from Dan Creek in Chitistone.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Which I can't imagine climbing up and down around that area.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, he had some rugged mountains right, well, up to Chitistone.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah and now you said you used to deliver mail to him?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, at Cordova Airlines.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. How often would you go out and deliver mail?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, the schedule varied from time -- sometimes in the wintertime was only once a week, but in summertime it was more frequent. Usually like three days a week.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh! They got that much mail?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I guess they are also dependent on the mail plane for groceries and so forth and so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. And now where would you land? I know May Creek had an airstrip, right?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: What about like for Martin way up there?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: He had his own airstrip.  
KAREN BREWSTER: He had his own airstrip?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And did he build that airstrip?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: No, somebody built it. I don't even know for sure who built it.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So you always had an airstrip to land on?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: What's that?  
KAREN BREWSTER: You always had an airstrip that you landed on?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: At least for the mail service?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah and we serviced Shoshanna at that time and Northway.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, you flew all the way to Northway?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Across the top?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Through the pass.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, I mean it is all part of the route.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So how many people were living in Shoshanna?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, it varied with the time of year.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. It was N. P. Nelson and Larry Folger was kind of a late comer at that time. He was a guide and I am trying to think of the name of that other guide that operated out of there.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Well, Ray McNutt, but he came later.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, he came later. He was after Larry died.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I think he took over maybe when Larry --  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, he took over Larry's.  
KAREN BREWSTER: I was trying to think Norwegian kind of name. They were maybe more out of Horsfeld who was a guide.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh --  
KAREN BREWSTER: His name -- I can't remember. He might have been around then.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, you mean Nickels?  
KAREN BREWSTER: No.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: No.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Who is Nickels?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, he operated on the White River.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, Nickels was his last name?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: What was his first name?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: I'll probably think of it after a while.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Is it Nickels -- N-I-C-K or C-H?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: N-I-C-K-L-E.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, S.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Nickles, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So you said 1965 you quit Cordova Airlines.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: What did you go -- do next?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, we won't get into that because it is a long story and I operated a mine for three years and I spent the rest of my time guiding.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: And I got my -- had my guide's license. I had number 54 guide's license after we became a state and I got that in 1959. And that is one of the things that I wanted to take time for that interfered with my flying for Cordova Airlines. So I'd rather be on the ground hunting than flying an airplane.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: So that is basically what I did for quite a number of years.

KAREN BREWSTER: So did you start your own guiding business?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what was that called?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Howard's Flying Service. Well, I was also back in the air taxi business after mining.

KAREN BREWSTER: So tell me a little bit about the mining if you can. Was that -- did you own part of Kennicott?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and so that is what you are talking about?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: And like I say that's a long story and we don't have time for that. But I would like to -- this happened before or before 1960. In 1957, I filed -- at that time there were various government programs where you could get five acres or more, business sites. You could file on with the BLM.

KAREN BREWSTER: Trading and manufacturing sites, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes. And I did take a site on Hanigita Lake and I started that in '57 and then in -- also in '57 I filed on another five acre plot of Tebay Lakes and talking about our relationship with the government agencies.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, right.

HOWARD KNUTSON: I had a good success with Hanigita Project. They did my survey when I had the cabin built and I was ready for the survey and they got right on it and I got my patent and so forth. On Tebay Site, they dragged their feet and every time I asked for a survey -- I proved up on it. Immediately built a cabin and did all the improvements that I had to do. Then they were always too busy to do the survey and eventually they showed up and I flew them -- flew the surveyors in and I forget which year this was, but it would have been probably '62 perhaps, something like that. And then I shortly after the survey I received a letter from the Bureau of Land Management saying that my claim was -- would be good for lease and lease only for a one year lease.

KAREN BREWSTER: Versus owning it?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Only one year lease.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: They later changed that to five years, but, of course, I had right of appeal. Of course, the first appeal goes immediately in the wastebasket. It doesn't get out of Anchorage, but the second one goes to Washington, DC and then there is a third one and this time, you know, I knew how serious this was. They were absolutely intent on that I would not ever get ownership of that property. So I had an attorney in Anchorage do the paperwork and like most attorneys he was a procrastinator and he waited until the last minute to file the appeal and then he forgot to put in the \$10 filing fee so it got thrown away again. So then that is it. There are no more appeals.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, man.

HOWARD KNUTSON: So I went to Senator Bartlett and Bartlett would have probably done something that would have helped me get patent to it, but we had the '64 earthquake.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

HOWARD KNUTSON: And then I all of a sudden had a lot more problems than dealing with the BLM. So I -- and also part of the property went into the lake.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, really!

HOWARD KNUTSON: It slid into the lake.

KAREN BREWSTER: From the earthquake?

HOWARD KNUTSON: In the earthquake so my cabin was half in the water and half out and so then I -- well, anyway I eventually threw in the towel and --

KAREN BREWSTER: On the Tebay one?

HOWARD KNUTSON: On the Tebay because I just didn't have time to deal with the BLM and so anyway that was my first bad experience with BLM. And as to the Park Service, I felt it was a great waste, not that I was against having a Park, but I was against not being able to hunt in the Park because the animals were available for harvest and there is some of the best hunting in the world and we suddenly got locked out of it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Before I follow-up on that I want to go back to the Hanagita/Tebay Lakes.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: What -- you built cabins there and what was your idea? Were you going to fly in fishermen or?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, no, I did fly fishermen in there and to both places. Yes, I was operating a fishing camp in both places.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So you were using it as a --

HOWARD KNUTSON: I was using it.

KAREN BREWSTER: The way you were supposed to be using it?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, right.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So do you know why the Tebay one was a problem?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, the Bureau of Land Management went from trying to give land away to locking it up and this happened just during that period when they were changing their -- I guess their attitude and their policy.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. It wasn't -- you had like five years to prove up or something? Was it like five years to prove up on it?

HOWARD KNUTSON: You had five years.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Five years, yeah.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, you had five years.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And you had done that?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: I had all of that done early on.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right, okay. You had mentioned about going into guiding that you liked to hunt?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So where did you learn? Did you grow up hunting in Minnesota?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, sure, well, deer hunting. About the only thing they had to hunt in Minnesota, except for ducks and geese and so forth, but yes, we were born on a farm, naturally you go hunting.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So did you learn from your father or you just taught yourself to go hunting?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I had brothers and father, yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So you became a guide. Tell me about guiding and what that involves.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, first of all my favorite animal is the Dall sheep. I really didn't -- I wasn't interested in guiding for anything other than Dall sheep. I like to climb a mountain and stay in condition and it was an interesting animal to hunt.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Is it more challenging to hunt Dall sheep?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, it is the most challenging.  
KAREN BREWSTER: I mean certainly I know the mountain climbing is, but as you said it is an interesting animal.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, they have very good eyesight, among other things, and it is the hunt that provides the best return.  
KAREN BREWSTER: What do you mean?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Financially. I mean people pay more for a sheep hunt than for a moose hunt for instance. Yeah and with a moose you have to pack a heavy animal and spend a lot of time doing something besides hunting. Hunting sheep was much more, well, I mean the reason you get into these things is because you like to do it, right?  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: So that is what I liked to do so that's what I did.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right and so you didn't work for some other guide in learning the guiding business?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: No. No. I just -- I, you know, I flew some other guides, but I really didn't need a lot of training.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Had you already been Dall sheep hunting for quite a while just for yourself personally?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I had -- I did my first Dall sheep hunt in 1954.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And you did it every year for yourself kind of?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, just for myself, yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So that is how you learned to be a guide you did it yourself?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Right.



KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And did you have to get a guiding license when you started your own business?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, yes, I had -- when we became a state, there were old guides from the old -- from the territory, but then the state came out with requirements for a guide's license and we had to take tests and so on and so forth.

KAREN BREWSTER: So by the time you started doing it, it was already a state and you had to do that?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and you accessed by airplane?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so were you the outfitter? You flew people in and guided or?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, for a few years I did take on some flying for flying other people in and that is why my flying interfered with the guiding and one of the reasons I wanted to get out of the flying business.

KAREN BREWSTER: You wanted to be on the ground?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So when you were the guide, who flew you in?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: You could do both?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Besides you need an airplane for emergency -- I mean for safety reasons. I mean a lot of guides, okay, got flown in, but at that time we didn't have communication like we do now. No satellite phones or anything like that. So it was just not as safe an operation as it would be now for instance.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But so flying yourself in and landing you felt safer cause you had your own plane there?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. Did you set up base camps and spike camps or how did you -- what kind of trips did you lead with the clients?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I may have had a base camp at the airplane, but I always packed a camp for myself and the client. We camped wherever. It is the only way to go.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So you didn't come back to base camp every night?

HOWARD KNUTSON: No, no, that would totally defeat the -- you would do a lot of extra walking that way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so you had equipment with you to spend the night along the way.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And did you have other guides working for you as assistants?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: How many, probably varied, but?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Usually just two.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. And so on each -- for each hunter you went out on a hunt it would be you, the hunter?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I'd fly my other guides out and then on the last and then I would fly myself out and my hunter and when I finished my hunt then I would check on the other guides.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay, so the assistant guides would be out with other hunters?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, so it was one guide per hunter?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't know if you went in groups?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, no, no. No, especially for sheep you don't hunt in groups.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, but then you -- if you got a sheep then you as the guide you would cape it and take the horns and bring it all down?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: A lot of work?

HOWARD KNUTSON: That's right.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what did you do with the meat?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, whatever we couldn't use or whatever the hunter didn't want we gave a lot of it away, but sheep meat is one of the highest grade meats in the world and we usually didn't have any problem getting rid of it -- the sheep meat.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you eat it in camp?

HOWARD KNUTSON: I'm sorry.

KAREN BREWSTER: After you caught a sheep --

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah, of course.

KAREN BREWSTER: You would eat it while you were up there?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Of course, naturally.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I know it is good meat. I've eaten it from the Brooks Range, but yeah, it's good.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: What was I just going to ask you about guiding?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, in 1975 I recognized that the Park Service was going to be shutting down in the Wrangell's so at that time we had guide areas and so and the Wrangell-St. Elias Park area I chose some areas in the Chugach Range on the south side of Chitina River cause I didn't know that the Park Service was going to extend that far.

KAREN BREWSTER: You were trying to get an area you thought would be out of the Park?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Exactly. Well, as it turned out, they managed to get it all, but anyway in the meantime I moved to the Brooks Range in the far northeastern corner of Alaska and I spent 18 years guiding out of -- in wildlife --

KAREN BREWSTER: The Arctic Wildlife Refuge?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Arctic Wildlife Refuge, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so where did you -- did you fly out of Kaktovik or you flew out of -

HOWARD KNUTSON: Fort Yukon.

KAREN BREWSTER: Fort Yukon?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: And that was a very enjoyable camp. We had probably the best campsite on the north side of the Brooks Range. I spent well, I spent a lot of time flying the Brooks Range before I decided on where I wanted to hunt there. And so I ended up with the far northeastern corner.

KAREN BREWSTER: But still in the mountains?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah, yeah. Kongakun River was the main drainage.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay and that was for sheep also?

HOWARD KNUTSON: That is for sheep, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So when you were first hunting in the Wrangell's and guiding, you didn't have guide areas, you could go anywhere?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Not to begin with, we could go anywhere, you're right. All those things developed over a period of time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right and I hadn't realized that guide areas were determined illegal and they got rid of them later sort of.

HOWARD KNUTSON: There are still guide areas.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: But I'm out of the business now so I don't pay any attention to what is going on. There got to be too many guides for one thing. It didn't get to be fun anymore and a guide area really didn't protect you because like I say there were too many guides – so many guides in the same area, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I guess that was maybe the old guide areas they were the exclusive.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Use areas so you were the only guide there?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Right. Exactly.

KAREN BREWSTER: That was I think what was thrown out in court, right?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So when you were the Wrangell's first though, there were no -- you just went anywhere?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you have a favorite place, particular place, you always went to?

HOWARD KNUTSON: No, no favorite places. I mean yes, favorite places, but did everything by ear. You did exactly what you wanted to do at the time. You know, some areas had larger sheep, but, you know, you didn't just hunt on those places, you wanted all -- all the places.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you think those guides in that time period were kind of helping to manage the population?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yes, definitely.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can you talk about how that works?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, first of all the guides worked for many years to get a law passed to have a minimum of a full curl and Fish & Game was geared to -- for maximum production rather than a maximum trophy. So there was a conflict there. The guides wanted a full curl minimum and the state wanted three quarter curl. Eventually they did pass the full curl law which certainly helped the conservation. There were guides out there who were I'd say overharvesting and they could do it because the three quarter curl.

With the full curl, they couldn't take as many animals because and it allowed the sheep to mature and there is a lot of reasons why it is better to have a full curl.

KAREN BREWSTER: So the full curl are the older animals?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so they are maybe breeding?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well --

KAREN BREWSTER: And there maybe aren't as many of them so you can't hunt as many?

HOWARD KNUTSON: You are right and it keeps the population up. Sheep population is only -  
- is controlled by. And it is, well, the winter climate is what controls the sheep population. The hunters have an effect on them, but the biggest factor is the climate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Too much snow makes it too hard --

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, ice, rain.

KAREN BREWSTER: To get through to grass.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Icy rain, so on and so forth like we had about three years ago a real bad kill off in the Chugach Mountains and it will take years and years and years for them to come back. You can fly over that whole area right now and have a problem finding a sheep. I mean there are some, but there aren't very many.

KAREN BREWSTER: So since the 50's when you started going hunting you have seen a change in the sheep population numbers?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah, definitely. Oh, yeah, there are definitely more sheep.

KAREN BREWSTER: Back then there were more sheep?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. One of the things that the Park Service ended up doing was by not hunting at all sheep will over populate. Because like I say, they are controlled -- their population is controlled by the winter climate and when you over populate there is not enough feed and so you get one bad winter and whereas a hundred sheep would maybe survive 500 wouldn't survive and if there were 500 sheep there, you would probably lose 90 percent of them or more. So when you have a die off like that, you don't -- you can't maintain a population.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you said that hunting takes fewer sheep out of the population?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Then a big die off like that.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, interesting. Oh, so when you were guiding before the Park, you said there were other guides around.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you guys work together or was it very competitive with each other?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Competitive, totally competitive, yeah. A lot of disagreements between guides as to areas.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. Did people feel like this was my area nobody else could come there?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were people possessive?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, they were very possessive.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did that get resolved?

HOWARD KNUTSON: What's that?

HOWARD KNUTSON

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KAREN BREWSTER: How did you resolve those disagreements?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: You don't ever resolve them. You are all independent.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Well was it whoever landed there first that he got it for that season?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, not for a season, but maybe for that hunt.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, you don't want to go into the same area as another guide and hunt the same sheep because that is not fair to the hunter. It is not, well, it is just impractical.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So as you said, it got to be more and more guides so did it happen you'd go to an area you wanted to go and there was already --  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, absolutely, oh, yeah. I didn't take these things so seriously as a lot of guides did. I just figured I know the country better than most of them so I know all the other places to go to hunt.  
KAREN BREWSTER: You could find another spot?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, right. I never concerned myself that much about the other guides. I might get temporarily upset, but not like I say I didn't take it that seriously.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And you never had a lodge or anything?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: No.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Out there so you could just move around?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: We had talked about assistant guides working for you. I know Gary Green worked for you.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: For 18 years. Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Did you hire people from local communities like any Ahtna people or what kind of people did you hire as assistants?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, actually most of the people that I knew, you know. Some of them turned out good. We are not talking about a lot of people, but I had some good guides.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. Yeah, so you were guiding in there from '65 till when?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, until the Park Service got serious.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, '75 you.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, I went to the Arctic in '75, but then I would still come back and maybe conduct two or three hunts in the Wrangell Mountains.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Until we got shut out completely.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Which was 1980?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, okay. That was a long time?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So tell me about the being shut out by the Park Service because there is still the Preserve. You can hunt in the Preserve, but you chose not to do that?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, actually most of the Preserve doesn't provide sheep hunting. There is other hunting, but not sheep hunting and I am really not interested in killing any big animals.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So Ptarmigan Lake that is not sheep hunting up there?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: What's that?

KAREN BREWSTER: Ptarmigan Lake, that area that is not sheep hunting?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, yeah, there is some sheep hunting over there, yeah. I didn't used to hunt that area at all, but yeah, there is still sheep hunting there. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what was that like when the Park Service came in?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, it was a period when it was kind of questionable whether they were allowing hunting or not, maybe for a year or two, yeah, but then it became impractical to hunt in there in the Park. Some -- I did -- I was offered permits, but I was in enough disagreement with the Park Service that I didn't want to deal with them, so I didn't. I didn't have to. I had other means to making a living. I'm a commercial fisherman also.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, that was my other question. Was guiding your only source of income in all those years?

HOWARD KNUTSON: No, no, I had been a commercial fisherman since 1969 and so timewise you can fish all summer, go hunting in the fall and it is, you know, you can do both.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. And where did you commercial fish?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I started out in Cordova and in 1971 I moved to Bristol Bay and I have fished there ever since.

KAREN BREWSTER: And are you still fishing?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow! And you are how old?

HOWARD KNUTSON: I am 86.

KAREN BREWSTER: Good for you. That's great.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I think that keeping active keeps us young, right?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's cool. And then so in the wintertime's you have winters off or did you do something else in the winter?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, I used to go to Belize for most of the winters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, just for vacation?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I eventually had a couple of condos there and it is a nice place to spend quite a bit of the winter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, yeah. But when you were raising a family here in Anchorage, did you just --

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, I wasn't raising -- all my family got raised in Chitina.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, by the time I left Chitina 1982 my kids were all grown up and gone.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, so all the time you were being the guide and air taxi and all that that was still out of Chitina?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Right. Yeah, that was my home base.

KAREN BREWSTER: Howard's Flying Service was still out of Chitina?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: So when you were guiding, how did you advertise for clients?

HOWARD KNUTSON: I didn't need to advertise.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Word of mouth?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: That is pretty good.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh, yeah, I didn't spend much effort in advertising.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Well, how -- do you remember how you got your first client?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Probably my first clients -- my first serious clients probably came from Jack Atcheson in Butte, Montana who booked hunts.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: And still does.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So it was like a booking agent kind of?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh. But then you build up your own clientele and so Cabela's provided some hunters later on when I was in the Brooks Range.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Well, so the -- did you have clients who kept coming back year after year?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And then they would tell their buddies?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah. Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: So this guy in Montana how did he know about you?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Through one of my assistant guides Guy George and they were friends from -- Guy grew up in Montana.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Everybody knew each other in the hunting/guiding community I guess?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah, right.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And how long was a sheep -- an average sheep hunt when you take somebody out? How long would you be out?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, five to seven days. You know a lot of people advertise 10 day hunts. I didn't set a limit on my -- I mean why would I spend 10 days when I can do it in five or seven, you know. And so that is --  
KAREN BREWSTER: Were there ones that lasted longer cause it took longer to find a sheep or the weather turned bad or?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, you always have to allow something for the weather, but, you know, usually after a couple of days the weather changes?  
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, but you were always able to find a sheep pretty quickly?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: You didn't have to spend a week climbing around looking?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: No. No, I knew where the sheep were approximately.  
KAREN BREWSTER: I am wondering how it works with airplane guiding. Were you allowed to kind of fly around and scout?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yes.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Where the sheep were and then you could land?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.  
KAREN BREWSTER: And climb up.  
HOWARD KNUTSON: Uh-huh.  
KAREN BREWSTER: Are they still allowed to do that?  
HOWARD KNUTSON: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Theoretically, this has all happened recently I think. If you see a sheep from the air you are not allowed to hunt them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. I know there are laws about same day airborne shooting on other animals. I didn't know about sheep.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: But back in the --

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, it isn't just same day, it is now it is --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, it is period.

HOWARD KNUTSON: It goes a lot farther than that.

KAREN BREWSTER: But when you were doing it as a guide, you could scout out?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Well, the same day airborne went into effect early on. I'd say maybe '67, '68, something like that. Let's see --

KAREN BREWSTER: I think with the sheep though by the time you landed and climbed back up there it wasn't the same day anyway.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Oh, right, exactly. That's right.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's hard work climbing up there.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Let's see. Well, I think I am going to change tape and then ask a couple more questions. I don't want to interrupt in the middle.

HOWARD KNUTSON: Okay.

KAREN BREWSTER: If that's okay with you?

HOWARD KNUTSON: Sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: It doesn't mean --

End of Part 1