

TRANSCRIPTION – ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH DENNIS MICHAEL MORAIN – JULY 24, 2012**DM – Dennis Morain, Interviewee – Phone 719-539-4243****JP – Jackie Powell, Interviewer – Phone 719-539-1826**

[Note: Background mumbled agreement, "Mm hm," "Yes," etc., of the interviewer has not been transcribed.]

JP – So I have to ask you some questions and things first. Uh, let's see – First thing – I want to thank you for giving us this interview, and –

DM – Oh, you're more than welcome.

JP – Also, for taking such good care of the courthouse. And, my name is Jackie Powell, and uh today's date is July 24 (I think) 2012, and I'm interviewing Dennis Michael Morain who uh was employed by the county, taking care of the county courthouse, and who also uh collected a lot of information and objects associated with take ... with the courthouse. Um, I need to ask you your date and place of birth, again.

DM – Uh, Salida, Colorado, May 23, [19]51, I believe at the D&RG Hospital.

JP – Okay, good! And the names of your parents.

DM – Ida Virginia Brady and Curtis Vernard Morain. [spellings?]

JP – Mm hm. Are they both from Salida?

DM – No, Curtis was from Oklahoma and Ida was from Leadville.

JP – Ah, okay. That's in the neighborhood – Leadville. (laugh) And what is your spouse's name, your wife's name.

DM – Mary.

JP – Mary. And what was her maiden name?

DM – Dunay [sp]. She's kept her maiden name.

JP – Oh! Okay. I remember that now. I'm sorry – I had forgotten. And do you have any children?

DM – No children.

JP – No children, okay.

DM – No. I have one stepson, and he's 25 now.

JP – Okay. Good! And when you were working at the uh courthouse, or for the uh Ch...

DM – the county...

JP – ... the county, what was your title?

DM – I started out just cleaning, then I worked at that for three years, and then they moved me up to Building and Grounds.

JP – Uh huh.

DM – I actually took care of maintenance on five buildings in the county.

JP – Oh! So it wasn't just the courthouse.

DM – No, ma'am.

JP – Uh huh. And when did you stop ... When did you start and when did you stop working at the courthouse.

DM – Seventy-two – I was hired in seventy-two, and I retired three years ago.

JP – Okay. So that'd be around 2011, right? [2009?]

DM – Yes, Ma'am.

JP – I have – I'm going to just sort of leave it to you, and if you get stuck I will ask you another question, but my first question to you is, um, what did you find most interesting about working at the courthouse? What did you like the best and what was most interesting to you?

DM – The vaults were my most interesting thing – that's where all the old records were stored – and it seems they were the most vulnerable part of the place.

JP – Vulnerable in what way?

DM – Uh, people wanted to clean them out....

JP – Oh!

DM -- ... and uh just throw the stuff in the dumpster. So that was kind of my most enjoyable part, saving what I could and ... and ... I know it sounds strange, but teaching them what to save and not to just get rid of it, to talk to me first. I was given a cabinet so I could put some things in it. Well, I very quickly filled up the cabinet from the stuff I'd taken home to save, and then I asked for another cabinet and they gave it to me, filled it up fairly quickly. I think we have five cabinets of objects now. So the department heads and the elected officials got to where they would come to me and ask me if they should throw this away, or if it should be saved. And I could determine from what it was, then, yes, or no.

JP – Well, I think some of the Assessor Records, for instance, ended up in the Salida Library and with BV [Buena Vista] Heritage. Did you, uh, make that happen?

DM – Well, the Treasurer at the time decided she was going to get rid of the old records. So she ordered me to take them out, get a prisoner and take them out, and stack them by the dumpster. Well, I just made a couple of quick calls and uh - to the BV commissioner and to Mrs. Chaputis [sp] who was the museum person at the time, and we quickly got that solved and we got the records up to BV to their museum.

JP – Good. Well, some of them ended up in the library archives here, and they've been very useful to researchers there...

DM – Ah! Very good!

JP -- ...so it's been very uh successful, what you've done. Um, just tell me a little bit about what it was like to work in the courthouse, what were your duties, what were some of the unusual things that happened, or what were some regular things that happened?

DM – I worked in the jail, maintenance when things were broke fix 'em. The old jail was very old and in very bad shape. We had the peanut butter rebellion, I called it. One night they called me at midnight, they said Ah, the prisoners, they've plugged up all the plumbing and uh we got a mess up here, could you get up here and see what's going on, and shut off the water so they won't make a bigger mess, because everything flowed down into the basement. There were drains that would come up in the basement, where the records were stored. So I went up, and I shut off the water, and there was about six policemen standing outside of the main door, yelling and hollering at the prisoners. So I said, Well, I've gotta see how bad things are. They said, Well, if you go in there it's your own.... That's fine. I knew a lot of the prisoners, for many years over and over, so I went in and they were all mad over the meal – the meal was bad. And they says, dammit, Dennis, we just want a decent meal. And I said, well, what do you want? It's midnight. They said, We would settle for peanut butter sandwiches. Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Anything better than that blop blop stuff that we got for supper. So I went out and I told the police, You know, you can solve this by just getting some trustees out and making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Well, they said, No no no. Well, I went back in and I talked to them and they said, tell them we'll clean up the mess, we'll do everything, we will quit yelling, we will let them in, if you will just let them ... if they'll let you get this going. So I went back and I said that, and they said, Well, I guess. They were ready to spray them with Mace and do the, you know, use the batons on them, and everything... Luckily they calmed and said, Well, okay. So they got up two trustees and they spent [laugh] probably an hour, an hour and a half, making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and delivering them in. The guys ate, they cleaned up the mess, and it was over.

JP – [laugh] That's great!

DM – Let me see, we had one suicide while I was in there, Christmas Eve. A young man hung himself. And again they called me in. The undersheriff was supposed to be watching, he was on a suicide watch, didn't work out he wasn't watching quite a close as he needed to. So, they called me in and basically it was just – he was melting down, and needed somebody to talk to. We went into the cell and undid the stuff. Him and I, we went downstairs where he lived, and we sat and I think we had maybe a beer or something. He talked to me about it and how bad he felt.

JP – It was good for you to be there for him to talk to. Yeah. Well, that's not quite in the position description of a... of someone who takes care of buildings. What other kinds of side duties did you run across during your career?

DM – Well, all the time I worked, I worked on the side. So, for about ten years I did murder and suicide clean-up.

JP – Oh, dear!

DM – Well, I always got plenty of comp time, so I could walk out of the county any time I wanted to. Any time they called and said, We got a problem here or there, and, our administrator was very good, he seen it as a public service, basically. And he'd say, Go on, get out of here, tell me about it when you get back (laugh) you know and... That's Dan Short, he was always good about it. Whenever they called I'd go in, Dan, I got a job. Go do it. So, we worked from Pueblo [pee ebb lo]¹ to Gunnison.

JP – Oh really?

DM – The big companies didn't really want to go into the little towns. Well, it would cost a person too much to have a crew come up, do the work, and go back. So, we did a couple of jobs in Pueblo and the coroner there liked our work, so they called us there a few times. So we'd go to Pueblo, we've been to Gunnison, and Buena [byoo na]² Vista quite a bit, unfortunately. A lot of stuff in Buena Vista.

JP – You mean at the correctional facility, or....

DM – No, just...

JP – In the community...

DM – In the community, is how we worked. And homeowners insurance paid for it. So, did that on the side, but it was...they seen it as a service, the county, so I never had a problem. Uh... What else did I do? I've done... One of the local antique collectors, she collected clothing, vintage clothing, and uh they asked me if I'd model it because I was small, and the men's clothing back in 1900 was small. So I helped with that for, oh, two-three years I believe, that I did the shows. Did antiques on the side for seven years. Uh, we did shows. We would go do shows here and there.

JP – So, you liked old things.

DM – Oh, always! I've been a collector forever.

JP – Uh, what uh...what were your biggest problems when you were working with the county? Other than trying to convince people to save things?

DM - The jail was a big problem, always has been, because you're on call 24/7 for that. So if something happens you'd better be up and fix it. Those people were stuck there, and I understand, you know. If you're cold or too hot, it's bad if you can't go out and get some fresh air. So, that has always been a major thing. It made it to the point a person could hardly...I left the country when I went on vacation, usually, because if I had a vacation here I always was called in. Uh, so the jail was always, uh, something. But the guys were always nice, I was never threatened, or anything like that. The police, they don't ...

¹ This is the way many Coloradans pronounce the name of the city of Pueblo.

² The local pronunciation of Buena [bway na] Vista is *byoo na* Vista.

They're not the same way. They're still ... Guards will not eat in restaurants, they don't like to, 'cause that's where the inmates work. And, uh, so they don't like to eat in restaurants. I've ate in restaurants, I've met some guys that came out from back, shake my hand, say How you doing? I'm doing fine! Eat my meal without any worries. But I ate in the jail a lot, too. If they were eating I would sit down and eat with them, if I couldn't.... Especially if it was an emergency and I was there over lunch. They'd say, Eat your lunch, I'd go sit with the prisoners and eat my lunch. Then I'd go finish up whatever job we had to do. So I always tried to keep a very good rapport with the prisoners.

JP – Good idea. Well, you said that sometimes there were the same people over and over again.

DM – Yes, ma'am.

JP – What kinds of things did they get put in jail for?

DM – Oh, a lot of drunk driving. Domestic abuse, unfortunately. We had a couple of murderers. They weren't bad, though. Usually if people if they murder it's once. It's not – most people it's just an act of passion, so you don't really have to worry about them too much. Uh, we had – before I left we had – we have a cellblock for pedophiles. I really didn't like working in there. It always made me feel dirty when I left. I just had to bite my tongue because they could say what they wanted to say but you couldn't say nothing to them and you had a billion things you would like to say to them. But, uh...

JP – So they uh had ... Were there facilities for women?

DM – Yes, the ladies' cells. We always had a lot of ladies. A lot of them I knew because they were in and out, too. And they were never any trouble. You'd yell when you come in, Man on the floor, and respect them if they said Wait a few minutes until I.... Yes, ma'am, you know. Stand on the railing, turn your head a different direction, wait for them to come out. The ladies were always good. I'd take Barney [his dog] in, after my mom died. I took care of her 'til she died. She died here in the house. She wanted to, so that was good. But anyway after that I had to take Barney to work for a while. And the prisoners loved it, the men and the women. Took him in and they would be busy with Barney and I would go do my work, so they wouldn't be looking over my shoulder.

JP – [Laugh] That's a good idea!

DM – Everybody likes a dog in jail, I found. The guys and – even the biggest, brutiest-looking guys, tattooed up. They would go and, Oh, can I pet your dog? Sure, help yourself.

JP – So, you said... Is this an old house here, where we are?

DM – 1893

JP – Oh. Okay. Just for the record, we're at 746 E Street in Salida, so. That's a good age for a house in Salida.

DM – The back end honestly is adobe. You can't tell it, it's been stuccoed over, but see those Spanish people up there, or Indian? [a sepia-toned photograph of three people] That I found underneath the dining room. Uh, we didn't know there was a room down there and the floor started to sag a bit. Mary says, I don't like that. I don't have anyway to get under there, I didn't want to dig on the outside, so I

went in the closet and I cut a hole in the closet floor, put a door in it, climbed under it, crawled over to right here and there was a vent, and I put my light through there and kinda spooked me. I seen this room, and stairs leading up to nowhere.

JP – Uh huh – they'd been shut off.

DM – They'd put a floor over it, and so I - we got the floor taken out, put a new one in, and when I was there, and underneath the stairs there's this picture, of people.

JP – That's interesting. Does it have any names on it, or...

DM – No.

JP – so you don't have any idea who they were.

DM – No. No I don't.

JP – Well that's interesting, that they're still in this house...

DM – They're old...

JP – The picture looks quite old, so....

DM – I felt they belonged there, so we put it up. I found a child's shoe or two under there, and inside in Spanish was the child's first name. I don't know why they left those things but I saved them.

JP – Sometimes they forget things, you know, when people leave.

DM – Well, and it looked like things might have been tough. I seen some welfare packages down there, from the period. Times were tough.

JP – Well, we're kind of getting off the subject of the courthouse....

DM – I'm sorry!

JP – Oh no, I'm the one who asked you the question! [Laugh] Uh – What... If you were to think of something that was the funniest thing that ever happened while you were working at the courthouse...Can you....? Or, uh, yeah, just think about that a while. Was there anything that was exceptionally funny?

DM – We used to have Christmas parties there in the evenings – employees and elected officials. Well, we had one where uh the sheriff – city marshall, I should say – came, and got quite inebriated and starting dancing with a broom, ended up falling over one of the ladies....The next day – It was always this way, we always drank too much at the parties, but the next work day everybody was like nothing happened. They finally quit them because we got one of the prisoners drunk one time – Joe Ralph. He was the man that – He was, they let him in for the winter. He could go in and out, it was kind of a Mayberry kind of thing. They didn't want him falling into a ditch and freezing, so he'd spend the winter in jail as a trustee, but he wandered the pace and, well, one night when we were having the party he

showed up and somebody slipped him a few drinks and he got drunk, and that kind of ended our parties up there. [Laugh]

JP – Did someone find out about it, someone from outside?

DM – Yeah, he stumbled back down to the jail and the dispatchers seen him and reported it to the sheriff, who wasn't at the party, so....

JP – It's interesting. Were you ever scared, uh...working there? I mean, was there any time that you, uh...felt threatened, or...

DM – No. We used to have snipers on the roofs before I left. We would have... Now they're getting bad boys from uh Denver, the gang bangers. Murderers. Because they threatened the people around them and the cases couldn't be tried. So they been bringing up to the county, quietly, putting them in our jail, putting snipers from the state on the roof, and trying them. Sometimes the witnesses were threatened, sometimes other gangs were threatening the man who had killed somebody in their gang, and this place they say is very good because all the exits are easy, uh, to catch if they're trying to drive away. And up on the roof, you can...They got on the adjoining roof, and uh they could watch everything that was going on. Once in a while they'd put their guns on you if they didn't recognize you. It didn't scare me, but it kind of....

JP - ...bothered you.

DM – Yeah. [Laugh] Cause you felt like you belonged there, or I did. you know, I was just – there.

JP – Of course you belonged there!

DM – Yeah! So – the gang bangers are kinda funny. Some of em would come in with shaved heads, and one of them had 7-1-9 on the back of his head. And I said...We have a glass area where we'd be watched where we'd work from, where they inventory our tools when we go in, and, you visit with the guards in there. And I said, What's this 719? What's he got that for? And he said, Aw, he just can't remember his three prefix. But no, it was the gangs. 719 is a big gang in Denver.

JP – Oh, really?

DM – But he had it on the back of his head in about three-inch letters.

JP – But that's our area code!

DM – Yeah! That's was I was thinking. It kind of threw me. But those guys weren't as bad as you'd think. You'd go in there...they weren't, you know... the guards didn't like them but I never felt threatened by them. They never...they might ask you questions, What's going on outside? Is it hot, cold, you know. And I'd always tell them, because....

JP – Why not?

DM – Yeah. The guards sometimes wouldn't tell them - It's none of your business. The guards would make them stand at attention when they walked in. Well, with me they didn't have to. They did it once

or twice and – I said, No, not a guard, don't have to do that with me. Like I say, a rapport with people, and a little respect. And I always gave them respect – them and the trustees. And I always got respect back.

JP – That's very interesting. One of the things that you did uh, which has been a big plus for the community is that you got the courthouse listed on the State Register of Historic Places. Now, how did that come about?

DM – Well, nobody really wanted to do it.

JP – They didn't want to do the work?

DM – Yeah, they really didn't want to do the work, and I had some time, so – And I knew everything in the vaults and I had half a notion of where to go. A lot of people didn't know where to start. The American Legion actually funded – got the money to build the building, through events and what have you. And so I went to the American Legion and they gave me their minutes. Luckily I was an old member. And they gave me their minutes and let me take them home so I pored through the minutes and read – 'cause the architect De Mordaunt, he would visit with them, I think it was every two weeks. When there were problems they would talk them over, or when things were going good – there would be just little tidbits in there that you could find and use. So – and I knew some of the old officeholders that were in there—old, old – and I spoke with them when -- got what I could from them also. Uh, we had a couple bomb threats. Well, three, I think.

JP – Oh, really?

DM – So I helped. They'd bring in the state guys with their dogs, and I'd walk through the buildings and help them look. That was kind of fun.

JP – Make sure they got access to all the parts of the building.

DM – Everything.

JP – Well, wasn't that a little tense for you? I mean, if you thought you were looking for a bomb? [laugh]

DM – No. I always felt that it really was...

JP - ...just a threat. Huh! I don't know whether I would like doing that.

DM – To me it was a little excitement finally. Life can be pretty boring with maintenance, when you're just working on machinery. So, Oh, this is a little exciting!

JP – I guess! Well, uh, the – everyone who went on the tour of the courthouse was very interested in it, and several people have remarked that they go into the building to do business and they don't even look around, but since the tour has happened they have uh started – like, I had lunch with a friend today, and she said she took her cousin to look at the courthouse because it was such a beautiful building. Uh, and, what do you like best about the building, the courthouse, the old part of it in particular? I'm not very familiar with the new part.

DM – I believe the travertine stairs and the terrazzo floors. I think they help make the whole thing. The plaster work is nice, but I like the travertine stairs and the plaster – travertine floors and– what is it, travertine floors and...

JP – ...terrazzo...

DM – ...terrazzo. I know! Now we got it! I think those are art. Just to cut the stone, and then to make the terrazzo floors – it's a lost art – to make nice ones.

JP – Was there any part of the building that you felt didn't work the way it was supposed to while you were working on it? I know things go wrong and they wear out, but, uh, sometimes there are parts of buildings that just don't seem to do what they're supposed to do.

DM – The third floor was hard because we had to carry a lot of stuff up to the third floor, and that's two flights of stairs. But, I wouldn't change it for anything, but that was always very hard. It was always the heaviest stuff you had to take down or bring up, so we'd get the road crew and myself and my partner – and we would carry the stuff down and up.

JP – So there wasn't an elevator in that part of the building.

DM – No, ma'am. One of our commissioners wanted to put one, but he would have put a hole in the middle of the antique building, going up, and oh, I stomped my feet and grumbled and I went and spoke to as many people as I could and luckily it didn't happen. He's the same one that stripped everything out of the third floor courtroom, had us do that, so he didn't have much respect for...

JP – Historic things...

DM – No. He was a builder around here and it was always just build and ... so ...

JP – A question went through my mind and now I can't think of what I was going to ask. ... If you think of something, say something. I can't – I don't know what I was going to ask.

DM – Most of the things...the good thing is that most of the stuff we tore out of the old courtroom, went to Buena Vista, so they put it in their old courtroom up on their, in their building. So it didn't go to waste, but I didn't always get my way. I would've like to have left it.

JP – Yeah. Well, I guess, uh, times change and needs for buildings change. Was that – I guess that courtroom was taken out after the addition was put on, is that right? Or, uh...

DM – Yes, ma'am.

JP – Okay. And that's when the elevator got put in, was when the addition got put in.

DM – [19]68, yes, ma'am.

JP – And were you involved with that? No – you weren't working there then.

DM – No, I wasn't there.

JP – Yeah. 'Cause that's one of the things in the nomination, that talks about how sensitive the new addition is to the original architecture.

DM – Oh, very nice. I always admired it.

JP – Yeah, it's very good. Um, let's see what else.... So who was your supervisor? Was it the administrator?

DM – Yes, ma'am. I didn't have a supervisor. I worked under the administrator who was always very good with me because ... I guess I did my work! So if he did say, we got something to do, what are you doing, I'd say, Well I got a unit up here that's not working, I gotta get up there and he'd say, Fine, when that's done would you do this? So, I always had a very nice working relationship. I worked under probably six administrators. Never really had any trouble.

JP – Were there any division chiefs that, uh, seemed to be more irritating, or more helpful than others?

DM – The courts were a little irritating. We didn't work for the state, and so you had to be picky about – they'd try to use you as much as they could, and there were two of us and five buildings, so they were a little bit – I would have to stop and say no. I always hate to say no but sometimes I just had to say, No, this, you get a state person to do this. Or, they'd want us to do a project that hadn't been okayed through the commissioners, they'd like to do that, too. 'Cause I would go buy what I needed, but I'd say, No, you talk to the commissioners. Then, I'd run up to my uh my administrator and I'd tell him whether I felt it was needed or not, and luckily they always went with me. They would say, Okay, Dennis, we will tell them at this end that we really can't do it right now.

JP – Well, you knew what you were doing and they trusted you with that.

DM – Yes, ma'am.

JP – Did you, uh – You know, there's a big flap over uh – ballots right now. Did you ever get involved with any of the voting and, uh...

DM – Yeah, I helped Joyce [Reno, County Clerk and Recorder] move ballots, set up voting areas around the county, put up signs. Yeah, we got pulled into that also. But we were county employees. If they needed extra help we'd have to drop what we were doing and go help Joyce.

JP – Yeah, voting is kind of important. [laugh]

DM – It is.

JP – Uh, do you remember anything ever really going wrong with elections, or, like, losing ballots or anything like that?

DM – No. One of our machines broke once. Jammed up, so I had to go into it and take it apart and get it going again. It took about an hour, hour and a half, so we couldn't use that machine, but that wasn't a big deal. It seemed like it at the time, but...

JP – It was urgent.

DM – Yeah. But it wasn't a terrible thing. Our first machines weighed about the size of ... weight of a car. And you had to – they were big giant things, and you had to push them into the back of a truck, and the county crews would haul them from there. But they were a monster. It took a, like a Model T crank to crank them up to their right size – They were monsters. So...

JP – You would stand in front of them and push buttons, or how...?

DM – Yeah, to... Yes'm. Flip your buttons. I have a sample of one of the pieces that were attached to them in then, in one of the cases up there. To show how they worked, 'cause they had miniature ones that people could learn how to work.

JP – Mm, hm. Oh! Like practice...

DM – Yes'm. Yes, ma'am. And I pulled one of them off when they scrapped the machines, and Well, actually, I bought 17 of them from the county. So left one there for them and I used the others for trade.

JP – Hm. Well, these days they're so small.... Or, well, you just put 'em through a scanner and, uh, you don't even have a machine, so – that's interesting. It really has come a long way.

DM – Oh, yes, ma'am.

JP – So, these machines would count the votes, okay, and they were pretty accurate, do you...?

DM – They were very accurate. We didn't have too much trouble with them. We'd have a man come in once a year, make sure everything worked. They'd go through all the works, so before election they would all be gone through and made sure they worked. We had spares if one went bad, but it was a mess because they were so big – we'd have to haul it from the courthouse and get it to wherever you needed it.

JP – So did you have one of these machines in each voting place?

DM – Yes, ma'am. It took a full day to get everything took out to the different voting areas.

JP – Well, now.... Do they still have like three voting areas?

DM – Yes'm. We have more than that. We have two in BV, three in BV I think, and about the same here. Different districts. So I've went with Joyce and we've done that. Used to have to go out and put up the permits for alcohol, somebody wanted a liquor permit, so Joyce and I would go put up the permit and I'd put it in the ground for her, dig the hole and put up the post, did all kinds of odd things.

JP – Well, you were there, you knew what to do, so....

DM – Whatever it took!

JP – Yeah. Hm, I never thought about those kinds of things in running a county. It's interesting. Did you um ever deal with other – like, road and bridge, or....

DM – Oh, yes'm.

JP – And what was your relationship with road and bridge?

DM – Ours was pretty good. If we needed equipment I would call up and ask, we needed equipment or if we needed a crew to help with something, they would come up and help.

JP – So they were very cooperative with you.

DM – Most of the time. Once in a while you'd get a couple that didn't feel it was their job, to haul something up to the third floor, or carry it down. But we had so many ladies in the offices I just didn't have help. There were two of us – two people that took care of the buildings, did the maintenance, and it kept us running. We didn't loaf much. But sometimes we needed extra help so I'd call in the road crew. The foremen were always good. Sometimes the crew members would say, Well, this isn't our job. And I would always say, Well, it's not my job either.

JP – You were all working together, right?

DM – We uh worked on the cemeteries. Woodland Cemetery and Cleora belonged to the county. So I was in charge of cemeteries also.

JP – And is that the one that's up on the side of the hill to the south of 50?

DM – Yes'm. One's over here by Methodist and one of 'ems on the side of the hill, over here.

JP – Where is the one by Methodist Mountain?

DM – Just as you're going up the hill to go up Methodist to go up to the subdivision there, look down below and you'll see the cemetery in there. It's uh eighteen... After Cleora was considered too old they moved over to Woodlawn. From Woodlawn they went over to the new cemetery which is owned by Lewis and Glenn, Glenns own that.

JP – Fairview. So, now wait a second. The one in Cleora was the Cleora cemetery, or it was named Woodland?

DM – It was Cleora.

JP – Cleora was one, and Woodlawn...

DM – Woodlawn.

JP - ... is two. And what county road is Woodlawn on? Do you remember?

DM – I don't remember. If you'll – you know where the uh nursery is? You just take that road right on up and you'll see it.

JP – Oh, that – in there someplace was where the brickyard was, too.

DM – Yes, down below the cemetery. Yes, ma’am. So I was in charge of them. When I first seen them they were sagebrush, higher than me, so I went to the administrator and I said, Well, what do we do? And he said, Well.... I says, I can’t spend my days out there cleaning it. He said, Maybe we can get a prison crew. So, for two years we got prison crews up there and I watched them until one time I wasn’t able to watch them and they started setting fires next to the stones. And that cracked the stones, and you can’t replace them. You know, those people are all gone, the families are all gone, so I went back and threw the keys on his desk and said, We can’t, I can’t do this any more. He said, Wait, wait, maybe we’ll work out something. ‘Cause I was mad – I can’t turn my back on these people, they destroy things. They set fences on fire, wooden fences. The guards weren’t paying enough attention. They’re big areas, though. They had too many prisoners there, actually. So, I uh was given the “useful public service” people then. The administrator said, maybe I can get the county.... So for about two years I started restoring the cemeteries. We rebuilt wooden fences, we redid the fences around them, we cleaned them up, so that....They had a headline in the paper, “Drunk Drivers Go to Cemetery.”

JP [laugh] – Well, explain what “useful public service people” are.

DM – Oh, someone who has committed a minor crime, so they give them public service to do, like 90 hours, uh, and so they have to find a place to do that. And they can, in many places. But the courts would give them to me, and I would take them up to the cemetery and say, well, I would drop them off, give them...make sure they had food and water, and say, Okay, I want this done today, do what you can. I was always pretty easy. A lot of people are very embarrassed about being caught drinking, and a lot of them – they weren’t criminals, they were just people – and so I kept them from being made a public issue. You could put them up there, they worked hard ... and I was happy and they were happy. Nobody likes to be ridiculed, you know, for a mistake. So it was a good thing until the administrator got into an argument with the courts, so the county pulled out of that. So, I was out of help. And so we did a lot after that by ourselves, but it generally, we haven’t done nothing, we haven’t done it in years now, it just got too busy. But, uh....

JP – So, are they getting back into...are they being taken over by sagebrush again?

DM – It’s slowly going back to the way it was and the fences are falling apart. One thing I did is, we took, and we took rubbings of all the names, and gave them to Chaputis, and she put them in her cemetery book. So, we did that, when we couldn’t work, you know, when we couldn’t do projects.

JP – Now, is her book published or is it a typescript?

DM – Yes, it’s a typescript, and it’s in – Joyce has a copy of it in her vault, if you ask for it she’ll bring it out for you. And it’s all the cemeteries in the county, not just those two. Chaputis was good, and she did everybody she could and found everybody’s – we have a lot of unmarkeds in the cemeteries, though. There was a Spanish gentleman, Los Amigos, matter of fact, from Los Amigos – He used to work on the Woodland cemetery, because a lot of Spanish people are buried there now. It was free burial. And they had a lot of infant deaths, so him and I worked together after the prisoners quit – He would call me up, Mr. Morain, I need some paint, I need barbed wire, I need this and that. So I would go down to the hardware store and buy what he needed. I need a new lock, somebody broke the lock. So I would go and get him the lock and he did – He was in his late 70s, and him and I worked kinda together for a couple of years, ‘til he passed away. And I think there’s still, I think they still do work up there some, at Woodlawn.

JP – Who is, who is Los Amigos?

DM – It's a Spanish organization, that ... The Friends ... Uh, they help each other. If someone is sick, somebody helps the family. If somebody dies, they make sure there's pallbearers, if uh ...

JP – It's mostly Hispanic?

DM – Yes, ma'am. I got along with them well, very well, matter of fact. But you can't be buried up there now unless you have relatives in Woodlawn.

JP – Oh, so it's not full?

DM – No, there is room, but mainly the people that are alive now that have relatives are Spanish people. So ...

JP – They end up being buried there.

DM – Yes'm. Which is... They fix their own little plots, and they keep it clean most of the time, very nice. The big part was when we started to get the five foot stuff out of there, you know – Sagebrush, and... It's growing again, I noticed, but it's always going to be a problem until they get people to do it, which is, that's hard to do in this day and age everybody's so busy.

JP – Everybody stays indoors so much.

DM – Yes'm, anyway, my time was very busy when I worked – I always had this, or that....

JP – Someone always needed something.

DM – Yes, something was broke, or somebody needed something.

JP – Did you ever feel pestered by people? Like – You know, I don't really need to do that for them but I'm going to do it anyway, and after a while it got to be not very much fun.

DM – Well, once in a while they'd call me to change a light bulb and I had a unit down I was working on, on the roof. And I'd say, No, I can't. Then they'd get mad at me and call the commissioners and complain. So, we got a system going where everybody did a work order and I – They said, Well, you take your work orders and you do them in order that you think is the best. 'Cause I'd gotten mad a couple of times and I'd go up and say, Look, I'm trying to get this done and they've got a light bulb out, that will wait until tomorrow, this won't. And the administrator got tired of hearing me do that, so he said, Why don't you just get work orders and you decide, so that was no problem. Then I could decide which was more important. And I always tried to take the one that affected the most people first. Especially cooling, heating, you know. Or safety. So... A lot of things to consider when you run around doing those things. But they were good with me and they let me make my own decisions. I guess I got spoiled. I worked – damn – twenty-some years, over twenty years as my own boss. Guess that's good!

JP – Yes! It is! Did -- I don't know, maybe I asked you this question earlier, did anyone ever try to be your active boss. I mean, it sounds like you had so much sympathy from the people who worked there and the department heads and elected officials and so forth, that they probably would have set 'em

straight.

DM – Once in a while you'd get a new commissioner, that felt like you were his uh shoeshine boy. My office up here, it's just – I want it moved around, or I want this, I want that. You change the lighting in my office. So I went to the, again, I'd go to Dan, and I'd say, Dan, you know, I really got a lot of things to do – And he would nicely talk to the commissioner and say, Well, you know, talk to me first, then I'll talk to Dennis. That sounds like a good solution.

JP – Are there any people that you particularly remember from your time....

[Phone rings. Dennis takes the call.]

[After Dennis returned from the telephone call, JP didn't push the correct buttons and therefore the rest of the interview was not recorded. During that segment, he described some of his world travels. He also told the story of how a prisoner hoaxed everyone into thinking he had blood in his urine by putting Kool-Aid in the toilet, and then when he was taken to a Bureau of Indian Affairs hospital in New Mexico, he disappeared and never was recaptured.

Dennis also said if there was a project that organizations could help with, it would be to clean and repair the cemeteries.]

End