

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
DALE GNIDOVEC  
FEBRUARY 4, 2019

Q. Good afternoon. I'm Kevlin Haire with The Ohio State University Archives. It's Monday, February 4, 2019, and I am at the Orton Geological Museum, to conduct an oral history interview of Dale Gnidovec. Dale, did I pronounce your name correctly?

A. Yes.

Q. And spell it for us, please.

A. G-n-i-d-o-v-e c. I'm Slovenian, originally from the Cleveland area.

Q. All right, speaking of which, tell me your date of birth and where you were born.

A. October 24, 1953, born in East Cleveland.

Q. Okay, is that where you grew up?

A. I grew up in Wickliffe, an eastern suburb of Cleveland. My dad was a carpenter; my mother was a librarian.

Q. Okay.

A. A good mixture of practical and academic.

Q. Did you have brothers and sisters?

A. No brothers or sisters.

Q. An only child, wow.

A. My folks had me and said, "Heck with this, that's enough." I had some real bad medical problems as an infant. I don't think they could afford anything else.

Q. Gotcha. Had they gone to college before you?

A. My mother had a Master's in Library Science. My dad, I think, barely got through high school.

Q. Okay, but he had a trade.

A. Oh yeah, he was a carpenter. He was very good at it.

Q. Okay. Now tell us about your educational background.

A. Well, I went to Wickliffe High School. Not a very big school, but I was very active in science and drama there. I did everything from acting to directing to makeup to set design, sound. Then I went to Muskingum College. I majored in Geology. And just loved it. I always knew I wanted to be in sciences somehow, especially in a museum. I remember my folks asking me what I wanted to do for my birthday every year and I said the same thing: Take me to the Cleveland Museum [of Natural History], so I could see the dinosaurs. So every year we'd drive to the Cleveland Museum and go see the dinosaurs. And I just fell in love with the whole process of science and geology and all that.

Q. So you knew going into college that you wanted to major in Geology.

A. I did, I did. I started upper-level Geology courses immediately because I had a good background and just loved it.

Q. Why did you pick Muskingum?

A. I didn't want a big school. I came from a small high school and I didn't want a large school. And I looked at about four or five small colleges in Ohio that had fairly good Geology programs. And just something clicked when I toured Muskingum. The professors gave me a look around the labs and student offices and everything, and I really liked it.

Q. And what year was that?

A. I started in '72 and graduated in '76.

G. Okay. And where did you get your Master's?

A. Got my Master's out at Fort Hayes State [University] in Kansas, towards the western end of the state. It's associated with the Sternberg Museum, which is a wonderful museum, all kinds of neat fossils and other kinds of natural history objects. I would groom the taxidermied bears and put glycerin on their noses so their noses looked wet. One time I was vacuuming a bear and I just happened to get down between the legs and a little kid came by and said, "Mommy, what's that guy doing to that bear?" So it was fun. I just love museums in general. The neatest thing about working in a museum is you get to go to the back rooms of other museums.

Q. And when did you get your Master's?

A. I got the Master's in '78.

Q. Okay. And you knew you wanted to go on and get a Ph.D.

A. I knew I wanted to go on and try to get a Ph.D. I started at the University of Texas at Austin and spent about a year and a half there. I didn't really care for that, didn't really care for Austin. But then I fell in love with this wonderful lady from Pennsylvania. So I went and transferred to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. And I got real close to the degree, got all the coursework out of the way, started the research, and never quite finished. Wife and daughter came along and my priorities changed. And I never quite finished, which turned out to be a good thing, because when this job opened up, it was me and 61 other people who applied. And everyone with a Ph.D. they put aside because they just thought that person would look at this as a stepping stone, and they

wanted someone who was going to stay here. So not having the Ph.D. paid off wonderfully, because I've been here 30 years now. I couldn't have designed a better job for me if I wanted to.

Q. Did you think about finishing your Ph.D. while you were here?

A. I thought about it about once a week. But I figure, "Why tip the apple cart? I'm so happy doing what I'm doing." I didn't see a real need to finish the Ph.D.

Q. Now what year did you come here, and how did you find out about the job?

A. I found out about the job through a geology magazine. It used to be called Geotimes, and about 10 years ago they switched to calling it Earth Magazine. And I still have the ad somewhere in this file cabinet and my acceptance letter and all that. I came here for an interview and was totally lost.

Q. You mean on campus?

A. On campus. But the people were so nice and so friendly. It's just been, I couldn't have designed a better job for me if I had really tried.

Q. Now, when you were in Philadelphia what were you doing?

A. Between going to grad school I was working part-time at the Academy of Natural Sciences, helping design a then-new dinosaur exhibit, writing labels for that, and [working on] a newer science exhibit. In between geology jobs I loaded bread trucks, cleaned animal cages, was a heavy-construction laborer, and worked in a manufacturing plant for heavy equipment. And that was interesting. We made some big stuff. Well for example, we made gears that were three feet thick and forty feet across. And they machined one side, and I hooked it up to the crane so they could turn it over and machine the other side. Well you take a forty-foot gear and turn it on end, it's three stories tall. So

we made some pretty big stuff there. That was fascinating work, but I couldn't imagine staying there for the rest of my career.

Q. No, well that was to support your family, correct?

A. Yes.

Q. When you were getting your Ph.D. you didn't have a graduate assistantship?

A. I did.

Q. But that wasn't going to pay the bills.

A. It wasn't going to pay the bills.

Q. Now, did your wife come with you when you interviewed for the job?

A. Not at first. She was a teacher there. She was very happy there. I moved here to Columbus and spent about a year and a half while she tried to find work here. And she finally found a job in the Olentangy district. She worked there for a couple of years and then had what she called the year from hell and quit. But then she found a job at McGraw Hill where she's been ever since.

Q. Oh okay, so she left the classroom.

A. She left the classroom.

Q. Gotcha. Okay, tell me again what year it was that you came here?

A. I came here in 1989. Started January of '89.

Q. And what was the title of the job you were supposed to have?

A. Really, it was just Collections Manager. I was supposed to be in charge of the collections. We've got about 55,000 rocks, minerals and fossils here. Concentrating from Ohio but we've got them from all over the world. Beautiful things.

Q. Wow. And were you replacing someone or was this a new position?

A. No, they had a student assistant for years, but they really wanted someone that could devote more time to the museum.

Q. Okay.

A. I started off just being Collection Manager but the job expanded tremendously. I started doing identifications, started doing some outside talks and tours in the museum. And all that sort of expanded and kept expanding and kept expanding. And now that's a major part of my job, and I wish I had more time for the collection work, because I really like cataloging. I love putting numbers on fossils. I love typing up the cards. I love arranging the fossils in the drawers. And I don't get to do that very much now.

Q. Are you the one who has the student assistants doing it?

A. I have student assistants do that sort of work. And I'm jealous and I think, "Oh, I want to do it." I also love, maybe, I don't know if this is the part to talk about this, but there are four main parts of my job.

Q. Go ahead, because I did want to talk about that.

A. First is the collection care, making sure they are identified properly and in the right drawer and the right cabinet, available for professors and researchers and students to use. The second part is the exhibit hall, designing and building exhibits, which I also love doing. The third part is the only part of my job I don't really care for and that's the finances. So I take care of the Museum Store, selecting inventory, keeping the tax records, keeping the sales records, donation records, all the finances for the museum, ordering supplies, and all that kind of stuff. That's the only part of my job I don't really care for. I'd love to give that to somebody else entirely. And the fourth part is the

outreach, giving tours in the museum, giving talks outside the museum at schools, parks, nature centers, libraries, and retirement homes. I spoke to about 4,700 people last year.

Q. Oh my gosh. Is that normal?

A. That's pretty average for now. It's built up through the years to that.

Q. Wow.

A. I have tables of fossils at the zoo and the fair every year. I've gotten quite a reputation. One school, we've looked at the records, I've been going to that school for 17 years. Teachers keep inviting me back for the talks. I'm on my third teacher for some of these classes. The teachers have retired, and the next one still calls me in. But that's great fun, I love it. I love talking to kids, and I love talking at retirement homes. These senior citizens are wonderful because they come because they're interested and they want to learn. They ask some great questions. So it's a lot of fun. I was just at Willow Brook up in Delaware last Thursday, talking about dinosaurs. Next week I think I'm going to Friendship Village up in Dublin, to talk about, I think it's dinosaurs. My favorite topic. I love talking about dinosaurs. And I just finished writing a syllabus for, I don't know if you've heard of LEI and LLI, Lifelong Learning Institute and Learning Enrichment Institute. They're programs for seniors. They are mini courses. And I've been doing these for years. I'm going to have a three-week course on dinosaurs for LEI in Pataskala this summer. I'm just writing up the syllabus and trying to squeeze dinosaurs into three weeks. I can't do it.

Q. That's a pretty big topic.

A. Yes, no pun intended.

Q. Now, an area you didn't mention but you have told me about this before, is your research, because you've done field research.

A. Oh, absolutely.

Q. Now, tell me about that aspect of your job. Is that really an aspect of your job?

A. I just sort of did it because I wanted to. A few days after I got here I heard an old buddy of mine, Glenn Storrs, who became curator of vertebrate paleontology at the Cincinnati Museum. Glenn and I were grad students together at Texas. And I heard he was starting these dinosaur digs out in Montana. And I said, "Hey Glenn, can I come along?" And after the first year he was asking me to come along and help dig dinosaurs. I did that for about 13 summers.

Q. The whole summer?

A. No, anywhere from two to five weeks. I didn't want to be away from here, my wife and everybody for longer than that. But yeah, it was anywhere from two to five weeks I'd stay out in Montana and dig dinosaurs.

Q. Does that help your job here?

A. Oh, I think it did. It gave me what you might call street cred among kids. I'd go and talk about dinosaurs. I actually did the digging for these things, and it also gave me wonderful slides to use in my classes. That's another part we didn't talk about is, I was asked to teach one year the Earth History class. And of all the classes they could have asked me to teach, that's the one I would have picked. I love earth history, or as I say, 4 ½ billion years in 14 weeks, so I talk fast. And I think this is my 13<sup>th</sup> year at it. I just love it, because I can roll stuff in from the museum for almost every lecture. And sometimes I'd do a cart load of stuff. Sometimes I do two cart loads. I've been known to do four.

Q. Is it a popular class?



A. It has been, yeah. This year was the first year it wasn't overbooked. And they changed the schedule for some of the other classes, so I think it impacted mine. Normally, it's been overbooked.

Q. And is that the one class you do?

A. That's the one class I teach.

Q. Is it once a semester?

A. Once every spring semester.

Q. Now are you still doing field research?

A. I haven't done field research for about five years. I've got a heart problem and a bad knee. That sort of stopped that for a while.

Q. Do you miss it?

A. Oh, I miss it terribly. I miss it terribly. The knee is fixed now. I had surgery on it a couple of months ago. The heart, we're still working on. There are two kinds of heart specialists: plumbers and electricians. My plumbing is fine. It's the electrical part that's the problem.

Q. I could see not going on field research because of that.

A. My wife said, "No." I don't understand why. She's become rather fond of me for 38 years.

Q. What did you like most about field research? Give me a typical day or maybe no day is typical, and that's what you like about it.

A. No, it got pretty typical. Get up early, make breakfast and go to the site. Depends on if we were excavating or prospecting. Prospecting is searching for fossils. If you're excavating you want to get there as early as possible to avoid the heat of the day. While it's still cool in the morning. If you're prospecting it really doesn't help to get up too early because

you've got to wait until the sun gets a certain angle before you go out. Otherwise there are too many shadows, and you can't really find the bones that well. So you wouldn't want to start prospecting before 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. But if you're digging you want to get out there as early as you can and avoid the heat.

Q. Do you do both in one trip?

A. Generally, yeah. You do some of both in one trip. Usually, one summer would be mainly devoted to one thing, and one summer would be mainly devoted to another. Like the first 10 summers were mainly excavating. The following three summers were really prospecting. But what makes the summer is the people. We had different people each year, and some of them were really funny. You always get one or two who are sort of a pain to be around. But that's people. And there's always the excitement of what you might find. Even when you're excavating, you know there's stuff there. When you uncover a bone you know that that bone hasn't seen the sun in 150 million years, which is really cool. And that bone was part of a living animal that did everything living animals do today. They ate, they breathed, they pooped, they mated, they had babies, they died. Just neat. And dinosaurs are the neatest things to ever appear on the planet. Can't dig up anything more exciting than dinosaurs in my opinion.

Q. Even gold?

A. No, gold is just pretty, but who cares?

Q. Did you ever, when you were prospecting, did you ever find something that you said, "Oh my gosh."

- A. No, that's one of the great regrets that I have in my life. I was in two of the most famous rock units in the world for dinosaurs. And spent weeks and weeks prospecting and hardly found anything worth taking out. But that's the nature of the business.
- Q. Right. You've got to be out there to look. You're not going to find anything if you're not out there looking. Well, that's pretty cool. Now you told me about the class you taught. And about being the curator. But the research, my next question you may have answered actually. You [have a staff position] but you conduct research and you teach [as a faculty member would]. Has being staff and not faculty affected you in any way?
- A. I think it's helped tremendously because I haven't had the committee assignments that faculty members have to serve on. I haven't had the advising commitments that faculty members have to do. So I think it's been a real plus.
- Q. Well good, I'm glad for you. Now I think you already answered this but you didn't imagine doing this much educational outreach when you came here, because there was no educational outreach.
- A. None.
- Q. Do you remember doing your first outreach? Was it somebody who contacted you or you decided to ...?
- A. I think it was someone who contacted me. They called the museum and said, "Is there anybody there that can come and speak to my class?" And I knew I enjoyed that. I had been doing stuff for parks back in Pennsylvania periodically. So it wasn't a brand new experience for me, to take out a bunch of fossils and go out and talk to a bunch of kids. And I was glad when people starting asking me. And word got around. I don't do any advertising. It's all word of mouth. And as it is, I've got more requests than I can possibly

do. It's just been sort of growing as one teacher has told another. And that's been very heartening. It means I'm giving them what they need and what they want.

Q. What's your favorite group to talk to?

A. Oh boy, I love like 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> graders. Fifth graders are better than 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Once they start getting in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade they start getting a little defensive about learning. But 5<sup>th</sup> graders and 4<sup>th</sup> graders are neat. And the senior citizens are great groups. [Presenting to] senior citizens is fairly recent. I've only been doing that the last 10-15 years. The kids I've been doing forever. Teaching college was something I never planned on doing. But of course, when you're in grad school you do that as part of your support. And I remember my first class, it was out in Kansas, and it was a small class for paleontology, maybe 10 kids. Actually, most of them were returned Vietnam vets. And so here are these guys that were older than I was. They certainly knew more of the world than I did at that time coming back from Vietnam. But they respected me because I knew what I was talking about. And I thought, "This is pretty neat." And so that really made me want to become more of a teacher.

Q. Have any of your students who have taken your class come back to you and said, other than the ones [who knew they wanted to go into Geology], maybe they were undecided and said, "I think I really want to do this subject."

A. Yeah. I had a couple. One time, it must have been about five years ago, I was walking across the Oval, and there was a geotechnical company doing some drilling out there. And one of the guys looked at me and he took off his glove and came over and shook my hand and said, "I want to thank you. Your class made me want to become a geologist. Now it's my career." And I thought, "Boy, that's pretty neat."

Q. It is pretty neat.

A. And when we were, this is another topic we'll get to, when we were raising money for the dinosaur, a [former] student came and handed me a check for \$1,000 and said, "You let me come on your mastodon dig and because of that I am now – he's up in Michigan, he's one of these guys that when they find a body or something, they call him and he goes out and looks at it and says if it's human or not. And he said, "Your mastodon dig led me to that career." And so not only did he give us \$1,000, his dad gave us \$1,000 because we sparked his son's career.

Q. You started a career for him.

A. Yeah. So yeah, that happens.

Q. That is really interesting. Wow, that must be rewarding.

A. Yeah. And that, I forgot a whole other part of my job here is identifying stuff that people bring in.

Q. How often does that happen?

A. I just counted up the figures for last year. It was just over 100 last year.

Q. Do they just walk in out of the blue?

A. Sometimes they walk in. Sometimes they call me for an appointment. Sometimes they send me email pictures and say, "I found this rock in my back yard. What is it?" And sometimes it seems like it's my job to disappoint people. I get kids that bring in dinosaur teeth all the time and they're either horn corals or cow and horse skulls, I've got them here to show them the two. This whole area was agricultural at one time, so people are finding these in their gardens. So I disappoint kids [who think they have] dinosaur teeth. I get men bringing in gold a lot. Not gold, it's pyrite. And meteorites, I've averaged one or

two [people looking for identification] a month since I've been here. In 30 years I've had two [turn out to be meteorites]. And one was just about two weeks ago, but unfortunately it wasn't from Ohio. They found it in Texas years ago.

Q. How big was it?

A. About the size of a baseball. But yeah, people have brought in, I've had cooper ore, iron ore, concretions, schist, gneiss, granite, pieces of farm machinery, furnace slag, concrete asphalt.

Q. Pieces of farm machinery?

A. Well, it was rusty and it had a magnet stick to it. And that's some of the characteristics you use to identify a meteorite.

Q. Oh okay.

A. The best one. I guy called me up and said, "I've got a meteor, I'm sure." So I started to ask him the standard questions. "Is it heavier than a rock that size ought to feel?" "Oh yeah, it's quite heavy." "Does a magnet stick to it?" "Yeah, a magnet sticks to it very well." "Is it sort of rusty colored?" "Yeah, it's very rusty." Boy, I thought, this is good. I couldn't wait for him to bring it in. We made an appointment and he came in and had it wrapped in a box. He unwrapped it and pulled out one of these, a railroad spike. And he said, "This is how it came through the air." Anyway, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. But he argued with me for half an hour that he had a meteorite. He wouldn't give it to me cause he wanted to take it. He left here thinking I was an idiot and he had a meteorite. But I only had two people get really mad at me. One guy had found a load of sapphire in southern Ohio, and this of course would make him fantastically wealthy. And I identified it as, at the time of the American Civil War, Ohio was the number one iron

producer in the country, through all these little iron furnaces down along Ironton and that area. And one of the byproducts of that process was this very shiny black glassy material that breaks like glass. And he had found some of this and he was thrilled that this was going to make him wealthy. I identified it as some worthless furnace slag, and he got irate. He got mad. He disparaged my parentage and everything. Not a happy man. I said, "Fine, take it to a jeweler, sell it for whatever he will give you. It's not sapphire." And then this last week I had a guy who got really mad at me when he sent me a box of rocks that he thought was a meteorite. And it wasn't.

Q. Oh, that's a shame.

A. Yeah. There's only about 12 from Ohio, and in a state this big there ought to be a lot more. The trouble is, the glaciers dumped so many funny-looking rocks on us, that meteorites just don't stand out like they do in Texas or Arizona. I disappoint a lot of people, but once in a while neat things really happen. I had a guy call me up, he was a farmer, way over in Darke County, way in the western part of the state, and he said, "I've got some dinosaur bones in my field." "Well, sir, probably not, why don't you bring in something to show me?" And I thought he'd bring in a cow bone or a horse bone or something like that. He brought in two beautiful mastodon teeth. And I went, "Oh, you've got a mastodon." So we went out there, we dug it up; I ran it as an educational dig for five summers, just weekends.

Q. He let you do that for five years?

A. Five years, yeah. Very friendly people out there. I had teachers out there. I had school classes out there, teaching them how to dig, how to identify bones, how to map them in. And it's fun. You get 30 fourth graders out in the mud, it's a lot of fun. But the people

were so nice. One hot day we were out there digging and sweating, and the farmer comes down there and says, “Wife orders you up the farmhouse for cake and ice cream.” Just wonderful people. In fact, I have one of the bones on exhibit out in the museum.

Q. Speaking of the museum, tell me what you do in more detail. Elaborate on what you do specifically with the museum. The museum part, not the collections.

A. The exhibits?

Q. The exhibit area, yes.

A. I clean a lot of glass. And I would really like to update a lot of the museum exhibits, because some of them have been there since 1980, and they’re getting really tired and worn out. The information has changed. But changing an exhibit is a lot more work than just changing a few labels. You’ve got to find new specimens to tell the story you want to tell. And now with computer graphics, we can integrate graphics and specimens a lot better than we used to. But it’s a very time-consuming process. I mean, I would love to be able to do that but that would be a full-time job as opposed to the other three full-time jobs I have here – the outreach, the finances. Each of my four parts could be a full-time job. Certainly the finances – I would work on grant proposals and contact donors and all that, that would be a full-time job. And the collections could easily be a full-time job if I spent all my time cataloging. And outreach could easily be a full-time job because I get more requests than I can handle. Exhibits, I’ve updated and done some. I’ve totally updated the fluorescent mineral exhibit not too long ago. I designed and built the Ohio minerals case that’s out there. One of the first things I did was get the big giant fish skull. We’re sitting on Devonian-age rocks. We need to have Ohio’s most famous fossil, which is that Devonian fish. So that was the first major change I made in the exhibit hall when I



came here, that Demonian fish. Yeah, I've done some of the things out there, but not as much as I would like to.

Q. Now you mentioned that you had a big addition recently, although it is out in the vestibule, not in here. Talk about that whole process because that was something that when I read how much money you needed to raise – and you can tell us how much that was – I thought, “Wow, that’s a lot of money for a small operation to do.” But tell me everything from how you got the idea or how that came about and forward.

A. Well, we’ve had the reproduction skull of that dinosaur here for a long time. It was discovered by one of our own professors, Dr. David Elliot, who is now Emeritus; he has been for a number of years. Super nice guy. And we thought, boy, it would be neat to get an entire skeleton of that. And we talked about trying to raise funds but never thought we could get enough money to do it. And then, OSU instituted the Buckeye Funder Platform, a brand new way of crowd-funding to get money. And we thought, “Boy, this would be perfect for this particular project.” And so we went to them and said, “We need to raise \$80,000.” And their jaw sort of dropped because they had been doing \$5,000 a year, \$6,000. And they told us afterwards, “You’ll never raise that much money.” And we needed to raise \$80,000 in one month.

Q. Oh, it had to be in one month.

A. It had to be in one month, that’s how long the [fund-raising window] lasted. So we pulled out the stops, contacted everybody I’d ever given a talk or a tour to, and in one month we were able to raise \$60,000. And then we had a very generous donor top off the remaining amount. So we were able to get \$80,000 and get the dinosaur, the whole skeleton copied

and installed in our foyer. And it came out much better than I expected. It looks like that space was just calling for that skeleton for 130 years.

Q. Absolutely, yes. It's a really striking addition.

A. Yes, we're proud of that.

Q. I just read a story, I think it was in OnCampus, through the College of Arts and Sciences, about a family that helped you. Can you tell a little bit about that? Because that was very cute.

A. Oh, those kids are adorable. I'd steal them in a minute. They were like 3 and 4 at the time. And the mother had brought them here to the museum, and Bill Ausich, my boss, he's Emeritus, he's officially retired but you'd never know it. He still comes in all the time. And still directs the museum. He met them out in the hallway and showed them around. And he told them about the dinosaur fundraiser. And they were so thrilled that they started raising funds for it. They dressed their kids in costumes and went marching around the Oval. And they sold cookies, just wonderful, just the enthusiasm they had for the project. And they recruited other moms. It was just a wonderful, wonderful experience.

Q. Well, how much did they end up raising?

A. About \$1,000.

Q. Which I thought was pretty good.

A. But boy were they cute. We had about a dozen of them in dinosaur costumes. It was wonderful. I loved it.

Q. Does the museum have a Facebook page or any kind of social media presence?

A. We've got a web site. I'm not into social media at all.

- Q. I was going to ask if somebody did that. It would probably have to be you.
- A. It would probably have to be me, and I'm just not a social-media person, just not a social-media person at all. I can't imagine being tied to my phone like that all the time. I put it in my briefcase and let the battery run down. It drives my wife nuts. "How am I supposed to get ahold of you?" "Well, there's smoke signals."
- Q. But the School of Earth Sciences has, they put out a newsletter, so they must have some kind of communications person or staff.
- A. Yeah, they've got one of the profs they tag with doing that. I really don't know if it's voluntary or not.
- Q. Okay.
- A. That's another nice thing about not being faculty. I don't have to pay attention to that stuff.
- Q. So you don't have to do any committee work with the school or the department?
- A. None.
- Q. Okay. That was one of my questions.
- A. I feel very free that way.
- Q. Yes, I'm sure.
- A. Which is nice.
- Q. Now let's talk about a low point. We talked about the dinosaur, which is beautiful. But I think it was about five years ago, a student broke into the museum and did some damage.
- A. January 8, 2012.
- Q. Okay.
- A. It was one of the worst days of my life.

Q. Oh, I'm sure. I'm guessing you got a call.

A. I got a call from campus police about 2:00 in the morning on a Sunday. And they said, "You better get down here." And I drove down here. There aren't many people on the roads at 3:00 on a Sunday in Columbus. And when I first walked in, it was like being sucker-punched. There was Plexiglas all over. The place was a mess. It was a drunken student, a drunken pre-med student, of all the stupid ideas. He had gotten in somehow through the basement, started out by punching out ceiling tiles down there, got ahold of a fire extinguisher, and started spraying that around, all in the hallway and up the stairs and all through the lobby. Boy was that a mess. Then he jiggled the front doors of the museum enough to get in, which is lucky because that's what set off the alarms. And he came in and just started smashing stuff. And he smashed the giant fish case and the skull. The one out there is our second one now. He broke the first one. He broke our Tyrannosaurus reproduction skull. He smashed the case for the Cryolophosaurus skull. Luckily, the only real fossil he damaged was the giant ground sloth. He broke off one of the claws. And actually that turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Back up a little bit. Dr. Greg McDonald used to be Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology (fossil bones) at the Natural History Museum in Cincinnati, which is how I got to know him. I think right now he is head paleontologist for National Park Service. But anyway, Greg is one of the top experts in the world on giant ground sloths. And for years he bugged me to get ours radio carbon dated. I didn't want to do it because only 30 percent of that is the real fossil bones, and to date it you would have to drill a hole in one of them to get the sample. And I didn't want to do that. But here with the kid who broke off a claw, we had a broken bone that we could use to date. And so we had our sloth dated. And it's the best dated sloth in the

country. And it's the most recent date in the country for a sloth. It's 13,100 years old. So we have one of the last of its kind here at the museum.

Q. Interesting. And I can't remember where that was found.

A. That was Holmes County, near Berlin.

Q. A long time ago.

A. Yes. That was 1890. A farmer was digging a ditch to drain a field and came across the bones, which is why we only have about 30 percent of it. He wasn't going to dig more for it. That was 1890, Holmes County. It's one of four in the state. It's the second most complete, about 30 percent complete. The one from Dayton, 1971, Dayton area, north of Dayton, up in Darke County, that's the most complete. That one is about 100 percent complete. That's in Dayton. The neatest one is from up near Toledo. It's only a few bones, but they've got cut marks from stone tools. So that one was butchered by humans.

Q. Oh interesting.

A. And for about 15 years I've been asking my tour groups, "Anyone here eat sloth?" I can't find anyone who has eaten a sloth. I want to know what it tastes like. One of these days someone is going to say, "Yeah, I ate one. It wasn't too good." But I don't know.

Q. What was the financial damage from that excursion?

A. I'd have to look at the numbers. But it was a lot. That was the worst day of my life here. Some of the best times were right after that, when the community came together and just gave us wonderful support. We essentially had the money back in no time. We had kids coming and giving us their entire savings and stuff for that. It was just wonderful. In fact, we actually came out financially quite a bit ahead, because the courts ordered the

perpetrator to pay us as well. And he did. It took him about four years to pay it off. Every month we got a check from him, court-ordered. It was either that or go to jail.

Q. Right.

A. And deserved. I just hope it was a wak-eup call cause the police said this had not been the first time he had been in trouble. So I hope it was a wakeup call, and he turned his life around.

Q. So you've never heard from him?

A. Never heard from him.

Q. Didn't get an apology letter or anything like that?

A. Nope. I know his name just because from the checks. But I wouldn't know him if I bumped into him.

Q. Okay. And how long did it take you to clean up the mess?

A. About a week before we felt everything was back.

Q. And did you open again?

A. Oh yeah. After about 2-3 days.

Q. Oh okay, I didn't know that.

A. We had signs all over saying, "Pardon our dust. Things are broken and we're going to replace it."

Q. So if that's one of the low lights or the lowest light, do you know of a time when it was, like, wow, this was probably the best experience of my career.

A. I would say getting the funds for the dinosaur in one month, because we had people from, not only all over Columbus, but all over the country and even some foreign people donate money for the museum. It just validated what we've done through the years, all the talks

and tours and stuff given. I would say that's probably the highlight, was raising the money for the dinosaur in one month.

Q. When I tell people, if I know of a mom with young kids or somebody looking for something different to do in Columbus, I say, "You gotta go check out the museum." But I always call it a hidden gem, and now I'm thinking maybe it's not such a hidden gem.

A. It has been a hidden gem and it still is. We get people here, probably a couple times a year, someone that works at OSU, "I've worked at OSU for 40 years and never knew this museum was here." "How can you not know it's here?" But we get people like that all the time. It just hasn't been well-known, despite as much time as I given talking to the community. And I've also written a column for The Columbus Dispatch for 23 years now. And that's been widely circulated, and yet people still don't seem to know it's here. So one of the things we were hoping was that the dinosaur would really increase our visibility and it has. It's almost doubled our attendance.

Q. Wow. Do you get a lot of people who, are there days when you can't get anything else done because people come in and they want a tour or they want you to explain something?

A. No, I don't do that, just on a come-in-and-ask basis. I've got too many other things to do. I tell people, I'm willing to do that if they schedule it ahead of time. Generally, I like at least two weeks' notice for that. I've got a family coming in this Saturday that wanted a private tour of the museum. But they scheduled it months ago. Sometimes Saturdays when I open it up I'll have a lot of people coming, buzzing at the store and things.

Q. It's not normally open on Saturday, is it?

A. Not officially. But I'm here probably about every other Saturday on average. And if I come in just to do paperwork or catch up, I'll open it up just so people can come in.

Q. Gotcha. Now speaking of gems, or it being a hidden gem, do you have, people always ask me from the Archives, "What's your favorite artifact?" And I really can't say, because everything's so different. So if you don't have a favorite stone or gem or fossil I can understand.

A. As far as the ones that are on exhibit, I do have a favorite out there. When I was getting my Master's at Kansas, one of their prized specimens was the famous Fish-Within-a-Fish. It's a six-foot long fossil fish inside a 14-foot long fossil fish. The smaller fish was swallowed by the big fish.

Q. Literally?

A. Literally. And that big fish is named Xiphactinus. It's actually a relative of the sardine. Big sardine. And so when I came here to the museum, we've got a skull of Xiphactinus on exhibit. And I thought, "Oh, there's an old friend of mine. There's Xiphactinus." Because one of my first museum jobs ever was dusting that Fish-Within-A-Fish at the Hays Museum in Kansas. The Sternberg Museum in Kansas. And so that's probably my favorite one on exhibit. Well, it's also the place where I met my wonderful wife. So people say, "That fish reminds you of your wife?" Well, some mornings. Anyway, I probably shouldn't have said that.

Q. We know that was a joke.

A. Yeah. So that's probably my favorite one that's on exhibit. As far as favorite in the collection, boy there's an awful lot. One is, we've got a toe bone, a real fossil bone of a



Tyrannosaurus Rex. And I've dug dinosaurs for 40 years and I still get a thrill out of holding that particular bone. That's pretty neat. It's fun to pass that around to kids.

Q. Now something, you gave me and my nieces a tour once, this reminded me of it and I've seen you do this at the Museum of Biodiversity for their open house. But you always have, I think maybe even you call it, I call it petrified poop.

A. Yup. Petrified poop.

Q. And that seems to be a big hit.

A. That's a big hit with kids, not so much with moms sometimes. And I think, "Your kids' hands are dirtier than that fossil," because it's, like, 50 million years old. But that's a big hit. The real mammoth and mastodon teeth are fun.

Q. Yeah, those are great.

A. You pass around a mammoth tooth as big as a kid's head, that gets their attention, which is fun. I remember having, I think it was a third-grade teacher coming to me after I gave her class a presentation and she said, "You kept my kids quiet for an hour. How did you do that?" I said, "Well, I talked about dinosaurs." My job was easy.

Q. Well, kids do like dinosaurs.

A. Oh, absolutely.

Q. But you do still have to make it interesting, because dinosaurs, their real names are hard to pronounce and it's just a lot of bones, not to disparage it or anything. Did you find it hard in the beginning to make it interesting?

A. Not for kids. Kids want it. I'm finding it hard to do for the senior citizens, how to make it more interesting for them.

Q. Why do you think that is?

A. Well, they think, there's this opinion that dinosaurs are just nothing but dusty old bones. And you need to show them that these were living creatures, and they interacted and did all the things that the animals do today. Look how interesting animals are today. They're not just dusty old bones; these were living creatures, part of an ecosystem. They interacted. Again, they breathed and pooped and mated and made sounds and took care of their young, and maybe took care of their old, and everything, just like living animals.

Q. I assume you were helped greatly by the Jurassic Park movie series.

A. Yeah. In fact, that's one of the neatest memories I've got here. When the first Jurassic Park opened, it was going to open at a theatre that is no longer in business, the one at the Continent [on Dublin-Granville Road]. The manager called me up and said, "We're opening Jurassic Park soon. You've got a life-sized reproduction skull of the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Could you bring it to our lobby and display it for the opening?" I thought, "Boy, this would be great publicity for the museum." So I borrowed my wife's horse trailer, put the Tyrannosaurus in the back of the horse trailer looking out the back, and almost caused three accidents going up 315. But it was wonderful because when we got there we set it up and the manager said, "Well, it's opening tomorrow but," this was before digital, "We've got the film rolls and we need to run it through to make sure we've got the rolls in the right order. Would you like to watch Jurassic Park with us tonight?" So my daughter, who was with me, and me, and the theater manager, and the guy running the projector, were the first four people in Columbus to see the original Jurassic Park movie.

Q. That is a cool story. Now did you leave the skull there?

A. Yeah, we had the velvet ropes around it. We left it there for a week or two.

Q. You weren't worried?

A. Well, there were people there taking tickets and watching it all the time.

Q. How heavy was it?

A. The skull itself is actually fairly lightweight because it's hollow plastic. What's heavy is the base and the stanchions for the ropes and things. It's rather awkward.

Q. But still, even a replica takes money to replace.

A. Oh yeah, yeah. They are a few thousand dollars each. And it's been dinged a few times and I've had to repaint it once or twice.

Q. Now, with the collections I wanted to ask you, and maybe I've asked you this before, what percentage of the collection is the original collection of our first president, President Edward Orton?

A. About the first 10,000 out of our 55,000. I always get a thrill when I find a red number because he painted red numbers on his fossils and minerals. I always get a thrill when I find a red number. And I looked for number "1" for years and years. I knew it was quartz crystal. And I looked and looked and looked and just couldn't find it. And I was dusting an exhibit and dusted this [one object] and turned it over and there it was. A "1" in red. I had found his original specimen bought in 1874, it was Hot Springs, Arkansas, quartz crystal. So it was a thrill. Now I've got it on my shelf over there.

Q. So he was President when he got that first specimen?

A. I don't know the timing exactly of all his activities. He was a very busy man.

Q. From 1873 to 1890.

A. Yeah.

Q. Interesting.

- A. So I love finding any of his specimens. And a lot of them are on exhibit. They were good stuff.
- Q. I always joke when we do Oval tours, I joke that his wife, the reason he donated them to us was because his wife wanted them out of the house.
- A. There's probably truth to that.
- Q. They were downsizing or something.
- A. There's probably truth to that.
- Q. He was really, you're very much into Geology, but he was also really into Geology. Do you have a best memory of working at OSU, not necessarily related to your job, although if it is, it might be the dinosaur.
- A. Best memory at OSU, wow.
- Q. You've been here 30 years.
- A. Yes, I've been here 30 years. I've gotten the staff award two or three times and that's been really nice.
- Q. That's quite an honor, Distinguished Staff Award.
- A. I've gotten that two or three times. I've been really proud of that.
- Q. It's pretty amazing to get that more than once.
- A. I love my job. I work very hard at it. I seldom put in 40 hours. That's a rarity. Fifty is not unheard of, and 60 is not totally [unheard of]. But I was very lucky doing something I like. My dad was a carpenter, a very practical man. I'm sure many times he looked sideways at me and thought, "You want to make a living doing what? Studying rocks and bones?" But he always said, "Do what you want because you'll be doing it for a long time." And so he was very supportive, and I feel grateful for that. Good memories of

OSU, boy, so many of them are good. But only a couple are bad. The break-in is one. And these people that call me, “Idiot” when I identify their meteorite as not a meteorite. Yeah, just a lot of good memories. We’ve had some fantastic grad students that I’m still friends with that have gone on to much better things now. Just being able to go out to Montana and dig up dinosaurs is a wonderful thrill. It’s living every kid’s dream. Just being able to touch any of these fossils that I want, and the minerals and the beautiful crystals and the gem stones. How many people get to do that?

Q. Well, for you that’s like being a kid in a candy store.

A. Well yeah, it is. I mean, I’ve loved dinosaurs since I was a little kid. People always ask me, “How did you get into your career?” And I say, “I never grew up.” Every kid likes dinosaurs. It’s almost like the measles. Most kids get it, most kids get over it. But I never got over it.

Q. That’s true. Well, most kids maybe don’t realize that they could make a career out of it.

A. Well yeah, and that’s one thing I hope to, when I talk to kids, [I tell them] “Yeah, you can be a scientist. It doesn’t have to be a paleontologist but you can be a scientist.” One of my biggest things I’m proud of, years ago I had a guidance counselor from a local high school call me up and say, “We’ve got this kid. He’s a good kid but he’s from a broken home. He’s starting to hang out with the bad crowd. But he really likes dinosaurs. Can you sort of take him in under your wing maybe one day a week as an intern?” “Sure, I’d be glad to do that.” In walks this tall skinny kid dressed totally in black and I don’t think he said two words to me in the first few weeks he was here. But he really liked dinosaurs, and we became very, very good friends. He became almost like a son to me. He came here. He interned with me his three years in high school and then came to OSU as an

undergrad. And he worked with me the whole time. And now he's getting a Ph.D. at Purdue. He's getting a Ph.D. in Minerology at Purdue there.

Q. That's fantastic.

A. I am so proud of him.

Q. That's quite a legacy.

A. I feel very proud of that legacy. His brother actually died of an overdose of drugs. So I think maybe I might have saved this kid.

Q. Did you ever think that would happen when you took this job?

A. No, no, I never expected to do anything like that. I have a high school shadow or intern at least once or twice a year, so I think I've affected a fair number of kids in the 30 years that I've been here.

Q. Their eyes must go wide when they walk through here.

A. Yes, it's great.

Q. Like I told you before we started the interview, my nieces, you did this about five years ago, you gave us a back-of-the-museum tour and they still talk about it. And they're going on to careers in other things, but they still remember this.

A. That's good, that's good. This is a neat place. Neat place.

Q. Do you think about retiring, or do you think, "Why bother? I really enjoy my days here."

A. I've had to think about retirement recently because I turned 65 and I had to sign up for Medicare and stuff like that. But that's about the extent of it. I mean, as long as the body holds out, I'm willing to stay here as long as they'll have me. Don't know how much longer it will go, because the knees are going, the heart is going, but as long as I can do things I hope to stay here. I have no real desire to retire. I mean, what would I do? I like

wood-working but I haven't done any of that in years. I just have too much going on here. So I don't really want to retire. Even if I retire, I hope I can still come back and do tours and talks and things, if I'm not involved in the day-to-day work in the museum. But I still enjoy that tremendously.

Q. Well, for a lot of people I would think, I don't think it's just me, but I equate this museum with you. Do you know what I mean? Like you are the museum to me.

A. Well, thank you.

Q. I think a lot of people do.

A. I'm very proud of that.

Q. You're the face of the museum.

A. I've got this wonderful face for radio and audio – things like this.

Q. Now did you want to add anything that you thought about that we didn't cover?

A. We've covered a lot of ground here. I'll probably think of two or three tonight when I get home in bed. But we've covered a lot of ground. I think we've covered the area pretty well. I can't think of anything. I've got dinosaur posters and dinosaur books and stuff all over. I'm just a kid that never grew up. I still like to play with little dinosaurs.

Q. Did you know, you must have known as soon as you came here, and maybe during your interview or even before your interview, that you thought, "I've got to get this job."

A. Yes, I was really hoping and praying. And yeah, when I finally got the letter saying, "You've got it," I think the guys at that factory I was working at said I was walking about 10 feet above the ground. I was so happy to come here. It's a neat place. I mean, my first day here was just awful. It was January and it was snowy and wet and the wind was blowing. And they sent me over here for this form to fill out and over there for that form

and over there for that form. And by the time they took my picture I looked like a terrorist. I mean, I wouldn't hire that guy. But after that first day things were much better.

Q. Things went up hill, right?

A. Right. The people I've worked with, I must say this, I've had two bosses here. Dr. Stig Bergstrum is one of the nicest people you'll ever meet in your life. He was my boss for about 15 years. And then, Dr. Bill Ausich, he's also now Emeritus. He is also one of the nicest people you'll ever meet in your life. And these two gentleman are both world-famous in their field. They are fantastic scientists, fantastic teachers, and just the best bosses anyone could ever have. I've been very, very lucky. I've been lucky in life, period. I've got a wonderful job and a wonderful wife. I've had two great bosses. You couldn't ask for anything better. I mean, I'm just a very lucky man.

Q. And you get to be a kid.

A. I get to be a kid. Yes, absolutely.

Q. Well, thank you Dale, I appreciate it. I'm going to burn this off now.

A. My pleasure.

Q. And I'll explain the rest of the process. Thanks.