IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - BONNIE HAHN

August 4, 1980
Nome, Alaska

BLM Interviewer:
Tom Beck
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INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEWER: .....National Historic Trail interview with Bonnie Hahn of Nome, Alaska, concerning the Cape Nome Roadhouse. The interview was conducted at the roadhouse on August 4th, 1980. The interview was conducted for the Bureau of Land Management by Tom Beck.

Bonnie was born in Nome and spent much of her life there. She has taught school in Nome for many years and is currently the physical education instructor at Nome High School.

According to Bonnie, the roadhouse was built about 1901. The original logs were brought by horse team from Council. It was a natural stop-over point on the trail for mail runners and other travelers. The dog and horse stalls used to house the animals can still be seen. It was used as a Methodist children's home during the 1920s under the Reverend Baldwin. According to Bob Baldwin, Reverend Baldwin's son, the roadhouse was used until the late 1920s when the Methodist mission in Nome was closed and the roadhouse was disposed of. It was also used by the CAA for many years as a communications center.

Pete and Bonnie Hahn bought the roadhouse in 1960, had an option from GSA. Further information about the roadhouse can be found in the Iditarod National Historic Trail interview with Bob Baldwin.

(Off record at Log No. 0134)
(On record at Log No. 0160)

(Side comment, laughter)

INTERVIEW

Q  So you're saying you bought it about 20 years ago?
A  Yeah, about 20 years ago. And we were going on a picnic from -- we were going down to the ferry at the time, I think, and the place was all boarded up. You know, it was -- it'd been standing empty for many years, and nobody had paid any attention to it, and we hadn't either. But going by, we decided -- we just had the idea, 'My, that would make a good camp.' And so the next day we decided to write to the GSA and find out if there's any possibility of acquiring it. And they wrote back and said, 'Well, gee, it's funny you should mention that because next week we plan to put that place up for sale. And look in the newspaper and you'll see the ad.'

And so the next week, we looked in the newspaper, thinking it was going to be a whole half-page thing and we were never going to -- you know, we'd have 50,000 people trying to buy it and we'd never have a chance, and we looked, and it was a little bitty thing about one by two inches in the bottom. And so we bid on it. It was a bid thing, see. And we bid on it, and then one other guy in town bid on it and he bid more than we did, and he couldn't
pay the initial, you know, 10 percent even on his bid, so we got it just because of that.

Q: It was being sold for back taxes or something?
A: No, I don’t know. We just bid as much as we could, which was practically nothing. We were practically broke too. In fact, they wrote back and said, 'Gee, we hate to let it go for that. Can’t you pay anymore at all?’ I wrote back and said no. I even had to borrow $10 from my dad to put on the bid. So we were just really lucky. But it was all boarded up, and then this room here was their main room for -- the last it was used was for a communication station.

Q: CAA, is that it?
A: CAA, yeah. That was a mistake out on the sign; they put FAA. And where you see the cement here and over along there on the floor was -- 12-by-12 beams were bolted to the floor and then there was radios from top to bottom, just solid, all along here and right along here. And then they had already taken their radios out and we just tore the beams out and the whole was totally empty. Somebody had even stolen the doors. Twenty doors in the house had been stolen, just the outside doors were intact. So we started with this room and tore the beams out and since then, we’ve done a lot of work along here -- put in the fireplace in.....

Q: When did you put the fireplace in?
A: It’s been about maybe 12 years ago -- 11 years ago maybe.

Q: How many rooms do you have?
A: We have -- well, total, 15 all together. I’ll show you the house. I’ll give you a tour of the house.

Q: Okay. Are most of them upstairs or....
A: There are six bedrooms upstairs. The main building that originally -- is the back room. I’ll show you where the logs -- it’s a log top, and those logs were brought in by horse and wagon from Council, 80 miles down the road east. And that was the first part of the building, and then it was extended from there, you know, built on throughout the years.

Q: Did you put the shingles on the outside?
A: Yeah, it was all board on the outside when we did that. That was the first thing we did. We shouldn’t have, but we covered that all up.

Q: Keeps the wind out?
A: Well, yeah. And it also helped preserve it -- preserve the building.

Q: Excuse me. Would you mind turning that down just.....
A: (Inaudible.)

Q: All we’ll get on this thing is the radio station here. Do you remember what color it was on the outside?
A: White.

Q: White?
A: It was painted white, but the paint was -- just peeled bad and it was really -- it was just hanging there. It was awful looking. And the original house -- the original starting of the house about 1901 -- I’ll show you a picture
of that. And then they built on -- then they tore that down and built the back first and then started with this main building.

Q Do you know who the original owner was?
A No, I don't. When the dog teams used to -- see, the dog teams used to come by here with -- in the early days with the mail, from Fairbanks to Nome. And this was a stopover point for the dog team drivers, and they used to put their teams in the garage -- there’s stalls in there where they had the dog teams, and then they used to have horses here in the early days too, had horse stalls. (Indiscernible) a few remaining horse things like harness things and -- hanging around the walls and stuff.

Q CAA had it for about 10 years and they lived here year-round. They had their own -- we were on well water and they buried a 500-gallon oil tank in the garage and they said they burned oil all the time, which we don’t. (Indiscernible.) And then the children’s orphanage were here were a couple of years too -- Methodist Children’s Home.

Q And do you know when that was?
A I think it was ’17 and ’18, around there. But the son of a fellow who was the minister then, Reverend Baldwin.....
Q Yeah.
A .....his son lives in town. I don’t know if you want to talk to him. Bob Baldwin’s still in town. He runs the Gold Company.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A His dad was a big man, about 300 pounds, and he used to go to sleep -- he’d wedge himself in the doorways and go to sleep.

(Laughter)

A It was one of the good stories about him.
Q Did you add the heating system or was it.....
A No, no. That was all here. The ducts come off a furnace. I’ll show you out here. It’s a furnace which is an old furnace, but when we got it the oil pot had been stolen out of it. But it was still lined with firebrick, so we (indiscernible), and I hardly ever use it because it gets the house so hot I can’t hardly stand it.
Q Hmm.
A Really it’s a -- also, there’s an electric fan on (indiscernible) hook it up to (indiscernible). All the lines and everything are underground so there’s no ugly looking lines all out. So when that fan is on, boy, it blasts out, and when the fan isn’t on it gets too hot too. Most of the time we just heat it with the fireplace. It’s good enough in the summer. This room was -- well, all the rooms, they have an insulating board on (indiscernible).....
Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah.
A .....(indiscernible) was put right over on top of the (indiscernible). Upstairs, we’ve hardly done anything. It
was just original, but we've done a little painting up there. We did that, and -- and downstairs we left it pretty much the same too -- this room. The only difference is, we put the fireplace in. The kitchen is the same. I've done some work in there. The back room, which is now the rec room, was the original -- which is the original room. When we first got the house, that was used as -- oh, boy, that was a -- it was so terrible that -- it was horrible. I've done a lot of work to that room. That's the only room I have done a lot of work to. The rest is pretty much all the same.

Q Should we take the tour or.....
A Yeah.
Q Do you want to look around now? Okay.
A I'm going to kind of follow you around with this, so.....
Q Sure. Okay. This is the 1901 original spot here.
A A picture of the original roadhouse?
Q Yeah.
A (Indiscernible.)
Q Is it? How can you tell?
A I don't know. It may have been.
Q Well, this -- now he's asked the original owners and this says -- I don't know if that said -- meant Road or C-o-a-p or R-o-a-p -- Roaphouse. I don't know.
A Probably Road.
Q Maybe. I would.....
A (Indiscernible - simultaneous speech) kind of the same word, yeah.
Q I thought it meant Road, you know, they made a mistake or something. Oh, I thought this was interesting, a long-distance telephone company. And I was talking to an old-timer the other day, he came down and his dad had worked in the phone business for a long time, and he said that must have been -- in fact, I remember the word, too -- but it was a name for the telephone company before it was telephone. His dad worked with this certain company many, many years ago here. I figured that must have been what it was. I just this last week finished this kitchen part here and decided I wanted to put in the old look.
A Yeah, sort of (indiscernible).
Q Yeah. I went out and got my lumber.
Q (Indiscernible) the false ceiling was here or did you.....
A No, I stuck that in a couple of years ago. This is the original right up there.
Q Is that plywood?
A Yeah, I think it's just plywood and.....
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A ......it's peeling real bad. Oh, when we got the house, the ceiling was -- well, the whole ceiling was worse than this. It just hung, and -- four and five-inch thing just, ugh, it was really bad off on the ceiling. It was just hanging. But the house itself is really sound.
Q We're leaving the kitchen and going.....
A Yeah. Well, the bathroom was -- we've repainted. There was a little flush toilet and there's a bathtub which we did
have running hot and cold-running water, but I -- we don't have the hot now so I just don't fool with it. You have to keep the fireplace going and the stove there heated and all. We just don't (indiscernible). This is the back room, just.....

A Down a couple of steps.
Q (Indiscernible.) And the original -- this is the original part -- portion was this part of the house which they built onto. And.....

Q This is what you saw then in that picture, is the.....
A No, I think -- I don't -- I think that's before this even.
Q Even before this part?
A Yeah, mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah. That was first and this came next, and this was first room of this whole portion -- the whole house.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A And they must have -- from the time they first built this portion, they didn't change much of what was in here because this was so terrible. They must have just lived in this area and never changed it from the time they built on. The toilet was wrapped around this pole here. That was the toilet.
Q The center pole?
A Right in the center. And they just had the one window in the corner, and then I put in the other four windows and then insulated and paneled it.
Q What about the ceiling? What have you.....
A The ceiling, I haven't done a thing to. It's exactly the way it was.
Q Planks and then there were.....
A Yes.
Q .....logs.....
A Planks and logs.
Q .....going across?
A Mm hmm (affirmative). It's just the way it was and these beams are just the way it was before I just paneled in between.
Q Did they have electricity in the room here or was that.....
A No, when we had it the electricity was already here, but that I think was from the CAA days.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A They put that all in.
Q And the stove in the corner?
A Yeah, I built that in out there. That's -- those barrel stoves are great. Boy, they just really heat up good. We come down here in the winter. We stay in this room because it just heats up so good.
Q Do you spend much time here in the winter?
A Not really. We come down once or twice during the year -- winter. The floor's the same. I haven't changed -- the floor's.....
Q Is that 2 by 6.....
Q Why don't you describe the ceiling (indiscernible)?
Q It's timber beams with, it looks 2 by 10s, 1 by 10s, rough cut. Is the room to the right just like this or is.....
No, the room to the right is entirely different. That is a walk-in cold storage area.

And this is (indiscernible). (Indiscernible?) (Indiscernible) on the, what is it, the south wall?

That’s the east wall.

East wall?

Mm hmm (affirmative).

(Indiscernible.)

Yeah, I think that’s tongue-and-groove, isn’t it?

Up here, it’s shiplap.

Yeah. (Indiscernible.)

And then does the top of that ceiling extend underneath that wall there?

(Indiscernible.) It goes back about 12 feet, yeah.

Hmm. Yeah, 12 feet. Was this wall where the kitchen is here?

Well, when we got it, yes. It was just like that.

Now that could have been, you know, all built in later, and it could have been this whole portion here originally.....

Hmm. It looks (indiscernible).

.....and then they built this in later.

Where the bathroom and that.....

Uh-huh (affirmative).

.....stove and.....

Mm hmm (affirmative).

Yeah.

Mm hmm (affirmative). Originally, that.....

Yeah. It’s got all sorts of combinations on this east wall. You’ve got shiplap siding and then really rough cut 1 by 6s up on top, and then this beam board down at the bottom.

Yeah.

Hmm. What’s in the next room?

Okay. The next room is -- these were all add-on. We replaced part of the ceiling. We should bring a flashlight out here.

Yeah.

Let me go get one.

Going through the back room into a smaller room.

Right in here, there’s a walk-in -- it’s most junk food -- a walk-in cold storage room right there. You know, there’s not -- the walls are not -- they’re not cement, but they’re -- what do you call that? Oh, shoot. Kind of fiberboard stuff. It’s real.....

Mm hmm (affirmative).

.....insulating stuff. This stuff, whatever it is -- cork, it looks like cork.

Hmm, maybe it is cork.

It looks like cork. Yeah, it is. Okay.

Yeah.

Yeah.

There we go.

Cork board.

Uh-huh (affirmative), cork board. So these two rooms were used for hanging their meat evidently, and the doors were
stolen and all that when we came, too. And the house is starting to shift some. These cracks were not there when we came, and they're getting bigger and bigger.

Q: Hmm.
A: So it's starting to settle.
Q: Is this cement?
A: Mm hmm (affirmative).
Q: The floor?
A: Yeah.
Q: Cement floor?
A: Cement floor, which goes all the way back to the front of the house there. This whole section's cement, like this was built in one whole section....
Q: Mm hmm (affirmative).
A: ....from here to the front, which is about.....
Q: And (indiscernible - simultaneous speech.)
Q: This was here when you moved in?
A: Yes, this was all here. Mm hmm (affirmative). This is our furnace, which goes to all -- there's ducts going to every room in the house from this furnace -- a great furnace, I must say, you know, we just throw this wood in. Down here this is another collection spot.
Q: Okay.
A: This was -- this must have been another section added on, oh, since....
Q: This one with the dog and.....
A: Yeah, this is where the.....
Q: Kennel or.....
A: Yeah, they had stalls in it. They had all these different sections here.
Q: Did you take those out then?
A: We just took, let's see, that one up there and this one.
Q: Is that the cement foundation in the back there?
A: I did that. I built that myself.
Q: Mm hmm (affirmative).
A: It was just like -- it was dirt.
Q: Dirt?
A: Mm hmm (affirmative).
Q: And this is the shed roof that's sort of added onto the (indiscernible) roof or.....
A: No, no. This is the outside. The shed is -- well, you'll see it upstairs, you'll see where it goes. Up there there's a bedroom that is above it -- well, let's see. This -- yeah (indiscernible).
Q: You kept saying to the left of this wall.
A: Yeah. This cuts into another bedroom up here, right along here. I'll show you that, too. This was the dog barn and the horse barn.
Q: It's a nice big timber.
A: Yeah.
Q: Ten by ten?
A: Pretty sturdy I think, good condition too.
Q: Sure is.
Q: Mostly beams supported the roof.
Mm hmm (affirmative). Here again, you had different kinds of lumber, too. Here’s -- here again is a.....

Yeah, it looks like tongue-and-groove on top.

Tongue-and-groove, and then there’s a big.....

Rough cut.

.....rough cut 1 by 10s, or whatever they are, and then up above is the (indiscernible).

It looks like.....

It’s like whatever they had at hand they used.

Yeah. Alaskan construction.

Yeah, right. Alaska (indiscernible).

Well, there’s not a lot of lumber lying around.

Mm hmm (affirmative). And I built the patio, and that wasn’t out there either. None of that was there. I built.....

Mm hmm (affirmative).

.....all that in after we had it. (Indiscernible.) There’s a split level up here. This is the front of the building. Let’s see, we’re above the furnace room here, you know. One little room you haven’t seen yet -- I ran a store here for a few years and (indiscernible) back in here. It’s a furnace room right in here now, and it goes back to this room here. This is -- this room -- this is the wall that went out on the garage.

Okay.

It goes right out to the garage. And then so -- and this one too. This is still part of the garage wall.

What does that tilt down to, about a five foot ceiling?

About eight foot to five foot?

Mm hmm (affirmative). I’m 5’7".

Just about.....

It’s about five foot, a little bit over that.

Yeah.

Yeah. Hmm.

This is my guest room.

Nice room.

Yeah.

Mm hmm (affirmative).

Nice old iron beds.

Yeah. I really (indiscernible) stuff in here, boy.

Yeah.

Everything. Here’s my daughter’s room here.

Did you add the paneling or was that.....

No, the same.

Mm hmm (affirmative).

We just painted. Uh-huh (affirmative).

It looks very much CAA.

Yeah. And this plywood or sheets and stuff.

Just paneling stripping over it.....

Yeah.

.....on the roof?

Yeah. Our next level up was -- yeah, this room here was also one of the communication rooms here. They -- as you see in that window there, there are wires that went out through there.....
Mm hmm (affirmative).

....hooked onto the telephone poles out here, and then ran their lines up over the Cape Nome Mountain into Nome. And we've had a couple of people trying to get it, that's why I boarded that up and I haven't fixed it yet, so....

Oh.

....that's closed.

Tricky roof. It's got a gable in the front then a (indiscernible).....

Yeah.

....in the back?

Right.

(Indiscernible.)

It was just a different (indiscernible), yeah. And then, let's see, we're -- I, you know, as I look at -- it seems to me like that room was built -- it must have been built first and then this whole section here, and then they went that.

Mm hmm (affirmative).

I don't know why I think that, but maybe, maybe not.

Some things have been built first and then added on? One would sense.....

Yeah. It could have been that when CAA got it they tore out the center section and put in a cement floor there for the furnace too and all that.

Mm hmm (affirmative).

It probably was a......

Now this paneling.....

Everything's all been removed.

Mm hmm (affirmative). Oh, was that CAA's.....

Yeah. (Indiscernible.)

Yeah.

A I just painted, you know, but (indiscernible).

(Tape Change - Tape No. 1, Side B)

There could have been a lot of smaller rooms and they, you know, cut them up, I mean, made them bigger from smaller rooms.

Do you rent rooms out now?

No. Hm mm (negative). (Indiscernible.)

Boy, I'd rather stay here than where I did.

Oh, listen, you're welcome.

Really?

You're welcome. I have a lot of room (indiscernible). And you're completely welcome to -- you bet.

The next time we get up here we'll look you up.

Oh, very much -- yeah. I took two of my boys' bedroom and -- my two boys there and -- but we've really enjoyed this place.

Uh-huh (affirmative).

When the kids were little, just threw them all upstairs and not have to worry about them. In the rain, I could.....

You've done wonders with it, I mean, it's really.....

Yeah. I have.....

....the nicest roadhouse on the Iditarod Trail.
A I've worked at it a lot and I've had a lot of fun doing it too.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A The fireplace was my masterpiece and I really enjoyed that. That took me three summers to do that. I did all.....
Q Did you do it yourself?
A .....myself. Mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah.
Q Where did you get the rock from?
A Some around here, and every time I went fishing I'd pick up rock on the river banks. Some is from Council, some's from Dixon, some's from Solomon.
Q That's great.
A All over, yeah. I had fun doing that. Sure a lot of work, but it was worth it.
Q Well, do you want to walk around outside?
Q Yeah. Why don't we do that?
A Yeah.
Q Take some pictures and.....
A Yeah. If you guys want to stay, you're certainly welcome to.
Q Oh.....
Q Fifteen steps upstairs and you've got (indiscernible) nine? You go nine steps in that.....
Q Five.
A Five, yeah.
Q (Indiscernible) six.
A The top landing would be five.
Q Yeah.
A (Indiscernible) off a wagon, probably one of the largest wooden wagon that was left in the world. Anyway, the wagon was built with two 10-foot wheels in the back and 5-foot wheels in the front, and the bed of the wagon was about 8 by 10 feet. And it was -- there were two wagons built like it in the early days of Nome here, and they were used in the gold companies to pull very large, heavy pipes through the gold fields for their mining operations.
Q Hmm.
A Anyway, this wagon was owned by a man named Ed Rone (ph), who was an early pioneer of Nome.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A And it took 60 head of horses to pull this wagon -- or 120 horses.
Q Is that right?
A Yes. And I have a picture of it. I found a -- my son found a picture in the archives at the University of Alaska, and I'm having it done now out in Washington, having it blown up and put on a, you know, like the one in the kitchen, on cardboard, so I can use that on my hall in the kitchen too.
Q Boy, wouldn't that be something to see that go by all loaded and.....
A I know. It was such a white elephant, I mean, that must have sunk down in the tundra about half the width of the wheel before they could -- no wonder it took 120 horses to pull the darned thing.
Q Oh, I know.
You know.

Boy, that's an enormous wheel.

Isn't it something? Yeah, this is -- the only two things that were left of it was that wheel and this -- this is the seat, the driver's seat. The other wheel was sunk in the tundra and it was just rotten, all in pieces, and part of the bed was still there. It was rotten all up. That's the.....

Oh, that's quite a sink there, too.

Isn't that something?

It's five feet long, is it?

Yeah, it's about five feet.

Hmm.

Part of the bed was still there and it was -- but it was no good. That wheel, it was sticking out of the -- it was found in the (indiscernible) out by Satellite Field in Nome. And we started looking through historic books and so forth and we finally found out that it was, you know, where it came from. And one of my friends in Fairbanks said he remembers when he was a real small boy playing on this wagon in Nome.

Hmm.

Having played on it, and how big it was.

You don't know when they abandoned it?

I don't know what year it was abandoned. They took it out and dumped it and I got what was left.

What about this fence here? Did you put the.....

I made -- I did that, yeah.

Yeah.

I built my patio first and then I started adding fence starting from that end. I kept adding on. I got this far.

This looks like a comfortable place, really.

Oh, I love it.

Oh, it's great.

Gosh, I just love it. I wish I could live here year-round because I just love it.

Do you have a place in Nome? Is that where you spend the winters?

Nome, yeah.

Yeah.

I have my own place in Nome. Yeah, I would love to be able to stay here year-round, but the problem -- the heating problem is the.....

Just.....

You know, during the winter.....

Yeah.

.....it takes too much heat to heat the whole house. And we have come down here during the winter and trying to heat it with the fireplace and the furnace, and you can't. My son did stay down here until December one year -- or till January. He was going to stay through the whole year and just live off the land and hunt and trap, but boy, you just burn so much wood to keep it going. You have to keep the house heated all the time even during the night because if you let it go out and try it from scratch again it takes
hours to get it warm again.

Q  Really?
A  Yeah, because it's too big.
Q  I'll bet you get some winds here, huh?
A  Yes, very big winds. Yeah, the winds are -- you know what I'd like to do, is -- I've really thought about it -- was introducing -- I've been reading about windmills.
Q  Mm hmm (affirmative).
A  This is ideal for a windmill down here because there's wind all the time, and I would really like to write in and see if I couldn't get some kind of a grant, which they had this year.
Q  Yeah.
A  For -- as an experiment.
Q  (Indiscernible.)
A  Yeah, uh-huh (affirmative).
Q  I think they gave quite a few of those away, yeah.
A  They did, and I was surprised to hear that some of the people in Nome that got them. I couldn't believe it.
Q  (Indiscernible - simultaneous speech.)
A  (Indiscernible) people in Nome at that time?
Q  Yes. One gal got a thousand dollars just for a little greenhouse she wanted.....

(Airplane noise)

A  ......house or yard or something, I don't know.
Q  Yeah. I think -- yeah, (indiscernible).....
A  I'd be ideal, boy. That's an old outhouse right there. There's a well about 20 feet deep, and the water's fine. There's just a little bit of iron taste to it.
Q  Now did you put that house up over there or was that.....
A  No, no. It was all here.
Q  That was there?
A  Mm hmm (affirmative). And that's a generator house down there. I have a -- (indiscernible) generator in there. And I usually don't start it and use it until later August when it starts to really get dark in the evenings, and then I put it on.
Q  Mm hmm (affirmative). How about the bell, Bonnie? Is that.....
A  The bell is the original bell off the old catholic church in Nome which is a real landmark. And they took it down off the catholic church a number of years ago because the structure was getting rather weak. It weighs about a ton. It's heavy. And they set it out in the (indiscernible) outside of Nome, where it sat -- it must have sat there for 20 years. And finally one of my friends in Nome, he went by and said, you know, gee -- he saw it there every day he went by. He said, 'Well, nobody's picked it up. Why don't you just pick it up?' (Indiscernible.)
Q  I'll bet it was quite a load.
A  Yeah. Oh, it was so heavy.
Q  Huh. (Indiscernible.)
A  And then that wagon.....
Q  Nice bell.
A  Yeah, that's -- I was just telling him -- off the old
catholic church. It was a Nome landmark.
Q  Hmm.
A  There's quite a history in back of that.
Q  How about the wagon?
A  That was used in the gold fields in the early 1920s and '30s
in the mining operations. That thing had been sitting in Nome
out in the tundra since then, since it was abandoned in
the '30s. And, you know, my friends in Nome hooked it to
the back of this pickup -- didn't do a thing, just hooked it
on. It had been sunk down in the tundra, and we brought it
all the way down. It was that well greased and oil. It
just stood the 14 miles great. Yeah, after sitting that
long.
Q  Well, you're still close to the road here, aren't you?
A  Yep. We sure do. We got (idiscernible.)

(Off record)

(End of audible portion)