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David Mihalic  
October 25, 2014

Interview conducted by Jeremy Kaufman  
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen  
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ANPR Oral History Project

David Mihalic

25 October 2014

Interview conducted by  
Jeremy Kaufman

Transcribed by  
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[START OF TRACK 1]

Jeremy Kaufman: This is the October 25, 2014 interview of David Mihalic by Jeremy Kaufman for the Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project, Ranger Rendezvous 37, Estes Park, Colorado. So, if you could first just state when and where you were born?

David Mihalic: I was actually born in Litchfield, Illinois. And the reason I say actually is because 10 days prior to that, I was in utero, is where I was. But I was in New Mexico because my parents met during World War II in Naples, Italy. And both my folks were in the army. My mom was a WAC and my dad was in a cryptographic company. And that's where they met. They actually met in North Africa. And then they got married after the war [in New Mexico, where my Dad worked for the BIA until the end of June, then went to his home in Illinois.

David Mihalic: I was born in 1946, in July. And my dad then went back into the service. And I ended up growing up as an air force brat, and I moved all over the country. So, I never really think of myself as from where I was born. Because unlike many people, the place I was actually born, I never lived. It just happened to be the nearest hospital near where my dad had grown up, which was in a little town called Livingston, Illinois. So, after the war they needed a place to land. They landed there. I was born. And then shortly after that, my dad went back in the service and we ended up living in several different places in Illinois, a couple of places in Texas, in England. I went to high school in two different high schools in England. And then actually back to one of the places we'd lived in, Illinois, that was the last place near my dad's home. Which was where I actually graduated from high school. So, a third high school.

Jeremy Kaufman: Growing up, what was it like moving around so much?

David Mihalic: You know, it's interesting because it's like, you have nothing to compare it to. So really, it's probably not much different from if I had been like a person who had grown up in a town, born in a town, grew up in a town, went to school in a town and maybe left as an adult. Only because I didn't know any different. To me, now one thing I will say, we [the interviewer and I] were both just in this program [at the Rendezvous] with a guy from NPCA whose name escapes me. But he was talking about because he's black, a black experience. One of the things I remember from growing up, because in the service, I was not in a segregated society. It was desegregated. My next door neighbors were a couple of brothers of whom the one who's my age. Ronnie Hardcastle was black. And I never thought anything about it. And so, growing up the way, I mean, there were, Ruben Garza was my best friend in high school. A guy named John Olvera and I built guitars together. I mean, there were white kids, black kids, brown kids, pink kids. My mom is half Indian. She grew up in South Dakota. She's a Lakota Sioux. So, I'm a quarter. But it's got to be a hindquarter,

because none of it shows. So, it [the program we attended] was interesting in that sense, but it's like many people, I grew up in Texas, but I'm not a Texan. I grew up in Illinois, but I don't think of myself as being from Illinois, and so on and so forth. But if there's anything that's different about it, it's that there are no hard and fast roots in terms of what I feel intrinsically about being from a sense of place and from this particular place. So that's a long, involved way of answering that question.

Jeremy Kaufman: And you mentioned guitar building. What other, including that, of course, hobbies, interests did you have?

David Mihalic: I was in Boy Scouts. I enjoyed the outdoors. I wanted to be a game warden. I went hunting and fishing. Even in England, which was very difficult to do, because of just the laws and the way they treat land. It was almost impossible to fish. It was difficult to hunt, but I was able to do that with a friend of mine in high school. And we'd actually go ask farmers. And they allowed us to shoot pigeons, because pigeons were viewed as something undesirable. So, I grew up, and when I was in college, I was a duck hunter. And what's amazing is that in the dorms, I was in a dorm that was 17 stories. And I lived on the bottom floor and we kept the shotguns in the rooms. And it was no big deal. It wasn't thought of as anything. And you know, the resident assistants, you had to tell them about it. But it wasn't the way it would be today in terms of things like that. That was in the '60s.

David Mihalic: But that kind of is, I guess, what kind of led me in the direction that I ended up going. Because I started in forestry in college, a forest recreation major – was in that program. And then the forestry program was at Southern Illinois University. And they dropped that program and I ended up going into the recreation administration program. So, I always kind of wanted to do something in the outdoors. And I actually followed through with respect to, at the college level.

Jeremy Kaufman: And with those outdoor activities, do you recall the first time you went to a national park?

David Mihalic: Probably, it would probably actually be Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. I remember, you know, a lot of people, I once read that they had done a study of, I think this was like Harvard grads. And they asked them about national parks. And it was like name the three most favorite national parks. Or name three national parks you'd been to. And I remember, and it must not have been that they'd been to. Because I remember they knew Yellowstone or Yosemite were national parks. They might mention another park, but it might be a state park. And the third park might not be a park. It might be something like Disneyland or Gatlinburg or something.

David Mihalic: I remember when I was at the Smokies, and I can't remember who did this study. But they talked about most people who said that they had gone to

the Smokies for the weekend, actually had never been in the park. They were in one of the towns around the Smokies.

David Mihalic: So, I actually think it was probably Saint Louis. Because it was when they were actually building the arch. In terms of a national park as a landscape, the first one was Platt National Park. Now Platt National Park has since been deauthorized.

Jeremy Kaufman: Oh, okay.

David Mihalic: But it was a national park. When I was in the army, I was stationed in Texas with the Corps of Engineers. And they actually had me doing work on Corps of Engineers reservoirs. And part of my responsibility was to start their ranger program. And the only people I knew that had rangers were the National Park Service. So, I started talking to people professionally in the National Park Service. But I was actually in the army, and was working in the Corps of Engineers. I was an engineer officer, and I was stationed with the Corps of Engineers in Fort Worth, Texas. So.

Jeremy Kaufman: I'm just very curious now that you said it. Why was Platt National Park—

David Mihalic: Deauthorized?

Jeremy Kaufman: Deauthorized.

David Mihalic: It wasn't considered worthy enough. It was in Oklahoma. Sulfur, Oklahoma. And I can't remember why it was a national park. What used to be that land is now part of Chickasaw National Recreation Area, which is also a reservoir in that area. And I suspect it was a historical site or something. But I remember it had a unique visitor's center in that the visitor's center was built over a small creek. And I remember being fascinated by the fact, wow, this is kind of cool, because the building was over a small creek. And I've been told that the building is no longer there because they had like a thousand-year flood, and it damaged the building so much they tore it down. But so that was probably my first national park.

Jeremy Kaufman: So now with going to school, take me like the chronology of your college and then your Army Corps of Engineers.

David Mihalic: When I got out of college, I was actually going to go in the air force. It was in 1968, the height of Vietnam. I was going to go in the air force. And it was supposed to be in August of '68. And I was told by my local draft board that I was going to get drafted in May of '68. And I said, "Well, I'm going to go in the air force."

David Mihalic: And they said, "We don't care. We're going to draft you in May. Whatever you decide to do, we have a quota, you're going to fill that quota."

David Mihalic: And so, I would have gone in the army before that, even though I had been accepted by the air force, because I wasn't in the air force. All I'd been was going to this thing. And so, I actually enlisted in the army. And I

enlisted for Officers Candidate School. And went into the infantry. And did all my training in the infantry.

David Mihalic: And then when it got time to go to Officers Candidate School, I was mysteriously – and the reason I say mysteriously is because I found myself, I was supposed to go to Infantry Officers Candidate School. I went to the Corps of Engineers Officer Candidate School. And I could never figure out why. And I found out later, because everybody in my class had a college degree. And that was very unusual that they'd all have college degrees. And then what I learned was that in the army, they were looking at that time for military intelligence officers. And the criteria was to have a college degree. And the most academically rigorous of these officer candidate schools, they had three or four of them, was the engineer program. Because it had math and stuff like that. I mean, engineering. And so that's how I got into that. I didn't end up in the military intelligence because there were 140 of us that started. There were 86 of us that graduated. Eighty went into the military intelligence. Six of us went into the Corps of Engineers. And I was one of the six.

David Mihalic: And then the Corps of Engineers had a lot of officers. And they would rotate them to Vietnam and back with the ones that had something that could work in what they called the Civil Works Program. Which most people in the park service know the Corps of Engineers as the reservoirs because they also do the dams and the locks on the like Mississippi River and things like that.

David Mihalic: And so, the Corps of Engineers assigned me to Fort Worth, Texas. And when I got to Fort Worth, Texas, they had me doing the first environmental analyses of proposed lakes. It was a lake near Dallas. And I had to do economic benefit cost analyses of that. And I worked with a couple of other people, and they showed me how to do that.

David Mihalic: And then they moved me into the park where I did design of campgrounds and picnic areas. And then they needed people to do the concessions for marinas, because they had marina concessions on these lakes. And they had, they put me in a group with, there were some other officers who they had degrees in agronomy, degrees as landscape architects, degrees in forestry. And those reservoirs had lots of federal land. And they had them managed with grazing leases, and as watershed and working with universities. I worked with the University of Texas on a research area down in southeast Texas and established an agreement with the university system for this research area.

David Mihalic: And then when it came time for me to go to Vietnam, amazingly enough, I got my orders and I had only seven months left of my obligation. And they wanted me to extend to 12 months, because it was supposed to be for a year. And I said, "Look, I am not going to extend. But you can send me."

- David Mihalic: And they said, “Well,” and there were three or four of us in the same boat. And they said, “Well, if you’re going to be a career officer, you really ought to volunteer.”
- David Mihalic: I said, “I’m not going to be a career officer.”
- David Mihalic: I ended up not going to Vietnam. They left me there and put me in charge of planning. And so, I was doing resource management plans for my last seven months with the Corps of Engineers.
- David Mihalic: When I got out of that, I enjoyed it. So, I thought well, I’m going to go to grad school. I entered the graduate program at Michigan State University. I’d met a guy named Quisenberry who was in the southwest region in Santa Fe of the National Park Service. He was the associate regional director for administration, and he offered me a job. He says, “You’re getting out of the army.” He says, “We’re going to offer you a job.”
- David Mihalic: And I said, “What would the job be?” And he said, “An archeologist.” And I said, “But I’m not an archeologist.”
- David Mihalic: He said, “Well, did you have any sociology classes?” I think first he asked me if I had any, first it was history, I remember. And he said, “Well, did you have sociology?” And I said, “Yeah, I had a sociology class.” And he said, “Did you study any anthropology in that?”
- David Mihalic: I said, “Well, actually I did study some anthropology in that.” And I said, “But it was the Margaret Meade, Samoa kind of classical stuff.”
- David Mihalic: He said, “That’s good enough. We’re going to offer you this GS-7 job as an archeologist.”
- David Mihalic: It was under a program at that time the National Park Service had for career conditional employees where you would work six months in one park and six months in another park. They said, “What we’ll do is put you in a regular general ranger job for your second six months. So, this is just to get you in.”
- David Mihalic: I said, “Well, what would the other park be?” And the first park was going to be a park in New Mexico, but they didn’t know which one. It would be one of the small parks in New Mexico. And I said, “Well, what would the other park be?”
- David Mihalic: And they said, “Well, we don’t know yet.”
- David Mihalic: This just all kind of seemed even hinkier to me than the army. I mean, at least in the army, when I went in that, I knew well you’re going to go to Fort Worth, Texas for two years, and then you’re going to go to Vietnam. And it didn’t end up that way, but the thing was, they were saying, “Well, we’re not really sure where you’re going to go, but it will be in New Mexico. And then you’re going to go somewhere, but we don’t know where. And you’re going to be in a job that you don’t know anything about.”

- David Mihalic: So, I had been, I had applied to graduate programs in resource management, park management, that sort of thing, at Texas A&M, Colorado State and Michigan State. And Texas A&M, I mean, they all accepted me. But Texas A&M didn't offer me any assistance. Colorado State offered me a quarter-time assistantship. Michigan State offered me a halftime research assistantship. I went to Michigan State because it was halftime. You know, it's like I could have – and it ended up being a great program.
- David Mihalic: What this Quisenberry told me to do is he said, "Okay, go to grad school." But he said, "You ought to at least apply for a seasonal job."
- David Mihalic: So, at that time, you applied directly to the parks. And I applied to a whole bunch of parks I think, like 20 parks. And I got offers from about six or seven parks. But the very first one was at Glacier National Park. And I accepted the one at Glacier National Park. And when the others came in, I'd just say, "Well, I've already accepted something at Glacier." So, I went to Glacier.
- Jeremy Kaufman: So, what was your, what were your duties?
- David Mihalic: I was a GS-5 seasonal park ranger, parentheses, general.
- Jeremy Kaufman: And what year was this?
- David Mihalic: 1972. And I went to the upper end of Lake McDonald. I was initially hired for a ranger station called Logging Ranger Station. When I got to Glacier, I was checking in and the personnel specialist said, "Well, we have you at the upper end of Lake McDonald."
- David Mihalic: And I said, "Wait a minute. I was supposed to go to Logging."
- David Mihalic: And he looked at me. And his name was Dick Frost. And Dick Frost ended up being [in his NPS career], I don't know if he was a superintendent, but he might have been like a regional chief of administration, or at least a regional personnel officer. I believe in the National Capital Region. But anyway, I remember Dick looked at me and he said, "Have you ever been to Logging Ranger Station?"
- David Mihalic: And I said, "No, I haven't." He says, "Have you ever been to Lake McDonald Ranger Station?" And I said, "No, I haven't." And he says, "Believe me. You want to go to Lake McDonald Ranger Station." (Jeremy Kaufman laughs) And I said, "Okay."
- David Mihalic: So then, I mean, this was like during, in the office. And then he gave me a park map and said, you know, you drive up the lake, and you turn left and you go down here and you look for a sign and you go down and that's the ranger station.
- David Mihalic: And it's the most beautiful ranger station in the National Park Service. It was at one time a permanent station. You go down, you drove down and you drove by a barn that had horses. And those were our horses. There was one other ranger there, a back country ranger. He had a small cabin.



There was a fire cache that had a small jeep pumper in it. There was, you drove down, the ranger station itself was a one story, one bedroom, bathroom, living room, dining room, breakfast nook. Moss rock fireplace with cedar on the walls. And beams on the ceiling. And a black bear skin rug hanging over the fireplace with, on the wooden mantel, with the skull and head and the front paws laid out like this [holding arms wide]. And you walked in and the living room window looked down at the lake with mountains on either side all the way down the lake. And there was a flagpole in front. And you had to raise the flag, take down the flag. There was a boathouse with a 16-foot aluminum boat that was out on the lake. And there was a patrol car there.

David Mihalic: And I looked around and I said, “Holy cow.” And that was my first job in the National Park Service.

Jeremy Kaufman: Unbelievable. Did you have any like expectations of that first job in terms of after that, what would—

David Mihalic: I didn’t know it was law enforcement. I didn’t, I expected it would have some interpretive duties. And as a matter of fact, it did. One of the things I was supposed to do for one day a week is I was supposed to go up to Avalanche Campground and give an evening program. And the reason I did that is because I was relieving one of the fee collection rangers. It was his day off, or hers, I don’t remember. Probably his. But it was their day off and I sat in the ranger station at the campground and collected campground fees and would go around and make sure people paid those fees. And then that night, at eight o’clock, I went down, built a fire and gave a program. And so, I did interpretive stuff. I had the patrol car.

David Mihalic: My boss was Doug Erskine who was kind of a very well-known ranger in the western parks. Doug had started at Mount Rainier and had gone to Yosemite and then had gone to Glacier. And this was in the era of, I remember he gave me a World War Two Colt .38, which had a lanyard strap on it. Little thing at the bottom where it was the kind of thing that might have gone on a horse. In terms of that type of Colt .38. And he gave me 12 bullets. Six to put in the gun and six spares.

David Mihalic: And I said, “What do you want me to do with that?” (Jeremy Kaufman laughs) And he said, “Lock it up in the glove compartment of the car. And don’t take it out until your last day. And then give it back to me.” And that was my instructions.

David Mihalic: And then, you know, he handed me a ticket book and he said, “You’ll have some training on how to write tickets and law enforcement.” That was when I found out, here’s what was called a sedan delivery. It looked like a station wagon, but it actually had no rear seats. And that was a stretcher. And I realized then I had had, I had worked in college as an ambulance attendant in the college health service and had what today we would call an EMT intermediate. But at that time, because there was nothing called CPR, but we had learned CPR. And we had an advanced

first aid thing, and then additional training on the ambulance with the doctors. And I had given CPR to people prior to going. And I found out later that was one of the reasons I got hired was because I had EMS experience. And that I'd been in the army and had been an army officer and all that. But it wasn't that I had law enforcement experience, or fire. I ended up doing fire and obviously law enforcement. But right at first, I didn't—

David Mihalic: I remember one of the great things about the boat is it was for rescue. But Doug told me, he said, "You better take," he says, "I want you to make sure you start it and run it at least once a week." But he says, "You should do it more often." And he says, "And take your fishing pole when you go out."

David Mihalic: I said, "Really? Can you do that?" And he says, "A ranger always has to be able to answer any question by a visitor." And he said, "And you don't ever want to say, 'I don't know' when the visitor says, 'Hey ranger, where would I go to catch a fish?'"

David Mihalic: And you know, when these things happen during my era of the park service, you wonder, you know, pinch me. You know, am I really awake? And that was kind of the first, that first summer at Lake McDonald Ranger Station was kind of what at that point I was going to grad school. I thought you know, like you and I were talking on the way before we turned this on, you know, some of your friends are thinking about well, maybe I'll go be a professor. Or maybe I'll go do this. At that point, I really, I knew kind of in the broader scheme of things what I wanted to do with my life. But that first summer at Lake McDonald kind of, like it does with many people, wanted me to be in the park service.

David Mihalic: What I didn't realize is that as soon as you become permanent, you stop doing all those things.

Jeremy Kaufman: When did you become permanent?

David Mihalic: I was actually offered to go into the intake program between my first summer at Lake McDonald, my second. I turned it down. And I remember Doug's boss was a guy named Bob Burns who was the district manager. And Bob told me, he said, "Why aren't you taking this intake position?" He said, "You don't realize, these come very few and far between."

David Mihalic: I said, "Well, I'm in the middle of my research." And I was doing research on visitor attitudes toward grizzly bears in Glacier as part of my studies at Michigan State. And I said, "You know, I'd like to finish that program."

David Mihalic: And he says, "Let me tell you how the park service values a master's program." And I said, "Well, I'd be really interested to hear that, Bob."

David Mihalic: And he says, "If the park service thought you needed a master's degree," he says, "they'd send you to school. And they'd pay you to do that."

- David Mihalic: And I said, “You know, that’s really interesting. Because one of the guys I’m with works for the forest service.” And I said, “He’s down at the fire lab in Missoula.”
- David Mihalic: And he said, “That’s exactly what I’m saying.” He said, “They’ve determined he needs a master’s degree, so they’ve sent him to Michigan State. He’s getting a master’s degree right along with you.”
- David Mihalic: And I said, “That’s right!”
- David Mihalic: And he said, “You want to know how many times the parks service does that?” And I said, “How many?” And he says, “To my knowledge, never.” (laughter)
- David Mihalic: And you laugh because this isn’t a surprise.
- Jeremy Kaufman: Right. Right.
- David Mihalic: This was in 1973. And I had actually traveled from Michigan State. I took time, I think I got on a plane and I flew out there because I was offered this job. And I really had to think about it. And I said, “You know, I’m going to turn this down because I want to finish my program.”
- David Mihalic: So, I ended up coming back that next summer, and I turned it down. And then when I graduated with my master’s in 1974, they put a service-wide freeze on all new hires. And so, I couldn’t get on with the park service.
- David Mihalic: So, I ended up getting a job offer with the Bureau of Land Management in Alaska. And I went to Alaska for two years.
- Jeremy Kaufman: And so, for two years. So, what did you do there that then perhaps you were able to bring back to the park service?
- David Mihalic: First of all, it was a GS-11. As a first job. (laughter) That was the first thing. The second thing was, it was an outdoor recreation planner for the north half of Alaska. And they wanted me not just because I had the degree, but because I had a law enforcement commission. Because they had pot hunters. It was the first time I’d learned about the cultural site protection. And they needed someone under, in the Bureau of Land Management at that time, the national, the NHPA, which was, you know, 1960, this was in 1970, this is only 12 years or so later after that, ’64 till, I mean, 10 years. And they needed to have somebody. But they had no, they had law enforcement authority that stopped at the district manager level. And the district manager didn’t want to have somebody else do this unless they had some sort of training. And they said the park service has given this guy a commission. At that time, it was called a C card. So that was one of the reasons why, and they had these archeological sites were being looted, and they were all on the national register. So, I ended up learning a lot about the national register program.
- David Mihalic: I did a lot of planning along the Alaska Pipeline Corridor because they expected the pipeline corridor to eventually lead to national parks. I worked on the park planning for what would eventually become Alaska

national parks under the parts of what's called the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which led to a section called Section D, Sub Paragraph 2, authorized planning for national parks and national wildlife refuges, national forests and wild and scenic rivers. So, I ended up doing wild and scenic river studies, national park studies, national conservation lands, which was what they were proposing BLM lands be called, and some forest service studies. And I did that. I did all of that between '74 and '76.

David Mihalic: And then in 1976, I quit the Bureau of Land Management and went back to being a GS-5 seasonal ranger in Glacier.

Jeremy Kaufman: Wow. So, it pulled you back.

David Mihalic: Yeah. Because I knew I wasn't going to get a job with the park service by being with BLM if I stayed with BLM. At that time, also, the park service had a program called BEE, which I think it was Branch Employee Evaluation and Staffing. BEES. And there was a lady named Mary Jackson. And I'd met Mary Jackson at a time with BLM with the park service. I was in Interior and working for BLM.

David Mihalic: And I went down, and I said, "I'm working for BLM in Alaska. How do I get a job with the park service?"

David Mihalic: And she said, "Well, actually you're already in our system because you have this file from when you were a seasonal and you were considered for an intake position." And she said, "Just keep us up to date on that file."

David Mihalic: So, I sent her stuff as things happened. So, when I went back to be a seasonal ranger at Glacier, at Pole Bridge, which was up where this Logging Ranger Station had been, but I was at Pole Bridge, and I worked all in the whole sub district, and I was there for only six weeks. And I got a call one day from, I remember I was with another guy and we were digging a post hole to put in a cable across a, to gate a road. It had been a fire road. And we were putting a cable across it. And this is how things were done. We're with shovels and a pickaxe and a post hole digger. And we're in our Class A uniforms and our flat hats. And it was raining. So, we had our hat covers on and raincoats. But that was, we didn't ask the maintenance guys to do that. That was our job, so we did that. I mean, I dug pits for pit toilets in my uniform, and I did wear green jeans.

Jeremy Kaufman: Okay. (laughs)

David Mihalic: But we're in Class A uniform shirt and we wore our flat hats. We always wore our flat hats.

David Mihalic: And I got a radio call and it said, "Come back to the ranger station before 4:30. You have to return a call."

David Mihalic: And I said, "Who's the call from?" And they said, "The chief ranger of Yellowstone."

David Mihalic: And it was like, holy cow! What would he call me for? So, we finished up. We went back. And my boss, who is a guy named Jerry DeSanto, who is

another legend in the park service, Jerry was, you know, he knew what was coming. And he said, "Get on the phone."

David Mihalic: And I was in his house, his office, and called Bud Estey, who was the chief ranger of Yellowstone. And he kind of asked who I was, "Is this Dave Mihalic? We'd like to offer you a job as," I can't remember exactly how he said it. But it was the north entrance ranger. And it was the ranger who was, it was an area ranger job in the Mammoth Sub District. But it was in charge of the north entrance of Yellowstone.

David Mihalic: And I said, "When do I start? Yes, sir."

Jeremy Kaufman: So, at this time were you starting to think of like which path in terms of, would you want to pursue law enforcement, protection, interpretation, at this point?

David Mihalic: No. Because at that time, you know, there was this thing called park ranger (general). And that's what the job was. It was park ranger (general). And it just happened to be fee collection. And you know now, fee collection, it's interesting. My son went and worked at that same entrance for two summers. And he might have become a ranger. But now it's in administration. And you know, he had his fire qualifications. He had other stuff. He tried to do ride-alongs. He knew people. He tried to get out, he volunteered. But he was told his job was to collect fees and that was it. And he became kind of demoralized. And I don't think he'll ever be in the park service now. But he at least followed me there.

David Mihalic: But at that time, the people who were in those positions were either seasonals, there were a couple of permanents and subject to furlough people. But that was kind of an initial job. And so that was my first job.

Jeremy Kaufman: From your work were you starting to get a sense of, or internalize the park service's mission in terms of protecting—

David Mihalic: Very much so. First of all, I'd studied it. But then very early on, I went to, I went to the introduction, I went to Albright to what they called Intro. That's all it was referred, but it was Introduction to Park Operations. And this is the way it used to be. I was in a class; I think there were 48 people in my class. And a lot of us had park ranger (general). A lot of us were interpreters. There were people who were in administration. There were people who were in maintenance. I can't remember the guy's name now, but it might come to me. But he was the guy who was in charge of the White House. That White House liaison position. So, he was there. Because we all had to wear our uniforms. So, we wore our park ranger uniforms. I mean, the regular gray and green uniform. And I remember he wore a suit. Because that was his uniform was a three-piece suit. (Jeremy Kaufman laughs)

David Mihalic: But we had women who were, we had some women who were interpretive rangers. There was one who was on the Mall, I remember. And I can't remember her name. But she had been hired during the Folk Life Festival

time of the Mall. And I can remember, she was the flower girl. She would go around, she was in a long white dress and a bonnet, and carried flowers in a basket. And it was, you know, "Here's a flower." And it's enough to make you gag now. But at the time, that was the thing to do. But she got on permanent, so, that's what she did to get on permanent. And I went to Alaska to get on permanent. There were a lot of different things that people did. But we all ended up at the Intro course.

David Mihalic: So, it was at the Intro course, and it was probably at the heyday of that, because Jim Brady and Rick Smith and Ron Thoman were the three key people at the Albright Training Center. And it was they who instilled in us these values that I think people who are in that era of Albright, and some of them are down there [indicating the meeting rooms at the Rendezvous], they're all old people now. But that was where we learned that we're all one team. We're not law enforcement, I'm law enforcement, you're in interpretation, or I look down on you because you manage national park resources with a snow plough and I do it with a patrol car. Or I use a horse and you use a pickaxe.

David Mihalic: And part of it is that thing you know, where I had been a seasonal, where part of my job was to, yes, it was to drive a patrol car on some days. But it was to give an evening program on some days, or it was to use a post hole digger on some days. You know, because I did back country patrol, I rode a horse, I did all that stuff, because I was a park ranger (general) which means you did everything.

David Mihalic: And then, you know, at Albright, these sorts of things, that's kind of the basis that I had. But these were then, this is who we are as an agency, this is what we do. This is our mission, to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife wherein by such means and such manner. I mean, all that stuff, nobody told us to memorize it, but all that stuff was kind of, not so much a mantra, but a set of values. And it was 10 weeks long. That program was 10 weeks. You came out of that program and you understood that maybe you were at Yellowstone, and maybe before you went you'd say, well, I wouldn't go to Gateway. But at least you understood then what Gateway was or how it fit or why there were cultural sites or why there were natural sites or why there were recreation areas, but how they all fit under the same umbrella. And it was a great time to be in the park service.

David Mihalic: It's not like that anymore. I mean, they cut it [meaning the Introduction to Park Operations program], they cut it, they cut it. They got it down to nothing. And then they started Ranger Activities, Ranger Skills. That was five weeks, and it went to three weeks. And now, it's almost as if, if you were in the army and before you went to boot camp, they sent you some links to YouTube videos and a couple of books and said, "Here, read this stuff and then report to your first place." And I think what happens nowadays is where we had this very common [bonding] experience of people from all over the agency who came together for 10 weeks and we

realized we were one agency, now when people go to a place, they learn how it's done on the mall, or they learn how it's done at Grand Quivira [at Salinas Pueblo] or they learn how it's done at Acadia, or they learn how it's done in Glacier Bay. But they don't learn how it's done in the National Park Service until they have these broader experiences.

David Mihalic: But I digress.

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, no, please do. Sort of to that question of this mission, talking a lot about the protecting the resource. How have you seen that in terms with the other mission of letting people enjoy the sites for future generations? Is that something that—

David Mihalic: You know, it's interesting, because we always, when I was at Albright, when I was a young ranger, early in my career, that was something that people constantly discussed and talked about. But it wasn't in an "I'm right, you're wrong" sort of a thing. But it was always to the fact that when you looked at the mission, there is what I call the genius of the "and," and I even, I think, wrote an article about this. Maybe it was for *Ranger*. I don't even remember what it was, because it was so long ago. But it's the genius of our mission. And the genius of our mission is that when you look at which purpose is, to conserve the scenery and the natural objects therein, you look at all the things that it says for the National Park Service to do is it's not a dual mission. It's not a contradictory mission. Everything in the mission is connected with conjunctions. Which are words that link things together. And the conjunction that's used in every instance is the word "and." The word "or" is never used. It's the genius of using the word, "and" rather than "or." But people tend to argue the mission using the word "or."

David Mihalic: And so, they say, "Are we supposed to do this or that?"

David Mihalic: And what Congress said to the National Park Service – Congress didn't say it this way, but Congress said to the National Park Service, we're going to give you this special mission. And it's going to be really hard. It's not going to be easy. If it was easy, anybody could do it. But it's going to be really hard. And what's hard about it is you have to do this and that. And this. And that. And this other thing.

David Mihalic: And it doesn't say we want you to do this first, and that second. It says this and that and that and that. And so, the genius of the AND is that we have to figure out, how do we do that together? Not "or", or "instead of."

David Mihalic: One of the things about, when you talk about future generations, when does that come? When is the future generation? Is *today* the future generation for something that I did [years ago]? Are you in your part of the career doing stuff in the same places that I did them in my part of the career. But now you're doing them for the future generations that I did what I did for. And if the future generations are always in the future, then who are we really doing this for?

- David Mihalic: Because if you were to look at the founding fathers of the country in 1776 and they were doing something for the future, does that not mean that what they did then is what we have today? And do we have to think of, well, what they did then is then, and it doesn't really count? Wait a minute, they were doing, would we say that about 1916? You know, here we are getting ready to celebrate our centennial. Are we saying that well, we didn't actually do it for the future?
- David Mihalic: So, you know, this philosophical thing, you know, and I'll just go back. There's a lot of things you can learn from the army. But one of the things that you learn from the army is nobody sits around and has philosophical discussions about what is it that we're here to do? But in the National Park Service, we have them all the time. And I think that's actually healthy. But I actually don't agree now that we should protect the resource first. Because somehow that makes it more important from what else we're supposed to do. Because the mission doesn't say first or second. I think we have to do both because that's what the mission says.
- David Mihalic: And so that doesn't mean we should protect the resource any less. It means when I, you know, one of the things that was kind of a little buzz word, and it's not that we were told "this is the purpose of parks," because we weren't. It always went back to the 16US code 1A. It was, "what was the mission"? But at that time, there was this saying it was a catch phrase, called "Parks are for People." And it was not that parks weren't for resources. It was that the mission linked the place with the people that put a value on this place. And so, there were people who would argue that the national park, a national park is an idea. Well, if it's an idea, do the elk have that idea? Or do only endangered species have that idea? Or do people – so if people are the tool that you use, then people are, is there some purpose, are we doing it for some broader thing called "nature?" And if we do it in the national parks, but we don't do it over there which isn't the national park, does that mean it's less important than that over there which is a national park?
- David Mihalic: And for the purpose of what we're doing here, I'm referring to Rocky Mountain National Park and Estes Park. And so, it's just, you know, this was kind of where I was when I was a GS-7 at Albright, and then early in my career. Even after I became a district ranger at Old Faithful, Deanne Adams, her husband Tony, we worked together. And we would sit on those 50-degree below zero winter nights in quarters at Old Faithful and we'd talk about stuff like that.
- Jeremy Kaufman: So, getting back to Yellowstone, then, how long were you there?
- David Mihalic: I left there in 1981 and went back to, I went back to Alaska. But when I, in 1977, the Bureau of Land Management asked me to come back to work for them in Denver as a GS-12. And I went there for about nine months and then Roger Siglin was the chief ranger. He'd taken Bud Estey's place. And then he came, and he said, "I want you to come back to Yellowstone



because we're reorganizing. And I want you to be the district ranger at Old Faithful because we've got Old Faithful doing this and why it's doing that in the north district."

David Mihalic: So, I ended up going back in 1978 to work for Roger. And then left in 1980. I was on the Ranger Task Force up in Alaska on '79 and then in '80 I applied for a job. It was a multiple vacancy announcement for new park superintendents up in Alaska. And I remember John Townsley was a superintendent in Yellowstone. And he was kind of a mentor. Not kind of. He was. Dan Wink, Steve Iobst, me and Kurt, whose name escapes me, who was an engineer. And Joe Alston we were all kind of the same level. And we, and I think all of us had a different relationship with John Townsley. But we were all kind of like baby rangers together. Dan was a landscape architect. Kurt was an engineer. Joe had been a ranger but had decided to take a job in concessions. And Townsley kind of mentored all of us, although I don't think we all necessarily knew it as a mentoring thing.

David Mihalic: But I talked to him about going to Alaska and he said, and he ended up dying of cancer. And he was sick at that time. But what he talked about was not whether I should become a superintendent and go to Alaska, but should I become a superintendent. And he tried to tell me that if I chose to do this, that I would have to realize that I wasn't, it's not that I wouldn't be a ranger, but I had to remember that the superintendent wasn't the chief ranger. And that you had to think about, you know, interpretation. You had to think about planning. You had to think about the resources. You had to think about the health of, "the environment" wasn't used then as a term, but the health of the resource.

David Mihalic: He also said, "You have to understand people and where they come from." He said, "I think if you do this, you can't stay in Alaska and be effective. You'd have to go to someplace like New York."

David Mihalic: He had been a ranger at Grant's Tomb in New York City. And he told me that what that did is it made him understand the visitors and what, and he said, in many respects, managing national parks is managing people. And he said you have to know people and their motivations. Because what you have to do is instill in them values of this place. Because unless people in New York also value a place like Yellowstone, they're not going to vote the money in Congress to protect Yellowstone. Or when they come here, they're not going to fight if somebody – and he told me, I mean, this was things he had grown up with the national parks. And you know, I'm probably mixing a lot of things that he told me.

David Mihalic: But he spoke about the things that had happened during World War II. He had been at Mount Rainier and he talked about how they'd wanted to graze sheep and cattle in Mount Rainier for the war effort. And how his father, who had been the chief ranger in Yosemite, they'd wanted to do the

same thing in Yosemite. And how they had to say, “You know, the war is important. But the national parks are important, too.”

David Mihalic: So, he made me realize that it’s not just about, being a superintendent was a completely different deal. So here I had gone and kind of sought his advice about should I take this job in Alaska. And he ended up giving me career advice about what, if I was going to choose to do this thing, what I was really buying into was a bigger thing. And you know, that was really invaluable in a lot of ways.

David Mihalic: I ended up going to Alaska and doing that. But I had a different perspective in doing it. I was thinking of it because as I had done some of the planning for that particular Yukon-Charley Rivers area. It was in a place called Eagle, Alaska. I had worked on the military fort that dated from the 1800s that was at that place when I was with the Bureau of Land Management. So, I knew the town, I knew some of the people. I knew the river. I knew the area. And I was thinking of it as going back. What Mr. Townsley really kind of made me see is that it’s not just what you’re doing in this place [as a new superintendent] but “what you’re doing to establish national parks in Alaska in the broader perspective.” And then, “what you’re doing in the National Park Service *as a manager*,” not just as a *practitioner* of whether it’s ranger facility management, visitor services, administration, but this broader thing.

Jeremy Kaufman: So, given that it was being created, those parks up in Alaska. You talked about managing people and community. How do you begin to build a relationship with local communities in a place where you are now coming in?

David Mihalic: Well, you know, we could talk about Alaska for a long time.

Jeremy Kaufman: I’m sure you could. (laughs)

David Mihalic: But I’ll try to give you the elevator speech. Alaska didn’t want us there and the people didn’t want us there. And I think what one of the perspectives I was able to bring was the fact that I had been in Fairbanks. I knew that I knew those people differently from people who maybe had never had any experience in Alaska. So, I was better able to relate to them in terms of I could see what their issues were and why. And I think that helped because there were signs that, I mean, literally, like billboards, that were put up all over that town [Eagle] for the park service to “stay out.” They had threatened to kill the first ranger to come into town and all that. And there I was and yet I was able to get a place to stay.

David Mihalic: You know, we did some unique things in that we had to have an office. There was a guy that had a cabin that he would rent to us. We had a thing called an SF44, which is a field purchase order. And it’s like writing a check. It’s a federal check. And you could take that anywhere and it was as good as paper currency. And this guy didn’t trust the government. He

only would take money in gold. He wouldn't take it in cash. He would take it in gold, or he would take it in barter.

David Mihalic: And I remember saying, "What would you barter?"

David Mihalic: And he said, "I'd take 10 cords of wood and you could have that cabin for the summer."

David Mihalic: And so, I knew where the BLM land was. One of the things that all of these villages did is they went, and they cut firewood on the BLM land around these communities in the bush of Alaska. Instead of writing a field purchase order to this guy, we went, and we bought a couple of Stihl chainsaws. We hired a few seasonals. Bill Foreman was the chief ranger. And what we did is we went out into an area where everybody went and cut wood. We cut 10 cords of wood. We stacked it up in this guy's yard over the course of about a week.

David Mihalic: And he came out and he said, "Okay. You can use the cabin." And we said, "Well, is there a lock?" He said, "Oh, the lock. It doesn't work. It's just open."

David Mihalic: And so that's what we did the first time.

David Mihalic: But I was there till 1985. And during that time, at the end of it, I think we had established credibility and we tried to consistently be honest. We never tried to waffle. We didn't lie. We were completely open. And at the last year and a half I was there, they asked me to be on the city council. It was an incorporated city. It was the second oldest, only to Juneau in terms of a city in Alaska, in terms of incorporation. And it one time had a federal courthouse there. But they'd asked me to be on the city council. So, it's just working with people and being straight.

Jeremy Kaufman: Do you think there's potential if a park has been established and been in existence for a good period of time that relationship with the community can in any way dissolve issues, both in the park, also in the community, are understood?

David Mihalic: Oh, yeah.

Jeremy Kaufman: Is that really, in some ways is that an advantage to actually start from scratch?

David Mihalic: I don't know about that. But when I went to Yosemite, it was right after the flood. They were unable to get the flood damage. I was, I'm trying to remember this. I was the fifth superintendent in eight years. And the previous two superintendents were there only a very short time. And the Secretary of the interior, Bruce Babbitt, was very frustrated that they had 200 million dollars of money appropriated to fix the damage of this flood. Eight miles of the road between the park and the community of Mariposa had been damaged pretty significantly and the road was washed away, and traffic was stopped and the park was quote "closed." And the community of Mariposa sued the park. Sued them in federal court because they

weren't doing what they thought was a quick enough job of getting things done.

David Mihalic: I remember the local congressman, Congressman George Radonovich and the board of supervisors for that county, and kind of the town council people about, because when I went there, we did things completely different than what had been done previously. But we got things done. And we had a celebration and a ceremony. I think this was probably about 10 or 12 months or maybe, it might have been a little bit longer after I got there. Because we opened the road. We got the road open. And that, again was, I think, and it's not a reflection on the two previous superintendents in Yosemite. It was just that when I got there, the park staff was more kind of focused on when somebody would say, "Why can't we do this?" What they'd do is they'd *tell them "WHY – WHY WE CAN'T"* [do it]. why. Why we can't.

David Mihalic: The Secretary had given me pretty wide marching orders about "Get this done! You can do whatever you have to! You have 200 million dollars! You have any authority you need! If you don't have the authority, come and talk to me! And I want it done by the end of the..." it was the end of the Clinton administration. So, this was in October of 1999. And the end of the Clinton administration was in December, 2000, or January 20<sup>th</sup> of 2001. So that was kind of the time.

David Mihalic: One of the things I'd done in Alaska, at Yukon-Charley Rivers, I did a general management plan there. When I was at Mammoth Cave, we did a whole bunch of stuff. When I was in the Smokies, we did a whole bunch of stuff. When I was at Glacier, we did a general management plan in Glacier. And we finished it in three years. And I think we finished it in 1996 or seven. Glacier had been proposed as a world heritage site for like 10 or 12 years, we got that done.

David Mihalic: I think one of the reasons why I was asked to go to Yosemite was because I was able to try to get people to work to getting things done. And the first thing I tried to do when I got to Yosemite was I said, "Why don't we try to look at this not as *why* we can't do it, but *how* can we [get it done]?"

David Mihalic: And I remember one of the first things there was the planning staff said, "Well, we can't do this because it will take this long to do the historic compliance." And I said, "Why will it take that long?" And they said, "Because we only have one historian and one cultural resource specialist and one archeologist." And I said, "Well, how fast would we have to do this in order to get the stuff done by our deadline?" They said, "Oh, well, we'd have to have three historians and three archeologists and three this." And I said, "Well then, hire those nine people." They said, "Can we do that?" I said, "Yes. You can go out today. Start the process. Hire these people."

David Mihalic: And that's what we did for everything. If we needed somebody who was kind of a NEPA specialist, we went out and hired them. If we needed

another bear biologist, we went out and hired them. We needed a fisheries or aquatic specialist; we went out and hired them. We needed somebody to be a project manager, and we expanded this group from what had been a small group of people who had either been given collateral duties or secondary duties or other duties as assigned, and we just went and hired people dedicated to this task.

David Mihalic: So that's one of the things I think I learned about, you know, a guy says, "I'm not going to take cash because I don't trust the government. I'll take gold or I'll take 10 cords of wood." Well, we could argue about cash and we could argue about that. And I could have gone back to Roger Conner, my boss in the regional office and said, you know, I can't do it. And here's why I can't do this. But I wasn't; kind of what I'd learned at Albright and all those things about what we're all supposed to do [managing national parks]. Because what we're supposed to do is *figure out a way* to "conserve the scenery and the natural and the historic objects." And that was what we were trying to do. And [in Alaska] we couldn't do it if we didn't have a place [to work]. So, we had to have a place [in Eagle, to operate], so how are we going to do it? We found out a way to do that to satisfy this guy [who would rent us a cabin but would only barter or take gold]. And to my knowledge, BLM hasn't ever told me that I was poaching firewood. And nobody, you know, ever asked me how I was paying the bill for that building that summer. But that's what we did.

David Mihalic: And so that's kind of, when you say does that have something to do, "Is it easier? Or harder?" I can then point to Yosemite. It wasn't that it was "easier" or "harder", but it's, you know, and I'll give you a very short example. Were you in the session here where they were talking about personnel issues and stuff and a couple of ladies said well, were you in that session?

Jeremy Kaufman: Yes.

David Mihalic: One lady said, "I've been trying to be a park ranger since I was 13." And someone else said, "I'm in dual careers, and I'm having a problem." Well you know, a lot of people come to ANPR and they think that they can join ANPR and "They're going to fix my problem." "I can't get on," "I'm struggling," so this [joining ANPR] is going to help me. And when we all started ANPR, we very specifically said this is not a union. This is not for the individuals. And somehow the difference is, is people, I think, when they do come to like a Ranger Rendezvous, what they see is, you know, if I fix this problem for everybody in the National Park Service, or I work to help fix that problem, I'm fixing it for me. If we can solve this issue for the agency, for everyone, and further conserve the scenery and the natural and the historic objects therein, and can do it by such means and such manner as to leave them unimpaired, and if that has to do with dual careers, if we can do that, that's like going out and getting the 10 cords of wood. It's finding, "How can we do this?" as opposed to arguing, "Why can't we do this?"

Jeremy Kaufman: I think you've been touching on it with that outlook, what would you say are the qualities of good leadership? I guess since you were superintendent, qualities of a good manager, things of that—

David Mihalic: I've always thought we should hire for character. You know, I remember, I remember, and I was even wrong in this, I remember we were looking, when Roger Siglin left Yellowstone, all the rangers, we were in a big meeting and somebody was asking us what qualities did we think should be for the next chief ranger. And I remember Jerry Mernin said, you know, the person ought to be able to cross-country ski and shoot. And someone else said, you know, they ought to be able to know how to manage people. And someone else said, they ought to be able to know, you know, hiking and resource management and they ought to be able to recognize good science. And they ought to be able to hire people over here to do this and that. And all these other ranger skills sort of things.

David Mihalic: I remember they asked me, and I said, "I want the person to be able to do the budget and get more money than anybody else." (laughs) Because I remember saying, "I don't care if they're paraplegic. I can ski. I want the chief ranger to be able to get the money."

David Mihalic: But even that was wrong. Because I've come to realize if you *hire good people*, like character, and they have basic skills, then you can teach, you can always teach them the actual things they need to know. Because at the end of the day, I've always thought that a park superintendent's job can be defined by four words. And that's to "Instill national park values." And you do that with the people in Mariposa when you're trying to tell them about we're working as hard as we can to get this road fixed. But we want it to be a road just like the Going to the Sun Road, which was built in 1933. People celebrate it 50 years later. We want this road that's going from Mariposa, which was built by the CCCs, through the Merced River Canyon, and was a beautiful road. We want to make, not just that we honor the CCCs, but we make it just as good. So as opposed to just being a road for today for Mariposa, that it's a park road to park road standards that befits a world heritage site. And the first place that we express the national park idea is in Yosemite. And that that's what links these. Not that it's just good for Mariposa, that it's good for the United States, for all people. And as a world heritage site, that it's [a rebuilt *park* road] emblematic of protected areas for people who come around the world.

David Mihalic: I think if you can get someone to think about that. You know, we talk a lot about money. Every day, and you were on the Mall, you know this. You know the Mall, what a lot of people don't realize is, and I can't remember Sean's name, but it's Sean Keneally who is the guy who runs a facility management program on the Mall. But there's facility management people, whether it's how they're going to turn on the water, all the work they've just done on the reflecting pool, what happens underneath the World War II Memorial, wherever it may be, somebody's making a decision that's spending money.

David Mihalic: So when we talk about we don't have enough money, if we can get and make sure that the GS-5 who's signing the DII, or the G-S9 who's processing that DII, or the clerk who's in FMSS who is taking account of the time to do something in facility management, or the person who's assigning the interpreter to do roving duties at the Lincoln Memorial, or the person who is determining how often are we going to cut the grass, or whatever it may be, they are actually expending money. More money than when we have the review of a project by the, and I can't even remember what they call that committee that [the DAB (Development Advisory Board)] reviews these huge projects to make sure we're spending the money the right way. We spend more money, GS5s make more decisions about spending money – in the aggregate – across the park service than do park superintendents.

David Mihalic: I don't want to argue these little points. But I mean, a GS-5 might be spending a thousand dollars but could do something different and only spend 900 dollars. That's a 10 percent savings. And the fact is, is that if you teach that GS-5 or WG-5 national park values, if you instill in them that every dollar we have to accomplish our mission, whether it's keeping the Sun Road open or Trail Ridge Road here in this park, that has some value if we do that in a way that stretches our funding so that we don't have to either lay off somebody or we can keep a seasonal on an extra pay period. That's helping the broader value of this park. That's as easy as going to Congress and getting more, that's actually easier than going to Congress and getting more money.

David Mihalic: So, if you can instill values in the people, those qualities, those are the kind of people who are going to rise to the top and go do something else. And whether they decide that they're going to do the best job where they are, or whether they want to do the best job at the national level in the park service, if you can get those values instilled and people have character, we were talking this morning, that guy was talking about doing the right thing. They will do the right thing. And it's not that you have to say what they're choosing to do is not right. It's that they're making a choice because it's a value judgment, in their sphere of influence. So, if they're talking about how often to paint the entrance sign, or how often to do some other piece of work that's maintenance, or how often to do something in resource management, or who to make sure that we have in interpretation who's going to be the communication with the visitor so that the visitor leaves, or even in concessions. You'll get people who argue about, "Well, visitors don't need to drink a glass of wine." The fact is, is if somebody's drinking a glass of wine here, looking out there, and they go, holy cow, look at how beautiful that is, I'm going to go back and tell my congressman that they need more money. I don't care that they had Chardonnay or Cabernet Sauvignon. You know? It's not that that's good or bad. It's that they are part of, the visitor is part of the solution. They're not *just* part of the problem. They're part of the solution.

David Mihalic: So, if we can take every visitor who comes to a park that doesn't have park values and instill in that visitor those values, they're going to be part of the solution when they leave.

Jeremy Kaufman: I'm leading into thinking about what we saw this morning about diversity or heard this morning about diversity. When you were, for example, superintendent of where you were working, how was that diversity? Was that something that you worked toward, both within the community, bringing people in? So, visitors would have that experience? But also, in terms of hiring.

David Mihalic: From the very first day of my career, diversity has been a big thing. Just like safety. And it hasn't changed. And what I heard this morning is that it's not much different since the very first day of my career. And that's not for want of trying. But you know the difference between the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts. The Boy Scouts, the pledge is – and this is nothing to do for whoever's listening to this, no disrespect to Girl Scouts – but the Boy Scouts, it's, "On my honor, I will *do* my best." And the Girl Scouts, because I was registered as a Girl Scout, because my daughter is a Girl Scout. My wife out there was a troop leader. But I noticed this. What she learned was, "On my honor, I will *try* my best."

David Mihalic: Well, you heard an associate director from Washington yesterday morning say, "You people need to hold those people accountable." "The superintendents." And I sat back there, and I bet you a lot of other retirees sat there and said, "Why doesn't the director hold those superintendents accountable?" Who's going to have more accountability? An employee trying to hold a superintendent accountable? Or a regional director holding a superintendent accountable? Because the Director has held the regional director accountable.

David Mihalic: So, anything can be done in the park service if you do two things. One is you give it money. And two is you hold somebody accountable. And the only way you can hold them accountable is to measure results. And part of holding them accountable is if they don't do the job, you take away the money. Money's a big deal. And people can philosophically say, well, it shouldn't be that way. But the fact is, that's the way it is.

David Mihalic: I'll give you an example. One of the things is, when I was at Yosemite and we were trying to redo the flood, and we were trying to redo some of the campgrounds, we tried to find out why don't Hispanics come into the park and go camping? And so, we had some listening sessions, some other stuff. And the long and short of it was, is the planners and what we learned is that the way we design campgrounds does not fit the values of the Hispanic community as a community. That's not to say that everybody that's brown speaks for the Hispanic community, or that they are all the same.

David Mihalic: But one of the things they said is, "You know, when we go out camping, we like to go with our family. So, my sister's got a car. I've got a car. My



parents have a car. My cousin has a car. And his friends, who we consider family, has a car. And we get to the campground and the rangers say, 'You can only have two cars in the campsite.' And we say, 'Okay. Well, that's okay. All right. Can we have these two campsites right next to each other, because we're all going to come.' And they say, 'You can only have two tents in each campsite.' 'Well, yeah, but my cousin, he doesn't like to sleep with my sister, so we actually need to have five tents.' 'No, sorry. You can only have two tents.'"

David Mihalic: I use that only to try to explain that what we did physically in the campgrounds is we designed the campgrounds as if it was 1930 instead of 2010 or, you know, what we are today. And so, we tried to do that in Yosemite. And I think if you go there, there are a few "group" campsites.

David Mihalic: So now, what's a "group?" To someone in the Central Valley of California [who is Hispanic], they're not a group. They're a family. So, they tried, but I don't think you see any more or less people from the Central Valley coming up to Yosemite as you did before. But if you turn around and talk to the people at that time, they'd say, "Well, you know, we tried."

David Mihalic: I think that's what happened my whole career. You can say, "Well, you know, we tried to hire black people. But black people don't want to come, so it's not my fault." And I don't want to get too far down in the weeds with all that stuff. But with everything, there's a little bit of legitimacy to some stuff. But it's kind of like, again, the guy who said, "I don't trust dollars, but I will take gold. Or I'll take wood."

David Mihalic: I think part of what you have to figure out is well, how can you do this? I mean, I'd love to talk to that guy [the presenter in the session]. I could probably spend a lot of time, hours, talking to him about why things are the way they are. But unless he and I talk, it's interesting that he mentioned Howard University, because some people want to go to a place where they all look alike. Well, if you and I said that, it would be a racial statement. But when he says that, it's not. So, there are some people who would sit there and start arguing over that. Well, is that? Is that not? That's not the point. Now you're arguing over the means instead of trying to figure out how you accomplish what both he and us agreed would be the desired end point.

David Mihalic: So, you know, you can focus on why you can't. Or you can try to focus on how you can. And I think what we haven't done in the park service, we haven't focused on how. And we've tried to focus. You know, it's really interesting. Because you heard that in some of the questions where you say, "We will not discriminate against this, this, this, this and this." Except actually, what we are going to do, is "We're going to discriminate, because we're going to focus on this, this, this, because we don't have this in some magical makeup."

David Mihalic: Well maybe if we could figure out these values and we could do it as you heard some of the ideas. If we did maybe a better job with young people.

If we looked at history as a way. If instead of saying, “Here’s a fishing pole,” maybe we ought to say, “Here’s a history book.” And I’m just thinking out loud now. And I’m not professing that’s the answer.

David Mihalic: But when they said we had to hire more women; we had more women. We had more female rangers when I was at Old Faithful than any other district in the park. And we got jokes about it. And so, if you think about it, is that kind of an affirming sort of a thing? No. What it does is it actually pokes fun at trying to do what’s right.

David Mihalic: We tried to hire people of color. We tried to hire Indians. We tried to do a lot of things. And we’ve done a little bit at that. But even that lady that was doing the program on traditional ecological knowledges, she’s in a specialty position. But if we had a whole lot of American Indian rangers, they would have been in the audience.

David Mihalic: We have a lot of parks where we’re cheek by jowl with [American Indian] reservations. And we’re not out there recruiting. And part of the reason we’re not out there recruiting is because of the way we’ve changed with human resources is it’s centralized in Denver, or it’s centralized here or something. So now you don’t have human resource people who are living among those same parks and reservations. I mean, it’s just a morass of how the problem is possibly harder today than it was 30 years ago. But it’s not that we haven’t tried. But we still have to, when people are held accountable, I think it would change. We’d figure out ways “how to do it” as opposed to finding all the ways why we can say, “We haven’t been successful.”

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, so to get back to your career, since these are a lot of philosophical things, we could spend hours talking about, so Yosemite, you were up there to, well you mentioned 200, 2001.

David Mihalic: 2003.

Jeremy Kaufman: 2003. What came after Yosemite?

David Mihalic: I retired. And you know, if I could have charted where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do, I couldn’t have been more fortunate, and blessed. I started in Glacier. I went to Yellowstone. I went to Yukon-Charley Rivers in Alaska, 160 miles of the Yukon River. Dog sleds. Northern lights. Seventy-two degrees below zero was the coldest night. Caribou hunting. Salmon, king salmon, fresh, alive an hour ago, eating it now. Nights on the river talking to the Gwich’in Indians there, traditional values. Talking to people who had gold mines. All the things that people think about Alaska is what that park’s all about. It’s one of the best-kept secrets in the National Park Service.

David Mihalic: From there I went to the Smokies as the assistant superintendent for operations at Great Smoky Mountains. From there I went to Mammoth Cave National Park. I was the superintendent. I was asked by Roger Kennedy to be the chief of policy. I said I’ll do it temporarily, and he said,

“Well, you can do it temporarily, but you also have to do the legislative, take the legislative lead on the California desert legislation.” So, I did that, too, and worked with another guy named Jon Jarvis. He and I and a guy that worked for Mammoth Cave [Joe McGown], the three of us put together that whole California desert plan. But that was on a detail as the chief of policy.

David Mihalic: Then while I was there, they asked me to go to Glacier. I went to Glacier. When I was at Glacier, I got a call from Bob Stanton who said that the Secretary was going to talk to me and wanted me to go to Yosemite. Would I go? Yes, I will. Went to Yosemite. And then I was at Yosemite. And after three years, the park service asked me to go back to Great Smoky Mountains to do a swap. And I said, you know, I’ve been there and done that. I don’t want to do that. So, I’ll retire. So, I retired.

David Mihalic: I didn’t get in the park service to be the director. I didn’t get in the park service to work in Atlanta or Boston. I was very fortunate to be able to do things in the park service that I thought were, you know, personally rewarding, obviously. But that I hope made a difference. And to do it in places that were kind of magical places, every one of them. So, I was actually pretty lucky.

Jeremy Kaufman: And since this is the ANPR Oral History Project, I should ask when and why did you join this organization?

David Mihalic: I was one of the founding members. In 1977, in that short time I was in Denver, all my friends said, “We’re going to go up to Jackson. We’re going to have a rendezvous. And we’re just all going to get together and go skiing and have fun.”

David Mihalic: So, I drove up. It was over a weekend, I think. I drove up. A guy named Rick Hatcher, who is a historian at Wilson’s Creek Battlefield, and I’d been to, I think to Albright, I might have been at FLETC with him, because I went to FLETC, too. But he was going to come out and visit me. And I can’t remember if we were going skiing or what. So, I picked him up at the airport, we jumped in my truck and we drove to Jackson. And we spent the weekend with some of these other people that had been there. And there were 32 of us. And we said, you know, we ought to start an association. But we don’t want it to be a union. But we ought to get together and we ought to try to figure out what can we do collectively to do better.

David Mihalic: A couple of people, Rick Smith and Jim Brady, were among those, you know, people who were there. Not everybody knew everybody else. But now we’d call it Linked-In or something. But we all kind of either knew each other.

David Mihalic: So, we started ANPR mostly to get together and have a voice. And initially the issues were over park technician and park ranger, the 025, 026 stuff. But there were some other things. And it was, you know, as much to

have fun, too. Because I think somebody, one of the first rules was that we shouldn't have any rules. And I know that's changed. And then one of the second rules is that we should always have beer. (Jeremy Kaufman laughs) So I mean, it was one of the, it was a social sort of thing to begin with. But at the same time, I think everybody there was committed to the agency and committed to the mission. And said, you know, not so much let's be adults, but it was, you know, is there something more we can do than just sit around and bitch and piss and moan and drink a glass of beer at the same time. So, I think we tried to suggest that maybe we had some collective wisdom together. And perhaps we could offer some solutions to some things that we thought were problems with the way we worked as an agency that maybe could be better for employees that were the heart of any solution that's going to help carry out the mission.

Jeremy Kaufman: Have you seen the organization evolve since the beginning?

David Mihalic: Yeah. There's more rules. (Jeremy Kaufman laughs) You know, it's interesting because one of the reasons why I came to this one is I thought with Teresa Ford, she's been a tremendous influence. And there seems to be an idea that we're going to have broad discussions about what should we do now, and should we evolve. And the biggest thing that I think is, it's hard to grow when you have such a small population to begin with. You know, we're not the Association of National Park Employees. If we were, we could have 20,000 people to draw from. We talked a long time ago about should we be open to rangers of state parks, or rangers of county parks? Should we be a ranger organization? And we're not that. We're the Association of National Park Rangers. So, we only have a few thousand people from which to draw to begin with. At the same time, we know that the agency in which we work, we're not just rangers. And you see that in the membership. They're not just rangers down there.

David Mihalic: But so, you know, I'm not sure how it's changed. In some ways, it hasn't changed at all. People saying, "How can I help? What can this organization do to help my personal problem?"

David Mihalic: What's interesting is that a lot of the solutions have been solved, they [the people here at the Rendezvous] just don't know it. There's a dual careers policy in the park service that does everything they were talking about yesterday, but people don't know it. One of the things that my wife Jeri talked to Mike Reynolds about is they could take care of many dual careers issues merely by reissuing the policy. Because a lot of the current regional directors and superintendents, it was issued in 1994. And it was one of the early director's orders. So, it's a director's order. But it has been 20 years since it was issued. Reissue it and people will go, oh, you mean we're supposed to actually give preference to a spouse? Because you'll find a lot of people that say, "We can't do that." Yeah, we can. It's in the policy. It's already gone through the whole stuff with OPM, fits Title 5, all that stuff. It's already there. So, just little things like that, you know. Some of the same issues come up because people have changed,

people have retired, people have gone on. And the newer *people either aren't aware or haven't been taught*.

Jeremy Kaufman: And just to, I guess, wrap up, since this is a very reflective type of conversation, is the hope. Is there anything, when you look back, that you can think of and say this is what I'm most proud of, this is something that was a great accomplishment, things like that, that you can think of?

David Mihalic: You know, there's really a lot. I mean, I've mentioned the California desert stuff. I mentioned getting the world heritage status for Waterton and Glacier. Which had been stalled, and it had actually been stalled by Canada. And we were able to work with Canada. And that might be up there. I honestly don't believe there's ever been another general management plan done for a big park since Glacier. And yet, and now we're trying to use other plans. You know, the law says that every national park will have an up to date general management plan, and no action can take place unless it's in the general management plan. We're administratively saying oh, well, if it's a wild and scenic river plan, that will be the same thing.

David Mihalic: And I think, you know, we ought to go back to congress and we ought to say to Congress, it's really hard to do a general management plan. Maybe we should do wild and scenic river plans. And again, to me, it's really hard. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. I think we ought to find out why can't we do a general management plan for Yellowstone. If Yellowstone is so special. We've tended to be like the Forest Service, where the Forest Service is so bound up in planning, they never "Do". The process has become the product. And that's my fear for the park service is that *the process is becoming the product*.

David Mihalic: But you asked me what I thought I had done the best.

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, things that you're most proud of.

David Mihalic: Maybe saying that I think the process has become the product.

Jeremy Kaufman: The things you're most proud of in your career.

David Mihalic: You know, starting a new park as the first superintendent at Yukon-Charley Rivers. That was a great thing. There's been a lot of people I've been fortunate enough to try to help with, helping them in their careers and stuff. And it's always nice to see other people go on and do other things. I was talking this morning to a young lady who was a seasonal ranger [that worked for me] who is now in a management position. And you know, it's nice to see stuff like that.

David Mihalic: So, if I had to point to one thing, it would be really difficult. But I can say that I'm pretty satisfied with all the things. All of those are highlights.

David Mihalic: I think one of the neat things about this project you're involved with is Rick Gale, you know, Rick Gale, I think, would be surprised in that he's

got a fund and that it's sponsoring these oral histories. On the other hand, he was a great storyteller.

David Mihalic: And what I mentioned this morning when Alison was talking about helping fund the Rick Gale Fund. And I popped up and Rick would have been, Rick very rarely said something until somebody said, "Well, Rick, what do you think?"

David Mihalic: And he would always begin it by saying, "Well, since you asked." And then he'd rip into you and tell you what he really thought. So, I think it's a great way to keep his influence alive. Rick and I actually ran against each other for president in I think the Rendezvous that was at Branson, Missouri. And I was very happy that he got the job. Because he did a great job. I'm not sure I'd have done as good a job as Rick.

David Mihalic: So, it's hard to point out to any one thing.

Jeremy Kaufman: Well, thank you so much for doing this.

David Mihalic: Did we run out of tape?

Jeremy Kaufman: Do you want to keep going?

David Mihalic: No, no, no, no. I'm done.

Jeremy Kaufman: (laughs) By all means.

David Mihalic: No. I want to make sure that you don't lose what your next thing here. I was just laughing about the tape. Because when I've done these things before, somebody would say, "Oh, wait a minute. We've got to stop." And then you'd hear the click.

Jeremy Kaufman: Oh, actual tape.

David Mihalic: "We have to turn the tape. Oh, my gosh, we've been talking for 20 minutes and the tape ran out."

Jeremy Kaufman: (laughs) This doesn't have that issue. But no, in all seriousness, thank you for doing this.

David Mihalic: My pleasure. My pleasure.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]