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Rebecca Harriett  
October 23, 2014 & October 23, 2015  
[Combined transcripts]

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones  
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen  
Digitized by Marissa Lindsey

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ANPR Oral History Project

Rebecca Harriett

23 October 2014

Interview conducted by  
Lu Ann Jones

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Audiofile: HARRIETT Rebecca 23 Oct 2014

[START OF TRACK 1]

Lu Ann Jones: So, I'm going to, let's just make a little test recording.

Rebecca Harriett: Okay.

Lu Ann Jones: Can you just give me your full name and where you were born, the year you were born, and whether or not I have permission to record this interview?

Rebecca Harriett: (laughs) Okay. My name is Rebecca Louise Harriett. And I was born in New Bern, North Carolina, April 21, 1957. What was the other? (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Do I have permission to—

Rebecca Harriett: You do. You do. You do have permission.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Lu Ann Jones: So, you were born in New Bern. Did you go to any of the North Carolina national parks when you were growing up?

Rebecca Harriett: We did. We went to the Smokies. We'd go to historic sites a lot, state and national parks. But we also went up into Virginia. We never did the big western trip, you know, in the station wagon. But we would go to Shenandoah National Park. Went to Colonial, Jamestown, Yorktown. And went to some other historic sites that are not National Park Service, but they certainly were places that influenced my love of history – like Monticello was always one of my favorite. Mount Vernon, Washington – I remember the first time I ever went to Washington, DC. You would have thought that I'd just died and gone to heaven. Because these are places – I love to travel – and that was something at a very young age that I loved to go to places that I hadn't been before. So, yes. Our family took those week-long vacations, and they were very much part of my growing up.

Rebecca Harriett: And history. My dad liked history. My mom, not so much. I remember my dad and I would go through a museum and read everything, and my mom would go sit in the lobby with a good book. She's like, when are you guys going to be finished? (Lu Ann Jones laughs) As early as fourth or fifth grade, they would say, "What do you want for your birthday?", and I'd want to go to a historic site to visit. I wanted the experience and not something. I wanted to go visit a historic site or something.

Lu Ann Jones: Well with your teachers, or people, in terms of your formal education, were there people along the way who you look back and particularly think, not so much, perhaps, influenced the park service career, but just the love of history?

Rebecca Harriett: Love of history. Yeah. I certainly, I think fifth grade, well, even as early as third grade, I loved to read biographies. I still do. I still am rabid about

biographies. And I remember there was this little series of blue biographies. They were, do you remember them? (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Yes.

Rebecca Harriett: And I think I read every single one in the library. Of course, now I go back and read them and go oh my gosh, these things are really inaccurate! (laughter) But I couldn't get enough of them. I just loved reading about famous people and how they lived. So, I said, oh, no, it was just kind of an innate—

Rebecca Harriett: But I also liked the outdoors. I was very much of a tomboy. I loved being outside. I did not like being in the house. Still don't. I'm not a domestic person at all. So, I would always go out and help my dad outside and outdoors and stuff. So that combination of love of outdoors and history.

Rebecca Harriett: And then, of course, as I got a little older, and I liked history classes. I mean, I certainly did have teachers. I liked US history. I liked geography, too. So those were my favorite classes. Those were the ones; I can still remember. I mean, fourth, fifth grade, I can remember some of the lessons from those classes. So just that love of travel and love of history. So, it just kind of came naturally. But certainly, teachers that I had, I already had that love. But I liked their classes because I enjoyed the subject matter.

Rebecca Harriett: Then when I would go to places like Colonial, I'd see the people in the green and gray and I thought man, they have a really cool job! They get to be outdoors; they get to do history. And wouldn't that be fun? So, I wanted to be a ranger from a very early age.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, wow.

Rebecca Harriett: I'd say twelve.

Lu Ann Jones: Well did that influence, I saw that you went to NC State—

Rebecca Harriett: I did.

Lu Ann Jones: —and majored in parks and recreation.

Rebecca Harriett: Well, actually, I knew I wanted to be a park ranger. I didn't know there was such a thing as a park management degree. I wasn't that refined. I thought you either majored in history or biology. Actually, when I first went to school, I majored in wildlife biology. That was really a little bit more than the scientific, they really encouraged research. And I thought well, that's not exactly what I want.

Rebecca Harriett: I was talking to a friend and he said, "Oh, go over to the forestry department and check out, they have a program called parks and recreation management, and you can emphasize different areas." He said, "I'm pretty sure that park rangers is kind of on their list, on their brochure."

Rebecca Harriett: So, I went across campus and picked up the brochure. And it says, "If you want to be a park ranger, you may consider this field." As soon as I got into that program, you just know when you're where you're supposed to

- be. Wildlife biology, as much as I, it was, again, it was more the research, and pretty hardcore. It wasn't people oriented. I wanted people orientation.
- Rebecca Harriett: But when I got over into park management my sophomore year, then I just felt like that was where [I belonged], because I was with other, and quite a few of my student colleagues went into the park service. So, there was kind of a group of us that were parkies. (laughs)
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, I mean, had you talked to any rangers?
- Rebecca Harriett: Oh, yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: Or known any before you went to college?
- Rebecca Harriett: Oh, yeah. A lot.
- Lu Ann Jones: Tell me about that.
- Rebecca Harriett: Oh, I was a groupie. Oh, yeah, I was a park ranger groupie. Oh, yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: What does that mean?
- Rebecca Harriett: Yeah, I'd go on the tours. Hang around them. Ask them lots of questions, and then after everybody left, I'd go "How did you get your job?" I remember doing that at Colonial. My dad says I did it at Harpers Ferry. And I remember talking to a ranger that was on horseback. My dad swears it was at Harpers Ferry. I remember talking to somebody on horseback. I don't remember it being at Harpers Ferry, but it could have been on the C&O Canal. I don't know.
- Rebecca Harriett: I do remember in one particular case, there was a ranger at the visitors' center at the Big Meadows in Shenandoah. I went up to him and said, "I want to be a park ranger." And he looked at me and he told me, "You can't be a park ranger because you're a girl."
- Rebecca Harriett: And I remember thinking, you're a ranger! And if you're a ranger, I can be a ranger. (laughter) And I remember, well, how dare you! But I wasn't discouraged. In fact, if anything, it made me want it even more. Because I didn't think in terms of male/female. I just knew that it looked like a job that I wanted to do. But I do remember that most of the ones I had talked to were always very encouraging. But I remember this one young man at the visitors' center that, he was very blunt. He says, "You can't be a park ranger because you're a girl."
- Rebecca Harriett: And I said, well, mentally, I was like, I'll show you! (laughter) And if you can do it, I know I can do it!
- Lu Ann Jones: Good for you. (laughter)
- Rebecca Harriett: But yeah, oh, yeah. My husband still says I do it. (laughter) He's like, "Please don't go in there and start talking shop with these people." He said, "Can you just not talk? Don't tell them that you work for the park service."

- Lu Ann Jones: Well at what point did you get that first seasonal position at Cape Lookout?
- Rebecca Harriett: Well, actually, I don't think I refined it at first. It was, I want to be a park ranger. And I had taken, obviously, classes where you had to do volunteer work. Mostly around Raleigh, North Carolina. There were state parks. So, I had done some volunteer work at Umstead and, I think, I can't remember, there was another state park nearby.
- Rebecca Harriett: But one summer, I went to summer school between my freshman and sophomore year. Since half my summer was gone, I did some volunteer work with the Maritime Museum down in Beaufort, North Carolina. And their office was right across the street from the Cape Lookout National Seashore headquarters. And I remember one day, and this is how geeky I was, I remember coming out, because again, my college friend and I, we had just volunteered to help with a summer camp. But I remember coming out one day and going over to the patrol car that was parked behind the building and I took a picture of it. (laughter) Just because I thought it was a cool car. And I remember thinking boy, I would really love to work at Cape Lookout. Wouldn't that be terrific? So that was when I first got the idea that I wanted to work at Cape Lookout.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, the next summer, I applied. And at that point, seasonal hiring was centrally located. You could pick out two places, two parks in the whole country – it was the hardest part of the whole application – and you could put what park you wanted. So, I would put Lookout and maybe Hatteras, something. And I didn't hear anything, didn't hear anything. I remember being at school.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I applied for a camp counselor's job at a summer camp near Asheboro. I had gone in for an interview and was accepted to be this camp counselor. And I remember I signed a contract with the camp. I mean, I was excited about having a job. I wanted a job. And I remember like a few days later, Cape Lookout called and offered me a summer job. And I just remember, well, I just signed this contract, and I can't break that contract. I remember getting off the phone and letting the chief ranger know well I just signed this contract to be a camp counselor and I can't go back on my word on this. And I said, "But I really wanted to work at Cape Lookout."
- Rebecca Harriett: And he said, "Well, apply again next year." He said, "We'll take a look at you then." And I remember getting off the phone, and I went into my drama mode of, "I've ruined my career!" (laughter) My dream job, my GS-2 park aide dream job had presented itself and I just turned it down. (laughter) Woe is me! I mean, I was (moans). So, I went and did the camp thing, and that was fine.
- Rebecca Harriett: But the next year, between my junior and senior year, being in park management you had to do an internship. It was part of the curriculum. It was eight hours or nine hours of your credits. So, you had to do it. So, I remember I humbly made an appointment. I called the chief ranger that

was fortunately still there. And I called him back up and I wanted to make an appointment over Christmas to meet with him. I went in and talked to him about this internship. I said, "You probably don't remember me, but I turned you down last year."

Rebecca Harriett: He said, "Oh, I remember you," he said. "I remember being really impressed that someone who really wanted this, but because you had signed a contract [turned us down]," he said, "No," he said, "I remember being impressed with the fact that you would live up to your commitments." And plus, I think he had a daughter named Rebecca, too, so that probably didn't hurt. So, he said that we would set me up with this intern, which was volunteer. It wasn't a paid position.

Rebecca Harriett: But I did go ahead and apply, just on a fluke, to see. While I was in the seasonal training, because I went through the regular training just like all the seasonals, one of the seasonals dropped out. It just wasn't what she thought it was going to be, for the summer. I guess I was reachable on the cert. So, I remember he took me for a walk around Beaufort, North Carolina. Took me to the cemetery at Beaufort, you know, and offered me my first park service job. And you would have thought that I had died and gone to heaven. Of course, I had to balance out that internship, because they were very specific of what I had to do. But then this was a job. But they were very, very good of helping me to make sure I could do what they needed me to do as a seasonal, but also help me get these other components that maybe I wouldn't have normally had for the job. So, they were wonderful to work with.

Rebecca Harriett: Actually, they kept me on intermittent. I would go back on holidays and work down there. And my first was Portsmouth.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what are you doing as a seasonal?

Rebecca Harriett: I was your jack of all trades, you know. I worked at Cape Lookout. It was visitor protection, resource management. So, there was a back-country ranger at Portsmouth Island that had been freshly assigned there, he and his wife, the Godwins, you probably know them [because LJ is from eastern North Carolina, too]. And basically, they called me their girl Friday. So, it was my job to run a lot of errands and assist them with their [duties], I'd bring a lot of supplies. Because they lived there. They were assigned to the island. A lot of sea turtle work, which I loved. I loved working with sea turtles. And of course, bird banding. Bird enclosures. Did the oral history, mostly on the buildings. Portsmouth had been covered with vegetation. There was kind of limited research. There was a lot of local history, obviously, to it. But they wanted to know more about the buildings themselves because they wanted to clear out that brush and get a feel for what that landscape looked like. So, when I did interviews, it was really to find out how did the town look, how did things, what were the color of the buildings, and those kind of things?

- Rebecca Harriett: So, I will say, though, and I'll get to your questions, I remember riding up the beach with the district ranger and Jim Godwin. I was sitting between them in this old rickety pickup truck, because you're driving up the beach. I remember looking into the marsh, and looking over toward, and seeing the church steeple. And I can't describe it. I just felt like I was home. Just felt like, this is where I'm supposed to be.
- Rebecca Harriett: Actually, at that time, I thought, don't know if I'll ever get married. But if I ever get married, I'm getting married in that church. And of course, it was six years later when it turned out that I did do that. But anyway.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I was a jack of all trades. I mean, I did a little bit of everything, which I loved. If the restroom needed cleaning, I cleaned it. If the brush needed clearing, I cleared it. If the car needed washing, I washed it. If someone needed to be interviewed, actually Nancy Godwin and I did a lot of those together. It was just a terrific experience. And again, I still go back and feel that that's home. That's where I belong.
- Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. So how many seasons did you go back to Cape Lookout?
- Rebecca Harriett: I did two years. I did, again, the internship between my junior and senior year, and then I came back the summer after I graduated. Again, they were kind enough to keep me on intermittent after the season. And because then I had graduated, they actually, you know, kept me on. I would work several weeks. Then I might not work over the holidays. But then they'd bring me back in the spring. I remember we, one of the things that we were doing was preparing to have Shackleford Banks come into the park. And so, there was a lot of stuff at Harkers Island. We didn't go up to Portsmouth all that much, but there was a lot of stuff at Harkers Island. Actually, I probably did a lot of the interviews during that period of time when I was on the mainland and stuff. But it was very hit or miss. But I don't remember, it was okay. I was just thankful to still be employed, even if it was a few days a week or a few days a pay period.
- Rebecca Harriett: However, I had also wanted at some point to go to Alaska. That was something that had always, Alaska had intrigued me. I thought, well, one of these days I'd like to go up there to visit. But certainly, it would be nice to go up there and work, too. As much as I loved Cape Lookout, I also felt that I wanted to broaden my horizons, broaden my experience. I needed to travel while I could. I was pretty much guaranteed a third season in the days when you could do that with the park service. And so, I threw out those two parks for the seasonal employment and put into Klondike Gold Rush and, I think, Katmai. Because I figured, again, even though I liked the outdoors, I tended to be drawn to historic. And even though Cape Lookout was a mixture, certainly the history of Portsmouth intrigued me, so I liked that mixture.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I applied with every intention of going back to Cape Lookout. It was just kind of a fluke because I knew Alaska was very competitive. Lo and behold, I got a call from Alaska, much to my mother's horror. (laughter) I



think she kept thinking I was going to outgrow this ranger thing. It was like, really? You know, really?

Rebecca Harriett: So, I remember in May flying – no, I had never been west of the Mississippi. Maybe, maybe just really across over into Arkansas from Memphis and back. So, I had never been out west, per se. So, to fly all the way up to Alaska was quite an adventure. And that was a wonderful experience, also. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Well, a couple of, any number of questions. So were people, say, at Cape Lookout, giving you advice about what kinds of options were before you and what you might do to, from the get-go, did you know you wanted to make this a career, you wanted to be here more than seasonal work and so—

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah, I knew I wanted to be permanent. That was certainly a goal. I knew just from the seasons there and the people that I work with, most of them had moved around. So, it was obvious that moving around was expectation. The two district rangers had been in an old intake program. But again, those kinds of things come and go. But all of them had had seasonal experience at a variety of places around the country. Actually, I was drawn to that. The idea of moving around the country appealed greatly to me. So that was like, that was just a bonus on that. So, I knew I wanted to be permanent, I definitely knew that that was a goal. And I knew that it was difficult because I certainly met seasonals who had worked many seasons.

Rebecca Harriett: But one thing I had noticed, and that I picked up on fairly quickly, that usually seasonals who had worked what I would consider a very, very, very long time as a seasonal, they had done it at one park, and they wanted to be permanent at that park. And I quickly realized that there were gateway positions, or gateway places, and what some people might consider less desirable. So, I was willing to go anywhere to get on permanent. And in a positive way. I wanted to make a commitment to that park to do good things. I mean it wasn't just I'm going to be here three months and then I'm going to leave them in the lurch. I mean, I really wanted to do that. And to be, you know, committed, and learn as much as I could about that park. And it was interesting—

Rebecca Harriett: Before I went permanently, I applied to this seasonal job. So, I went to Alaska for six months. I remember that summer there was a whole bunch of us that were seasonals, and we would have these postcard parties. Every week we would sit down with our postcards and we would divide the country up into the OPM [Office of Personnel Management] districts. And we would write to the, this is how archaic this is now. (Laughs) You'd do this on computers. We didn't have all that. So, we'd divide up the country. So, each one would take all the OPM offices in the Pacific West or Alaska or wherever. And then we'd all mail our cards out. Now the deal was that if any of the registers for park ranger, I guess park technician at that time,

or museum aide, or something applicable, then we had to share that information with the others, knowing that you probably might be competing with each other. But we'd make a party out of it.

Rebecca Harriett: So, we would send out all these postcards and then you'd get one or two saying well, there's a park ranger with the Corps of Engineers, or a park technician with the Corps of Engineers. So, you'd share that information. Everybody had their [Form] 171 [application] all ready to go. And then of course toward the end of the summer we would all be sending out our seasonal, for winter, seasonal, to Everglades and to anyplace that you could find out who hired winter seasonal. Because it wasn't as prolific as summer seasonals. Like I said, there was probably five or six of us that very much wanted to work seasonally or permanently with the park service.

Lu Ann Jones: What exactly were you doing at Klondike?

Rebecca Harriett: I was interpretation?

Lu Ann Jones: You were?

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. I had quickly risen. Because I'd been at Lookout first as a GS-2 park aide, then I went to a GS-3 park aide the next summer. So, this was a GS-4. I was on the fast track! (laughter) I was coming along those grades. So, I was park interpreter. So, it was very interesting. It's this little Gold Rush community. It's very isolated. They had just opened a road to White Horse, which was three hours away. And cruise ships would come. We were at the top of the Inside Passage. It's where the Gold Rush seekers would come up the Inside Passage of Alaska. They would stop at Skagway. That's when they would either hike over the Chilkoot Trail by foot, or they would go up what was called the White Pass by horse. So, this little town was, the park had gotten it, and it was historic district. So, there were a lot of these Gold Rush buildings. And then there was a cemetery, and then, of course, the Chilkoot Trail itself.

Rebecca Harriett: One of the first things we did, though, and this was in May, was we were going to hike as part of our training, was to hike the Chilkoot Trail. One of the things we'd been asked was, "Do you hike?" Well, kind of, yeah, but I'm from eastern North Carolina, it's kind of flat. So, I didn't really know. (laughter) And May, early May.

Rebecca Harriett: So, the first part of the trail was fine. But then you start going up in elevation. Well, we start hitting snow. What normally would have taken a three-day, four-day, took us five-days. And like the third day, we were in knee-deep snow. It was quite interesting. I thought well, I wanted to come to Alaska, and I'm going to die here. (Lu Ann Jones laughs)

Rebecca Harriett: I remember there was one day we only, I mean, the whole day we only went about five miles. The snow was that deep. But it certainly was quite an experience for not having been west of the Mississippi.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes. Yeah.

- Rebecca Harriett: But I had a great supervisor. He was very good at rotating our schedules so that at least twice during the summer we'd have four days off together. Like I went backpacking in Glacier Bay, and so I got to see —, but, you know, did interpretive programs. And it was one of those things, you know, when the cruise ships come in, the town would be overfilled with visitors. But you knew when they were coming. If you had two ships in, you were really cramped. And we did tours and things like that.
- Rebecca Harriett: Sometimes we'd go on the cruise ships, and that was always interesting. Because sometimes we would go and greet the cruise ship and they'd let us come onboard. We would let them know what we had going on in town and stuff.
- Rebecca Harriett: I remember the *Odessa* came from Russia. And it was Soviet Union. And that was right during the Afghanistan. And even though they let us onboard, we couldn't just roam around. When the crew came into town, there was someone with them at all times. And you couldn't just go up and talk to the crew. Again, it was right after, I guess, the Russians had invaded Afghanistan. So, it was very close [observation]. But at the same time, the staff of the cruise ship did a program in Russian dance for the townspeople one of the times they came in. And it was just wonderful.
- Rebecca Harriett: There was five women of us living in one of the park housing. It was a great summer. I did go back and do the Chilkoot Trail without the snow, and that was a lot of fun. And to do it with the, we did the boulders instead of the snow.
- Rebecca Harriett: Actually, I stayed a little longer. Some of the folks had to go back to college. But there were one or two of us that had graduated, so we were working on projects. I was working on the museum collection. We could pick out different projects other than interpretive stuff. I chose museum, so actually that was a good experience to learn about care of museum collections. So, I did that into September.
- Rebecca Harriett: Then it was starting to get cold and dark. I loved Alaska summers, you'd get off work at nine o'clock after a campfire or evening program and you still had three hours of [daylight], and in those days, when you're early twenties, you'd go hiking for two hours. You'd come in at midnight. It would be still daylight.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, it was just wonderful. Again, I loved being in the park service. I loved the experience that that offered me because I wouldn't have done that otherwise.
- Rebecca Harriett: But during the time, I did get a job, well, I was offered a job at Saint Louis. They called me on a Thursday. They wanted me there on a Monday. I couldn't get a flight out of Alaska until Saturday. I said, "I really need to go pick up my car, then come back."
- Rebecca Harriett: They said, "Nope. If you can't be here by Monday, don't come." Well physically, I can't do it. They said, "Well, too bad." I mean, it was a very

write-off. And again, woe is me, I've turned down the park service.  
(laughter) And this was for a seasonal job. This was not a—

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Rebecca Harriett: I can't believe I've done this, but I don't know what else to do. I couldn't get out. So anyway, I was coming out of Alaska unemployed. Had every intention of heading back to North Carolina. Thought well, I'll go down to Cape Lookout, see if they've got anything. Probably going to go be a waitress. Whatever. Whatever I can do to pick up work. But I thought well, you know, I'd like to stop by Seattle and take a look in Seattle. Because we talked about it, because Seattle was the main gateway to the gold fields, and there was a museum there. One of the women I work with, her family lived in Edmonds, just north of Seattle, and so she'd invited me to come spend a week with her. She wanted to show me around. I thought well, obviously didn't have a job, so I might as well do that.

Rebecca Harriett: So, went around. Went sightseeing with her. So, we went one day down to Klondike Gold Rush Seattle unit, in downtown Seattle. I'm not a city person, but I kind of like Seattle. You know, you just kind of get a feel for a place. Of course, I had been in this remote little town that didn't have paved streets, much less sidewalks. I just remember Seattle was just kind of overwhelming because it was very busy. But at the same time, there was a real outdoors feel to it. People, even though they were in suit and ties, they had backpacks. And they'd wear hiking boots with their business suits. It was kind of weird.

Rebecca Harriett: But anyway, went down and visited. We were talking to the interpreter at the desk. And I remember her saying, "Boy, you know, I think our superintendent, we have a new superintendent. And I know she would be interested," she just came in in August and this was October, says, "I know she would want to talk with you all, because she wants to make more connections with the Alaska unit," because it was so far away. We're telling a similar story.

Rebecca Harriett: So, we went upstairs and met with the superintendent. We were sitting there chatting, we told her about our summer and stuff. She said, "Well, what are you all's plans?" And my friend says, "Well, I'm getting married. I'm moving to Oregon with my husband. He's a forester with the Forest Service, and I'm going to try to get a job with the Forest Service." And I said, "I'm just trying to get on permanent with the park service."

Rebecca Harriett: And she said, "Great!" (laughs) She said, "We have an opening here for a frontline subject to furlough GS-4 interpreter. And I would really like to have someone who has worked at the Alaska unit." And I said, "Well, when is it due?" She said, "Tomorrow!" (laughter) Of course, I'd shipped all my 171s, all my stuff back to North Carolina. So, she said, "Here. Fill out this application. I'd really like to have you consider this."

- Rebecca Harriett: So, I went to my friend's house that night and I hand did an application. I had this nice 171 that was all typed up, and just fill in the gaps for the position. And here I was doing this thing from scratch. And handwritten. Trying to remember what little bit of experience I had. But trying to make it look nice.
- Lu Ann Jones: Yes.
- Rebecca Harriett: The next day I took it back down there, handed it to her. That was when you could do that. It didn't go to some nebulous being somewhere. And gosh, right around Thanksgiving I got a call and they said, "We'd like to offer you this job. Permanent, subject to furlough position in Seattle."
- Rebecca Harriett: I said, "When do you want me there?" And they wanted me there the week before Christmas. I said, "Absolutely. I'll take it." Again, much to my mother's horror. I can't believe. I was going to drive across country. So, I said, "I can't pass this up. This is a permanent job. It's subject to furlough, but it's a permanent job." This is that opening I've been looking for.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I called up a girlfriend of mine from college. I said, "You want to do a road trip across country?" And we took off. So that was my first permanent job. I was there maybe about a year when, maybe even a little less than a year, when the permanent GS-5 retired. She was fulltime, and she had been the woman at the desk. And she retired. So, they offered me that position. Or I applied for it and got that. So, I wasn't there too long. I think I did do a furlough once because I got my emergency medical technician [certification]. Talking about skills that you get. I knew that there were certain skills. This was an urban [park], so I had to get some of those skills that I knew I needed to broaden my experience on my own. Which was fine. I was happy to do that. So, I remember I got my emergency medical technician certification while I was on furlough.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well was there anybody there, how did you kind of get that information that these were a set of skills that you needed? Did somebody say, or osmosis, or somebody say—
- Rebecca Harriett: Well, I think, again, the people that you work with, you sort of started seeing, but especially probably more a [Cape] Lookout because, just because of the nature of the park. You had people that were commissioned law enforcement, emergency medical technician skills were, the law enforcement rangers had that. Of course, basic CPR, firefighting skills. So, you knew there was sort of a list of things that you knew park rangers, and I came in when it was very generalist. So, there was almost like this list of law enforcement, interpretive skills. I mean, you kind of did it all. I mean, I kind of knew in some parks there was a distinction between, especially the larger parks, where interpreters and law enforcement were separate. But at Lookout, you kind of did it all. There was a separate interpretive division. But we were so small, we all worked together, and so it didn't feel like there were these big divisions that you see in a bigger park.

- Rebecca Harriett: I would say that the district ranger who was my immediate supervisor, I'm sure he encouraged me to broaden, get as much experience as you can. I think where he could, he obviously, again, I was a seasonal, so there's a little bit of a limit as to what he could do. But I did know going into the permanent job that one of, from Cape Lookout, that one of the classes that was sort of the class, was Ranger Skills. That was one of those, you saw the rangers going to Ranger Skills. And so, you knew, man, if I could get in Ranger Skills, you know you've made it if you go to the Grand Canyon for five weeks, you've made it. (Lu Ann Jones laughs)
- Rebecca Harriett: I remember I wasn't at Klondike Gold Rush in Seattle very long before my supervisor came down – this was not the superintendent, but the supervisory park ranger – saying, he said, “Would you be interested in going to Ranger Skills?” Again, thought I had died and [gone to heaven]. It was like, oh my gosh! I mean, I've been here three months, or two months, and you want to send me to Ranger Skills for five weeks. Again, died and gone to heaven. I mean, it's like, wow, this is, and of course went. And that was where you did have a week of law enforcement and a week of interpretation and a week of administration and a week of resource management. And then kind of the leadership piece.
- Rebecca Harriett: Again, you just, in fact, one of the guys who I went through that class with, I hadn't seen him probably since, gosh, 20 years, came up and hugged me last night. He said, “Are you one of the last ones from Ranger Skills?” And I said, “I think I may be!” I said, “Everybody keeps retiring.”
- Rebecca Harriett: But, yeah, again, as you make those contacts, you see what other people are doing. Again, I'm sure we had those conversations. I just can't remember specifics. But you just start seeing okay, if I want to be, again, there was that park technician. So, there was this gap between, okay, the technician and the park ranger were more the managers, the district rangers and things like that. So, you're like okay, how do you make that leap? How do you make that? So, we're like okay, I'm not a supervisor, but I do supervise volunteers. Because I was working with, you work with volunteers. So even though it's not an official supervisory, you're still giving guidance and things. So, you try to do those things to help in that arena, hoping that at some point you will become official. But you know, you just do that.
- Rebecca Harriett: Again, being in Seattle, we were very close to the regional office. We were only a few blocks. So, there were sometimes there would be regional committees. I remember there was a federal women's program committee that they wanted someone from the park to be representing. So, I was asked to do that. So, I got some EO [Employment Opportunity] experience with doing those things. And again, because we were so close, I got to see some of the regional. I saw Russ Dickinson because he was from Seattle. He had just become the director, but he had been the regional director. So, he would often pop back in. So, I would see him periodically.

- Rebecca Harriett: So again, every place that I went, you just learn something new. Learn something different. There are just different opportunities. And I think one big thing I learned is you just need to be open to those opportunities when they present themselves. And even if it's something you hadn't thought about, if it presents itself, you need to take advantage of it.
- Rebecca Harriett: But again, interpretation there, I had a great staff. Really fun time in Seattle. But then I thought okay, I don't want to be so long in one place, or in one field, that I don't broaden my experience. So, I started thinking okay, I really need to probably get that law enforcement commission.
- Rebecca Harriett: Now looking back on it, again, it wasn't, to me it was just something you were supposed to do. It wasn't that I really wanted to be a law enforcement officer. It's just, that was part of it. I certainly enjoyed the interpretive. I was more of an interpreter. But to me, you did it all. If the situation presented itself that you could handle it interpretively, or educationally, you did it. If it didn't, then you had to handle it another way.
- Rebecca Harriett: I started looking at positions that were more in the protection arena, which was very hard, because of the training that was necessary. I even thought about going, during my furlough period, or taking some time off and going back and getting my seasonal commission. But that was tough to do, because I didn't have that much leave to be able to do that. Of course, they weren't going to send me because we didn't have law enforcement.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I did find out that – I think Jim Godwin went to Buffalo. So, I knew he was leaving. And so, I called Cape Lookout and I said, "You know, I'm really interested in potentially coming back." But they knew I didn't have a commission.
- Rebecca Harriett: They said, "Well, would you be interested in just doing a lateral?" By that time, I had gotten that 5, and the position was a 5. It was before Ranger Careers. They said, "We can, if the two superintendents agree, we can just lateral you over. But you will have to move yourself back." Well, I still didn't have much furniture and stuff. But the position was a subject to furlough, and I was a permanent fulltime. I would never do that in this climate. But at that point, to get into that skill, that arena, it seemed like a good thing to do. As it turned out, it was.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, after I'd been at Klondike for two and a half years, I transferred back to Cape Lookout in the southern district this time. I was assigned to be the back-country ranger over at the lighthouse.
- Lu Ann Jones: Where did you get your law enforcement training?
- Rebecca Harriett: At FLETC [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center].
- Lu Ann Jones: At FLETC.
- Rebecca Harriett: At FLETC, yeah. Because at that point, they didn't have the field school that they do now. So, you went for the three months. It wasn't the nine

months that it turns into now. So, it was just part of it. I was there probably a year, though, before I actually went to FLETC. I'm pretty sure. Because I remember there were just a lot of times you had to use your interpretive skills to enforce the things. Or there were just certain things that you couldn't do, obviously. Cape Lookout was, I mean, for the most part, you know, it was fine. It worked. I mean, it wasn't like going to Lake Mead, where you need to be commissioned immediately. Whereas here, it was, you know, there were tactics that you could use. Because where are they going to go? (laughs) I mean, you've kind of got them. And then, of course I was working with someone who was commissioned.

Rebecca Harriett: So eventually I went to FLETC. That was an interesting experience. Again, I enjoyed that. Someone did ask me one time about had things changed as far as men and women and stuff. I said, you know, when I went to Ranger Skills, I would say it was probably about 50/50. It was probably about 50/50. When I went to FLETC, there was only four, out of a class of 30, there were only four women. But it was a great group. Got along fine. Enjoyed the classes. Did fine. Didn't flunk out; enjoyed the experience. And then came back. I was commissioned there for, I guess, three years. I actually kept my commission all the way till the time I became a superintendent. So about 13 years, I was commissioned. But also worked in parks that were not heavy law enforcement, and to be honest with you, I was comfortable with that. I really did not desire to go to a Lake Mead where you are constantly doing it all the time. To me it was a skill set in the toolbox. You used it when you needed it, but not all the time.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well, did you begin to have some plan about where you, at some point, where it was a more conscious about what you were going to be working towards?

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. I can't remember the exact moment or time because at first, the first thing was to get on permanent. Well, the first thing was to get in the uniform as a seasonal. (laughs) Then second was to get on permanent. And then it was to get as broad a skill base. But I would say probably sometime at Lookout was when I made a conscious decision that eventually I wanted to be a chief ranger, chief of interpretation, and eventually a superintendent. I would say that somewhere in there was when that started to take shape. Just because that, in my mind, seemed to be the natural progression of things. But it wasn't that I went around saying, "Well, I'm going to be superintendent."

Rebecca Harriett: I will say that with some of the colleagues there – I remember we had gone to visit, there was a group of us from Lookout. And we had had a little rendezvous. And someone had said something about, "Is anybody in this group going to be a superintendent?"

Rebecca Harriett: One of the colleagues said, "Oh, yeah, Rebecca's going to end up being a superintendent." (laughs) But that was just banter. But yeah, I would say



that was probably, and I think there was part of it was, I mean, certainly, you know, when you're on that front line – and I love the work, I love what it represented. But I also, obviously, saw things that I as a field person thought, there were just some things that just weren't right. There were just some actions that were taken by leadership, especially a superintendent, that you think, well, that just doesn't seem right to me. And there was a little bit of a good old boy network. It's not that he didn't treat me well. But it was a little patronizing. But there were things, I'm like, wow, that just, that just doesn't seem like that sets a good image. And it seemed to be accepted. There was, like I said, there seemed to be that kind of a – I thought, you know, I just, you know, I think I can do as good. (laughs) If not better. Not in an arrogant way. But just like, you know, there were just, there were some ethical things. I was like wow, that just doesn't – and it wasn't that anybody told me. It was just, there were just, I mean, there were things that were just wrong.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Can you give me an example?

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, the superintendent would have the maintenance guys go do stuff on his house. I mean, he didn't think twice about going to the liquor store in the middle of the day to get his stash while he was in uniform in a government car! I mean, stuff that would just get you, and should, get you fired! I was always very conscious of the image. I will say, though, that was one thing that the district ranger did instill in, that when you're in that uniform, you are representing the National Park Service. And you're not just representing Cape Lookout or whatever park you're at. You are representing the whole agency. And I took that to heart. That meant something to me. And if you did or said something while you were in that uniform, or even if you were out and people knew that you worked, that it was bad for the organization. I think that, I picked up on that very early. Again, and sometimes you learn as much what not to do as what to do from leaders sometimes. Or whatever, you know. So, I thought, well, I think I can at least not do those unethical things. (laughter) I mean, I think he was probably very good at budgeting. I'm sure he was very good at some things. But certainly, they were just what I would consider just things, it left a bad taste.

Lu Ann Jones: So then from there, you go – Oh, where do you go from there? Do you go out to Missouri at that point? To George Washington Carver?

Rebecca Harriett: I do. Yeah. Actually, one of the women that was in my FLETC, my law enforcement class, she was lead park ranger, that was back when you had lead park rangers, at George Washington Carver. She just was really enthusiastic about the park. Obviously, small park. But her position was a 7. At that time, there were no GS-7s at Cape Lookout. And there was a glut because this, again, before Ranger Skills, I mean, Ranger Careers. They did at some point, when I was the second, when I was permanent at Cape Lookout, at some point, OPM decided to go from the park technician to the park ranger series. Now it wasn't the progressive 5, 7, 9. But they

did away with the park technician. I think we had kind of heard rumors that that was happening, but we weren't real sure. We weren't getting a lot of information at our level about it. Certainly, that park was not communicating that to us that this was happening.

Rebecca Harriett: I do remember one day coming in off the banks [Portsmouth Island] and in my box, in everybody's, all the park technicians' box, there was I guess what would have been an SF50, basically saying you've been converted from a park technician to a park ranger. Obviously, they didn't think it was a big deal. I actually thought it was a big deal, because I'd always wanted to be a park ranger, and now I officially had that title. It didn't change my grade. Didn't change my job. But to get that. But I remember like oh, okay. I'm a park ranger. Great! I'm a park ranger, you know? But they were GS-5s.

Rebecca Harriett: And not having a GS-7 at that level, I realize that I needed to probably move somewhere else. This woman had just, again, she actually moved out west. But I just remember she just really loved the park, spoke very highly of it. So, when she left, I put my name in for it. It was a lead, which at that point wasn't an official supervisory, but, again, more responsibility. It was a commissioned position. It was the only commissioned position. So, I had a commission. But I also had an interpretive background. And it was sort of to me a next logical step.

Rebecca Harriett: So, I applied and got it. And we moved to Missouri.

Lu Ann Jones: Well did you find the kind of personalities of parks were different when you moved from one place to the next?

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah, yeah, a little bit. Yeah, I think every park has its personality. To me, they're like people. They all have their personalities and their quirks, and their good points and bad points. I like small parks because I got to do everything. I really like that autonomy to be able to do a whole bunch of things. But I also found people very passionate. I mean, every park I've been in, there have been those that have been incredibly passionate about that resource and that place. I mean, there's still some folks who work at George Washington Carver that have been there their entire career and love it. Will never, ever, nor do they ever want to, they will retire there. And that's great. They love it. And I loved it for the time that I was there. Had a wonderful experience. Because I got to do, again, a whole host of things. I got to operate a visitors' center and do new exhibits. And supervise seasonals, and volunteers. I really, again, a great experience. Good, good folks. And we had an active resource management, a prairie management program. So, I got to keep my red card. Being in the Midwest region, there's lots of small parks. They were very good at helping small parks gain experience in a variety of things.

Rebecca Harriett: So actually, I went on a special event team, which I'd never done that from, I couldn't really do that at Lookout, because they didn't really support that. But the Midwest region did support, especially lone rangers

like me, to keep up our skills to serve on these special event teams. So, I worked what at that point was the VP Fair in Saint Louis. Which was, as it turned out, an Anheuser Busch drunk fest. (laughter) But it was fun during the day. Night would turn into a whole different situation. But, again, good experience. But again, with those teams, you meet people. And again, several people that are here that have retired from the park service are people that I actually met and knew through the Midwest or being on this SET team, or special event team. So again, anytime you did these special things like that, you broaden that network. You meet friends. Again, people are very passionate. Yeah, so that was a good experience, also.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did you come up to speed with the new resource? What was that like to go to a park where you weren't familiar with the park and now, you're new and you have to learn it pretty quickly?

Rebecca Harriett: Well, yeah, I mean, there are people there, obviously, that they train you. There was a woman there who had been a, what was the old coop program. And she ran the natural resource. The Midwest region had a very active prairie management program. When you're there, I mean, as far as the basics, they train you and stuff. But the Midwest region was very good. I mean, I was in a position where I could call if I had any questions. If I couldn't get the answer at the park level. I mean, there was a chief ranger, even though he was only there for a few months before he transferred. The superintendent that was there at that time, he had been there for a long time, and he was very accessible. The AO who was now the chief of interpretation there, again, very knowledgeable of the park as a whole. And so, everyone was very helpful to answer those questions. But if they couldn't answer your questions, then you could call the region or get that. Or there were lots of other small parks that had similar programs.

Rebecca Harriett: I remember there was a colleague of mine who was a lead park ranger at Fort Scott. A similar situation, small, historic site. They were about an hour and a half away. So, he and I became friends. We met through training or whatever. So, we would exchange a lot of ideas and things. Actually, he and I both became the chief rangers of our respective parks about the same time. And so, and he's still in the park service. I still am in contact with him. So again, you make these lifelong relationships. You may not see them every year. But when you do see them, you pick up where you left off, though, which is always pretty neat.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, what did it mean to be the chief ranger?

Rebecca Harriett: Well, that was, again, that was probably, if you kind of lay out a plan, that certainly was an area, to be a division chief in the park service, if you aspire to be a superintendent, that seemed to be one of those potential areas when I came up that you, rite of passage, or whatever. And—

[END OF TRACK 3]

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- Rebecca Harriett: —that one was interesting because I was the lead and enjoyed it very much. Then a new chief ranger was hired when the man who hired me left. This other guy came in, and it was pretty obvious from day one this really wasn't where he wanted to be. He was pretty, nice guy, but just obvious that he probably was not going to last very long. He was there probably maybe about a year.
- Rebecca Harriett: But in the meanwhile, my husband had moved out when I had moved out. He was starting to want to look, he worked for the park service. So, he had actually gotten a job offer back east, and his dad was sick, so we were starting to look back east. This was after I'd been there, I guess four years. And we'd also had our child out there and stuff.
- Rebecca Harriett: A new superintendent had come in. He was different from, the previous one had been very gregarious, very outgoing, very approachable. This gentleman was much more reserved, a little more closed door. You didn't talk personal stuff. You just kind of closed-door policy.
- Rebecca Harriett: My husband had gotten a job offer from Catoctin as resource management. So, I went in to tell the chief ranger that. I said, "You're going to hear that my husband is moving. But I'm not planning to move immediately. But at some point, I will be looking for a job back east."
- Rebecca Harriett: I just remember him saying, he says, "Oh," he says, "that's a shame. Because the current chief ranger's getting ready to, he just told me he's leaving." He says, "I was hoping you'd consider the chief ranger's job." (laughter)
- Rebecca Harriett: I was like, oh! Because I had no idea that he would even consider me. I mean, we just didn't have that kind of comfortable relationship that he would, and of course he couldn't guarantee me anything.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I remember going back and telling my husband, I said, "I think I may have a shot at the chief ranger's job." He says, "Well, I have a job over here." (laughter)
- Rebecca Harriett: I'm like, "Yeah. You do." And I said – well, anyway, that was one of those, that definitely was one of those hard decisions, because this would have been an upgrade. I wasn't guaranteed it. I just knew that it was hopeful that he would even consider me for the position.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I remember my husband saying, well, he said, "Do you think you'll get it?" I said, "I don't know. I can't tell you." He said, "Do you want it?" I said, "Yeah, I do." And he said, "I'll call Catoctin and tell them."
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I've owed my husband ever since! (laughter) Periodically, he will bring that up.
- Lu Ann Jones: Now was he working—

- Rebecca Harriett: He was.
- Lu Ann Jones: —at the same park?
- Rebecca Harriett: No. He was working at Wilson’s Creek. He had actually been at Cape Lookout. And I had moved to Carver after we got married. He tells people that I left him after three months of marriage, or six months of marriage. But they were very good out there about keeping out for potential, and there was an opening at Wilson’s Creek, which was about 72 miles away. But he was law enforcement, too, and we both were in required occupancy. So, both of us had to live in our respective parks. But they were good about giving us the same days off. So, we would see each other.
- Rebecca Harriett: But then when this chief ranger thing came up, he said, well, he said, “I’ll turn it down.” I always kid, I say, “I know that was a really hard phone call to make.”
- Rebecca Harriett: He said, “That was not the hard phone call to make. The hard phone call was for me to call my mother and tell her that we were not moving back east. And that was the hard phone call to make.”
- Rebecca Harriett: But I said, man, if I don’t get this, I am never going to hear the end of this. So. But I got it. So, I was chief ranger for three years out there. And then actually, because we were, chief ranger, and then he actually got a natural resource management job, which was his background. So, he actually got a position soon after that he really wanted at Wilson’s Creek. And then I had this. So, we were released of our required occupancy and were able to live together. That’s when we actually started having children. When we started living together, we started having children. Yeah, it’s hard to have children when you don’t live together. So actually, that was when we had our first son.
- Rebecca Harriett: Midwest was, again, the region was a very good region to work in. It was much more of an approachable region than Southeast region had been. They’d been a little more, “Who are you? Don’t call me if you’re a GS-5.” Whereas the Midwest region was a little more low-key and more supportive. Because they had so many of these smaller parks. You didn’t have the big domineering Everglades and those kinds of, I think Isle Royal was probably the big one. So, they were very good at being supportive of the smaller parks, which was appreciated.
- Rebecca Harriett: So, I was out there for five years. Two as the lead and then three as the chief. And that certainly was nice to get a grade increase without having to move. So that was nice.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, at what, so you come then to Friendship Hill in Pennsylvania?
- Rebecca Harriett: Mm hmm. Yeah. My father-in-law became ill, and I needed to – he had been actually, when my husband had gotten the job at Catocin, he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer. But it had been in remission. So, things weren’t bad. He was still able to travel, and we saw him. By the

time we had been there for the five years, it had come back, and it was not good. So, we made a very concerted effort to try to transfer back closer. Again, my husband was in natural resources. But by this time, he was also talking about graduate school. To be honest with you, the park service, there were some things that he just felt he wasn't able to do within the realm of what he wanted to do. He's an ecologist. Again, he thought he needed to get his master's or doctorate. Wanted to do that. But also wanted to get back east. That was a priority.

Rebecca Harriett: He and I both started applying back east to be closer, within a day's drive of his family. So, we both started throwing out applications back there. As it turned out, Friendship Hill had both a natural resource manager's job and a supervisory park ranger site manager's job at Friendship Hill. And they came out like within just a few days of each other. So, we threw it out there, just, and to be honest with you, I didn't know a whole lot about – I'd heard of Fort Necessity, and it's managed by Fort Necessity. But had never been there to really know a whole lot.

Rebecca Harriett: But one thing that did appeal to me about Friendship Hill is I knew it was a new site. And I knew it was kind of trying to, I'd been to places that had been well established for a long time, relatively and this was new. So, there were a lot of new things going on.

Rebecca Harriett: Anyway, we both threw our applications out. And the deal was, at least how I recall it, my husband may have other, (laughter) was whoever gets the job first will take the job. And then the other person will stay home with our son. As it turned out, the supervisor was for both, for both positions. It would be the same supervisor.

Rebecca Harriett: One day I get a call. I'm interviewed, and I get offered the job.

Rebecca Harriett: So, I go home. I said, "I've been offered this job. And I think, you know." And he says, "I haven't heard anything."

Rebecca Harriett: Then a couple of days later, he gets a call, and he gets offered the job. I think by this time he had really decided that he just wasn't as enamored with the park service as I was. So, he actually, and the supervisor was very good at not, he figured out that we were together because our applications had the same address. But I have a different last name. So, it wasn't until he started that he realized that wait a minute, I can get two for one on the move. (laughter)

Rebecca Harriett: So, when he called my husband and offered him the job, he turned him down. He has called him Mud ever since. (laughs) I just reconnected with him on Facebook not too long ago. He's retired now. And after a few months, sometime this summer, we sort of reconnected through Facebook. He said, "How's Mud doing?" (laughter)

Rebecca Harriett: So, my husband went back to graduate school at West Virginia University.

- Lu Ann Jones: Uh huh. So, there was no opportunity whatsoever when you were interviewing for that job to say, “By the way, my husband has also applied for the natural resources position.”
- Rebecca Harriett: No.
- Lu Ann Jones: That would have been out of bounds.
- Rebecca Harriett: It didn’t come up. I know that it had not been announced as a dual career. And you’ve got to remember, some of the stuff was new. This whole thing of dual careers. They had been very good when I moved to Carver when they found out that I was married and that my husband worked for the park service, the superintendent, again, like I said, he was the gregarious one. He put the word out to other park superintendents. I did not do that. I just—
- Lu Ann Jones: I guess maybe like after you were hired—
- Rebecca Harriett: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: Not while you were interviewing, but after you were hired to say, “And by the way.” But that just would have been—
- Rebecca Harriett: I think, yeah, I would have felt that if I’d said something, there would have been expectation, “Oh, by the way, hire my husband, too.” My husband and I both have always tried to keep that, you know, separate. Maybe if it had been announced as a dual career position. Again, that whole term of dual career was just starting. Again, it was very nice of the superintendent from Wilson’s Creek to hire me, I mean, to be honest with you, I truly believe, I mean he brought him in laterally because he was a romantic. He thought we should be close together. He wanted to help the kids out. And very generous, and I was certainly very appreciative of it. But I never wanted to go and expect. I didn’t because I feel like we chose this career. We chose this path. I didn’t want there to be expectations that I expected them to do stuff for us that they needed to be based on merit alone and stuff.
- Rebecca Harriett: Actually, I told my husband, I said, “You don’t have to turn it down.” It really was his decision. I mean personally, I would have been happy for us to have moved and found a caretaker. We had done that in Missouri. And I was fine with that. I mean, you don’t want to have it all the time, but I felt, you know, people do it every day. We have childcare every day.
- Rebecca Harriett: But by this time, my husband really had started thinking very seriously about graduate school. I think he felt that he really wanted to get that master’s. And he’d actually already started his master’s. He’d already taken some graduate courses in Missouri. So, he had already sort of started down that path, and it meant a lot to him. That meant more to him than the park service career. So, I don’t think it was truly a hardship on his part. In fact, several people did tell him that he was making a mistake by giving up a government job to go back to graduate – in fact, I believe his immediate supervisor said, “I can’t believe you’re doing this.” But I think by this

time he was pretty determined to go back to graduate school, and also felt that somebody needed to be more with our son.

Rebecca Harriett: But yeah, my supervisor gave him a lot of grief over turning it down. So. (laughter)

Lu Ann Jones: Well, what were the advantages of going to a place where it was a pretty new site?

Rebecca Harriett: It was exciting. It was. It was really fun to build something from the ground up. The house was being restored. It was going through that restoration process, so it wasn't open to the public when I first got there. But the big part of my job was to get it ready for the opening. And so, to plan the grand opening, to get the interpretive program in place. There had been other folks there before, but they did a lot of outdoor nature programs, which is great, because it was beautiful landscape to be in. But you know, to work with Harpers Ferry Center on the brochure. You know, things we take for granted. But those things have to start somewhere. So, to work with the writing team from Harpers Ferry Center, to work with the exhibit team. I mean, I knew about Harpers Ferry Center, but I had never worked on a project. I knew they existed, obviously. But I didn't know, I had never really worked on a project with them.

Rebecca Harriett: So, there were actually three major things that I worked with Harpers Ferry Center on. One was a brochure. In fact, the writer, every time I see her, I always think of, I see her all the time now and I think of that brochure. And then the exhibit, which was very high-tech, and it was already in the planning stages. I kind of came in in the middle of that, so that the concept design of the exhibit had already been decided on. That had already been, so it wasn't like that was new. But I did come in with the details of text and looking at pictures. So again, working and being part of that team to see how exhibits come together. I mean, it was like a lot of folks. How are these things created? So, to go to Harpers Ferry, we went to Harpers Ferry a lot to meet with the planning team. Of course, they would come out. So, to have that interaction with Harpers Ferry Center was invaluable, because I mean they are the media, interpretive media center. It was a lot of fun. It was a different aspect of the park service.

Rebecca Harriett: And then the big thing was the talking head, the Albert Gallatin talking head. This was a park who had more money than, they were, it was a congressional earmark where it just, this huge amount of money. So instead of doing a regular film that you see at most things, they decided to do this hologram of Albert Gallatin. So that whole process of the talking head. It was cool, but it was very high tech. (laughter) And I just remember, oh, my gosh, you know, I feel like I need to be an electrical engineer. But again, that whole seeing something from the ground up was, or at least most of the ground up. Then having the grand opening. And then literally having the exhibits installed the day, the morning, and



they're leaving as the people are coming through the front door! (laughter)  
And it's like, don't do that to us again!

Lu Ann Jones: I don't know any exhibit that that hasn't happened. (laughs) Any museum.

Rebecca Harriett: I remember during the grand opening weekend, and I was, let's see, this would have been, I can't remember, it was in the fall. So, I was probably six months pregnant with our second son. I was pretty big. I remember the hologram went down, or it wouldn't do automatic. So, I had to do the, you had to time it to hit the proper sequence of buttons to make it all come on like every 15 minutes. So, I just remember, I'm going to end up having this baby behind this wall. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) Because I kept having to watch my watch. And to go do the sequence of button pushing that I needed to do. I'm like oh my gosh, I'm going to have, you know. I was just running everywhere. But it was fun. That, to me, was a new--and to get those standard operating procedures, just sort of the basic of how you run this place. Then of course with it becoming operational, hiring the staff that comes with that. And the programs. And we also did an audio tour. So, working with a contractor on the audio tour. How do you make an empty house engaging? That was a huge challenge, because the community had wanted it to be full of this antique furniture that they had remembered from the 1950s but had absolutely nothing to do with the period of significance that we were interpreting. So how do you make this engaging? It was a challenge. We looked for dirt on Albert Gallatin. He was a pretty straight arrow. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) It was like gosh, can't there be somewhere, an affair, something. Just give us a little something here. (laughter) But anyway, so.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, what do you think, like by this point in your career, that you felt like that you were good at? What were your strengths and maybe things you were beginning to say, these are things I need to -- well you were always kind of building your skills. But what do you think were kind of your strengths at that point?

Rebecca Harriett: Well, I think I felt that I was grounded in a lot of the technical aspects of the different jobs. I felt very confident of park operations. I could run a park. I mean, as far as what the visitor sees, I can provide excellent services to the visitors. I can protect the resources. I know legally what I need to do to protect resources. I think that I started to, and I had supervisory, small staffs. Nothing huge. But I think, with small staffs I think I did well. I tried to always be a supportive supervisor. I felt like a lot of people had provided me with a lot of opportunities. So, I wanted to pay that forward to others, and so I felt good about that. I always wanted to be a team player. I loved, I was acting chief ranger for Fort Necessity and Friendship Hill after the opening of Friendship Hill. Because the chief ranger who called my husband Mud, the superintendent actually transferred. So, the chief ranger became the acting superintendent. He asked me to serve as the acting chief ranger. Now I had been a chief ranger before, but this was over two sites. A little bit broader experience

there. And really enjoyed, again, because even though I worked under Fort Necessity, I didn't really know a whole lot, other than just sort of visitor type. So, I was able to delve into that history, which was totally different from.

Rebecca Harriett: So, I think, I felt like there were some areas I needed more work on was budgeting and actually the politics. That was something that I think I had sort of been sheltered from a little bit. The whole political arena of the park stuff. And lands was also an important thing that I hadn't really delved into. So, I felt very confident about operations. I could run a park. I knew how to do that. But then that whole community relations, politics.

Rebecca Harriett: I could do a budget, but this whole thing of this long-term, and then trying to get the budget at a higher level is a totally different thing than just submitting to your boss, "This is what I need to run my operation for the year." And then you get that money and then you spend it. This whole thing of, that strategic planning piece of, okay, how do I look out more than just next year, but the next year, and get those priorities in place.

Rebecca Harriett: Anyway, so I started thinking that those were areas that, and certainly when you become superintendent, those are the skills, that's great. Because you can run a park and you need to have that foundation. But it really becomes the community relations, the politics, being able to maneuver. You know, how do you manage the regional office? (laughs) You know, how do you, I felt good about managing downward. I needed to work on managing upward. I think that there was a shift in there somewhere, well, probably about the time I started thinking about looking at superintendencies. After I'd been at Friendship Hill four years, I think I thought okay, I'm ready to make that next leap.

Rebecca Harriett: Actually, I had applied at Booker T. Washington. I had actually applied for the superintendency there when I was chief ranger at Carver. I had put in for the superintendency, and didn't get it, obviously. So, after Friendship Hill, that opportunity presented itself again. And I had visited the site and I loved the site. It's just a beautiful little site. And again, there's just, like you said, personality. They're just places that you go, and you think oh, I can work there. I'd like to work there. And having visited that site, I had felt that. And I thought oh, this would be a great place to work. And so that had always kind of stayed with me. So, when the opportunity presented itself again, I threw the application out there.

Rebecca Harriett: And I actually did talk to the regional director. I said, "This is a position that I'm very interested in." That's probably the first time I'd ever really done that, that I had taken the opportunity on a visit that she had made to the site.

Rebecca Harriett: Actually, the superintendent at that time knew I was interested and said, "You need to let her know." And I was probably the type that wouldn't normally have done that. I just don't like to, you know. And she said, "Here's what we're going to do. You're going to be walking with her."

We're going to show her around. Then I and the rest of the folks, we're going to walk away, and you're going to stay, and you're going to tell her that you're interested in this." (laughter)

Rebecca Harriett: And I said, okay. And I did. And she was very nice. She was very kind about it. And she said she hoped to see my application. And obviously couldn't guarantee because it was competitive. And I said, well, thank you for—

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I guess I was wondering. At a certain point it seems like in certain positions that I would assume there would be some kind of personal intervention. Not to say, "You'll get the job," but some kind of—

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: But some kind of, that it wouldn't just be whoever, whatever application comes over the transom.

Rebecca Harriett: Right.

Lu Ann Jones: That you'd be trying to shape the applicant pool and things like that.

Rebecca Harriett: Right.

Lu Ann Jones: At certain levels. So that makes a lot of sense to me.

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. And the superintendent at Fort Necessity and Friendship Hill, she was a go-getter. You know, she had been around; in fact, she had been my interpretive skills trainer eons ago. And so, she, even though she didn't hire me, the chief ranger did, she obviously approved. So, she was always good for advice. Sometimes she'd be probably a little more assertive or aggressive than I was comfortable with. But this was a job I wanted, and I had not gotten it before, and I had been disappointed at not getting it. So, I thought well, you know, this is probably, again, there's nothing wrong with just letting – I thought well, as a supervisor, I like for someone to let me know. Now if they harass me about it, they're probably not going to get it. (laughs) But there's nothing wrong with someone saying, or calling and saying, "I'm very interested in this position. Can you tell me more about it?" I actually appreciate that. That tells me that they're mature and they're thinking about okay, is this a fit for me and my family and those kinds of things. So, I kind of said, okay, how would I feel about this? And I thought well, I kind of like it. So, I'm going to take this opportunity, and it worked. I'm not saying that was the whole thing. I did go in for an interview.

Lu Ann Jones: Once you got that position, what kind of training did you start to get at that point?

Rebecca Harriett: Well, they were good about, there was at that time they had a one-week called Introduction to the Superintendency. And I can't remember, it wasn't like right immediately. But sometime within the first probably year I had that. Had it at Shenandoah. And it was great because all the regional directors were there, which was interesting in itself. There was the

superintendent of Shenandoah, the former director, deputy of the park, well, the current deputy director, John Reynolds, and the former deputy director of the National Park Service. These were the instructors. Which was huge. I mean, I knew who these people were. And they pretty much were like, “This is what we want to see in a superintendent.”

Rebecca Harriett: One thing that they really drilled, if I got nothing out of that one week, was the policy. I mean, I obviously knew about policy. I had worked with policy. But it was like, there’s a reason these books are out there. They’re for you to use. And they seemed to be somewhat frustrated that some superintendents didn’t use them. (laughs) And in fact, they were just like, “Read the policy! Read the book! Read the book!” That was kind of drilled into us, is that you need to do this, and so we would have all kinds of exercises. I mean, a lot of case studies.

Rebecca Harriett: And I remember the, I mean, the superintendent of—

[END OF TRACK 4]

[START OF TRACK 5]

Rebecca Harriett: —of Everglades came up and did a case study about Hurricane Andrew. I mean, so these were real life, and these were high, what I considered high-level folks, telling me as a superintendent, “These are my expectations of you as a superintendent.”

Rebecca Harriett: That certainly wasn’t the only thing. That region, and I think a lot of regions do this with new superintendents coming in, you know, we went to the regional office. They introduced us to the players, and who our contacts were for budgets or lands or whatever. So, you kind of got to put those faces with names. And at that point, too, there had been a reorganization in the park service. So, the regions were developing these leadership councils. Now Northeast region had combined, you know, it was the old Mid-Atlantic and old North Atlantic. So, they combined into this huge region. So, we were kind of divided up into clusters or sub-clusters. And the work group that I was in was the Virginia sub-cluster. And so, people like Bill Wade and he was at Shenandoah. And so that was sort of the group, the team, that you, of colleagues.

Rebecca Harriett: They also had a mentor program. The then-superintendent at Colonial was assigned to me. And he was assigned. It wasn’t a choice. But he and I hit it off. I had a great deal of respect for Alec. And of course, Colonial had been one of those parks that meant a lot to me growing up. So, he was very good at being available when something would come up and I’m not sure where to go, you know, I could pick up that phone.

Rebecca Harriett: But then in that Virginia group, there were certain superintendents that you knew what their backgrounds were. So, I knew for cultural resource stuff, Cindy McLeod at Richmond at that time, was a person that you could get good, solid, cultural resource management advice from her. So, you did learn to depend on your network.

- Rebecca Harriett: With these clusters, or sub-clusters, they had their ups and downs. But I'd say for the most part, I lucked out and got a good one. I mean once in a while there'd be little, especially budgets time, but for the most part, we were very supportive and helpful to each other. I mean, I felt like I could pick up the phone and call, and I hope they eventually with me, too, as I'd been there longer. So, I thought the Northeast region did a good job of—
- Rebecca Harriett: And there were some other classes. There was one called Managers Institute for Public Policy. That was a phenomenal class. I mean, it really talked about the politics. And I will say that of all the things, that was probably the one that, I'm a realist, I know it exists. I mean, it's a reality. It's part of the job. And you kind of have to, but sometimes you just go, really? (laughs) When you're dealing with Congress and stuff. But it's part of the job and you have to – but some people love it. I don't love it. I do it because I know it's important in the preservation of the park. But it's, you know, going to see my congressman is not one of my favorite things to do. (laughter) I just, because I don't know.
- Lu Ann Jones: Just like you're playing a game with them.
- Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I do it, but it's just not the highest of importance. To me, it's not. And especially now since none of them are doing anything. (laughter) It's like – you know. So, but that was a great course to go to.
- Rebecca Harriett: But again, I think the region did a good job of, and I always felt that the deputy regional director, Sandy Walter, she was always very accessible. Very busy, so I was always respectful of her time. But she knew if I called that it was something that I really needed. But I tried not to do that, I tried to work at the lowest level I could to not bother her. But at the same time, I always felt I could call her.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, what were some of the like management challenges that you had at Booker T. Washington?
- Rebecca Harriett: Well, it was a small park. It had gone through like 16 superintendents in this very short period of time. So, there had really not been this consistency. And in the park service, it takes so long to get anything done. When you have that break of leadership over and over and over again, and everybody comes in with a different – it was a demoralized staff. They're like, why don't people love us? (laughs) Not my predecessor, but several superintendents before had been placed there because they had done bad things other places. So, they were kind of dumped. It's like, we'll put them there. They can't do much harm. Well, they did do harm, because they did harm to the community and the relationship between the park and the community.
- Rebecca Harriett: My predecessor, I don't know if you knew Bill Gwaltney, he came in as the superintendent. And he had a wonderful experience and was well-known in the park service, and a very positive person. So, I think he came in with a lot of fresh ideas. And they sort of like, oh, great, finally we have

someone who will be good for the park. And he was, but he was only there a very short time because his dream park came open somewhere else. So, I just remember they were just like, not only were we a dumping ground, but we finally get somebody who we think is really going to lead us out of this morass, and then they leave to go to their dream park.

Rebecca Harriett: So, I would say the first couple of years of my time at Booker T was just trying to convince them that I wasn't going to leave anytime soon. (laughs) I mean, I think they were, they felt like they were that steppingstone park. So, I don't think it was until I bought land and we built a house that they were like oh, well maybe she is going to stay longer than the one year or whatever.

Rebecca Harriett: And the whole thing of interpreting slavery was a challenge. Bill had gotten that ball rolling. You can't talk about Booker T. Washington's childhood without talking about slavery.

Lu Ann Jones: Right.

Rebecca Harriett: However, because you didn't have that leadership in doing that and it's an uncomfortable topic. And if you haven't trained the staff to deal with the controversy of interpreting, especially in an area who still is fighting the Civil War. So, there was a reluctance on the part of the interpretive staff to delve into that. Bill was starting down that path, but it's easier to fall back to arts and crafts. It's easier to talk about making a basket than it is to talk about being enslaved. So, I kind of picked up where Bill left off and said we can still do those other things, but they have to be in context of the bigger picture of the influence of slavery on Booker T. Washington's philosophy as he became an educator. So, trying to make that combination of doing the fun stuff, but talking about the hard, hard things.

Rebecca Harriett: The community took the park for granted. I think a lot of communities take their, especially small parks, for granted. They're kind of always there. But not a whole lot of support, per se. So just trying to, again, be there for community. Being out in the community. Living in the community. That was another thing, these predecessors had lived in Roanoke, and even though it's not that far away, in the locals' minds of – by this time, too, they had said well boy, the park service doesn't care about the park because they can't keep anybody there, so it must not be worth. So, I think trying to build up the staff's, they had a great sense of pride in the park. They loved the park. But they needed someone to be out in the community promoting the park and being proud to be there, too. So, a lot of community work. A lot of staff work.

Rebecca Harriett: Then we had some land issues. Which actually was very difficult. But also, and again, small park. But if someone's threatening to build 50 townhouses on your boundary that you can see from the cabin, that's a problem. I don't care what park you work in. And so again, trying to build up that local political support to say, you know, there's other ways to do

this. We don't have to do it right on the boundary. There's other ways to work that.

Rebecca Harriett: Actually, we did a general management plan, which I'd never done a general management plan before. That was a great way to get the public or the community involved and to, you know, see what their, but also to explain our parameters. We are an agency of laws.

[END OF TRACK 5]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

ANPR Oral History Project

Rebecca Harriett

23 October 2015

Interview conducted by  
Lu Ann Jones

Transcribed by  
Teresa Bergen



[START OF TRACK 1]

Lu Ann Jones: So why don't you give me your full name and your permission, please, to record this interview? And then I'll do the full introduction here.

Rebecca Harriett: Okay. My name is Rebecca Harriett. I do give you permission to use this oral history tape for the National Park Service.

Lu Ann Jones: Great. This is Lu Ann Jones, historian with the park history program. We are here today, October 23, 2015, at Black Mountain at the 37<sup>th</sup> Ranger Rendezvous for the Association of National Park Rangers. And the third party in the interview is—

Thea Garrett: Thea Garrett. I'm a seasonal for Acadia National Park.

Lu Ann Jones: Excellent. This is a second session with Rebecca as I discovered about a month ago that some of her interview from last year's Rendezvous had not made it from the recorder to the computer, apparently. So, thank you very much for coming back to make this up. I think at the part where the recordings got deleted or did not get transferred, you were at Booker T. Washington. The staff, you were reinvigorating a staff that had felt neglected for a while.

Rebecca Harriett: Mm hmm.

Lu Ann Jones: And you were there, I think you were there for—

Rebecca Harriett: Thirteen years.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow. For 13 years. I think we were kind of assessing what that meant to you, and kind of meant to the park. And then how you were looking to move to another position.

Rebecca Harriett: Okay. Well, Booker T. Washington National Monument was a park that I wanted very much to go to. I had applied to it actually several times, and finally got it. (laughs) But it was a park that, because it had like 16 superintendents in three or four years, it was really one of those – counting actings – that felt like the park service had rejected them as a park. They felt that they had become a dumping ground. They felt they had been, oh, send them to Booker T., they can't get in trouble there (laughs) type thing. So actually, my predecessor, who was Bill Gwaltney, who did come in with some wonderful ideas and just very energetic, and really raised their hopes that they'd finally gotten someone. But his dream job was out west, and that opportunity presented itself, so he left. Again, the staff really, because they had at least gotten their hopes up (laughs) and then rejected again. So, they certainly were very timid about okay, who is this person and how long is she going to stay and those kinds of things.

Rebecca Harriett: So, I gave a commitment to the regional office of a minimum of five years, or at least five years. But actually, grew to love the area. It was a beautiful area of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Starting a family or had a young family. And you get involved in the community. And one thing, it being my first superintendency, you learn that it's really hard to come in

and do really positive, sustainable things in a short period of time in this agency. You really have to have strategic planning. You have to have a vision. And it takes time. It's not something you come in and whip things up in a frenzy and then leave if you want it to continue. I was very comfortable going there and then trying to win them over, so to speak. (laughs) I think when I bought land and built a house, I think that helped.

Thea Garrett: That signaled.

Rebecca Harriett: That signaled that I wasn't going to be leaving anytime soon. Of course, now after 13 years they may have said, gosh, we wanted her to stay long, but we didn't mean that long. But no, they were a great staff and they really did have the passion and a love of that park that they just felt had been neglected for a while.

Lu Ann Jones: In addition to just kind of signaling I'm here for a while, were there other things that you did as a kind of a new supervisor to acknowledge to the staff you've been through a difficult time?

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah, I mean certainly in any new position, but especially as a superintendent, both that park and the current park is at least the first year, you just listen. I mean, it's really a listening session. It's hearing people out. Hearing the good, the bad, and the ugly. People need to talk, and at first, they're a little hesitant. This isn't one of those things you walk in the first day and say, okay, tell me all your problems. But I found that asking questions from this very sincere desire to learn about the park and knowing that they had a very sincere desire to preserve that park and not feel that they had not done that. I think it took a little while, but they began to see that I was genuinely interested in what they had done and what they thought about the park. They certainly had wonderful ideas.

Rebecca Harriett: I will say there were a couple of times where people would say, "Why are you asking these questions? You're the superintendent, you just go out there." They were used to people just coming in and making [decisions], not asking them questions. And so, it was like—

Rebecca Harriett: But I think, you know, with time they realized I was very sincere in wanting their opinion, because a lot of them had been there for a very long time, and because they cared about the place. So, it took a while. Relationship building.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes.

Rebecca Harriett: Then also, bringing the division chief, again, a very small staff, 10 people, but you still had your division chiefs. And bringing them in and being able to make work plans and strategic planning. And involving them in a budget and not just saying, "Well, this is your budget. Make it work." It was like, okay, what are your needs? What are your plans for your division? I think they were like okay, well, this is interesting. (laughs) But you know and wanting to be a part. So, I hope that I built a team atmosphere there. That certainly was my goal.

Lu Ann Jones: Am I remembering correctly that there was like a land acquisition?

Rebecca Harriett: There was. Yes. Mm hmm. Yup.

Lu Ann Jones: And that was a particular challenge?

Rebecca Harriett: Yes. Well, fortunately, one of the good things, and I had never gone through this before, was when I got to Booker T. Washington, the park was in the queue for a long-overdue general management plan. It had been one of those sites established in the '50s with a very broad legislative history. It had a master plan that had long since been completed, you know, with a Mission 66 visitor's center and those kinds of things. So there really wasn't an overarching management document.

Rebecca Harriett: So, we were in the queue for a general management plan that actually was going to be a couple of years out. Well, lo and behold somehow, this is rare in the park service. Usually, you get pushed further out. But for some reason, another park dropped out for the next year. So, we were asked were we ready to take on a general management plan. I said absolutely. I wasn't one to turn down money or something like this. Actually, when you have that kind of big picture planning, that really brings, it can bring a staff together because they have something to rally around. They have something to have input, if they're included in the document. They certainly have ideas that they would like to see put forth. And that's an opportunity for that to occur. Even though there were times in the middle of the general management plan I was like oh, gosh, I can't believe I volunteered to, I can't believe I jumped on this. (laughs) Because it was more the contractor, trying to get the contractor to move on the work. But as part of that, we're in an area, it's a small rural area. But it was near a lake, a resort area, that was rapidly growing. So, you had this development that's creeping closer and closer to the boundary. And so, what was a historic tobacco farm from the 1800s is going to be surrounded by a suburb, basically, if, you know, there's not something done.

Rebecca Harriett: So as part of the general management plan, we identified a view shed analysis that we needed. And it wasn't quite as complicated and scientific as Blue Ridge Parkway, because we didn't have the money for that. (laughter) But we were able to get some funding to do some aerials and do some know, GIS work. So, we identified several parcels that were within the view shed of the actual farmstead, sort of the core of the park that we felt were a priority. The landowner (laughs) typical fashion, wanted to sell it to the highest bidder, which was certainly their prerogative. Just being able to get them to agree that it could be in the general management plan, again, takes relationship building. You definitely knew that at any point they could pull out, because this was going to require legislation if it were to go through. Even though we had a supportive congressman, very conservative, but supportive. As long as the landowners were okay. At any point, they could have picked up the telephone and said, "You know, I've changed my mind. I don't want to do this anymore" and we would have

been dead in the water. But I think they also knew that, again, I think they thought our pockets were deeper than they were. (laughter) They'd go, "Oh, yeah, sell it to the federal [government]." They obviously didn't know acquisition.

Rebecca Harriett: So, they allowed us to keep it in the general management plan. So, once it got into the general management plan, then the congressman was able to introduce the legislation to move forward on the acquisition. And we couldn't, the park did not have money. So, The Conservation Fund – thank you for partners, because it's our partners that can move faster than we can. And so, The Conservation Fund. After a couple of years. It took a while to purchase it from the landowner. I'll be honest with you, once I knew they had the title in hand, I didn't have to look out every day as I left for work to see if a bulldozer was on the property. (laughter) Because it was right on the hill. It looked right down onto the farmstead. It would have just been terrible if condominiums and hotels and things like that would have been built on top of the hotel looking down to the farm. That just wouldn't have been very good.

Rebecca Harriett: It is interesting, though, that several years later, and this family that had it, they had inherited it through a deceased relative. So, they really weren't farming it. But they were, I remember, you just never knew. Whenever you saw them, you know, one minute you were kind of their best friend and then the next minute you were being accused of things. You just never knew what mood they were in.

Rebecca Harriett: I remember being called the day The Conservation Fund signed the document. She called me and she's like just how much she appreciated working with us and The Conservation Fund, she just couldn't say enough good about them. I don't know what deal they had. They must, I mean, yeah, I don't know what deal they did. But she was incredibly enthusiastic and happy. I'm like, yes! So, I like it when there's not only when we win, but when we win and everybody's happy. I was like, yes, okay, she got what she wanted. The Conservation Fund got some pretty good publicity out of it because usually they deal with a lot of large natural landscapes. But this was an African American site that they needed to kind of show that we're not just saving the Yellowstones, so they got good publicity. Of course, we got the landscape protected that we wanted.

Rebecca Harriett: About two years later, the same person basically had been telling people in the community that the park service had taken their land. (laughter) I was like, I said, we bought it from The Conservation Fund. They sold it to The Conservation Fund. We didn't even buy it. Anyway, so that just shows you; I think what happened, the land values in that area, even though they got a good price at that time, the land values were just accelerating before the crash. Yeah, I'm sure if they had held out to a private, they probably could have made a half a million dollars. But anyway, so, it just shows you how—

- Lu Ann Jones: [unclear]
- Rebecca Harriett: That's right. They do. They do. So, but yeah, that was a good feeling. That really was a good feeling to, even though it was a small piece of land, it was an important piece of land for that resource. So, you definitely felt like, yes! Did something good today! (laughs) I did something for the resource today!
- Lu Ann Jones: Could you also talk about interpretation there and sort of some of the challenges of interpreting slavery, which still deals with that?
- Rebecca Harriett: Right. Yeah. I will say that, and having visited the site prior to Bill Gwaltney going there, it was very much an emphasis on the farming, the crafts, the agricultural aspects. The farm animals. Even though certainly in the film and in your basic tour you can't not mention that Booker T. Washington was born a slave. I mean, he wrote *Up from Slavery* and you can't not mention that. But I would say it would be, and we certainly used that term, so we didn't totally skirt it. But it was sort of, he was born a slave here and these are the types of things that he would have done. But it was not put in the broader context of slavery, of American slavery.
- Rebecca Harriett: And I will say that my predecessor, I have to give credit to Bill. In the short time that he was there, he reintroduced the staff to a broader concept of where Booker T. Washington fit into slavery in American history as a whole. He did a lot of training in the staff on this. I will say when I got there, there was still concerns about, from the staff, of it being controversial. I mean, we were in Virginia. Certainly, I understood a little bit where they were coming from. Because I remember, let's see, I came in the spring, whatever year it was, I don't even remember. And I was going on a tour. It was a homes tour. Actually, the park had really kind of fought to be on the tour. It was through the local historical association. They were opening up all these beautiful homes, the Southern plantation homes that were privately owned that were not normally open. So, it was an opportunity. It was a fundraiser for them.
- Rebecca Harriett: We got the park, at least on the map. Some of them wondered why we were on there because we were open anyway. And I said, well, I think it fits us into the broader context.
- Rebecca Harriett: But I'll never forget, one day I was on my own and was going to take the tour. Because I wanted to get into some of these houses, too. I mean, I love historic houses and wanted to get into places that I knew I wouldn't get into.
- Rebecca Harriett: I'll never forget a woman who was taking tickets at one of the plantation homes. When I went to do this, she says, "You're the new superintendent over at Booker T, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." I said, "I am." I said, "I'm real happy to be here" and stuff.
- Rebecca Harriett: Well, there were two things she said that really just struck me. She didn't mean it to be insulting.

- Rebecca Harriett: She says, “Oh,” she says, “I thought you’d be black.” (laughter) I said, “Well,” I said, “this is American history.” Why do you all harp, we really had not delved into it that much yet, “Why do you always talk about him being a slave?” I said, “Well, because he was.” (laughter)
- Rebecca Harriett: So that just showed me that the interpreters who were from the area were going to need some support and training to feel more confident about interpreting.
- Rebecca Harriett: Also, one thing that had occurred, they had gotten very comfortable with the crafts. And there’s no question people loved the basket making and the quilting and the soap making and all those things. And Bill had sort of done away with those things, because I think he felt they were a distraction. But I also felt that to the staff, that was also important to them. So, I thought well, can we do both? Can we find a, not make it a distraction but an enhancement. They can be doing these things. Not necessarily talking about doing these things. But still talk about slavery and Washington’s experience. Because he writes about it. I mean, it’s straight from his book. It’s not like he didn’t write about it. But you still have those props, and maybe that brings a little more comfort to doing something that the interpreters did, while they tell this very difficult story. But still doing something. So, I think we tried to blend that a little bit. Not make it the focus.
- Rebecca Harriett: And to be honest with you, I think if I’d gotten rid of the farm animals, there would have been a mutiny. Everybody loved the animals. And they did make the place come alive. In fact, that was one of the first questions that when I got there. Evidently there’d been conversations about doing away with the farm animals. And that was the first question I had. “Are you going to do away with the farm animals?”
- Rebecca Harriett: I’m like, “Well, I don’t think so. I need to see how much they’re costing us.” (laughter) The superintendent looks at the budget. But to be honest with you, they were, to me they made the place come alive. It would have been pretty dull if you didn’t have the chickens and the geese and the horses. I mean, they certainly, to me, they added to the landscape. But we did emphasize the historic breeds. We sort of made a little bit bigger thing of that. That would have been the appropriate. And so, I think that enhanced that part of the story.
- Rebecca Harriett: I think again, training was key. It was getting the folks; I think the reason they didn’t talk about it as much because they didn’t know as much. But we sent them to Williamsburg because they have, or had, a wonderful program there. And still do, as far as I know. And finding that training. There’s Gilder Lehrman Institute on the slave trade. And those things are really scholarly type trainings that’s not just your surface. I mean, it really gets into the nuts and bolts and the politics and the economics. And providing that information so that they can at least have that in their toolbox, so they’re not out there on their own with this because there

certainly were people that you know, this happened, I talked to the folks at Williamsburg. I mean, there are certainly folks that would start these tours and leave. Both black and white. I mean just either (laughs) you know and would leave because of the content. And I would just kind of tell the interpreters, you know, that's okay, that's their choice. We still have a responsibility to tell the story. You know, you just can't say, "Booker was a slave," and go on from that. Because it was at the very core of why he did what he did when he became an educator. So, you can't make, you can't not make that connection.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did you—oh, [unclear] talking about—

Rebecca Harriett: No, okay. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: I think we might have also talked about just kind of your relationship with the regional office and kind of learning to connect to regional directors. Was this the first time that you had kind of been in that relationship?

Rebecca Harriett: That's correct. Yes, yes. Well, certainly, yes, yes. I mean, I had been a chief ranger at another park, and a site manager. So certainly, I had contact with staff people in regional offices and stuff, but certainly, I wasn't supervised by a regional director or a deputy regional director. It was more of I would get advice from another chief ranger in the region, or program managers, where you don't really have line authority. When I came to Booker T. Washington, it was when the park service was undergoing their reorganization where they went from 10 regions to seven regions, which was for the old Mid-Atlantic, North Atlantic regions, they were combined. So, you went from roughly 36 or whatever the makeup was into this mega-region that just is huge. So, all of a sudden, the poor deputy directors supervising 80 superintendents. Which is like, really? (laughs) Oh, gosh, that's just, I can't imagine that.

Rebecca Harriett: So, the regions were combining, and so going through that angst. But I will say that the then deputy regional director, I never felt like I couldn't pick up the phone and call her. I just felt like if I needed to talk to her, I could do that.

Rebecca Harriett: They did have an orientation. Once they got settled in their new Philadelphia office, they did have an orientation. So that was good. I think all regions now, when new superintendents come to a region, they have those orientations. Which are very good, because these are the people that you need to work with and work through or around or whatever. (laughs) But it is important for a superintendent to have that rapport, because you certainly don't want to go around them. (laughs) You certainly don't want the Washington office calling your regional director about you. You don't want that to happen. (laughter) But I didn't go up there a whole lot. It was mostly by telephone, just because of the distance.

Rebecca Harriett: But I will say that one thing that the regional director – Marie Rust was the regional director when I was in the Northeast Region – she was very,

very big on, at least an annual conference. Of course, park service looks down on those things now, which is sad. Because that was where we all connected. I mean, that was an opportunity for the regional director to have their platform for connecting with us in person. It was also a time for us to see who the superintendents were up in New England that we never saw.

Lu Ann Jones: Right.

Rebecca Harriett: It was more than just fun and games. it really was an opportunity to look at regional issues. And yes, I know, you can teleconference, and you can have phone calls and all that. And that's fine to a point. But you know, not to be able to get together once a year. Really? Really? And then you wonder why we feel so disconnected? I mean, it's—(sighs) We certainly tried to have them in locations that were easy to get to and stuff. So, I think that's a loss, that the park service has really discouraged conferences. I think that's why people feel disconnected.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you create a set of peers, other superintendents that you looked to—

Rebecca Harriett: Yes. Absolutely. Yes. And with the reorganization with the region, the names of these things, but they had clusters (laughs) which was basically two, well, there were three clusters. There was the new, basically it was the old North Atlantic Region. Then there was the old Mid-Atlantic Region that was a cluster, which was still pretty big. And then bless their hearts, West Virginia was out there by themselves, because Senator Byrd did not want his parks to be in any kind of grouping. He was evidently opposed to the reorganization. So, he wanted to make sure that West Virginia national parks didn't get lumped into whatever, he didn't want us lumped in. So, they sort of their own cluster, which basically was New River Gorge. Harpers Ferry was in another region, so it was New River Gorge was a cluster into themselves, which was interesting. Well actually, I think the western Pennsylvania parks, for some reason their politics didn't want them to mix with the others. I don't know. (laughs) It was a weird, it was a political setup.

Rebecca Harriett: But anyway, not to be outdone with the clusters, though, then the smaller groups were sub-clusters. We used to call ourselves clots sometimes. You know, we're the Virginia clot. But that was the group of the Virginia parks that were in the Northeast Region that really coalesced. There were seven of us. We would meet quarterly, and that was where we would work on state issues. You know, state agencies don't know or care, well, this park is in Virginia but it's in the National Capital Region, and this park is in Virginia, but it's in the Northeast. They really don't care about that. And they don't want to hear from 14 different parks, either, on issues. So, when it came to transportation issues, tourism issues, those common, SHPO [State Historic Preservation Office] things. We tried to work together as a unit, basically to keep those folks from being so confused and hearing 12



different things. We could speak as one voice when we were dealing with the state. So, I think that worked out, but that gave us an—

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Rebecca Harriett: —opportunity to get together. I enjoyed those meetings. We would get together and look at budgets together. We would set priorities together. There was a real commonality and camaraderie with those quarterly meetings and stuff. I don't know if they're still happening in the old Northeast Region. But I do know that in the National Capital Region, because we're so small and we're close together, we do meet every other month, and we have a regional leadership council. So, it is all the superintendents, all the directorate. So, we meet on a regular basis. But yeah, that's where you forge your friendships and your colleagues and your mentors.

Rebecca Harriett: When I became a superintendent, they did have a mentoring program for superintendents. So, they would, in fact, Alec Gould, who was a superintendent then at Colonial, was my mentor. And so, you know, I could pick up the phone and, [say,] "This is going on. What do I do?" type thing. But you also learn from the other superintendents, you knew different people had different specialties. So, I know that Cindy McLeod who was at Richmond, now at Independence, her background was cultural resource management. So, if I had a cultural resource issue, she was who I normally would go to. You find out who's been through it and who has been successful, and you end up picking up the phone to call those people. So, you really have a network of mentors. It's not just one.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, when did you decide that it was going to be time to go to the next challenge? Rebecca was one of these people, it was wonderful to listen to you because she really, there was a point where she kind of planned – was going to carry out that plan. So, at what point did you decide I've learned what I can learn here, I've given to Booker T. [unclear] what I can give to this site, and it's time to go to the next challenge?

Rebecca Harriett: Right. Well, I've always had a plan. I've always had multiple plans. I had plan A, B, C, D, all the way to Z. (laughter) This doesn't work, then I go here. First of all, Booker T. Washington was just a wonderful site to work at. It was, again, an incredibly, a wonderful staff. People that I still am in contact with as friends, and people that I care about deeply. But you do reach a point, especially after a GMP [general management plan], and as I tried to explain to my husband, it's kind of like staying in first grade when you're ready or staying in elementary school when you're ready for high school, or high school to college, you know. But there were family issues as far as kids in school. Nothing dramatic, but just the normal. So, I was probably ready to go several years prior to my actually starting to look, just because of, again, the kids in school. You try to figure out that magic time when you think you can take them out of school and move without

them hating you for the rest of your life or without them going into therapy. So, you're looking for that magic time. I will say that probably, you know, I definitely stayed longer than, if I had been single, than I would have, for family reasons. And don't regret it. But at some point, I think I did say, you know, I either need to retire or move on. I can't keep doing this.

Rebecca Harriett: So, I started bringing home the applications. Let's see. Guam got nixed very quickly. I left that on the kitchen table for a while. That didn't go over well. (laughs) I think the hardest one was Cape Lookout. I'd always wanted to go back and be superintendent at Cape Lookout. That was my, that's my national park. (laughs) Find your park, that's my park. My first park. My husband I met there, and we got married there. So, I always dreamed of being the superintendent there. But as fate would have it, that didn't work out, which is the way it goes. But at some point, I said you know, I've really got to start looking.

Rebecca Harriett: Harpers Ferry was a place that had been – I kind of had like the list of five or six that I kind of knew that my husband would go for. So kept an eye out. Harpers Ferry was on that list, and so when that opportunity presented itself, I applied and was fortunate enough to get it.

Rebecca Harriett: In the meantime, though, to keep myself engaged, I did some details. One of the details that I did, I was deputy superintendent at Independence National Historical Park. I will say that I think that more than anything else really helped me get Harpers Ferry, because again, as wonderful as Booker T. Washington, it was a small park. To go from 10 employees to almost 100 employees is a jump. But that, those few months, a few months at Independence, that's like years elsewhere. (laughter) Because it's huge. Two hundred and some employees, and personnel issues that made me very glad to get back to Booker T. Washington. (laughter) I think I hugged them all when I got back. "Thank you guys for being normal." Because boy, there were some personnel issues there that you just go, you just can't make this stuff up. They're just like, wow, really. Really?

Lu Ann Jones: Can you give me an example?

Rebecca Harriett: Oh, without—

Lu Ann Jones: I know it's delicate, but—

Rebecca Harriett: Well, I know that what had happened was the superintendent from Independence had become the regional director. So, the deputy superintendent became the acting superintendent. So, then I was asked to come in as acting deputy. I remember, I was the first or second day I was there we got a, well, first of all, she gave me a stack of the EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] complaints. And when I say this, I mean, list, I mean, I'm not talking the case studies. I'm talking – and some of these things went back 10, 15 years, that were still hanging out there. I mean, it was really quite sad. (laughs)

- Rebecca Harriett: Then one day the superintendent – and it was like the first week – she hands me this complaint that we received from an employee. It was an EEO complaint. And (laughs) it's one of those ones that you read, and you go, this is a joke. This doesn't happen. But some members of the staff, I don't want to go into too much, because it may be still pending, the case may still be pending, I don't know. There was staff, I guess it was raining, and they decided that they couldn't work. So instead of going back to where they could do some work, they decided to sit in the truck and watch videos. Inappropriate videos. And so, the complaint was that while they were watching these videos, two of the employees, I guess, start acting on these employees [videos?]. And the third employee files the complaint because she felt left out. (laughter) And you know, I mean—(laughter) It was just like, yeah, you're just like. I'm like, okay, I said, [Darla] is just, she's just doing this because she knows I've come from little innocent Booker T. Washington and she's just picking on me. This is a joke.
- Rebecca Harriett: And so, I go in there. I'm like, "Ha, ha, ha. This is really funny." She's like, "It's real." (laughter) Anyway. So, you have to—
- Lu Ann Jones: Probably not what the EEO regulations were written for.
- Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. Yeah. Yes. It's just like, well first of all, none of you should have been doing what you were doing in the first place! Do you really think that you being excluded from an improper act on government time really warrants that you win an EEO suit? Gosh, it was like, oh, let's just say I could never look at the park service gardeners the same way. Anytime I hear the word "gardener," I go, (makes horrified noise). (laughter)
- Rebecca Harriett: There was just a lot of those very, very challenging personnel issues. It was the first time I'd ever been exposed to union activity. Not that we didn't have a union at Booker T., but we didn't have a steward. We never had complaints. So that was a good experience, but an interesting experience. I mean, you can take all the training you want, you can go to your, all the employee relation stuff, but until you're thrown into the situation – and Independence had three unions, one of which we only spoke to the lawyers of the law enforcement rangers. You never could talk directly to the steward of the law enforcement folks. You could only talk through their lawyers. Which, it's hard to accomplish things when litigation is always being hung over your head. It's like, come on, guys, can't we find some common ground? But when you can't even have that conversation, it made for a very interesting, and I had never been in that kind of situation before. So that was a huge learning experience. First of all, you need to know what the contract says. You need to know what your rights are. You need to know what their rights are. So that was a huge learning experience. So, like I said, even though I was only there for a few months, it was a lifetime of experience. (laughter) So I do think that detail helped me get Harpers Ferry. Which we still don't have those kinds of issues. Not that I know of, anyway. (laughter) I don't have gardeners.

- Lu Ann Jones: Were there other details?
- Rebecca Harriett: I did. I did.
- Lu Ann Jones: Kind of detail system works in terms of career development?
- Rebecca Harriett: Well, you know, we all have, even superintendents have the individual development plans. And even prior to it becoming very formalized, I always had a little sheet of, okay, these are things that would, you know, help improve my skill base. One of the ones I went into was an executive leadership program through the USDA [US Department of Agriculture]. They were very popular. A lot of park service would send a few people a year to it. You don't hear much about it anymore. It's kind of sad. I don't hear about it anymore, and I'm looking. I think it's still out there. But you just don't hear about it. But it used to be, it was announced through the park service training program. So, I got permission. We had to compete and go through the process. So, I got into that back in, I think it was 2002.
- Rebecca Harriett: Part of the program was that you had to do two details outside your regular place of work. They do encourage that one of the details, even though it can be affiliated to park service, they really encourage you to kind of go into a different agency if possible. So, the two things I did, I worked on the Chesapeake Bay office, which the park service is a signature on the agreement, but it's operated by EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. So, the director of the program is an EPA employee, but the park service, we do a lot of the interpretive pieces of it and stuff. And then there's some resource management pieces, also. Even though I did work a lot with park service people in getting the word out about the agreement, my direct supervisor was the director of that program for EPA. So that was fun.
- Rebecca Harriett: Actually, it was 2001, because I was there when 9/11 happened. So, when that happened, the director, she actually also worked out of Philadelphia, so she was kind of pulled back into there. So, I didn't see her as much as I had planned to. But it was great experience, because it was this whole partnership where you can't do it alone. You know, you can't clean up the Chesapeake Bay by yourself. So, it really put you in contact with, I mean, the states, all these agencies, communities. So, it was a great learning experience about how do you herd cats, is basically (laughs) which is what being a superintendent is, is herding cats. And so that was a really, and the park service had a small staff there, but you got to work with a lot of other agencies. Plus, we got to go out on the Chesapeake Bay a lot, so that was fun, too. So that was a great experience.
- Rebecca Harriett: But the one that probably was the most fascinating – the park service had an introduction to, for park superintendents. Believe it or not, there was a, they do try to train us. (laughs) It was kind of a one-week thing. But one course that they had recommended was management, Public Policy for Managers. Excellent, excellent course. Still one of the best courses I've had in the National Park Service. And so, I'd had that when I was at Booker T.

Rebecca Harriett: When I had an opportunity to do this detail, I requested to go to the Legislative Affairs Office, because the political piece of it, I would say, was probably one of the weaker sides for me personally. I truly understand we're a political animal. I'm not naïve to that, but I actually, I sometimes just get very frustrated with the lack of other people not doing their job. (laughs) And I'm out there trying to do my job. And then these people not doing their job. And then getting mad at me for not doing my job because they don't do their job. (laughs) But I understand how the game. But I thought well this will help me understand that mindset a little better, maybe. And it did. (laughs) It was a great two months. I enjoyed it. It is definitely a fire drill. It's hard to accomplish these – it's like working in an emergency room. You don't know what the outcome's going to be. Sometimes you never know what the outcome is going to be. But you kind of patch things up and move it along, which is kind of an interesting—

Rebecca Harriett: At that time, the director was Fran Mainella. She had just gotten there. Well, she had been there for a few months. The honeymoon was declining. I think at first, everybody was willing to try to, you know, be supportive. But obviously different policies or different approaches or, I guess, different philosophies about what parks are and what they should be started to break apart. So, it was interesting. It was interesting to watch. Because I was definitely a fly on the wall. Again, when you're on a detail, it's not that you don't have things to do. You do. But a lot of them, you really don't have a lot of skin in the game. But it's interesting to watch when people do. Certainly parks, like Gettysburg at that time, their whole investigation into the funding for the visitors' center and those kinds of things were the hot button issues. The snowmobiles in Yellowstone, which constantly stay, in the past have stayed. So, all those things were going on, so it was very interesting to see, and that office is basically the clearing house for access to Congress. And I'm not saying – and it was fun to go up to The Hill and to observe hearings.

Rebecca Harriett: While I was on detail, the hearing for the legislation for the land acquisition that we had at Booker T. Washington occurred. So not only was I there on the detail from the Legislative Affairs Office, but then also as a superintendent of a park that was going to benefit. I'll never forget the hearing on that. It looked like it was going to go through. There was nothing out there saying you know; the federal government shouldn't be expanding Booker T. Washington. It seemed to be kind of one of those things that was going to, but you still had to have the hearing.

Rebecca Harriett: But I do remember when Senator John Warner, this was a House committee, he came in, and there were several other, it was a list and Booker T. Washington expansion was just a list of several. But I do remember Senator John Warner came in, and I'll tell you, when a senator walks in a room, everybody stops (laughs) whatever they're working on. Basically, he comes in and he says, "I just want you to know these are the things I support." And ours was one of them. He kind of went through the

ones that were in Virginia. There were several in Virginia. And then he turns around and walks out. (laughter) And then they proceed. Then it gets voted on in committee. And it's like, okay, that was interesting. So, it was a good experience.

Rebecca Harriett: I was surprised, I think one of the things that did surprise me, was members of Congress, and actually, Roger Kennedy said this. That the American people love the national parks, but they know very little about us. That their depth of knowledge is very shallow. I would say that also applies to Congress, because I was amazed at the number of people in the House that really did not know how national parks were created. I mean, you had to explain to them. We went up on numerous times to explain to them that they actually have to create a bill that the National Park Service does not create a national park. We may have an opinion, and we do the studies, but you guys are the ones who create. (laughs) Unless it's an executive, unless it's through the Antiquities Act.

Rebecca Harriett: But it was interesting to have to go and explain to them. Because you'd either hear the park service, you know, can't do this. Well, no, we can't. We never said we could. (laughs)

Rebecca Harriett: Or we'd get the phone call of, my favorite was, someone had called their congressman in Arkansas. It was the third oldest house in Arkansas. They wanted to know could the park service make it a national historic site. The third oldest house in Arkansas. (laughs)

Rebecca Harriett: I said well, so I'd set up a meeting, and then we would go over and we would explain well first of all, there has to be a study because there's criteria to become a national park site and probably we told him more than he wanted to know. But he just thought all he had to do was pick up the phone and say, "I want a park in my district, and you all are going to make it happen." And it was really quite fascinating the lack of knowledge that they had about that. So that was a little scary. (laughs)

Rebecca Harriett: Or we'd do the studies, and we'd say, "We don't think this belongs in the National Park Service."

Rebecca Harriett: Then you would have a senator or a congressman saying, "Well, we don't care what you think. My constituents want it to be a national park. It's going to be a national park."

Rebecca Harriett: And (sighs) it's like, you know, we're having trouble taking care of what we have. Especially during the base closings, a lot of congressmen and stuff wanted to turn all these military bases into national park areas. Which was bizarre. I mean, I understand they're more into economics. I understand that. But it was really quite, oh, well if it's not going to be a military base, we'll just make it a national park. Really? Okay.

Rebecca Harriett: So, it was a very interesting, I really applaud the folks who work in that office. They're certainly very dedicated. It's a hard job because you really are nursemaids, I hate to say, I shouldn't say that, to Congress. Now the

staffers are the ones who are the ones who get things done. You've got to make friends with the staffers. They are the ones who are the gatekeepers of the information. So, if you have good relationships with the staffers, then you can maneuver. Or at least you could.

Rebecca Harriett: I'm not sure where things stand now. But I'll be honest with you. It was a great two months, but I was glad to get back to my park. I was glad. (laughs) I felt like I'd taken off the rose-colored glasses in DC. I was glad to put them back on. There were times where I didn't recognize the organization I work with. But, anyway, but it was a good experience. And I do think it helps make a better manager, because you understand the pressures of what a regional director or director faces. Even if you don't agree with some of the decisions that are made, you understand the pressures they're under from, basically who pays our, I mean—

Lu Ann Jones: When you did make that shift to Harpers Ferry, again, if I'm remembering correctly, one of the challenges there was that there had been a superintendent who had been there for a long time. Just the opposite of the situation at Booker T. Washington.

Rebecca Harriett: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. That's correct.

Lu Ann Jones: Could you tell me about some of the challenges that walking into that kind of history, legacy, created for you?

Rebecca Harriett: Right. And first of all, my predecessor at Harpers Ferry was a wonderful superintendent. So, I had big shoes to fill and was very aware of that. I had known Don Campbell for a lot of my career. Or not well, but I certainly knew of him and knew the good things he was doing at Harpers Ferry. So, at a time when our Senator Byrd was a huge supporter of the park. And not just in words. With a great deal of funding. I went from a park – Booker T. Washington, when I got there, our base budget, our personnel cost exceeded our base budget, which is not a good place to be, that's not good, to a park that was what I would consider a rich park. (laughs) And to go from where you're monitoring every penny to money's just flowing, at least at first, it's quite a change. So, there was a – any type of change like that. But I would say my approach is similar to Booker T. Washington was here, what people have to say. But much larger staff. So, you certainly had those who liked the direction the park was going. Some didn't. You know, different management styles on how do you approach things?

Rebecca Harriett: A big difference with Harpers Ferry was the park and the town of Harpers Ferry, a lot of people don't even know that there is a town there. There's very much of a town there. And there's actually two towns, Bolivar and Harpers Ferry. Two separate town councils. Sometimes they fight among each other and we just kind of stay out of the way. And so those relationships are very, very important.

Rebecca Harriett: I will say that my predecessor was really good at projects. I mean, that money was coming in and the park showed it. I mean, the buildings were great, immaculate, restored. I mean, when you look at the before and after pictures of downtown Harpers Ferry. I mean, the park service has invested millions of dollars to preserve that park. And it's of great benefit to both towns and the community as a whole. So, there's some people that get that, and there's some people that still don't. I don't know if they even wanted it back to the slums or what, but whatever.

Rebecca Harriett: So again, my approach was like before. Listening to the different entities. But at some point, you do have to make a move. You have to say, okay, this worked for him, and respect that, but this is really not going to work for me.

Rebecca Harriett: I did have to do a little reorganization. One thing that I just had to do, I mean, we have a park with 92 historic buildings, millions of artifacts, and cultural resources was just buried in interpretation. I like for everybody to work together. I like for everybody to be collegial. But basically, here I am responsible, for we're responsible, for protecting all these fantastic cultural resources. And yet I don't have a direct line to the cultural resource management person. It just wasn't working for me. After about six months, I did a reorganization. That course, of course, freaked everybody out. (laughs) So it took a little while. And I would try to explain to people that this was not, that anything they had been—

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Rebecca Harriett: —done in the past was bad, this was not an insult to them. But this just was my emphasis is more on community relationships, those kinds of things. I just couldn't work the way it was set up. So, I needed to do this. No one was downgraded. But there were some technical people that answered directly to the superintendent. Well, I couldn't, that didn't need to be there for me. I can't have a historic architect coming to me asking me for direction on historic architect when I'm not a historic architect. You need to go over to planning and maintenance and work in that group. So, there was a little shuffling. I think people have gotten used to it now after six years. It's just part of it. At some point you have to make those decisions. And you try to do it and explain why you're doing it, where you're not offending anyone or stuff like that.

Lu Ann Jones: But did you, like there did you have a team that you talked to about what you were thinking about?

Rebecca Harriett: Well, sure. Sure. The senior management team. Yeah. And I always have – division chiefs are critical to an operation. There's no way that I can personally get into the weeds on every single, you know, operational topic. So, it was very important to have people that you trust and that you can bring together to work on the bigger issues and vision of the park.



Rebecca Harriett: Whereas Booker T. Washington, we started from scratch on a general management plan and saw it through to completion, Harpers Ferry was at the tail end of their general management plan. Now that was an interesting thing. Because when I heard that it was ready for, you know, it was like in the final draft, I thought, oh, great. I just need to push it over the finish line with Washington, and we'll have a general management plan and good to go to implement that plan.

Rebecca Harriett: But I will say, my first two years of Harpers Ferry was trying to get that finish line with the Washington office. Because what had happened was you had, basically, it was one of those long, drawn-out plans. So, what had been scoped out seven years before got drug out. I mean, what should have been a three-year project ended up being a seven-year project. And just things had changed, the budget's starting to collapse. Washington's Washington. You know, it would go up in the black hole and you're like, can somebody please sign the thing? I mean, I'll bring a pen. (laughter)

Rebecca Harriett: You know, and then you get the call, "Well, this needs to be changed." Sometimes it was a big change and you're like, this isn't what was in the EIS [Environmental Impact Statement]. This isn't what was in the draft. If we change this, then we're going to have to go back out for public comment, and I really don't want to do that. It was, yeah, that two years of trying to push that sucker just to get it signed. And sometimes it was political. It was like asking me someone to change a document based on the political whim that would basically nullify the previous – I was trying not to throw away the seven years of money that went into this. (laughs) I said, can't we find language that's more neutral? That's kind of vague. It is a general management plan. Let's just, for this particular resource, just kind of be vague. But don't say you're going to tear it down, because I guarantee you that would create a firestorm in the community. I mean, we as the park service may not think it's much, but this community has said that they want something positive done with it. And if we go in there and the draft said that we were leaning in that direction, and if we come back with the final saying we're going to tear it down, holy cow! You might as well just transfer me or retire me right now. You know. So. So, yeah, those kinds of challenges. But we finally got it signed.

Rebecca Harriett: To me, that's when you get down to the nitty gritty of the work of implementing the overall plan. That's when you can sit down and say okay, here's our overall vision for the park. Okay, where are we right now? Where do we stand? Here we have what we want it to look like, so now what are the hundreds and hundreds of projects that we're going to have to put into PMIS to make this happen? (laughs) Then that's where you have your building blocks for getting the different project funds and things like that. But yeah, sometimes it just takes time.

Lu Ann Jones: Forever.

- Rebecca Harriett: It does. It really does. And then to have, and then when you get something like a sequestration, which it was another one of the challenging things about Harpers Ferry is that you have a park, again, that had a very supportive senator who not just in words but in deeds of huge amounts of money coming into that park. I mean, earmarks out of the, I mean, just— (laughs) Like I said, I was in a park that didn't get earmarks. And go to a park that does. Of course, I used to always like, "Man, these parks need earmarks. They're cheating everybody else out of it." Of course, they didn't get it. But those things were drying up when I came in. So, I try to be very upfront with people. But I still think there's a little bit of, "Mr. Campbell and Senator Byrd brought in millions of dollars to this park. Why can't you do that?"
- Rebecca Harriett: And you can say, "There's no more earmarks. Senator Byrd died. He's not coming back." (laughs) Try to say that as respectfully as possible. But it's still, they were used to, to be honest with you, they were spoiled. Very spoiled. And having to live like the rest of parks. They have their little tantrums. Just like, "We're Harpers Ferry. We should get this." And they're like, "Well, I mean, you know." But we've got to play the game. Guess what? We have to play nice with others now. We have to be— because I think sometimes, they did kind of go off on their own, kind of ignored everybody else and to heck with everybody else.
- Rebecca Harriett: So again, part of my job is to build those relationships, both in the community, in the region, with other parks. To be honest with you, our park had a reputation of not playing well with others. Did good stuff for the park. But because of the influence of the senator, didn't see the need to play nice with others because the money was coming. But you go in there now and you have to – and I like to play nice with others. I like to play in the sandbox with other people. I don't see Antietam and C&O Canal and even the National Mall as my competitor. They're colleagues in this. But I don't have a whole staff that feels that way. It's like if another park gets something, then, they got that. Why didn't we get that? We've got lots of people out there who truly do not want national parks and are willing to fight to see us fail. They're our enemies. Our fellow park employees and colleagues and other parks are not our enemy. We need to focus. And for every time that we're fighting among ourselves, somebody outside who would love to privatize national parks wins. So, let's keep that in perspective.
- Lu Ann Jones: You came here, what, on the eve of the Civil War commemoration?
- Rebecca Harriett: I did. Yes, yes, yes. I did. That was a great time to come in, actually.
- Lu Ann Jones: [unclear]
- Rebecca Harriett: Certainly being, even though my background was interpretation, law enforcement, I was a generalist, we talked about that in the first time around. The generalist ranger, jack of all trades, master of none. But interpretation has always been my passion. So, to come in where the major

event for the park has already been pretty much planned was great. So basically, it was just stepping in and showcasing the John Brown raid. We were sort of the kickoff for the Civil War 150<sup>th</sup>. So that was kind of fun to be first out of the gate and I hate to say it, kind of get it over with and then enjoy being supportive to the other parks in our area. And certainly, Harpers Ferry. There were two battles that were tied in with Antietam and an earlier battle. But they were lesser events. But still, it was fun being a part of the bigger picture of that, of such an important – I do think, I think the park service sort of itself after Gettysburg sort of lost interest, which was very disappointing to those of us who had put a lot of time and energy collectively into the four years. And basically, feeling like your agency has – well, Gettysburg's over and the war still had two more years and then they sort of moved on to other things. Not that the centennial shouldn't be moved on to.

Rebecca Harriett: But we felt like the park service kind of gave up on us before we were ready to, I know Appomattox certainly kind of felt that way. That they kind of felt left out of the bigger picture thing but did a wonderful event. I got to as many of them as I could reasonably get to. And that was one of them that they did a great job with very little support.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you won a pretty big award, didn't you, as part of a collective?

Rebecca Harriett: We did! Actually, yeah. It was the Appleman-Judd-Lewis Cultural Resource Award with our fellow superintendents in the National Capital Region for the work we did on the Civil War. Because we did work collectively on trying to tie the stories in. And Susan Trail actually from Antietam was our Civil War coordinator for the region, at least for the year that we really kind of set the interpretive plan for all the sites. That was a nice surprise. Yeah. That was unexpected. But it was nice. Again, I'm a team player. I was in good company. And so, it was very nice to be recognized by a regional office, and, well, Washington, for that. So yeah, that was a nice surprise. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I don't mean to ask an indelicate question or not, but are you thinking of retiring? You've mentioned a couple of times.

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, well, I don't mean to pry. But kind of what's the end game here?

Rebecca Harriett: Well—

Lu Ann Jones: If you're thinking about, what has been just a really great career in the National Park Service.

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. It's certainly out there. (laughs) I haven't made any formal announcements. But yeah, I would say in the next couple of years for sure. I would be very happy to retire from Harpers Ferry. To be honest with you, there have been a couple of positions that I've thought about that have come up in the last couple of years. When I saw them pop up, you know, they were sort of on that list that I told you about earlier. Colonial

being one of them. And when it showed up, I wasn't quite as enthusiastic about it as I thought I should be for applying for it. (laughs) It was like oh, there was part of me like, oh, Colonial's open! But then it was like, oh, do I really want to do an application again? (laughter) Do I really want that application?

Rebecca Harriett: And also, the timing. I think if it had opened up a couple of years ago, maybe I would have put in. But I feel like if you do that, you need to make a commitment to it. I mean, I think for a superintendency, you really have to at least at a minimum, minimum, three years. I mean, I know people have done a lot less. But I also think that's very unfair to the park, because as I learned at Booker T, it takes time to get anything done. I don't care how energetic and dynamic you are. It takes time to build relationships. It takes time to really understand the needs of the park. I just feel strongly that when you make a commitment like that, it's unfair just to pop in and pop out. Again, I know people that do it. But it's unfair to the staff. I never want a staff to feel like the staff at Booker T Washington, that somebody, that I used a park as a steppingstone. I never want them to think that I was never, that I was always 100 percent committed to that park at that time. You really can't do that if you just come in and pop in and pop out, kind of stir the pot and then move on and then you really haven't seen anything to completion. That's really unfair to folks that are there. So, I never wanted to be that way. (laughs) So, but yeah.

Rebecca Harriett: I'm excited about the centennial. I must admit, I was a little, I think part of it was the Civil War. I mean, the sesquicentennial was, you know, it's like oh, okay. But after Appomattox, I think I was, I could then focus on the centennial. And I really couldn't think about the centennial till like, till we got through Appomattox. So now I'm excited about that. We have a team at the park that's planning some really wonderful events. We met a couple of weeks ago with the regional folks. So, the region's doing some things.

Rebecca Harriett: I am involved with the World Ranger Congress. To me, that's my personal, one of my personal contributions to the centennial just as a citizen and not necessarily as an employee but because it's something I care deeply about. I've been to a few of the congresses. International. It's as wonderful as ANPR is when you connect with people in the United States from all over about your passion for the agency and the parks that we preserve. When you get it on a worldwide, and you realize there are people like us all over the world who are as passionate, it's really quite a humbling experience.

Lu Ann Jones: I'm thinking about applying to be a delegate.

Rebecca Harriett: Oh, okay. You should! You should. You should. Yeah. No.

Lu Ann Jones: I'm thinking about it. I'll see.

- Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. You should. No, no. I do think Bob [Krumenaker] was correct, and I think, I don't know what time it is, but at 4:30 he's going to have that summary. I think that's a great idea to do that. And I should.
- Lu Ann Jones: Remind me how you got involved with ANPR. Because maybe we can kind of conclude with thinking about this organization.
- Rebecca Harriett: I'm trying to (laughs) that's a long time ago, LuAnn. I'm trying to think when my first Rendezvous was. But it was back when I was first starting out. Someone at Cape Lookout must have told me about it. Had a *Ranger* magazine laying around somewhere. I was like oh, this is great. And then I'm pretty sure that there must have been a Rendezvous, gosh, it had to be somewhere probably in North Carolina, I'm thinking, I'm not sure.
- Lu Ann Jones: There was one at Blue Ridge, I think, that a couple of people mentioned to me. Wendy Lauritzen went. That might have been the first one she went to or something.
- Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. See, I came into the service in '78. And so sometime between '78 and then I got permanent in '80, so somewhere in there I heard about it. And maybe it was also at Ranger Skills, when the old Ranger Skills. Because I know that the one that I went to, there were a couple of folks from my Ranger Skills class that were there. So, yeah. You're with a group of people that are of like mind and passion. And yeah, you tell the war stories, and you complain about the Congress and you complain about Washington. But that you also have a passion about how can we better protect these resources. So, it was early on in my career. I really, I truly can't remember. I'd have to look at the list of previous Rendezvouses to try to figure it out. I wasn't able to go to all of them by any stretch. My husband made the comment when he was at one of the things. He says, "It's great. You got quite a few young people," he says, and he says, "you've certainly got some old-timers here." He says, "There's no middle-age."
- Rebecca Harriett: I said, "Well, if you recall, middle-age was when we were raising the kids". And it was a little harder to take your annual leave to go and leave the kids to go to a Rendezvous. So, there was sort of that gap in there. But no, I've always enjoyed, I've been a life member for, gosh, well at least since 1980, for sure, when it was cheaper. (laughs) But I make a contribution every year. I try to give gift memberships to new people at the park. People that are new employees and stuff. I try to get them involved without putting too much pressure on them. It's always fun. It's always a wonderful way to reconnect. I mean, some of these folks here have been here as long as I've been in. But it's always fun to have the new folks come in and the new faces. And it does my heart good to know that it's going to carry on after I'm gone.
- Rebecca Harriett: But it's a great organization. I'm sorry there weren't more people. I come and when I hear that the membership is down, I go, why is this? I mean, especially people don't remember Ranger Careers. But I remember Ranger

Careers. There was a gap between – you were a park tech at a 5 doing the same job as a park ranger 9. And it was this inequity that was so blatant. It took ANPR and other organizations to say, you know, this isn't right. You're abusing your employees a little bit here – and really it took the chief ranger at that time was Walt Dabney. And it also took somebody in WASO to push it. But you know, if people don't understand those battles.

Rebecca Harriett: But I do agree with Ken [Bigley] this morning. This new law that's going to allow people, that is just huge. [On August 7, President Obama signed H.R. 1531, the Land Management Workforce Flexibility Act, which allows seasonal temporary employees in federal land management agencies to compete for vacant permanent positions under internal merit promotion procedures. The bill will also waive age requirements that currently prevent well-qualified temporary seasonal firefighters from competing for permanent positions.] He's absolutely dead on. That is just huge. And ANPR has been in the forefront of pushing, trying to push that through. I don't understand who more people don't see the results of what ANPR can do in situations like that. But then also just the camaraderie that comes. And you do make connections. You do network. You do. And there's no question, when I'm going through a list of applications, and if I see someone who's an ANPR member, especially if I know them, there's no question. I'm probably, it's just human nature, if they've made contributions to this organization, I'm probably going to consider them very highly for a job. So that is true. People who don't think networking works don't know that it really does. (laughs) Because it's about relationships. So, yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: When you think about the future of the park service, what gives you hope and what worries you?

Rebecca Harriett: Well, I think the hope is folks like this sitting right here. When I come to these [Rendezvous] or when we have lots of interns or seasonals at Harpers Ferry. I wish I could give them all jobs, but I can't. I hate the end of the summer because they're great places that you wish you had a place for that go out the door. Some will come back, but some will be lost to wherever they go. All you can do is hope that they've learned something in their experience at the park, and they will carry that either to another park or to wherever they end up, and that it was a good experience for them. And that they will maybe become a very wealthy, successful person and give back in another way. (laughs) You just hope that it was a good experience for them, and they will be supporters of the parks.

Rebecca Harriett: When I, when I hear that there's not a lot of, when I hear there's not a lot of young people interested, that's not the world that I see. Because again, between interns, volunteers and seasonals, we have about 30 college students that come in every year. And they're dedicated, they're passionate, they're great. So, I don't worry about that piece of it. Because I'm sure, you know, when I was coming in, I'm sure the folks who were toward the end of their career were going, "Oh, what's the park service

coming to? Look at this!” (laughter) But you know, we’ve managed to survive. And so, it will.

Rebecca Harriett: I guess one thing that I am concerned about, I’m a true, true, big proponent of partnerships. The park service has always depended on partnerships, including volunteers. I do get a little concerned when every time I go into a visitor’s center, or every time I go into a park, that I see more volunteers than green and gray. It’s not that those volunteers aren’t dedicated, and they’re wonderful. I started off as a volunteer. And when I retire, whenever that is, I will go back, and I will be a volunteer in some capacity somewhere. But it was always to enhance. I never wanted it to be the core. I feel like we’re cutting to the bone. I really think it’s going to be to the point where you’re going to have a few green and gray that are going to be managing volunteers. There seems to be an acceptance at higher levels that this is where we’re going, and it makes me sad.

Rebecca Harriett: Because I do think, well, the whole endangered ranger report is there’s a decline in that professionally. We’ve worked so hard to be accepted. We’ve always been professionals. But to be officially accepted as professionals and now to see the decline in that from upper echelons is a little--when you have a secretary that has come out and said, “Well, we’re just going to have a million volunteers.” Really? Is that what the centennial goal, really? And what about quality of experience? We’ve had several conversations about that. Again, I love volunteers. Huge supporter. They’re a wonderful asset. We couldn’t do – but I feel like there’s a little bit of an attitude oh, well, we’ll just have one or two permanents and the rest will be, volunteers can handle it.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, it’s kind of like in academia the move towards adjuncts.

Rebecca Harriett: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you don’t have tenured faculty.

Rebecca Harriett: A permanent. That’s right. That’s correct. That is correct. Yes. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: A contingent workforce.

Rebecca Harriett: Yes, that’s a very, and I understand the budget. But I think it devalues the work. Again, not that there aren’t wonderful, high-quality volunteers out there. But again, they should be enhancing what we do, not the core of what we do. I feel like there’s just a huge emphasis right now on that.

Lu Ann Jones: I hear some rumbling out there.

Rebecca Harriett: Yeah. Okay, time to go.

Lu Ann Jones: There’s something going on out there. Thank you so much.

Rebecca Harriett: You’re welcome. Oh, thank you, thank you. Unplug me.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah.

[END OF TRACK 3]

[END OF INTERVIEW]