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NPS Operation Leadership Program Interviews, 2018

Cheryl Scherier
November 14, 2018

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
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National Park Service Oral History Project:
Operational Leadership

Interview conducted by
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The narrator has reviewed and corrected the transcript.

Audiofile: SCHERIER Cheryl 14 November 2018

Narrator – Cheryl Scherier
Interviewer – Lu Ann Jones

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Lu Ann Jones: I usually start out the interviews just by introducing us. This is Lu Ann Jones with the Park History Program. And it is November fourteenth, 2018. And we're here at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Page, Arizona. And I am talking now to—

Cheryl Scherier: Cheryl Scherier.

Lu Ann Jones: We are doing this conversation in connection with the 10th anniversary Summit for Operational Leadership. So I always ask, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Cheryl Scherier: Yes, you do.

Lu Ann Jones: Thank you so much. So as I said, I would like to take this opportunity not only to focus about your role with Operational Leadership, but just to place that within a context of your career. So if you don't mind, could you just give me a little bit about your personal background? When you were born, where you were born, and kind of what prepared you for life in the National Park Service?

Cheryl Scherier: Sure. I was born in Minnesota, in Minneapolis, and lived there for most of my life until I went to college. I majored in natural resources management. It sparked an interest in outdoors, really from 1970, when the first Earth Day occurred. What I really wanted to do was to be a wildlife biologist. My plan was to save every single threatened and endangered species of wildlife.

Cheryl Scherier: Well, I tried that route and found that I really liked working with people, also – so natural resources, interpretation. My very first application to the National Park Service, I selected two parks. One was the Blue Ridge Parkway, and one was Jewel Cave National Monument in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Lo and behold, I was selected for that position as a seasonal. At that time, it was called a park technician. So basically, I was a park guide. My best friend, her husband worked at Jewel Cave and said you should apply for Jewel Cave because they don't get that many applicants. That's why I had applied for a more well-known park and a less known park. I remember being in the Black Hills of South Dakota on a family vacation when I was 12 years old. Really, that embarked my

journey with the National Park Service, an entire career with the National Park Service.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow. If I remember from looking at your resume, you were a seasonal at Yellowstone for a while.

Cheryl Scherier: I was.

Lu Ann Jones: So, can you talk about how you kind of progressed through those different steps in the Park Service career?

Cheryl Scherier: Sure. I was a seasonal employee both at Jewel Cave and then Yellowstone, starting in 1981. I was an entrance station ranger at the West Entrance Station – the absolutely busiest entrance station in the National Park Service. I was a GS-3 at the time. Loved it. It was a 24-hour operation. So sometimes we would be out there in the middle of the night. You couldn't really see out the windows very well. Of course, there're bears all over. I had a chance to really do a lot of reading about Yellowstone. So that was my introduction to Yellowstone.

Cheryl Scherier: I then transitioned to be a campground ranger at Madison Junction. I also went to a seasonal law enforcement academy. That was back in 1985, if I recall correctly, at Santa Rosa, California. Just to expand my horizons. So, I did some law enforcement at Yellowstone. I also worked as a seasonal concessions management interpreter. So, the concessions management division was hiring a position so that what I would do is provide orientation to the National Park Service for about 2,500 each season concession employees for all the different concessioners in the park. Then I would help with interpretation and evaluate with the concessions program all of the interpretive activities. So, I was the one who had to go out and evaluate the horseback rides, the tours of the Old Faithful Inn, the boat tours on Yellowstone Lake, the bus tours – a tremendous opportunity to be able to incorporate my interpretive skills with concessions management.

Cheryl Scherier: Eventually I did some natural resources work, also at Yellowstone. But then that is where I left for a short period of time to travel to Independence National Historical Park, and that is where I gained my permanent position as a protection ranger. I was there for 111 days as a GS-4. I received a promotion after 90 days to a GS-5. Then I returned to Yellowstone, and I went back into concessions management. So that was my tenure at Yellowstone.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow. Had you been a seasonal? I mean, when you say you were a seasonal, how much were you working in any given year? Were you working more than a season?

Cheryl Scherier: I was able to work almost 12 months a year. Those were the days, as they say, that you could work six months one place. You'd have maybe a week to travel to the next park to be able to work. Even in Yellowstone, I was able to work during the winter. There might be some winters that I didn't actually work. Just as a side note, that's where my husband Bill and I got married in 1982. So, we embarked on this career together.

Lu Ann Jones: Right. Right. Did you talk at the time about how you were going to strategize? Or was it just kind of the blind faith of young love and optimism? (laughs)

Cheryl Scherier: We strategized a little bit as to when we applied for jobs, was there going to be an opportunity for both of us to work? My husband was in a natural resources training program in 1988 and '89. So, we were there in Yellowstone during the infamous 1988 wildfires. When he completed the program, he received an offer from the Denver Service Center to be a natural resource planner. Then I had an opportunity to do a detail assignment in concessions management in the regional office. So that was then our move and transfer to, at the time, the Rocky Mountain Regional Office, in 1991.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, that makes life interesting, where you're trying to manage two careers as well as one.

Cheryl Scherier: Right.

Lu Ann Jones: So, did you begin to see a career trajectory at some point? Or what did you, how did you begin to plan your career? I'll just say that, I'm just always so struck when I talk to people, particularly early on, that people are able to get just this vast array of experience. And people say, "Oh, yeah, and I went and got my law enforcement commission." Well, to me, that was like, oh, my gosh! But it often seems like well, it's just one of the things that you do. Or I learned this, and I learned that. It seems like that you thrived on this kind of variety, for one thing. But I guess out of all of that kind of early variety, did you begin to see a trajectory in your career?

Cheryl Scherier: I did start to see a trajectory, and that was when I moved to the Rocky Mountain Regional Office. As I mentioned, I was detailing in concessions management. But then knowing that that was a short period of time and I had supervisors who were really supportive that wanted to see – I was almost there with my career conditional status; that was golden for employees to be career conditional so that you could eventually after three years be career.

Cheryl Scherier: I had some opportunities; there were some other divisions that were seeking people out as far as they knew who I was. I'd only been on a detail for a short period of time. But what they called it at the time, the external programs. The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance programs were looking for an employee who would perhaps work as a term employee as the National Natural Landmark Coordinator. So, I transitioned into a term appointment within the Rocky Mountain Regional Office and the external programs and received a lot of training in facilitation, learning about outside the National Park Service areas, how the National Park Service supported other programs, like Rivers and Trails. And also some of the grants programs. Land, water conservation, fun programs.

Cheryl Scherier: Then the National Natural Landmark Coordinator position was instrumental. You'd work with other agencies, other organizations who were helping to protect these natural landmark areas that weren't necessarily National Park Service areas, but had these specific and very unique qualities that allowed them to be designated as landmarks. So, I gained a great deal of experience in working outside the agency.

Cheryl Scherier: And facilitation. I really liked facilitation. I was part of a team of employees in the Rocky Mountain Regional Office on an orientation team. It was called America's Treasures: The Parks and You. So, we would go out and orient new employees to the National Park Service. It was just such a fun program.

Cheryl Scherier: Then I applied for this mentorship program in the regional office, and I was selected. So, I had an opportunity to receive a lot of different training in supervisory training, teamwork, all different types of exposure to leadership training. At that point, I decided that I was going to go one of two ways. I either wanted to be a park superintendent at that time, or I wanted to be a trainer in training and development in the National Park Service. So that was really the turning point.

Cheryl Scherier: In 1995, there was a program called Operation Opportunity where the National Park Service was moving from ten regions to seven regions. They were looking for people to return to the field from regional offices. I said, "Pick me!" I had an offer from Bryce Canyon National Park to be a management specialist. That was my next route that I went down. That was where I really became involved in safety, because the management specialist position was concessions; it was the collateral duty safety officer; and also the public information officer. And the proverbial other duties as assigned.

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) What did it mean to be the safety officer in a park like Bryce?

Cheryl Scherier: It was a huge learning experience. I had always had an interest in safety – had been on the safety committee in Yellowstone National Park. I was just always interested in employee and then also visitor safety. Maybe it was partly because I tried to practice safety in my own life, and also was one of those – I've always been one of those that was very compliant. (laughs) If I read the safety regulations, then that's what I would do.

Cheryl Scherier: Also, coming from a place like Yellowstone, where you saw people interacting with bears. I was there during the time that there were a lot of fatalities. I also had been a practicing EMT. So, I saw what injuries and accidents would do, how that impacted employees as well as visitors.

Cheryl Scherier: So, it was a huge job trying to learn everything there was about OSHA [Office of Safety and Health Administration], what the culture was. Of course, at that time in the mid '90s, it was really all about, you know, you get the job done however you can get the job done. And not a lot of emphasis on employee safety.

Cheryl Scherier: One of the stories that I like to tell is our maintenance crew were also a historic preservation crew. They had skills in historic structures, and there were a number of historic structures in Bryce Canyon. I'll never forget – when they were remodeling and rehabilitating some of these employee cabins for employee housing, that they ran into, and this was at a time when Hanta virus was being exposed on the horizon for employees and employee exposure. We had the situation where they were tearing out the walls and they ran into so much deer mice, and just being exposed to the deer mouse feces, the dry, the exposure.

Cheryl Scherier: Some of the employees said, "We don't want to continue on this anymore." It was the first time I had ever seen where we did a stand down, and where we actually shut down operations so that we could decide what to do, how were we going to manage this. Would this be our employees making sure that they have all the proper PPE, respiratory Tyvek type suits? And that's what we did. But that was almost unheard of, to shut down a project. These are individuals who were the ones that would do the job no matter, no matter what.

Cheryl Scherier: We did have one employee who had been exposed to Hanta virus – and very possibly not at the park. But many of the employees were locals. So, at the end of the day, they would go home and work on their ranches. They were exposed to a lot of deer mice. One of our employees did have, doing the testing, blood test, determined that this employee had had Hanta virus, and he was a survivor. So that was what I recall from that very first type of safety stand down.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, going back to being on the safety committee at Yellowstone, so presumably that's employees as well as some managers make up the—

Cheryl Scherier: Right.

Lu Ann Jones: So, from that vantage point, from a safety committee at a park, what kind of authority did you have as the safety committee? What was your purview there?

Cheryl Scherier: I don't think really at that time we had as much, if you will – I'm trying to figure out the best word. Influence, perhaps? The park did have a safety manager, did have a dedicated safety manager. It was really more of the compliance, like the OSHA compliance. I'm not sure how much of a difference that we made that I recall from my past experience. I knew the Safety Officer. I knew that he was trying to do the best job that he could do. But it's a big park. And with one safety officer, professional safety officer, it was very, it was very difficult.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. This is a little bit off topic, but do you think at that period, so we're really talking twenty-plus years ago now. Do you think people were, visitors were more risk takers then, less risk takers? How they interacted in dangerous ways have changed over time? Or has it been pretty consistent?

Cheryl Scherier: I think people were less risk takers at that time. And I think it's just, I think it's an evolution because I think people aren't as familiar with the out of doors, and they're out of their element. I really see that, and I noticed today from times past, social media. The use of cell phones, and situational awareness. People are not very aware of their surroundings when they venture out; you know, I think back on Yellowstone where you're walking on boardwalks and you've got hot thermal areas around. How do we best serve the visitor? I mean, I think people back then really did practice more restraint with their families, with their children, about what they could do or not do.

Cheryl Scherier: On the other hand I think we have more safety preventive measures in place encouraging people to wear like a helmet, or providing helmets for people when they're bicycling. Or even on horseback rides in national parks, if that helps to explain that.

Cheryl Scherier: I remember, an experience at Bryce Canyon also was with visitors in particular; we were trying to figure out, we had an intern who was from Europe. We were asking her, because our visitation was about 40 percent plus international visitors to Bryce Canyon. We have a lot of places at Bryce Canyon where people are on the edge taking photographs, and there

would be a place where people would physically cross over a restraining fence. How do you sign that to keep people out and away from the edge?

Cheryl Scherier: What we learned was that if you said fine – if you go over this, it's like a 50 dollar fine. The language that this young woman, this young intern said, well, probably if you say a 50 dollar penalty, it will resonate more with an international visitor, especially a European visitor. So, we changed our signage. I'm not sure how much it helped. People are going to do what they so choose to do. And if they see other people doing it, then they will do that.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. But still, you're attuned to how different cultures respond to specific words.

Cheryl Scherier: Yes. The different cultures. And even the different age groups and just the times. The times have really changed.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Yeah. Once you were there at Bryce and became more engaged with safety, so what were some of the particular issues that you were facing there? And how did you address those issues then? Then we'll get up to how Operational Leadership begins to affect some of those issues.

Cheryl Scherier: So, employees, I think overall, wanted to be safe. We certainly had incidences where we had employee injuries, accidents. I think it was part of that, you know, the mission was everything. Then we place people into situations, like place people into the back country, did they have the right tools and the right PPE [personal protective equipment]?

Cheryl Scherier: I did see changes over time. We did have a safety committee that we had different representation from the different divisions in the park. There was always, I think, pushback about, you know, like we can do this, or it's okay, it's all right, Cheryl.

Cheryl Scherier: One area that I really noticed, and this has also changed, I think, as well, is that you would, anything having to do with materials where at the end of the year people felt compelled to stock up on chemicals and paint, striping paint, and store it, and not necessarily would it be stored properly. But because it was that mentality of we have year-end money, let's stock up and let's pile up. Let's get this stuff.

Cheryl Scherier: The other area where I noticed it was in equipment. We obviously weren't too far from Nellis Air Force Base. So a lot of that government surplus, we would get all this equipment. Some of it – we even had this, literally I think it was a bomb launcher, if I remember correctly. Like why do we have this? Are we ever going to use it? Is the equipment safe? And always that was in the back of my mind.

Cheryl Scherier: I also had my own government vehicle. It was a K car, and it was from Nellis. It was one of the most unsafe vehicles you could possibly have. It was mouse-ridden. It had a lot of mechanical problems. I'll never forget when we had, it was actually the safety manager at the time from Glen Canyon National Recreation Area came up to assist us on a board of review. I believe I had to pick her up, I might have had to pick her up at the airport or let her use my vehicle. She said, "Cheryl, this is one of the most unsafe vehicles I've ever had. You can't use this vehicle anymore." So, there was this perception that, you know, we got a great deal on this equipment – and this was all throughout the park – let's use it, yay, you know, we can do this. So, it was some of those little things, but also some of the big things that I think prevented us from moving forward. Just a little bit of backlash to that.

Cheryl Scherier: But on the other hand, there were employees who wanted to do it safely. Wanted to make sure that their employees, that they were in the back country, the bio techs, for example. Or even back country rangers were performing their jobs safely.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I'm really fascinated by, we talked about culture change. I want to talk about that. So on the one hand, how do you think that message of the mission first, how did that get conveyed to the point where you might ignore safety issues? Do you see what I'm saying?

Cheryl Scherier: Yeah. I think part of it is if you had a project, especially projects, at that point, a lot of the projects were done in park. So, they were done by National Park Service employees. Where that was the case, you had so much money, you had so much time, or only so much time to complete a project. I think shortcuts were taken in whether or not we had programs like Hazmat in place. We did spend a fair amount of time on Hazmat programs, and then also the PPE programs and confined space. Employees were conducting themselves and working in confined spaces where perhaps what we do now, or even with like the respiratory protection program, having set aside and having that understanding of we have to finish these projects, we only have so much time to do them. The other side of that was, we have to train our employees to be able to do these type of projects, whether it be being exposed to respiratory issues or confined space where now I think we've evolved, if you will, into, if that job is too dangerous to be done by employees, contract that out. Contract it out to people who are the experts and have the training, rather than being caught up with we've only got this much time to complete it and then the money's going to be gone. So always that pressure, that stress of finishing something. And to try and do it safely, but having, always having that pressure of let's get 'er done at all costs. Hopefully that makes some sense.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. It does. That's a very helpful kind of particular situation where it helps to, yeah, the particulars. So as your career evolves, how does your thinking about safety evolve as your career evolves? If you could kind of do those two threads together, if that's not artificial.

Cheryl Scherier: Sure. Sure. So, with a change in how many regions we have being back in the park, being the collateral duty safety officer. Then having an opportunity, I was asked if I would participate in what they call the Risk Management Advisory Council at the Service-wide level. At that time, it was primarily the Service-wide risk manager, who was Richard Powell. I knew Richard from working in the Rocky Mountain Regional Office. I had a personal connection with him. He was very supportive of me being on this, having a collateral duty safety officer on this risk council, which was also made up of regional safety managers. And then also the Service-wide, there were some occupational hygienist, industrial hygienist on the committee. And so we looked at safety Service-wide.

Cheryl Scherier: It was also, at that time where we were starting to create a program called NP Safe. That was a program where you'd look at roles and responsibilities all the way from the director down through regions into parks and what were the roles and responsibilities to help the Park Service, since everyone knew we had the worst safety record. We were still killing and injuring our employees.

Cheryl Scherier: So, I was really interested in that. It was a little ho-hum.

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

Cheryl Scherier: The facilitator for this, Sue Thomas, who, she started with the Risk Management Advisory Council as a consultant and a facilitator who was hired to facilitate the meetings. She also helped with NPS Safe program. So how that continued to evolve is, when I left Bryce Canyon, that was my first superintendency at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, in North Dakota. So, I continued to be part of this Risk Management Advisory Council, being involved with NP Safe.

Cheryl Scherier: So the NP Safe program I think was a really great idea, what evolved from this council, in bringing in people from the field. Superintendents and others who had an interest in safety. But it was so, it was so bogged down. It was more about those roles and responsibilities and the expectations of, at the time, starting to evolve into Directors' Orders, and employee safety. You also had, there was a component of visitor safety. And it was almost an evolution for me that well, this seems to be getting better. We seem to be getting a better handle on this. But yet I felt like it was fits and starts,

and still sort of that thinking of well, we're not making great strides. We're still killing and injuring our employees.

Cheryl Scherier: Then you started to look around and you knew being a smaller agency, you began to realize how many people you know, or knew, that had died on the job, and that more than likely could have been prevented.

Lu Ann Jones: Are you able to give an example or two of that?

Cheryl Scherier: Sure. I mentioned the incident, Michael Beaulieu, who was a law enforcement ranger at Bryce Canyon. He was responding to a wildland fire call at night. The road he was traveling on is going all the way out to the end of the roadway at Bryce Canyon. And there's turns. And at nighttime it can be a little bit deceiving. So, his thought was that he had to respond with basically red lights, siren, to a report of a wildland fire. So his response to that – it might not have been a situation where [such a rapid response was necessary] – and he went over the edge of the highway, rolled his vehicle, and died immediately. No airbags went off.

Cheryl Scherier: So when I got the report, it was probably around midnight, because I was also the public information officer and safety officer, obviously. It was very heart wrenching. That was my first board of survey that I was involved in, and seeing that this didn't have to be a red lights and siren [response]. So that communication gap. I will tell you that this employee's direct supervisor was a district ranger. I know throughout the rest of this individual's career is that it affected him deeply that on his watch one of his employees died. So, what could have been done differently? He wasn't the chief ranger. But the chief ranger at the time also was, it's very devastating to a staff. He had a young child. He wasn't married at the time.

Cheryl Scherier: But a couple of years later, I was at the end of my tenure at Bryce Canyon, around 2003, I believe it was his parents that I met, came out. They wanted to go out to the sites. One of the rangers took them out there. So, it is still emotional. I think about that. That was 1996. So I do, those are the impactful situations that you remember.

Cheryl Scherier: I also knew of a couple of employees in Yellowstone that I had worked with. Bob Mann was a district ranger at the east entrance, and Rick Hutchinson was the park's geologist. Bob Mann had died in a snowmobile accident – checking the roads in the morning, went off the side of the road. Rick was in a back country situation in the winter, and had died in an avalanche. The avalanche was not a huge avalanche, but he was out in the back country with a researcher, had taken the researcher, and they both had died in this avalanche.

Cheryl Scherier: So knowing the impacts to the families, the spouses, it just, it never leaves you. And knowing that both of those, at this point in time, could have had a very different outcome if we had in place what we have, I believe, today, with Operational Leadership and the support from the bottom all the way to the top of the organization.

Lu Ann Jones: One of the things that Craig [Geis] and I talked about, did you also see just, I guess you would call them kind of routine kinds of accidents. The slips, trips, fall, the things that aren't the dramatic, don't result in fatalities, but are kind of routine injuries that you would see?

Cheryl Scherier: Oh, yes. I would say slips, trips and falls, even today, those are still probably the most common. Always seem to come back to that situational awareness when we've done our after-action reviews. I think those are the incidences that I think people felt like, well, you know, they happen. How can you prevent everything from happening? Well, we might not be able to. But when it boils down to – was that person holding a cell phone? What was that person doing when it happened? You know, in the wintertime we provide – and it's usually wintertime in usually snowy and icy conditions, we provide tracks – or the Yaktrax, some of the things that you can put on your snow boots to prevent the slips, trips, and falls. Some people just really ignore that. Or they don't have the right kind of equipment. Or they're just, as I said, situational awareness, they're just not paying attention to their surroundings.

Cheryl Scherier: So, I'll give you an example. A year ago, we started seeing this at Mount Rushmore where I had I'm not sure how many, a half dozen, maybe up to eight incidences in one year where it was all having to do with slips, trips, falls and that situational awareness. So, I required all of my employees to go back through a two-hour OL facilitator to conduct refreshers on OL. And I did. I required every single employee to go back through a refresher which he created to hit the high points of Operational Leadership. I think it helped. I think people went, well, you know, it's been so long since I've had the OL class, and I may have forgotten some of that. But I think it helped to put it in the forefront that what seemed to be routine could be very serious. Could have had very different outcomes for our employees. Hopefully, that helped to answer that question.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes. Yes. So how did you go from one, you know, the risk management, this form of this safety, to the introduction to Operational Leadership?

Cheryl Scherier: It was really through the transformation through the Safety and Leadership Council and my involvement with that. I had begun to hear about Operational Leadership. That would have been at the time I was superintendent at Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in Iowa. So still having those connections with safety. We had a safety committee there.

But I got back involved with, at a Service-wide level, the Safety Leadership Council, which had formed in 2007. Part of their work was to help to, if you will, deploy or provide information to all levels of the Service about this new way of looking at safety.

Cheryl Scherier: I mentioned Sue Thomas, the facilitator. When I was approached by Pedro Ramos, the superintendent now of Everglades, he was at the time deputy superintendent at Big Cypress in Florida, he had actually talked to a couple of us in our Superintendents Leadership Roundtable. We worked together with Pedro and two other superintendents, Laura Rotegard and Cindy Ott-Jones, and both of them were very interested in safety. He recruited us, basically. So, we had approval from our supervisors, regional directors, to participate in the Safety Leadership Council.

Cheryl Scherier: Then when I knew that Sue Thomas was a facilitator, and I had had conversations, she said, "Cheryl, this is so different. I think you would be so amazed that this council is so different from the Risk Management Advisory Council." Because it is made up of the support from the leadership in the National Park Service, regional directors, also superintendents at higher levels, and then superintendents representation from all of the seven regions. And made up of regional safety managers, and also collateral duty safety officers. I took it to heart. Because Sue knew, I mean, I'd known her for many years, and if she spoke that highly of this potential to change safety and to maybe change the culture, I was definitely onboard.

Cheryl Scherier: So that was March of 2010, when I embarked on that and learned more about Operational Leadership and was so thrilled to be able to be a part of that, and to take the course. I just felt like this was right on. This was allowing our employees to say no to unsafe behaviors, or to look at being empowered. To look at what other employees were doing and saying to other employees, "That is an unsafe practice. I don't want you to do it that way." Or, "Let's step back and let's look at this. Let's do a GAR [Green-Amber-Red] or make sure that our job hazard analysis is accurate." And that everything we do, we need to be looking at for employee safety.

Cheryl Scherier: So that was I think the real change movement for me personally that I felt like wow, when I started to—. We would meet a couple times a year, and normally meet in different park areas and just focused on different employee issues and hazards. So, when we met at Yellowstone, and this was in the fall of 2010, then we invited people in resource management. So our focus at Yellowstone was on resource management, and how employees were trained. If people went out on boats, what did they do, like for the fisheries aspect? What kind of focuses were in place? And even something like trapping bears, the bear program, what things were happening around that that really elevated that up to the levels that it

needed to be up at. The regional level, all the way up to the director's level.

Cheryl Scherier: There were some issues. We have people out in the back country working perhaps in unsafe conditions, and that were not utilizing the best available practices to ensure our employees are safe. So that really was an area for me that I saw where Operational Leadership could really make a difference.

Lu Ann Jones: Have you ever been in a situation where a lower level employee did stop work and say, "Let's think about this?" Kind of challenged what was going forward? Or do you have examples of that?

Cheryl Scherier: Let me think. Maybe it's because I'm just so safety-oriented that – go ahead.

Lu Ann Jones: Let me back up and ask you a more kind of conceptual question. How has Operational Leadership been able to help Park Service culture change? I mean, if the culture now has to accommodate people at all levels being able to say, "I'm not comfortable moving forward with this," how has that happened? Where have been the places where people have embraced that? And where are the places where people have resisted that change?

Cheryl Scherier: I think it's been a ship that has turned very, very slowly. But some of the successes, I think, with Operational Leadership and some of the focus with the Safety Leadership Council that we've seen broadly some of those culture changes, is that it has been grassroots, where people have spoken up to say, "This is not safe. I don't want to do this." And that it has changed at the grassroots level. But also having that support at the top, the people who have been involved, some of these individuals, they may have been a superintendent at the time. I'll use Jon Jarvis, for example. Being a superintendent, regional director and then the director, and having been involved at that somewhat grassroots level and being supportive of employees, and integrating that into our goals for 2016, for the centennial Call to Action, was very, very important, I believe, in making those broad changes.

Cheryl Scherier: You have employees who I believe, maybe if you want to call it the old guard, that just haven't had the same kind of buy-in. But I think what I would say at the Operational Leadership, especially in some of these classes, and you have a mixture of employees from different divisions, and the way the class is provided or instructed, it gives people an opportunity to understand what that empowerment looks like, what it feels like. Then perhaps hearing, being able to be in a setting where their supervisors might be, or other supervisors from other divisions might be, that this is, that this is okay.

Cheryl Scherier: So the culture change, there's so many different aspects of it. But it takes a long time. It takes years. Sometimes just a couple of years to transition into, "this is what acceptable behavior is" and "this is what employees should feel comfortable with saying." Hopefully that helps. There's so many different things about culture change—it starts slowly. It starts to permeate. You hope that as new employees come on board, that these activities, like Operational Leadership, would be a normal way. This is how we do business. We're not going to accept any other way of doing business. I think as time changes and through attrition, I think we'll see that. But I also think you always have to go back to the basics of new people may not have been exposed to what Operational Leadership is, and what the emphasis is by the National Park Service.

Lu Ann Jones: We talked a little bit yesterday about the changes in the fireworks policy.

Cheryl Scherier: Yes. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: At Rushmore. It really is a safety issue.

Cheryl Scherier: Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: That was one key thread. So can you give me that story? Because I think it's a fascinating analysis there.

Cheryl Scherier: It is. The fireworks at Mount Rushmore started in 1998. It was supposed to be a one-time event. It was supposed to be commemorating the redevelopment of Mount Rushmore. Huge project that transformed the park more into the look of a memorial, and to accommodate the increasing number of visitors. We have over three million visitors a year at Mount Rushmore.

Cheryl Scherier: So the idea came about, well, let's have a celebration. Someone mentioned fireworks. So our friends group, the Mount Rushmore Society, helped to seek out sponsors to help coordinate this event. The event occurred, 1998 being the first. Well, then they decided it was so successful that they would continue to do this. Where they launched the fireworks were back behind the sculpture. So back behind the heads, if you will. There's a place called the Hall of Records Canyon. It's a very narrow canyon. It's over seven stories high to be able to walk up to the Hall of Records.

Cheryl Scherier: So, what they decided is to continue the fireworks on an annual basis, because they televise this. It was 60 million viewers could see this. It occurred on July third. So supposedly the first fireworks that people could see in the United States that occurred at a very iconic park. So every year since that time, and all the planning started from almost the day after. So,

July Fourth, you have an exhausted group of employees who then started planning for the next year.

Cheryl Scherier: It became apparent through – there was an environmental assessment that was completed in 2004. The environmental assessment was to state that fireworks were the preferred alternative. In other words, that was almost a predetermined outcome is that we'll look at this as, and I was not there at the time, but that this is what it's going to be. And it's very political. It's very tourism-oriented. It was supposedly to be a huge economic impact for the communities around. And people really liked it – that wow, I can go to this place that represents democracy and patriotism. What a better place than Mount Rushmore to see the fireworks?

Cheryl Scherier: So, they continued this up until 2009. There were actually events that had fog, and so they couldn't light the fireworks off. One year, and I don't recall the year, they ended up doing like a laser light show because it was too dry in the surrounding forest. So, they did a laser light show. And that bombed. That was not very well-accepted.

Cheryl Scherier: So when I arrived in 2010, what was happening in the forest around us in the Black Hills is that it's a natural infestation, but the mountain pine beetle. That received a lot of attention because you had trees dying. With the forest duff, you had a higher increase in wildland fire. In 2010 there was an acting superintendent that made the decision with the regional office, regional director. Even though this EA that had been completed said this was the preferred alternative to allow fireworks, they looked at what was one of the other alternatives, the environmental alternative that said if there was fire danger that we should not be lighting fireworks.

Cheryl Scherier: So the year 2010, acting superintendent prior to my arrival, they decided not to light fireworks and have the fireworks display. It was very political. There was such uproar from the communities. So, what eventually happened when I arrived in the fall of 2010, and almost the first week I was there, the congressional delegation and other community members, tourism associations, wanted to meet with me and our staff. So, we did. I said, "We can't make that determination right now for next year. We're trying to look at all of the factors, including environmental." The wildland fire, I don't think anybody would say, and if they look today at what's happening around the country, that wildland fire was a real threat.

Cheryl Scherier: What I embarked on was – I decided that, you know, we had a new tool. We had Operational Leadership. We also had the history of how many different fire starts happened on the mountain. I believe it was anywhere from 21 to 23 different fire starts. You had firefighters. We had modules up on the mountain placed in forest areas. Granite, very difficult terrain,

dangerous terrain to be on at night. And people were trying to extinguish fires. There was even one fire on a tree in front of the sculpture that got lit.

Lu Ann Jones: As a result of the fireworks.

Cheryl Scherier: As a result of the fireworks. You also had embers that were coming down from the fireworks that would, all of that ash and the embers and debris were also getting in visitors' eyes. We had people just, I mean, they would camp out there all day long. *All day long*. The park would close at ten o'clock and no one else could get in. They'd camp out and they'd stake out their places. So not only did you have the wildland fire danger, but you also had employees who were working incredibly long hours with no sleep, exhausted, managing these large crowds of people.

Cheryl Scherier: The other aspect was, our waste water treatment plant, could not handle the number of visitors there to accommodate all of the waste. So, Porta Potties, it was just sort of this environmental nightmare.

Cheryl Scherier: But the safety component part of it was so important, and the risk so great, that when I arrived there and I said, hmm, we're going to look at this really closely. So eventually I invited Mark Herberger [Operational Leadership program manager] to come and help facilitate a risk assessment of the fireworks. Looking at both employees as well as our visitors. So, it involved our staff along with people who had been involved in the wildland fire component of it, who had actually been there. We conducted the risk assessment. We did the GAR, and it came into the red. There was really no way to mitigate this activity to make it safe.

Cheryl Scherier: In the interim, so what was helping or assisting the park with not having fireworks, our main focus was because of the threat of wildland fire, because of the mountain pine beetle infestation is that we just felt like it was a reasonable decision. Our regional director at the time, Mike Reynolds, fully supported it. Mike Reynolds was also someone who had been involved in Operational Leadership. He had been on the Safety Leadership Council. So he knew; he would help me take the heat and support the park 100 percent. Then we could also go back to that environmental assessment and focus on you know what? We're looking at the environmental alternative as the area that we could focus our attempt on. But it was also that visitor safety and employee safety. There was no doubt that that was one of the most important components.

Cheryl Scherier: When we shared this with the public, the congressional delegation, of course, great disappointment. People said, "Hey, you know what? We can have the National Guard come in and help put out fires if need be." Apparently they felt like, do you know how important this is to the

community? I said, "I understand and I appreciate that. But most importantly, my job is to preserve and protect.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes.

Cheryl Scherier: And also provide for employee and visitor safety. So that visitor safety being really important, but also that component of our visitors. We can't place our visitors in that situation. So, fast forward, I think to this day it is probably—

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Cheryl Scherier: —every year we look at that. It has been a good decision. The people who had lived through that thank me every year for not having fireworks at Mount Rushmore. Part of it is just that stress. When we looked at doing the GAR and the stress that our employees were under, and the impact to the overall health and wellbeing of our employees. And all of the employees that we had to bring in. We had to bring in SET teams. The cost and the expense of that. And so we couldn't focus on other activities at the park. That was like one of the main focuses.

Lu Ann Jones: I think you said yesterday, too, that it turned out that by not focusing all the economic activity on the park, that some of that economic activity went back to the smaller towns.

Cheryl Scherier: It did. Early on when we didn't – for the first, I would say probably for the first three years, we would meet with community partners. Chambers, tourism associations, the department of tourism and the state. We'd come up with this idea of activities throughout, usually from the first of July maybe through the fifth of July. They still publish it every year, is a brochure on Independence Day activities through the Black Hills. So, you would still have probably I think as many as 13 different fireworks displays in other communities throughout the Black Hills, and also other Independence Day activities. So, people could come to Mount Rushmore on July third. But they could still, on July Fourth, go to a community. So there was this wonderful flow of visitors. Our park on July third, the way we handle our activities now, is we can see a turnover in visitors throughout the day. We have presidential reenactors. They're really our rock stars at that. But the parking facility turns over five different times throughout the day. The economic impact to the communities it just exponentially raised – like Keystone, two miles away from us, main community, gateway community, and Hill City, a little further away. But basically the businesses are very happy about that, because their businesses just basically closed down at ten o'clock in the morning until the next day. And so that's hugely impactful.

Cheryl Scherier: But there are still the state, people who reside there, that would still like to, who are in the administration, who would still like to see fireworks. Would never say no to fireworks. So, our work seems to never be done. And I think that it's really important that with our past regional director, Cam Sholly, who is also very supportive and developed an excellent review for the director and also the Department of Interior as to why. One of the main focuses will always be on safety of our employees and our visitors as to why this is not a good idea.

Lu Ann Jones: That's a fascinating case study. It just brings together so many elements—

Cheryl Scherier: It does.

Lu Ann Jones: —under the umbrella of safety.

Cheryl Scherier: It does. Absolutely. I think, seeing what the impact is of conducting a GAR on that activity. And how much I learned as a superintendent about how my, I was looking around at how much my employees were impacted by that. I thought to myself, any responsible park manager – and I understand in the past the tremendous, if you will, stress that other park managers had to endure. Was I any braver? It was just one of those things where everything came together, the alignment of the stars, if you will, that allowed me to discontinue – and having that support all the way up, all the way up to acting directors. If I didn't have that support, it would be, for me, personally, and I'm not afraid to say it, it would be so extremely disappointing to see, I would be devastated. Because I know what the impact is to our employees. We should not place our employees in any way into that situation ever again.

Lu Ann Jones: For the event like this of marking the tenth anniversary of Operational Leadership, what does that mean to you? And again, your superintendency in a very, you know, kind of the evolution of your career, and you have seen it really in action in a number of ways. So, what does having an occasion like this to kind of mark ten years, what does that mean to you?

Cheryl Scherier: For me I think it really means to see that we're making progress. What is so encouraging to me, knowing that our employees continue to be so important. On my signature line on my email, I have, "Commitment to mission is commitment to each other." That is, I think, one of the most important things is that we have made a commitment to our employees that we care for them, and we still want every day for them to go home. To see what has happened over the ten years of OL, it's, I think it's tremendous. Because change happens so slowly. And this is such a positive change. What could be more important, as I always tell my employees, I said, "We preserve and protect resources for generations to come. My job is not only to preserve and protect those resources, the

human resources are by far the most important. Because those are the resources, you are the ones, my employees, my team, is going to be the ones that are going to help preserve and protect those cultural, natural resources." So, I think it's amazing to me. Maybe that's not the correct word. But it's very satisfying. It's rewarding. Just the accomplishments. Not that we can just stop. But what I also love about this summit is that we're looking forward into the future. What are the next ten years going to bring? And that we have to depend on our next generation of leaders, our up and coming leaders, our emerging leaders, to ensure that this torch, if you will, of OL and safety, safety, health and wellness, is carried on. That we know what it looks like when it doesn't work, and we know what it looks like when we've embraced it fully.

Lu Ann Jones: Do you think part of Operational Leadership from the start was the, as somebody talked about yesterday, these kinds of psychological stresses, or these issues of harassment? Did you foresee that that could come under the Operational Leadership umbrella, for example? Do you think that will be part of the future more than it even has been so far?

Cheryl Scherier: I think it will be part of the future. Just even looking at the change in the makeup, if you will, on the Safety Leadership Council. To be there to help support both the safety, health and wellness in that meshing in with all of the employee issues, having a safe and respectful, free of harassment type workplace. As we have been looking at that, I remember when Mark Herberger looked at some of the components of the employee viewpoint survey a few years ago and how that meshes with OL and safety. And after the work survey, and looking at harassment issues, it makes sense, it just makes so much sense that there's more of that culture that we have to address and change. It seems like it's very integrated together, because it all boils down to that, the health and wellness of our employees, which includes safety, and having that workplace that is harassment-free.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, are there questions I haven't asked you that you would like to comment on?

Cheryl Scherier: Well, I would just say that it's been a remarkable, I've had a remarkable career. And looking at – I get emotional. If I can just save one employee, that's really what it's all about. And having them go home each day. I tell them almost every day, and I couldn't do it without a team. So I'm just very thankful to have this opportunity. I think it is just incredible. I just feel like I see the people that I've been involved with who really care and just at all levels, that really care about employees and their job. They love the mission, but if they're not supported and not cared for, that we're going down a wrong road. I want to see it go down the right road. So, I hope if anyway if I've just contributed just a nugget or a small bit, that I don't really believe in legacies, personal legacies. But I would say if I

could have a personal legacy of safety, health and wellness for my employees, that would be the best legacy of all.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, that sounds like a great place to end. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Cheryl Scherier: Thank you. You are very welcome. Thank you for the opportunity.

Lu Ann Jones: Absolutely. Thank you.

[End Track 3.]

[END OF INTERVIEW]