

National Park Service (NPS) History Collection

NPS Oral History Collection (HFCA 1817)
Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project, 2012-2016



Georjean McKeeman
October 22, 2014

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

This digital transcript contains updated pagination, formatting, and editing for accessibility and compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Interview content has not been altered.
The original typed transcript is preserved in the NPS History Collection.

The release form for this interview is on file at the NPS History Collection.

NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

ANPR Oral History Project

Georjean McKeeman

22 October 2014

Interview conducted by
Lu Ann Jones

Transcribed by
Teresa Bergen

Audiofile: MCKEEMAN Georjean 22 Oct 2014

[START OF TRACK 1]

Lu Ann Jones: Thank you very much for joining me here this morning. I just usually start off by saying this is Lu Ann Jones and it's October 22, 2014. We're at the YMCA of the Rockies at 2014 Ranger Rendezvous. And could you give me your full name and tell me whether or not I have permission to record this interview.

Georjean McKeeman: I'm Georjean Gladys McKeeman. And yes, you have permission to record this interview. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Right. Good. Well, even though the focus will be on the park service, I always like to go back and just, as I say, get the origin stories of people. Where did you begin? So, if you don't mind telling like the year you were born and where you were born, and just something about your family background.

Georjean McKeeman: Okay. I was born in 1948 in South Dakota. My parents were small farmers. I grew up on the farm. Went to school in the area. Went to college in South Dakota, at South Dakota State University. So that would be my background. I graduated in 1970. I don't know if many people know that, but at the time there was something called the Federal Service Entrance Examination, and I took the FSEE and scored well on it. The way I got in the park service is through the FSEE. I did not have any park service background. Supposedly, I had visited Badlands National Park when I was about two. Did not remember it other than the pictures I've seen. But I did not have any background with the park service.

Georjean McKeeman: Hopewell Furnace, what was then Hopewell Village National Historic Site – it's now Hopewell Furnace, they were given permission to hire off the FSEE, which I understand to be quite rare. So, I got a call that summer about a job as what they called a junior historian. That was a job title for Hopewell Furnace.

Georjean McKeeman: In talking with the superintendent, I said, "Well, I'm interested in the job, but I don't think I can afford to come out there for an interview and then maybe not get the job."

Georjean McKeeman: So, he arranged for me to be interviewed by the superintendent of Pipestone National Monument in Minnesota. I went over there and did the interview and got the job.

Georjean McKeeman: Then I moved to Pennsylvania and started work for the park service August 31, 1970.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow. What did you study in college?

Georjean McKeeman: I was a history major in college.

Lu Ann Jones: Uh huh. I guess as an undergraduate history major, you studied many different things.

Georjean McKeeman: Yes. One of my advisors really got on my case about whether I was concentrating on European history or American history. But the chair of the department, who was somebody I worked with closely, felt that that was too limiting, and so I had a very broad history background. I had also scored very well in math on the FSEE and so I'd had a couple of calls from the navy as to whether I wanted to come and work in their financial thing. But I wasn't quite sure I wanted to do that. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Who directed you towards that test in the first place?

Georjean McKeeman: I assume it was the department chair, but I really don't remember. I took it the summer between my junior and senior year in college, I participated in something called – I'm thinking of how it was termed. The army at that time was recruiting in the upper Midwest because we were not, we were a college that did not have antiwar demonstrations and stuff. We had a strong ROTC program. They recruited women to go to a summer program for a month in Alabama. And I don't remember, at Fort McClellan. The idea was you did this month of military service. And at the end of the month, you could either say that yes, you were interested in joining the military for a two-year commitment. In which case they would send you back to your college and they would give you a stipend for your senior year. Which is why I did this, was to get the money. (laughs) Or you could say no, and they put you on inactive reserve for two years. So, I'm technically a military veteran, although I don't claim it very often because I don't feel that my service anywhere compares to those people that actually were active duty.

Georjean McKeeman: So, I don't remember whether I heard about the FSEE through that program or whether it was through my department.

Lu Ann Jones: Where did you take that? Was that something you could take just about anywhere?

Georjean McKeeman: Yes. Yes. I want to say you took it at like a post office. You went in and they had set dates that it was given. You would go in, and, yes, it was at a post office because it was one of the ways that they got postal employees. You'd go in and you'd take the exam. It was like taking an SAT or an ACT type exam. You were there for two, three hours. It was a written exam, and then you got a letter afterwards saying okay, this is your score and what you're eligible for grade-wise and stuff like that. So that is how it was done.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, do you remember what the interview was like, the first interview there with the superintendent?

- Georjean McKeeman: Well, I remember being very scared, (laughs) and in one respect, very sure of myself because I was a college graduate and that sort of thing. My mother and father, also, but especially my mother had raised me to be a self-confident person, but at the same time, I didn't feel like I knew what he was talking about. But it was just a very casual interview. He said, "Well, I think you'd probably do a good job for them. I'll let Mr. Riddle know and we'll go from there." So, I got hired.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, what was it like to pack up and head to Pennsylvania?
- Georjean McKeeman: Oh, it was very strange. Very strange. My mother was very worried about me. She drove out with me and I packed what I had in a car. I got out there and I was assigned a three-bedroom home and didn't have any furniture. (laughs) So I remember I bought a day bed, and the park provided me with a table and two office chairs. I had my sewing machine, and I had a small two-drawer chest and that's how I started out. And then as I worked, I added pieces and that sort of thing.
- Georjean McKeeman: It was a very, very different environment because I was used to living in eastern South Dakota, a very open environment. This house was set among trees in eastern Pennsylvania, and I felt very closed in. (laughs) I really felt uncomfortable at night there, not because I was worried that something was going to happen to me, but just all this greenery just sort of closing in on me. But it was a good job and I enjoyed it.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, what was that site like when you arrived there?
- Georjean McKeeman: Well, I mean, there was the maintenance staff and then Larry Points was the ranger.
- Lu Ann Jones: If you can spell some of these names for me, the transcriber would love you for that. So how do you spell his last name?
- Georjean McKeeman: P-o-i-n-t-s. Then Earl Heidinger, H-e-i-d-i-n-g-e-r, was the chief historian. I didn't get to know a lot of the maintenance – I mean, I knew them casually, but I didn't socialize with them, necessarily. But Earl and Larry and I shared a large room as our office. Earl had been there forever. He and his wife lived in the Mission 66 house across the road between my house and his house. Larry lived down in a historic house at the end of the village because that was one of their ways of dealing with security. So, I got to know his wife, Toni, really well. Superintendent Riddle, John C. Riddle, R-i-d-d-l-e, he lived in the superintendent's quarters. So, it was an area that at that time in the '70s, when schools had money for field trips and stuff, saw a lot of use from schools in spring and fall. So, we did a lot of school tours.

- Georjean McKeeman: When I first got there, I was loaned, I guess what they called the stewardess uniform, which was a white blouse and green straight skirt and a little green cap. My first uniform purchase was the double-knit tan dress and coat and the very chintzy hat. (laughs) I don't know if you remember those.
- Lu Ann Jones: I've seen photographs of those.
- Georjean McKeeman: Yes. So that was the uniform that I wore, giving tours and that sort of thing. I worked through the winter. Because I did not know anything about the park service, I was really, really interested in going to the Introduction to Park Operations course at the Grand Canyon, at Albright Training Center. My superintendent said, "Well, the only way you're going is if you get into the class that starts in January and ends in mid-March, because you have to be back here for school tours in the spring. I will not let you be gone."
- Georjean McKeeman: I applied, and originally didn't get in, and went home for my brother's wedding over Christmas. When I got back, here was a letter on my desk saying that I was supposed to report to the Grand Canyon, basically in about five days. (laughs)
- Georjean McKeeman: So, I went out there. That's where I met my husband. Then, when the class was over, I came back to Hopewell Furnace, did more school tours. During the summer, they at that time had a program of living history. They had three or four schoolteachers; local schoolteachers that demonstrated how the castings were made. But then they had also gotten, I think there were five Student Conservation Association workers. They were all girls, so they were in costume and staffed various buildings. The store, the big house. One of the workers' quarters. Then we had horses and cattle that one of the local farmers provided, and that sort of thing. I was real active in that. I really participated, made my own costume. I was basically there till the end of '71 when my husband and I got married.
- Lu Ann Jones: Can I ask you a couple of questions based on what you've done?
- Georjean McKeeman: Sure.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, your title was junior historian.
- Georjean McKeeman: Right.
- Lu Ann Jones: And what were your duties with that job description?
- Georjean McKeeman: My primary duty was to give tours.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, it was really interpretation.
- Georjean McKeeman: It was really interpretation. When I was hired, that was what the park gave me. On my paperwork, I was a park ranger interpretive specialist. Primarily I gave tours, manned the visitors center. I did

not do a lot of research, because Earl did all that. He was big into research, and he had done research not only for the park service at Hopewell, he had done it for other park service sites and he had done it for the state of Pennsylvania and that was his bailiwick. And he didn't need any young thing coming in and doing it.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, did you base your talks, though, on his research? Or could you do that?

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: He collaborated, then.

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. He collaborated. I was given a batch of the research and read that. Then I also did probably two or three observation tours with him that he was leading and then was expected to be able to tell the story of what happened at Hopewell, why it's important, and that sort of thing. Of course, as you do it longer, you get better at it, more skilled at it. So. I did a lot of stuff where I was at the visitor's center desk and greeted people, answered their questions, told them where the restroom was (laughter) and explained and gave them the brochure and that sort of thing. That was back in the days of the little paper brochures that were about like that.

Lu Ann Jones: And what was the training at Albright Training Center like at that time?

Georjean McKeeman: It was a combination of field skills and history of the park service. I remember being in classes where they talked about the history of the park service, how it got started, what the first parks were, and that sort of thing. I remember there being classes in which we practiced interpretive skills. In fact, I remember that my interpretive program that I gave was not on Hopewell, but we were told to look at what areas the park service wasn't serving, what natural or historical areas. One of the things that I felt that the park service wasn't doing at that time, it didn't have a Tall Grass Prairie, which we do now. But didn't then. And I gave an interpretive program on the prairie.

Georjean McKeeman: And then we also did some field skills. We did hikes. We went to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and stayed overnight down there and then came back up. We did a day where we were doing ropes courses and belaying and that sort of thing. We did field trips. Went to San Francisco on a field trip. Went to Lake Mead on a field trip. I think we also went up to Zion on a field trip. Saw how different things were happening in different parks. San Francisco was obviously an urban park. Zion was obviously a natural area, and that sort of thing. And Lake Mead was talking about recreation areas and stuff like that.

- Georjean McKeeman: And there was a lot of socializing. Now the class that I was in, I was considered a backlog. Other than my husband and maybe two other classmates, everybody else was a backlog. So, most of the people that were in the class had been working for the park service, many of them for years, and they were now coming to this class. So, there was a lot of camaraderie and a lot of information you were getting from classmates who had a lot of experience with the park service.
- Georjean McKeeman: There were classes on just the paperwork. How to fill out forms and what you needed to look at and stuff. The one thing that wasn't emphasized that I wish had been emphasized; it was talked about but sort of brushed over, was about getting permanent status. When you first came in, you had two years where you were permanent but not fully permanent, not with reinstatement rights, and they really didn't emphasize that. I resigned from the park service when Bruce and I got married in December of '71, and had I totally understood that if I work for X period longer I would have had reinstatement rights, I would have really reevaluated when we wanted to get married.
- Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Where was he duty stationed when he – I'm just going to get this out of your way.
- Georjean McKeeman: Sure.
- Lu Ann Jones: Where was he—
- Georjean McKeeman: Because he has two bachelor's degree, he was in a dual program, he graduated in December of '70. I had graduated in the spring of '70.
- Lu Ann Jones: Where was he from?
- Georjean McKeeman: Well, he grew up in Massachusetts and Ohio, and went to Marietta College and the University of Michigan on a dual program between those two schools. He graduated from Michigan in December. He had worked seasonally for the park service. Had been hired through the urban intake program and had worked a summer at the Smokies. Went back and finished up school, and when he called the Smokies to tell them, "Well, I'm graduating on this date, when do I report for duty?," they said, "Oh, your next duty assignment is the Grand Canyon. You're going to Introduction to Park Operations." So that's where he went after college, and where we met.
- Georjean McKeeman: From there, then he went to Washington, DC, and was part of the urban intake program there. Did his law enforcement training at the old park police academy and then was at various assignments over the summer. In the fall, I guess it was in November, he was then assigned to Tonto National Monument in Arizona, and that's

when we set the date for our wedding and got married in December and our honeymoon was driving to Arizona. (laughter)

Lu Ann Jones: Well, if you had stayed in, I mean, you weren't that many months away from two years, right?

Georjean McKeeman: No. No. I would have, well, I had started in August of '70, so I would have had to work until August of '72. But I probably would have considered that.

Lu Ann Jones: Was there any idea that you might try to find a job at the same place that he was at? Or was that even contemplated at that time?

Georjean McKeeman: Well, it was, and it wasn't. I was actually higher grade than he was. But growing up in a rural setting like I had, it was not something I would contemplate that I would work and he – because he said, "Well, you can work, and I'll be a professional photographer." That just was something that did not fly with me at all. (laughs)

Georjean McKeeman: So, we moved to Tonto. Tonto had a very small staff. At that time, they had a superintendent, they had a ranger, which was my husband. They had a maintenance man, and the maintenance man's wife was a part time AO [administrative officer]. And that was it. So, there was no chance that I was going to work there.

Georjean McKeeman: Then when we went to Yosemite, I looked into working there seasonally. When we first got there and I interviewed with the chief of interpretation, he was not interested in hiring me at all because I had a historical background and this was a natural park, and I didn't have a natural background and so I wouldn't be able to interpret the natural world.

Georjean McKeeman: Then the following summer I was hired seasonally, and I worked at entrance station. Worked in entrance station and gave two campfire talks a week, which I did give one historical because there's plenty of history in Yosemite.

Georjean McKeeman: Then my mother had some illness and I had to go back and help my parents while dealing with her illness.

Georjean McKeeman: Then I got hired on a part time basis in the curatorial division. Jack Geyer was the curator for Yosemite at that time and Craig Bates was one of the interpreters. Craig, he was their Indian specialist, and he was hired in part to create an Indian museum in Yosemite. And if you've been there, you know that there is an Indian museum. Well, they had a lot of stuff in their collection, but there was some confusion over what they had and what they didn't have. I was hired to do an inventory with them. And then I ended up working part time with Jack and Craig for about two and a half years before our first child was born. I really liked that.

Georjean McKeeman: One of the things that if you aren't in the park service long enough you may not know about was, they changed, in the mid '60s, '64, maybe, they changed their inventory process in the park service. In a lot of parks, they didn't have curators, they didn't have historians, and somebody was assigned to do this as collateral duty who didn't have any background in it, and they were in a hurry. They had a lot to cover, and so if they couldn't find it the day, they were typing up the card, it was missing. (laughter)

Georjean McKeeman: What we found when I did the initial inventory was some of the stuff that was missing really wasn't missing. Other stuff that was supposed to be there was missing. It was one of those kind of things. So, I worked in that. I facilitated a three-way, what's the word I'm looking for? Well, Yosemite had some Indian baskets that were not from the Yosemite area.

Georjean McKeeman: One of the things you have to understand is a lot of Californians that collected Indian stuff over the years, and if they didn't know what else to do with it, they would donate it to the park, whether it had any – I mean, we had a lovely collection of Arkansas arrowheads, among other things. It didn't have anything to do with California, but somebody who had collected them in Arkansas, retired in California, didn't know, his kids didn't want them. And so, we'll give them to Yosemite.

Georjean McKeeman: But we had some baskets. Sitka had some baskets and there was a museum in southern California. We did a three-way exchange where Yosemite baskets that were in southern California came to the Yosemite for our museum. We had baskets, Sitka baskets, that went up to Sitka. And Sitka had baskets that the museum in southern California it wanted. Now we couldn't actually permanently give them because the way the donations had been received, they had to stay in each museum's collection. But they're on permanent loan, and that was one of the things I felt really good about, when I did that. Jack went back to Eastman Kodak and took a class on how to preserve glass plate negatives, and I helped him with that when he came back from the class. We had a *National Geographic* photographer that came out and wanted to look at some of the Bierstadt and Watkins paintings and photography and that sort of thing, and I showed him around. So, it was a really good, compatible way for me to work and for Bruce to work in protection, and not to be an issue.

Lu Ann Jones: So, was he there at the time of the famous Yosemite riot? Or—

Georjean McKeeman: No. We came in after that.

Lu Ann Jones: And was he brought there specifically as part of their response to that event? Or did it just happen that he—

Georjean McKeeman: Well, they did—

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Georjean McKeeman: They upped their trained law enforcement staff after the riots. So, he just was offered a, you know, back in the days when you got the phone call out of nowhere saying, “We have a job for you here. would you like to take it or are you declining it?” (laughs) And that was the way the Yosemite job. We spent the first year at Crane Flat, which is up at six thousand feet. He was in the Mather District and working road patrol up there, and then the next seven years we were in the valley.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you stayed there a pretty good while.

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. We were there eight years.

Lu Ann Jones: Was there, how many children were born while you were there?

Georjean McKeeman: Two. We have two.

Lu Ann Jones: Two. Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Georjean McKeeman: When we got there, the hospital, had just converted to a clinic and they were no longer doing live births there – you know, so you’re going to have your baby here. So, we did all our prenatal and obstetric care and everything, both the kids were born in Fresno. So. The first one, we were down there, had a doctor’s visit. The doctor said, “Oh, it’s going to be another week.” And I thought, oh, no. (laughs)

Georjean McKeeman: We stayed overnight that night because Bruce wanted to observe a court case that was in federal court the next day that had some relationship to Yosemite. And I went into labor that night.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, lucky you.

Georjean McKeeman: So, we were in town. Then the second time, he was taking park medic classes in Fresno. There were a group of them that were driving down once a week and taking park medic classes and then coming back up. He got home very, very late because there was another Wednesday night snowstorm, which was pretty typical that winter. And Thursday morning I woke up and I said, “I’m in labor and we need to go back to Fresno.” (laughter)

Georjean McKeeman: He chained up the car. Took our daughter over to a friend’s house and chained up the car. And we went up over Badger Pass and down to Wawona and out that entrance with chains on. And then unchained and went the rest of the way into Fresno. (laughter) So that was the more exciting one.

Lu Ann Jones: How long did it take you to get there?

- Georjean McKeeman: He did it in two hours.
- Lu Ann Jones: That's pretty good.
- Georjean McKeeman: That's very good. (laughter) He was hoping he would get stopped for speeding, because then he'd have a police car to escort him in the rest of the way. Didn't happen. (laughter) But yes, he was not exactly driving the speed limit all the time. So.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, was there, what was it like to live in the park? Just to be part of a park—
- Georjean McKeeman: Community?
- Lu Ann Jones: Worker community, yes.
- Georjean McKeeman: It's very special. Because you really feel like you're part of the community. We were in Yosemite for eight years, and it was as if we had two time periods. The first four years there were a lot of single folks and little more on the partying end and that sort of thing. And then, almost seemingly overnight, although it wasn't quite that fast, we had a new group of people come in and they were more family oriented. They were a little bit older. Had families already going. And the tone of things really changed. But especially the second group. I mean, I would say my best friend is still somebody I met then.
- Georjean McKeeman: Bruce worked night shift for a good part of the time while he was working in the valley. So, it was a real interesting situation in the sense that he would get up and was very involved with our daughter, especially, the first two years that we had her, and then go to work at four. Come home at seven for a supper break. And then go back and work after that.
- Georjean McKeeman: There was a good staff. We had a full-time dispatch, and so if he was not going to be able to get home at what we considered reasonable hours, between one and two a.m., then he would have dispatch call me.
- Georjean McKeeman: One of the stories is, one of the dispatchers that was new, Bruce called him on the radio and said, "You need to call my wife and tell her that I'm not going to make it in, we're hung up on something." The dispatcher said, "But it's two a.m. You don't want me to call her now." Bruce said, "Well, yes, you do want to call her now. Because I'll be in a lot more trouble if you don't call her than if you call her now."
- Georjean McKeeman: He would call and I'd say okay, and then I could sleep securely. One of my friends, her husband also worked nights. As she likes to say, "I always knew I could call Georjean at eleven o'clock at night, that she'd still be up." (laughs) Because you know, we just did that.

- Georjean McKeeman: One of the other things that I remember is there were four of us with assorted children that were supposed to get together for Thanksgiving. It was the year that they had the Wawona Hotel fire on Thanksgiving Day. So, we had gathered, and the guys were coming. Then the fire alarm went off, and that meant they all disappeared.
- Georjean McKeeman: And somebody, one of the younger wives said, “Well, are we going to wait until they come back?”
- Georjean McKeeman: Linda said, “No way. We don’t know when they’re going to come back. We’re going to have Thanksgiving as we planned it, at this time, because that’s when the food’s going to be ready. And if they show up, fine, they’ll get some. If not, they’ll get leftovers.” And that sort of thing. But it was that kind of relationship. So, it was really special.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, it sounds like also from that story that you, people with more experience kind of socialize newer people there what to expect—
- Georjean McKeeman: Oh, yes. Yeah. There was definitely that. When we first moved to Yosemite, Bruce’s supervisor was married, and they were living at Big Oak Flat in housing up there. I would go up there and Bonnie would tell me, “Well this is what’s happening or not happening.” Once we were in the valley, there was a lot of that that went on. The older spouses definitely took younger spouses under their wing, which was part of why the community was so nice. Because you really felt you had people you could go to, and even if you didn’t know them that well, if you had a problem, they probably had experienced it and you could go ask them for a suggestion of how to handle it.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, without trying to like push a bruise or something, what would be an example of something, an issue like that, that might be something that would be particularly germane to families and beyond the worker—
- Georjean McKeeman: Well, you know, I got called for jury duty. Well, how do I handle childcare? I can’t rely on my husband because he’s at work, also. So, you talk to one of the other mothers. In fact, one of my jury duties, my son walked away from his babysitter. She was watching her three kids and my two. He decided he was done. It’s just the way he was. So, when she realized that – I mean, you always knew you could call the rangers if something happened. They immediately put out a search. He hadn’t gone very far and was perfectly safe. Not feeling at all scared or anything like that.
- Georjean McKeeman: But you could ask, you could also ask about other places that people had worked, and whether you wanted to consider putting in for them. Because while we were at Yosemite, the process changed

from the phone call out of the blue to where you applied for jobs. And that happened. and so, it was always good to talk to people who might know somebody and whether you want to go there or not and that sort of thing.

Georjean McKeeman: You could talk to them about how do I get something, or I need to get these things for my kids, but I don't have access to it the way I would. Especially, like I had grown up in a rural setting. I was used to planning and plotting out, you know, I'm going to go to town on this weekend and this is what I'm all going to do.

Georjean McKeeman: But we had a number of women come in that had all lived in urban settings. And this was very radical to them to not be able to just run to the store. So, you educated them as to well, you can buy milk ahead of time and freeze it, and when you thaw it out it will still be good, it won't spoil, and things like that. So, with stuff like that.

Lu Ann Jones: Where did the children go to school?

Georjean McKeeman: Yosemite has an elementary school. So, they went to elementary school there. And if your child was ready for high school, then there was this whole bus problem where they were bused out of the park. It was about an hour ride for them to get to the high school and stuff. But it had an elementary school. They were combined classes. It was like kindergarten, one and two, three and four, and so on. So it wasn't that big. There are plusses and minuses to that. One of my friends' son did not do well in first grade in Yosemite. When they left towards the end of his first-grade year, his mother and father both, but primarily I heard the mother's side of the story, decided that, you know, we're going to a whole new area. We'll just enroll him in first grade again, and he'll do much better the second time around type thing. So, there was some of that. I mean, it was a plus and minus thing.

Georjean McKeeman: My daughter was just ready to start kindergarten when we left Yosemite. So, then we went to Hawaii Volcanoes and she did kindergarten and first grade in Hawaii. One of the mothers had organized a preschool that when it first started, it met in the Girls' Club and after that, it met in one of the auditoriums.

Lu Ann Jones: At Yosemite?

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, that's nice.

Georjean McKeeman: So, my daughter did preschool in Yosemite. And that was very convenient because it was just right there. It wasn't very far from the housing area.

Lu Ann Jones: It was just self-organized.

- Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. It was self-organized. She was a licensed teacher, and a couple of people had talked to her about we need to have a preschool for kids. So, she organized it and she knew what she was doing.
- Lu Ann Jones: That's great.
- Georjean McKeeman: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: So how did you, so it sounds like on the one hand you learned to roll with the punches of—
- Georjean McKeeman: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: —a husband who was law enforcement and could have very unpredictable – I guess how did you learn to do that? And were there others who had a more difficult time in making those adjustments?
- Georjean McKeeman: Yes. There were others that had a more difficult time making those adjustments. How I did it, I just did it. (laughs) I mean, I guess Bruce and I communicated enough that, I mean, I know there are things he didn't tell me until long after the fact, or I heard him talking to somebody else about it. But at the same time, like I said about the dispatch, if he wasn't going to be back home at one when his shift ended, then dispatch called me, and I knew that he wasn't going to be back home. He did horse patrol there. He took horse patrol training. So that was daytime. After our son was born, about six months after our son was born, he was shifted to daytime. But you know, you just relied on each other.
- Georjean McKeeman: Especially with the second group, where there were more married couples, if somebody's husband was out with various things, law enforcement situation, you called each other and supported each other.
- Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. So, I take it things that he didn't tell you about were pretty dangerous things.
- Georjean McKeeman: Well, yeah. Yeah. Well, the worst was when he was shot at.
- Lu Ann Jones: Oh. Can you tell me about that?
- Georjean McKeeman: They had had a report of a rape in the park. When they got there, the woman that had been raped, Bruce stayed with her and took off his shirt, his uniform shirt, and put it over her. The individual that had done the raping was a 14 year-old kid on PCP. And he had a gun. And they were over in the tent cabins. And Bruce had a white undershirt on under his uniform. So, once he took off his uniform shirt, he was very visible, and this kid turned around and fired off a round at him. Missed him. But, you know, and that sort of thing.

- Georjean McKeeman: I think for Bruce the biggest issues were they had more than one, I'm not sure how many more, but more than one incidence of a SIDS death in the campground. And of course, as somebody who had young children at home, that was a very difficult thing.
- Georjean McKeeman: When we lived at Crane Flat, we had a radio in the house, so I heard a lot of the radio traffic there, because it was just, in fact, as a housewife, depending on where you were in the park, you had your own call number. Because there were places where they had to relay it through you to get to, because they couldn't directly send it to the employee because of physics. The radio signal wouldn't go that way. But it would get to the house. And then from the house, it could go on to the employee. So, there were some things like that that I did when we were first married, when we were first at Crane Flat.
- Georjean McKeeman: The other thing I should back up and say is when we were at Tonto, the maintenance man's wife who was the part time AO, she was really good about teaching me some of the ins and outs about being a park service spouse. Tonto was not their only place they had worked. They had worked other places. And so, she was really good about teaching me that. And talking about, you know, planning and how to do grocery shopping and stuff and planning for other things.
- Georjean McKeeman: Then when we went to Hawaii, then there was a whole other set of planning because people that lived there – Hawaii Volcanoes at the time we were there, when a new family came in, they assigned one of the families who was already in the park for the first month or so sort of as their guides. Because it can be a very different culture. This was in the days when airmail was extremely expensive, and you learn things like well, if you're shipping something, everything goes to Honolulu and then it goes out. The same way with the stuff that's coming from the mainland. Everything comes to Honolulu, and the mail barge doesn't leave Honolulu for the outer islands until it's full. So things can sit there for a long time unless you – which is fine if it's not something that's going to be damaged by heat or humidity. But it's going to sit there. The paper barge comes in this week, and that's the week you buy paper products, because that's when the paper barge comes in. And those kinds of things, which if you haven't lived there, and I'm pretty sure it's different now, because we've moved on. So much stuff gets sent UPS and stuff, and that gets air freighted. But at that time in the early '80s, this was a way you had to learn about these things.
- Georjean McKeeman: You had to learn the dialect. Like what heavy pu-pus are. Doesn't have anything to do with bodily functions. It means a lot of hoers d'oeuvres at a party. And stuff like that.

Lu Ann Jones: You wouldn't know how to spell that, would you?

Georjean McKeeman: I believe it's pu-pu. So. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, did you say heavy pu-pus?

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Got you. Okay. Heavy. I wanted to make sure that "heavy" wasn't part of a Hawaiian language—

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, so where is that park, exactly?

Georjean McKeeman: Well, we were at Hawaii Volcanoes, which is on the Big Island, on the south, southern side of the island. If you look at a map of the Hawaiian Islands, it's down here. And my husband, one of the reasons he was brought in for that particular job was they had a lot of problems with marijuana being grown inside the park, and it was starting to become a hazard to the visitors. So, the chief ranger, who had worked in Yosemite, knew my husband, recruited him to come to Hawaii Volcanoes. He spent good parts of the first year on stakeout, and that was very challenging because I knew he was on stakeout, but I wasn't supposed to tell anybody else who wasn't law enforcement. The Hawaii Volcanoes Park housing area at that time had both park service, it had both law enforcement, interpretation, maintenance. We had Fish and Wildlife Service folks there, we had U.S. Geological Service there. While they wanted to believe nobody was involved with this, at the same time they didn't want to mention something to somebody who might mention it to—

Georjean McKeeman: We got there and we were there for maybe four days, and he went out on his first stakeout. A Fish and Wildlife Service family called and wanted to have us over for supper. And I said, "Well, thanks for the invitation, but Bruce isn't available right now."

Georjean McKeeman: She wanted to know why. (laughter) I had to disassemble and say, "Well, he's just not available right now. I'm not sure when he will be available. Try me back in a week or something like that." So that was another whole aspect of being there.

Georjean McKeeman: Then the second year, he spent a lot of time flying to Honolulu and testifying in court cases.

Lu Ann Jones: So, he was able to prosecute.

Georjean McKeeman: Mm hmm. I forget. They arrested like 26 people and convicted all of them, or something like that.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

- Georjean McKeeman: Was very, very successful. It really changed the attitude of those people growing marijuana and supposedly after that you could fly over in a helicopter and actually see where the park boundaries were and there was no marijuana inside the park.
- Lu Ann Jones: Were they locals who were growing that?
- Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. Yeah. And some of the staff had local connections. So.
- Lu Ann Jones: So that made it dicey.
- Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. That made it dicey. It wasn't so much that you thought the staff was doing something, but they had family connections and that sort of thing. So.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, when you were, so you went there. When did you leave Yosemite?
- Georjean McKeeman: We were in Yosemite from '73 until '81. August of '81. Then we went to Hawaii from August of '81 until the very end of August of '83. We were just there two years.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did you make decisions about where, I mean, you moved a lot. So how were those decisions made, about what the next step was going to be?
- Georjean McKeeman: We would talk about it. We would talk about it. There were, at one point we thought we'd probably end up in Alaska at some point in Bruce's career. And that didn't happen. In part because the jobs that came up, the ones he was interested in – I remember one he was interested in a position at Wrangell-Saint Elias, and when we started looking at what housing would be and what schooling would be, it just wasn't a good fit for our family. And so, he didn't put in for it.
- Georjean McKeeman: Another one was down at Big Bend. Our kids were at that stage where they wouldn't have been eligible for the elementary school, and they would have had to bus in to Alpine. And we talked about it and said okay, this is just not a good fit for us at this time.
- Georjean McKeeman: When we went to the business of applying for jobs versus just getting the call, at first it was a real struggle for me. Because he would apply, and then you have this long wait. You get a letter saying well you're on the short list, or you're not being considered. If you're on the short list, then there's a whole other waiting period. And it used to really stress me out.
- Georjean McKeeman: Then it got to the point where I had to decide that you live where you are as if you're going to live there forever but be ready to move whenever it happens. That really became my mantra. He would put in for jobs and we would discuss it when he'd put in for them. But I tried not to think about what happens if we get this and that sort of thing, because it just stresses you out too much. So, you

have to be where you are, where you are. You have to be in the present.

Georjean McKeeman: Our daughter's real good at this. Our son hated the actual process of moving. He disliked the disruption. When we moved to Hawaii, he was two, and he got really clingy for a while. But then once things settled down and we got into the new routine, then he would be okay again. Our daughter was just always one of these kids that she was up for anything.

Lu Ann Jones: So, kind of take me through – yesterday, when we met originally, take me through the list [of jobs]. And maybe kind of talk about kind of what inspired those moves, the conversations around them.

Georjean McKeeman: Well, we started our married life in Tonto. And then he got this call out of the blue and we went to Yosemite. We were in Yosemite for eight years. The first year in Mather District and then seven years in the valley, which was heavy law enforcement at that time.

Georjean McKeeman: Then the move to Hawaii was a situation – Hawaii Volcanoes had an employee that they felt needed to have closer supervision and needed to go someplace where he could really be in a very close supervision situation. So, they did a swap. Yosemite and Hawaii Volcanoes. Bruce was the one because the chief ranger knew him and knew his capabilities; he was willing to take Bruce in the swap. We went to Hawaii Volcanoes. There was another family from Yosemite that were hired over to Hawaii Volcanoes. So, we actually moved at the same time. Which was a plus, because between the two families we were able to fill a sea crate. Yosemite is just at the edge of the limit of where they can take sea crates. They can only take sea crates from ports so many miles off the seacoast, and so they were able to bring it up to Yosemite and we didn't have to have our furniture. Like when we left Hawaii, they came up to the park with crates. Packed everything in crates. Loaded those on a flat bed. Took them down to the port in Hilo. From there they were put in a sea crate. Shipped to San Francisco, port of Oakland. Then the crates were taken out of the sea container, put on a truck. You know, it's a very involved process.

Georjean McKeeman: We were looking at things because it was a lateral to Hawaii. And so, we were looking at jobs for possible promotions. Again, somebody he knew suggested that he apply for a position—

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Georjean McKeeman: —as site manager at Johnstown Flood National Monument. So, we moved there. People always thought it was really unusual for us to move from Hawaii to Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It's Johnstown

area. We were living in a small community named Salix and the park is in Saint Michael, and we lived in Saint Michael for the first two and a half months. That was the first place we had to buy a house. That was a challenge because you have to be able to come up with down payment. And not having ever done this before, it's a brand-new thing. We found at the last minute that the insurance company that we had our renter's insurance with wouldn't sell us homeowner's insurance. They only did renter's. So suddenly we had to get another insurance company. And we did a lot of looking, trying to find a house. It was a real challenge.

Lu Ann Jones:

He was going from law enforcement – I mean, how did his law enforcement background translate to being a site manager?

Georjean McKeeman:

He had law enforcement background, but he was a well-rounded ranger. When we were in Yosemite, he had done things like gotten trained in budgeting and stuff like that. So, he had more than just law enforcement. Yes, he had a commission, but it didn't necessarily – I mean, he had done interpretation. He had done management stuff. So, it wasn't in the sense where I hear about some people now who are stove piped, and they only do law enforcement. That's not the way it was then. When he was in Yosemite, his supervisors were very good about suggesting, well, if you want to look at broadening your skill levels, learn budgeting. Learn more on management and stuff like that. And he did. He took advantage of it whenever he could.

Georjean McKeeman:

So, we went to Johnstown Flood. We were there three years. Like I say, it was the first place we bought a house, and that was a challenge, coming up with enough money for a down payment. My mother, my parents, helped us in that respect. So, we found a house, got our kids back in school. I was involved with volunteering in the schools a lot. Then you know, started getting used to what the environment is again in the new place. What you can do. What's available. My kids had just gotten done taking some swim lessons in Hawaii. Moved to this part of Pennsylvania, and at that time, there weren't any public pools. You had to belong to a country club type thing, and we couldn't afford it. So that was the end of swimming for three years. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones:

My gosh.

Georjean McKeeman:

Because there just weren't any public pools available. Bruce, while we were in Pennsylvania, he got asked to be on a task force for Alaska land claims. Because when Jimmy Carter, at the end of his presidency, created all the parks and stuff. INOCLA – no, I'm not saying that right, so I won't bother. There's an acronym for the land claims that Native Americans up there can claim use of inside the designated parks, but they had to prove that this was part of

their heritage and that their claim was a legal claim. They pulled rangers from parks all over the United States for different periods of time to review these claims. While we were in Pennsylvania, he went up to Alaska for, he was up there, what, he was there for the month of December. Came home for Christmas and then part of January. And then went back up and was there from mid-January until March.

Georjean McKeeman: There were situations pretty much all the way along until our kids were grown where I was a single parent for various periods of time. That was one of the reasons why we made the decisions we made that I was not going to actively pursue a career, because one of us had to be, we felt, I mean, not everybody feels this way and there are lots of people who say, well, I have a career in nursing, or I have a career in teaching, or I have a career in this or that and it will work out. But we felt, for our family, that one of us needed to be available. And so, I was the one that was available.

Georjean McKeeman: The other thing that while we were in Hawaii, the superintendent at War in the Pacific on Guam was killed in a government vehicle in a traffic accident. Bruce was tasked with going over there and doing the administrative review as to whether, you know, he was at fault or whether him being in the government vehicle was proper or not for that particular, which it was. The park service employee, the superintendent, had done nothing wrong. The people that ran into him had.

Georjean McKeeman: Then once we were in Pennsylvania, then he flew back to Guam to testify in the court case. So, you know, it was always those kinds of things that were part of him being in the park service and me being the one that was at home with the kids and being available for them.

Lu Ann Jones: Was Johnstown a community where you were more part of the communities where you lived—

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Because you did buy a home out there.

Georjean McKeeman: Well, and there was no park service housing.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes.

Georjean McKeeman: Johnstown was administered by Allegheny Portage. They were administered together. There was no government housing quarters for either park. All the people, all the employees had to [buy or rent housing], so you got acquainted with your neighbors where you lived, and you did not have as close a feeling to the park service folks that you worked with. You'd try and have potlucks and socials. But it was much harder because everybody was scattered. So.

- Lu Ann Jones: How did people greet park service folks at these communities?
- Georjean McKeeman: Well, it wasn't a problem at Johnstown Flood. From there we went down to Virginia. Bruce was site manager at Great Falls, which is part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and there again it wasn't a problem. When we went from Virginia to International Falls, and he was chief ranger at Voyagers National Park, there it was a problem. There were people in the community that were not happy that Voyagers had been created as a park. It just depended on who you encountered.
- Georjean McKeeman: By that time, our daughter was in high school and our son was rapidly getting to high school. So, we moved in different social circles, if you know, because of their activities. There were a couple of times when I was at a luncheon or something like that. One in particular, a Mrs. Carl Brown; Carl Brown had brought a number of suits against the park service. So, this was an ongoing issue. Got to this luncheon, sat down with somebody I knew. And then somebody else came in and sat down.
- Georjean McKeeman: This fourth person comes in and introduces herself as Mrs. Carl Brown. And she says, "I'm sure you know my husband."
- Georjean McKeeman: I said, "And I'm Mrs. Bruce McKeeman, and I'm sure you know mine." (laughter) It was one of those situations where we just agreed not to talk about things. But it just depended on who you encountered. And you were always a little bit of aware of it, that people might not approve, or might not be very pleasant. So, you just, you know, you were careful.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, do you think it was more of an expectation then than now that spouses, entire families, be kind of ambassadors for the park service? That that was part of your assumptions?
- Georjean McKeeman: It was always part of my assumption. It was always part of my assumption. It's like this organization. I've been a member almost as long as Bruce has been a member. Because although he got the paycheck, it was our career. And we looked at it that way. So, yes, I've always assumed that I was supposed to be a representative for the park service whether I was an employee or not.
- Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Why don't we take this opportunity before we keep going to different parks to talk a little bit about belonging to ANPR, and kind of what that has meant to you?
- Georjean McKeeman: It's been a really good way to make connections and meet people and make connections for Bruce for career moves. And it's been a way for me to reconnect with friends over the years. I always look at it that way. I wait to see who shows up. And there were a number of years when I didn't go to the Rendezvous because of other commitments. But then when it was possible and I started

going again, it's always who's going to be here that I haven't seen for a year. Rendezvous, for me, is very important for the connections. And I think that's what got it started, and I think that's still a big part of what is important to the organization.

Georjean McKeeman: And then, of course, ANPR spearheaded Ranger Careers. They did a lot with that. They also were a lot involved with park housing and having been somebody who lived in park housing for a number of years, that's very important. That's very important.

Georjean McKeeman: We, actually, were fairly fortunate with our park housing in most places. We don't have some of the horror stories that some people have.

Lu Ann Jones: What are some examples of those horror stories?

Georjean McKeeman: Oh, you hear horror stories about some people who are assigned to a park house that's a single-wide trailer and the floorboards are rotting and you have problems with mice and all that stuff. So, our stories are minor in that respect. It's having refrigerators on the back porch and having to be careful as to where you put stuff in the refrigerator, so it doesn't freeze. So. But yeah.

Georjean McKeeman: Ranger Careers was really important for Bruce over the years. He got his 6C in part because of stuff he learned through ANPR. Once he had it, then he could move into management, and he retired at maximum retirement. So those were very important things. Those are very important things.

Georjean McKeeman: I get a little bit frustrated when I hear about some of the – well, Bruce uses the term stove-piping. But some of the people that are involved in protection that only look at it as law enforcement. Because over the years when Bruce was involved in protection, it was so much more. It was natural resources. I mean, he helped dart bears and transport bears in Yosemite. You know, problem bears, to other parts of the park and stuff like that. He's worked on fires. He's been involved in budgeting and management and all those kinds of things. So, it was a much broader picture.

Georjean McKeeman: When we were in Hawaii, when the eruption started that's still going on, it started in January of '83. He had his rangers doing interpretation out at the overlooks because that was part of their job. They needed to interpret the eruption to the public to keep the public safe. Because people see, they can see the red over there and they want to go over there. (laughter)

Lu Ann Jones: They see the bear over there; they want to go—(laughs)

Georjean McKeeman: Right. And that sort of thing. So, he was always – his way of looking at being in visitor protection, which was much broader than just being, you know, writing tickets and road patrol and that sort of thing.

- Lu Ann Jones: Well, we took a little detour off the path of your park assignments. So where were we and where do we go? So, we were at International Falls.
- Georjean McKeeman: From Hawaii we went to Johnstown Flood. And from Johnstown Flood he went down to Great Falls. There again, the superintendent was looking for somebody who had had experience in rescues and had some law enforcement background, but not necessarily, you know, only thinking in terms of law enforcement. They were having problems with people using alcohol and getting on the rocks and losing their balance and falling in and drowning. They wanted to reduce that. Stop it, if possible. But definitely reduce it. That was one of the reasons why Bruce went down there. We were there for four years.
- Georjean McKeeman: Then we went up to International Falls and he was chief ranger up there. We were there for eight years. We got both our kids through high school and would have been ready to move a little bit earlier than eight years, but that's the way it worked out.
- Georjean McKeeman: From there we went to Roosevelt-Vanderbilt [National Historic Site] in Hyde Park, New York. He was there for four years, also. And then we went to Herbert Hoover.
- Georjean McKeeman: When we were at Roosevelt-Vanderbilt, I really struggled when we first moved there, because both my kids were in college by that point and so I had to sort of redefine myself. That's when I started working as a volunteer for the park in curatorial. I mean, there wasn't any chance that I would consider, I mean, he was deputy superintendent. So, I wasn't going to look at taking a seasonal position or anything like that. But I know that in any of the parks where you go to, if there is a curatorial division, they're always shorthanded. It's a given. So, I started working as a volunteer for curatorial; one of the things I'm good at is inventory. I have a meticulous type of mind in that respect. So, I was a volunteer for the curatorial division for probably three of the four years that we lived there, and really enjoyed that.
- Georjean McKeeman: It was very interesting because it's, well, the Roosevelts and the Vanderbilts just moved in a totally different social circle than I ever did. (laughter) One of the things that happened while we were there is one of Franklin Roosevelt's former daughter-in-laws, let's put it that way, it was one of his son's ex-wives, was having an auction. Somewhere along the line, through family processes, she had acquired this particular painting that was very significant to Franklin Roosevelt, both when he was under-secretary of the navy, and also when he was president. It was something he had hanging in his offices. And so, the park service and the friends group accumulated money so that they could go to this auction and bid on

this painting and get. And they did, and they got it, which was a good thing. But they also bid on a couple of other lots.

Georjean McKeeman:

When the auction was over, I got to help the curator inventory these items, and that was very interesting to see. Like one of them was a picnic basket that Franklin and Eleanor were given as a wedding gift. And instead of having a salt and pepper shaker, it had little cellars. Salt and pepper cellars with little tiny spoons. And it had a tomato server; a sterling silver tomato server, which is not something I had encountered before. So, it looks like a sterling silver, what I would call a pancake turner. But that was its title. And things like that. So that was always enjoyable and fun. It connected me with some of the staff at the park, which was a good, you know. That was a positive thing. Makes you feel like you're more part of the family again.

Lu Ann Jones:

Mm hmm. Well, say, for example, as your husband, now he's a deputy superintendent, were there different expectations for you as the spouse as he kind of moved up?

Georjean McKeeman:

Yes. As he moved up, especially once he got to Roosevelt-Vanderbilt and also to Herbert Hoover, there are social events that you go to as the spouse. You are expected to dress in a certain manner and be able to make small talk with the people you're meeting there and stuff like that.

Lu Ann Jones:

What might be an example of that?

Georjean McKeeman:

Well, at Roosevelt Vanderbilt, they do the Val-Kill Awards. I think that's the right term. I met Mr. Rogers. I met James Earl Jones. I met, well, I saw Richard Gere, he didn't stay around for the handshaking part of it. You go to these social events that honor these dignitaries that you've always just read about or seen on the movie screen or on the TV and you actually get to meet them and that sort of thing.

Lu Ann Jones:

I thought you were talking about the Rotary Club. You're talking about—(laughs)

Georjean McKeeman:

No, no. At Roosevelt-Vanderbilt, it got a lot higher than the Rotary Club. (laughs) Now he was in Rotary as well over the years. He was in Rotary while we were in New York and while we were in Iowa and that sort of thing. But no, these are, and as deputy superintendent he has an automatic invitation to these things. So. So, yeah. There are some expectations. And it just depends on the spouse more than anything as to whether they really, you know, want to go to these things or want to be a part of that or not. I think there are spouses who say they're not interested. And I don't think it hurts the other spouse's career. But at the same time, yeah, there are expectations that you can clean up nicely. (laughter)

- Lu Ann Jones: And then, so Herbert Hoover was the last—
- Georjean McKeeman: Herbert Hoover was the last.
- Lu Ann Jones: And how did that decision get made?
- Georjean McKeeman: Well, that was another swap again. The superintendent that was there was having some troubles. And she had family back in New York that she wanted to get back closer to. I believe it was her mother, but I'm not positive. So, one of Bruce's former employees suggested to him that he might want to consider a swap. Because this former employee thought that Bruce would do a much better job at Herbert Hoover than the current superintendent. And so, as it was, we did the swap. It was a real good move for Bruce, and it was a good move for me. I really felt comfortable in the community. It was, again, one of those situations, we were in our own house but when Bruce took the job, he – because the previous superintendent had lived in government quarters. And there were some government quarters available. And so, when Bruce took the job it was, well, I'm interested and willing to take the job, but we will be selling a house. I want to be able to buy a house. And that sort of thing.
- Georjean McKeeman: And the regional superintendent said, "Well, you can buy a house, but it has to be in West Bench, where the park is located."
- Georjean McKeeman: So, one of the things that happened is, we found a house and he started walking to work. So, a lot of people knew him because they saw this guy in uniform walking to work. So that was a real plus for the community. I got very involved with the church there, which we also walked to. In some ways, it was like being back in a government housing area in that you were in a small enough community that you could walk to a lot of things. But in the other sense, you know, most of the people there didn't have any connection with the park. So.
- Georjean McKeeman: You had some people that – like one of the seasonals that worked at the park went to the same church we went to. So, there were some connections like that. But in a lot of respects, you know, it was you were out in the community and people knew that you belonged to the park. So, you represented the park. But at the same time, it wasn't a park community like it was in Yosemite or Hawaii Volcanoes. That sort of thing.
- Lu Ann Jones: Was it good be back closer to where you started?
- Georjean McKeeman: Yes. I felt much more comfortable. In part, again, the same initial feelings that I had when I moved to Pennsylvania when I first started working for the park service, I had those same feelings in New York. Much more dense population, and also a lot of trees and stuff. My mother, by that time, wasn't able to travel, and she

asked me to describe what the landscape looked like. And I said, "Well, it's sort of the opposite as out here. Out here, there would be no trees unless people planted them. There, there would be no houses unless people took the trees down." (laughter)

Georjean McKeeman: But I found New York to be very challenging in the sense, I had always assumed that New York would be more advanced than other places I had lived, and I didn't find it that way. In a lot of respects, I found it sort of a step back. We lived in International Falls for eight years. And the only time I had a power failure was if I had gotten a letter from the power company saying, "We're going to shut the power off for these four hours on this date."

Georjean McKeeman: Then we moved to New York State and we had power failures at least once a year and often more than once a year, every year that we lived there, that were caused by lines going down, storms, and this sort of thing. And I found that very unusual; just seemed like they should be more advanced on this stuff. (laughs) They should have figured out how to keep the power on.

Georjean McKeeman: In fact, there was one-time Bruce had been called down to DC for a meeting.

[END OF TRACK 3]

[START OF TRACK 4]

Georjean McKeeman: And there was a storm, you know, one of these Nor'easter hurricane remnants that was coming up the coast. So, he started out by taking the train. They got down as far as Wilmington, Delaware and the tracks were a wash. So, then the train, the Amtrak, said they were bringing in buses. But there were a group of people that were talking about this, and this was a full trainload of passengers and how many buses is this going to require and how long is it going to take?

Georjean McKeeman: And somebody had a card for a limo service. So, a group of them called in a couple of limos and limoed or took the car down from Wilmington into DC.

Georjean McKeeman: He had the meeting the next morning and then when the meeting was over, he went to the travel office in the department and asked if the train was running, and it wasn't. So, he had them change his reservations or tickets or whatever and he flew back to Poughkeepsie. He called me and said, "You need to come and pick me up at the Poughkeepsie airport." So, he had a planes, trains and automobile trip, and I was out of power for 25 hours. Which is one of the reasons why we still have a princess phone that's hardwired in, because it works when the power's off, unlike all the handheld ones. Cell phones if they don't have juice don't work anymore. So

that's one of the things. I haven't convinced our kids that this is a priority. But it still is a priority for us. (laughter)

Lu Ann Jones: Well, where did you end up after, what year was retirement?

Georjean McKeeman: Retirement was January of '06.

Lu Ann Jones: So, and now where do you live?

Georjean McKeeman: We live in Prescott, Arizona.

Lu Ann Jones: That's right.

Georjean McKeeman: And from when we started out our married life at Tonto, we had really gotten to be very interested in the Southwest. Not the first number of years that we were married, but probably the last 10 or so, we had gone to Arizona and looked at different areas. And in 2000, Christmas of 2000, we decided that we would do a Christmas family gathering with our kids in Arizona and show them the Grand Canyon and some other stuff. And I had a nephew that was in the air force at Luke Air Force Base in the Phoenix area.

Georjean McKeeman: So, Bruce sort of threw a dart at the map and said, "Well, we haven't been to Prescott yet. Let's try Prescott this time. It will work as a place to headquarter at while we drive here and drive there."

Georjean McKeeman: After we had been there for five days or six days, we decided that, you know, this is a pretty nice community and has a good medical facility there. And it has a real downtown. It's not strip malls. So, we ended up deciding to retire to Prescott. So.

Georjean McKeeman: One of the ways that I've been, in addition to being a school volunteer for years when my kids were in school, one of the other ways I've connected with communities where we lived is, I'm an avid reader. So, I've been in a book club of one sort or another since 1990.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Georjean McKeeman: And now, currently I'm involved with two of them.

Lu Ann Jones: What kind of books do you read?

Georjean McKeeman: The two that I'm involved with now read all kinds of books. We read fiction, non-fiction. We read some classics. It just depends on what gets decided on for the next – I mean, for one of the book clubs, for October, I had my meeting before we left, we read *Atonement*. And the other book club we read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, which is about a Hmong girl and her family. She has epilepsy, and that's how, the spirit catches you and you fall down, that's how the Hmong, that's their term for epilepsy. It's not a one word, it's a multiple word. And they had

immigrated to the United States, were living in the Modesto area. No, Merced area. And the book is a nonfiction account of their interaction with American medicine and how cross-cultural issues are such a problem. Apparently one of the other club members had read it or heard about it and suggested it. Apparently, this particular book is now used in medical schools to teach preparing doctors about cross-cultural issues.

Lu Ann Jones: I knew I'd heard of that before. I haven't read it. But I think when my niece, oh, it's been 10 years ago now, was a first-year student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I'm a North Carolinian, and they had a book that all incoming students read together and talked about. And that was it.

Georjean McKeeman: Mm hmm. Yeah. So, I mean, the book is not a new book. And then there are other times when we're reading—

Lu Ann Jones: It sounds really interesting, though. It sounds like one I should put on my list.

Georjean McKeeman: Yeah. It's a good book to read and I mean, the author not only talks about the cross-cultural issues between the Hmong in California and the doctors, American doctors, but she also does a nice summary of the forgotten war in Laos and why the Hmong have immigrated to the United States and this sort of thing. It gives you a little bit of background about that. So.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I think this has just been a fascinating conversation. I have a couple of kind of concluding questions. One question is, how much of that South Dakotan has remained there in the midst of all these experiences. And here you talk about the book groups. I mean, just the education you've had in terms of adapting to new places, living in new places, meeting a host of different people. But where is South Dakota in all of that?

Georjean McKeeman: Oh, South Dakota is still there. It's there in my needing open spaces, for one thing. Certainly, that was one of the issues when we were house hunting in New York. And we finally found a house that had an open feeling to it, and I didn't feel the trees were going to surround me and hold me down. But our Realtor didn't understand. He really just wasn't getting it at all, and that sort of thing. So that's one of the things.

Georjean McKeeman: I'm still very close to my family. We have gone back at least once a year every year since we were married. So, I've always made those reconnections over the years. And that sort of thing.

Georjean McKeeman: I was going to start to say I think some of the politics are there. But my politics have changed so much from when I started out to where I am now that I won't say that at all. (laughter)

Lu Ann Jones: Can you describe what the, from changes are?

Georjean McKeeman: Well, I grew up, I can easily say that I met my first Democrat when I was in eighth grade. Very much was raised to be anti-labor, anti-labor unions, very much Republican environment and stuff. Over the years I have just really broadened how I look at things. And I've gotten much more liberal.

Lu Ann Jones: How do you think that process happened or unfolded?

Georjean McKeeman: I think it's just the more you experience, the more you have to reevaluate those traditions that you grew up with. The stuff that you're taught as a child, not so much in school but that you learn by hearing your parents and their age people talk about things, and their attitudes. The more you broaden your experience and experience people in different places and in different situations, the more you have to reevaluate what you started with.

Georjean McKeeman: One of the experiences that I had in Hawaii was to be in a minority. I had always been in the majority. In fact, when I was growing up, it was a very, you know, it was like 99 percent of the majority. And we moved to Hawaii. To this day, I do not remember why I needed to go to the county building in Hilo, but I needed to go there for something. And I stood in line. And this individual that I needed to talk to took everybody else who was Oriental-American. I won't even say Japanese American, because probably some of them were Chinese American. But obviously ethnic more so than me. Took every one of those before that individual would wait on me. And that was, you know, that was a new experience. And it made me reevaluate how I treated other people, necessarily. And you run into this a lot the more you expand your horizons.

Lu Ann Jones: That's interesting. You said that you were able to kind of realize that you probably were going to be moving a lot, but you had to live in the moment. If you were going to be giving advice to somebody now who was kind of at the beginning of a park service career, and it's probably changed somewhat now, but what kind of advice would you give to those people?

Georjean McKeeman: Well, I guess my advice would be, be open to new experiences. A lot of people, it seems like, get to a certain park and they really, really love that park. And they're reluctant to move onto another park because it's going to be different, and maybe it's not going to be as good. Sometimes that's the case, but I think you need to be open to new experiences because it makes you grow. And you also need to be willing to live in the moment. Because you can't live with expectations of something happening and maybe it will and maybe it won't.

Georjean McKeeman: Our daughter and her husband currently live in Lincoln, Nebraska. They are looking at some career changes that might bring them to

Arizona, and that would be wonderful. But at the same time, I can't start planning for that to happen because there's also the possibility it won't happen. So, I have to be able to enjoy the possibility without making it tie me down and say this is the only thing that's going to happen.

Georjean McKeeman: The other thing is, as far as if you're going to have kids and stuff, it's a great way to learn geography. I don't hear it so much from our son, but I hear it from our daughter that she has been so many different places. The people that she works with currently have mostly just lived in Nebraska. In fact, some of them have only lived in the Lincoln-Omaha area. And they don't have this sense of geography, a sense of how big the country is and what else is all out there. So.

Georjean McKeeman: You just have to be, you have to be an advocate for your kid, no matter where you move. Because they're always coming in new, you have to be the advocate that makes sure they get what they need. You can't automatically assume, like a lot of parents do, because they've always lived there, well, everything is going to just work out.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, we often ask people what they feel like their legacy is to the park service. And I feel like that's a fair one for you. Can you think in those terms of kind of a legacy to the park service?

Georjean McKeeman: Well, [pause] it's not a term I've actually considered. Certainly not for myself. I think Bruce has a good legacy for the park service. And I have been there supporting him all the way. So, I guess that's my legacy for the park service is I've been a support for an employee.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. I mean, I was struck by you saying that he was the one that had the formal job, but you were in it together.

Georjean McKeeman: Right. Right. We were in it together. So. And you know, we're still in things together. He's involved, well, we're both involved with a hiking group, although my arthritis over the last couple of years has limited my hiking. But when he plans a hike trip, I'm involved with the planning and the organizing and stuff like that. So.

Lu Ann Jones: Are there other things that I haven't asked you about that you think are important for us to discuss?

Georjean McKeeman: No, I don't think so. I'm sometimes told that I should write a book because I have a couple of bear stories, but I don't think that those are necessarily unique.

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) What are the bear stories?

Georjean McKeeman: Well, when we lived at Crane Flat, that's one of the things that I would add to advice to young [employees], is you have to be

willing to work with things that aren't necessarily as technical as you expected them to be. My parents got electricity when I was one. And so, I always grew up in a home that had electricity. I mean, I don't remember from birth to one and that sort of thing.

Georjean McKeeman: We moved to Yosemite, and we're assigned a house at Crane Flat. We got there and it had a wood cook stove, and I had never cooked on a wood cook stove. The water heater was connected to the wood cook stove. There was piping, there was a reservoir at the back of the stove, and there was piping that went up to a reservoir in the attic of the house.

Georjean McKeeman: Well, this is brand new. He goes off to work and he comes home the first day. And he says, "Well, what's for supper?" And I say, "Well, I don't know, because I've never cooked on a woodstove. I don't know how to light this thing."

Georjean McKeeman: So, he taught me how to light the woodstove. And we, I learned to cook on it. Bake bread in it. Learned to have a pot of chili on the back or a pot of stew and that sort of thing.

Georjean McKeeman: Well, if it's a woodstove, you have to have wood for the fire. The house was like here and then there was a four-stall garage shed. One stall was for our personal car, one stall was for his work car. One stall was for the snowmobile. And the fourth stall was for the wood. We didn't, you know, in that particular house, the parks had provided all the wood and there was a nice stack of it in there and everything.

Georjean McKeeman: That winter I go out one day to get wood from the woodshed and we had a – why can't I say that word that right now – wheelbarrow. Thank you. We had a wheelbarrow that I used between the back of the house and the woodshed, and pile it up with wood. Well, I'm in the woodshed, I pile the wheelbarrow up, I come out. And here is this bear walking around the corner. And I've got wash freeze-drying on the line. Because the house did not have enough electricity power to run a dryer.

Georjean McKeeman: So, he's sniffing the wash. So, I left the wheelbarrow and started rapidly walking – not running, but rapidly walking – towards the house. And he realized that I was moving. And so, he started encountering me. You know, started to come towards me. And I moved a little faster and got to the back porch. And he's getting a little more interested and a little more interested. So, I threw the broom at him and went in the house and locked the door. He chewed around on the broom and then decided it wasn't that appetizing and left. (laughs)

Georjean McKeeman: And then later that following spring, we were home, Bruce was home that time, and we hear this really awful sound. And it's

coming from the ceiling area in the living room. We can't quite figure out what it is. But it's an awful sound. Something, obviously, is on the roof.

Georjean McKeeman: The house was actually one-half of a duplex, but the other half of the duplex was unoccupied that winter. The snow had mounded up so that there was a nice snow ramp to that roof that could then – and a bear had gone up that snow roof on their roof and then come over on ours and was ripping the shingles off, looking for insects and stuff.

Georjean McKeeman: So, Bruce went out. When he realized what it was – I mean, we couldn't tell what was happening on the inside – but he went out and says, "Oh, there's a bear up there." So, then he, I forget how he shooed it off. I suppose he threw something at it to get it off the roof and stuff. You know, you don't have those experiences a lot of places.

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) Well was there anybody else living close by there?

Georjean McKeeman: No.

Lu Ann Jones: No. You were—

Georjean McKeeman: No. Not at that time. Not that winter. The following summer, we moved up there in September. The following summer in June, another family was assigned the other half of the duplex. So, for the summer, we had somebody there. But that first winter, we were up there by ourselves. Well, you either had to go into the valley or you had to go out to Big Oak Flat to find anybody else.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. So, you had to figure it out on your own.

Georjean McKeeman: Yup. Yup, you did.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, this has just been an absolute delight. Great way to start this Rendezvous.

Georjean McKeeman: (laughs) Well, I'm glad that you feel that way.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes. I'm going to ask you to fill this [oral history legal release form] out. And if you wouldn't mind to print your full name so I'll make sure I can read that okay up there. And then down here, your signature, address, date. And if you also down here have an email address and a phone number, that would be good. We have no blanks on there, but that would be great.

Georjean McKeeman: Sure. Okay.

Lu Ann Jones: How do you spell – when you do this, could you put your maiden name in there?

Georjean McKeeman: Sure.

Lu Ann Jones: So, I can make sure I have that spelling.

Georjean McKeeman: My maiden name's very easy.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay.

Georjean McKeeman: It's Bender. Just the way you would think.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. (laughs)

Georjean McKeeman: It's my given name and my last name that give people problems. (laughter) [pause, writing] Here you go.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes. One of the things that happens is—

[END OF TRACK 4]

[END OF INTERVIEW]