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Lisa Eckert
October 29, 2016

Interview conducted by Brenna Lissoway
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
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ANPR Oral History Project

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The narrator has reviewed, corrected, and edited this transcript.

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[START OF TAPE 1]

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. This is Brenna Lissoway interviewing Lisa Eckert and we are in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at Ranger Rendezvous. Today is October the 29, 2016. I was hoping to start the interview, Lisa, with maybe you just introducing yourself a little bit. Telling me a little bit about where you're from and your family.

Lisa Eckert: Absolutely. I was born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. It was a very environmentally sensitive, politically astute place to grow up. So, from kindergarten to the University of Wisconsin, where I graduated with a degree in conservation biology, throughout my childhood, I was one of those active children playing in the outdoors. We lived near woods. We lived on a cul de sac. All the kids played outside. Very neighbor-centric. Lots and lots of friends. I just feel so fortunate that I grew up playing in the mud and the dirt, even if I was just making little houses in the trees in the woods. Picking violets as I walked two miles to school, to Crestwood Elementary. Riding my bike. Most of all, I would say all of the outdoor activities I did were with friends or independently. It wasn't that I grew up in a family atmosphere that went camping in national parks, like some of my colleagues.

Brenna Lissoway: What did your parents do?

Lisa Eckert: My father was an obstetrician/gynecologist, and my mother was a fulltime, stay at home mom. I'm the oldest of three. I have a sister and then a brother. My claim to fame with my family is I got them all west to Yellowstone when I started waiting tables there between college summers. Then my sister came out and worked, and my brother came out and worked. And then my parents would come and visit. That's when my parents first started hiking.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, wow. So, when was your first exposure to national parks or National Park Service? Was it that Yellowstone experience or before that?

Lisa Eckert: It would have been Yellowstone. As a 19-year-old I went out West, I was a waitress at Old Faithful Inn. So, I was a server, and that experience really changed my life.

Brenna Lissoway: How did you even get connected with that opportunity?

Lisa Eckert: Through high school friends. The high school friends I hung around with loved to be outdoors. One of them, Mark Tomlinson's older sister, Tommie, had been a server in Yellowstone at the Old Faithful Inn. So, through Mark, he was giving us the information or passing out the

applications. He thought a bunch of us should go west. We did apply, and that summer, three of us went to the Old Faithful Inn.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. And that was the first time you'd ever been west?

Lisa Eckert: Yes, that's the first time.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. So, tell me a little bit about your first impressions of this new place.

Lisa Eckert: I remember being on the concession bus; the buses picked the employees up. I took the Greyhound out, or the second year I took the train. But they'd pick us up and then process us in and we'd get our ID cards and everything. But I remember the bus, the day they took me from Mammoth Hot Springs down to Old Faithful Inn. I even remember what I was wearing. It's kind of funny. A red turtleneck. But I was going from side to side on the bus. And, "What's that?" asking the bus driver, "That's a black and white bird. What is that?" And he laughed. "It's a magpie." But everything was just so intriguing to me, and my curiosity was really piqued about what this place was. And also, just being so far away from Wisconsin and feeling so independent.

Brenna Lissoway: And what was your first impression of park rangers, or park service staff?

Lisa Eckert: Well, while I was a waitress at Old Faithful Inn, I saved my tips and I bought hiking boots up in Bozeman, Montana. Then I bought a backpack and then I bought a sleeping bag. And I didn't have a tent. I'd go out and camp all by myself. And I'm sure I didn't know there was a permit system. When I did realize there was, that was my first introduction to rangers. So, I waited tables two summers, and then I was a tour guide the third summer. It was the third summer in 1977 that I got to explore the whole park, because we'd be basically interpreting for visitors. Back then, you had to have a tour guide on your buses, and they'd pick you up at the entrance gates. It was another amazing experience, because I didn't have a car, I still didn't have a car at that point. So, if I was traveling around Yellowstone, it was hitchhiking or hopping on a bus.

Lisa Eckert: But I started memorizing the scripts they gave us, and I realized when some visitors on buses would say, "Well, why are geysers here?" a more thoughtful question that I could not answer. I could memorize a script, but I really started thinking, why are there no geysers in Wisconsin, and there are geysers in Yellowstone. So, when I went back to school at the University of Wisconsin that year, I had probably changed my major five times by then. I then changed it into sciences. Because I wanted to, I didn't know the word then, but I wanted to interpret. I wanted to be able to analyze what I was seeing, and having theories or hypotheses or be able to

answer a question about the geology of the area more in depth than just memorizing a script.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. So, when did you get the first inkling that you might want to try and pursue a career with the park service or in that field?

Lisa Eckert: I spent New Year's Eve with tour guide friends in Sun Valley, Idaho. One of those tour guides gave me a seasonal application for a seasonal ranger, and I applied to Yellowstone. I remember when I got the call, my first inkling, what I said was, "Well, I didn't apply to Yellowstone." Because I was thinking it was the Student Conservation Association calling, because I'd also applied to their organization. And I was just amazed. I was so tickled. I got the real deal.

Brenna Lissoway: You got to wear the green and gray.

Lisa Eckert: I did! I was offered a seasonal naturalist job in 1979 at Fishing Bridge, in Yellowstone National Park.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. So, tell me about that first season.

Lisa Eckert: I learned – I was just overwhelmed with learning about the mud pots, and like Yellowstone. I had been so inspired by one of my university professors, Dr. Linda Graham. She was my algae professor. I so admired her, because she was incredibly enthusiastic, and it was contagious. When I got to Yellowstone, I had her, that contagiousness, and so I focused in on algae, and it was just so perfect because there's algae all along the hot springs. In fact, indicative of the temperatures of the water.

Lisa Eckert: But I do remember and tell new seasonal interpreters when I'm coaching them or teaching, "Don't do what I did!" And what that was, I was so excited about algae that when I gave a campfire program with slides, Bridge Bay Amphitheater, three hundred people. I called it Algae in Wonderland, you know, I thought I was being so clever. I had slides of cells. Individual cells of different species of algae. And don't do that. (laughs) You know?

Brenna Lissoway: A little too technical?

Lisa Eckert: Yeah, it was. It wasn't a university class. Even though I was passionate about algae, you know, let's don't forget – which I did tie into the whole ecosystem and the food chain, and I had that message. But don't forget who our audience is.

Brenna Lissoway: Important lesson.

Lisa Eckert: It was a very important lesson, and I love to tell on myself on that one.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So maybe talk to me a little bit then about some of your other seasonal positions. Because I see that you were a seasonal for quite a few seasons at quite a few parks.

Lisa Eckert: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Tell me a little bit about that period.

Lisa Eckert: During a period of eight years, I was a seasonal at four different parks. Kind of the winter/summer, summer/winter. Yellowstone, Everglades, back to Yellowstone. Also, in the switch was at Colorado National Monument, Haleakala, Colorado National Monument. During the seasonal time, I'd started as a naturalist. But I wanted to increase my abilities and increase my options for being hired. So, I put myself through the law enforcement academy at Santa Rosa.

Brenna Lissoway: Put yourself through.

Lisa Eckert: Yes. As seasonals still do. I got a seasonal law enforcement commission. So, in some parks I'd work as a naturalist or interpreter, and in some parks, like Haleakala, I was a law enforcement ranger. So, I went back and forth. But I was always one to seize opportunities. When I was in Yellowstone, there was someone there from Royal National Park in Australia. He told me, "Lisa, if you get yourself to Australia, I'll get you a job in my park." So, I got myself to Sydney via New Zealand, and then I ended up volunteering in Royal National Park one winter. Then I met people there, and another winter I returned to Australia, and through those contacts, I volunteered in Kakadu National Park.

Brenna Lissoway: Interesting. So, while you were trying to build your career in the US, you were also reaching out to international opportunities.

Lisa Eckert: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: So, can you talk a little bit about what you gained from working internationally, and how that may have affected your park service career?

Lisa Eckert: Well, I remember the first time I returned from Australia, and I was back at Yellowstone, I gave examples to other seasonals, such as "Don't finish visitors' sentences or questions for them. Really let them ask their questions." You might know what it is. What I was trying to share is, I was in Australia, and I asked dumb questions. I asked questions like what's the difference between a kangaroo and a wallaroo and a wallabye? And so, for visitors coming to Yellowstone, well, what's the difference between a geyser and a hot spring? Let the visitor ask the question, and maybe ask the question back with them and have them help answer the question. So that was a valuable lesson. Right off the bat I felt, even

though Australia is English speaking, though I would joke about that, because they have their own nuances, but I felt that my patience expanded because so many Australians were generous, kind and patient with me.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you sort of had the experience of being a tourist, so to speak, in a way.

Lisa Eckert: Yes. Yeah. And I learned fire there. So, we did prescribed burns at Royal National Park, and I had never done that before. So, the staff there were just so happy to host me and I just really felt honored.

Brenna Lissoway: Any observations about difference of attitudes toward conservation? Or even operational differences between the two systems?

Lisa Eckert: One major difference that Australians pointed out to me right away is they were surprised that as a ranger I wore a gun. Because back then, this was 1980, '81, a lot of their police did not wear guns. And so that truly amazed them. So that was one major difference. One similarity that I always smiled about, as often Yellowstone Yosemite have the "Who's first?" Who was first established in the US? Royal National Park and Tongariro National Park in New Zealand also have that friendly banter back and forth. It's truly Royal, in 1879, and Royal is the world's second national park, after Yellowstone.

Brenna Lissoway: Interesting. Can you talk a little bit about what it was like for you then to be a commissioned law enforcement ranger, but not always to be in that role in your Park Service position? Did one inform the other? I mean how did you kind of walk that line, having those two different hats, so to speak?

Lisa Eckert: Yes. When the 6C retirement was starting, and rangers were putting in for credit whether their time would count toward the 20-year retirement, a lot of my time didn't because I'd been a generalist, because I did both. At some jobs, I actually did both. At Yellowstone I asked what could I do, what if I crafted something such as, I'll do interpretive programs in the morning but I'll do horse patrol in the evening. Or I'll do road patrol in the evening. So, I actually was allowed to do that. The supervisors at Canyon and Norris allowed that. So, I felt really privileged to be able to do both. For me, the fine line was I felt I had to be extra ready and be prepared at all times. Because even if I was giving an interpretive program, I felt that I was still creative and being with people and answering their questions, but that I could also be called out on a law enforcement incident. Of course, through time, that's exactly what people didn't want to happen anymore and that was changed. We're more species-specific now, as far as ranger being a genus and what type of ranger you are, a species.

Lisa Eckert: But I actually liked doing both. I've always framed it through my career that I was a generalist or an omnivore ranger during those ranger days. Actually, even through permanent career and chief of interpretation at Denali, I felt that I still had this essence of being a generalist ranger, until I turned in my law enforcement commission in Anchorage and then started 17 years as a superintendent.

Brenna Lissoway: So, what was that decision like for you to relinquish that commission?

Lisa Eckert: It was a difficult decision. Because rangering meant both to me, and even as a superintendent, I was a ranger at heart. When I actually first decided to go into law enforcement, the story there, or what took me down that path as I was getting ready to give an interpretive campfire program, I was chatting with a law enforcement ranger and a visitor went to him and not me to ask the question, "What kind of tree is that?" He couldn't answer, and he said, "Well, ask her. She doesn't wear the gun." And I thought every ranger should be able to say, "That's a lodge pole pine tree." Eighty percent of the trees in Yellowstone are lodge pole. So often for me, the visitor contact, the information, it's gray. There really isn't a fine line. That visitor information, welcoming, being an ambassador. You do that no matter which job you're in in the gray and the green.

Brenna Lissoway: It's been interesting. Over the course of some of the interviews that I've done for this project, there's been several folks who have sort of lamented, I would say, the sort of passing of that sort of generalist ranger where interpretation was a part of everyone's job, and protection was a part of everyone's, you know, position to a certain degree. How do you see the evolution of park positions, specialization, during your career? Would you like to comment on that at all?

Lisa Eckert: Well, it definitely was more of a generalist time when I started, and the evolution went to what I call the species-specific. You know, if people don't forget their roots, you know, that maybe, well, it's been done, so there is the 20-year retirement now for fire and law enforcement, and there's all the credentials to keep up, which actually makes sense, because in this day and age with where crime rates have increased. I know a major concern I have with the future of this agency is having recently been at Bryce Canyon National Park, so being in the state of Utah, being at Colorado National Monument in western Colorado, it's the concept of federal overreach. And so, I mean, rangers do need to be prepared that what if a Malheur National Wildlife Refuge situation takes place in the Visitor Center at Bryce Canyon National Park, or another national park.

Lisa Eckert: So, I'm not belittling the skill set or that I wish we were still all generalists. I understand why we specialized. I also know time is of the

essence, and time is like an endangered species. There's never enough time. But it always makes me smile when on my staff, there's a law enforcement ranger that's bringing in a picture of a bird they saw and they still want to know, they want to identify, what's that bird. So, I smile.

Brenna Lissoway: Can you tell me a little bit about some of the trainings that were significant to you in your career development? And where you got those.

Lisa Eckert: Yes. A lot of my training actually occurred as a superintendent when I left Denali as a chief of interpretation to my first superintendency. I went to the Midwest Region because they advertised the job as a developmental superintendent position. I went to Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site. I reported to a more senior superintendent at Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Noel Poe. And when I saw that vacancy announcement, I thought well, being a superintendent perhaps I can make more of a difference than I can as a division chief, or as a generalist ranger. Throughout my career, that's what I aspired to do, make a difference. Seeing it advertised that way, it was like having training wheels on your bicycle. Or I used to joke with the staff. It's my training bra or learning to ride a bike with training wheels! (laughter) I had guidance in that position, and I feel so fortunate. I can't even imagine becoming a superintendent without that. It worked out really well for me.

Lisa Eckert: So, I had training in that regard, because then the senior superintendent and I, we actually put a list together and wrote kind of a manual for the Midwest Region of competencies and what choices should be made for people in my type of positions. You know, the choice of fire management leadership, when would it be good for me to take a NEPA class, natural resource and policy for superintendents, cultural resource and policy. I had a litany of courses, and it was an incredible framework. So, I had that as a framework of training. Then later, when I was interviewing for other superintendent jobs, I still always cited the framework of a generalist ranger as these solid building blocks that formed the basis for my career. It was like my personal version of a Maslow's hierarchy of psychological needs as I had my basic building blocks. It worked for me in my career, the omnivore ranger. Especially as a superintendent, the interpretive skills and the public speaking. I feel the ability to succinctly try and frame my thoughts quickly has really helped me, though I often still have to remind myself to do that. (laughs) It's easy to get waylaid because we're so passionate about what we do.

Lisa Eckert: So, I had training in that regard. But other training opportunities that I had, Brenna, were I was the superintendent at the Horace M. Albright Training Center, at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. So there, as a part of WASO's Learning and Development, I applied to and was allowed to

participate in a pilot study of a course that was 18 graduate credits. The 18 graduate credits, applied to Leadership for Public Lands and Cultural Heritage. It was a consortium of five universities. Actually, I think 16 of us were selected to participate. I was allowed to take that, and I feel that was an amazing opportunity, as was a National Conservation Leadership Institute I applied to and was accepted into. So, I had that as a leadership opportunity. So, I am very grateful for the training and the learning, continuous learning opportunities that I had. Then at Albright Training Center I was allowed to, and I was able to help share some of those with what I called, or we all called, the new students, the new employees that were coming through the Albright Training Center for NPS Fundamentals, I was allowed to, if they chose, share my perspectives and leave my thumbprint on aspects of their career or thought that they would like to choose to take or embrace.

Brenna Lissoway: How long were you an instructor there?

Lisa Eckert: Well, I was their superintendent for three and a half years.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, you were the superintendent. Okay. Okay.

Lisa Eckert: But when I could, I often would instruct. So maybe once every other session I'd instruct history, or I would instruct from my perspective a resume class and interview class. You know, my perspective, how to make my short list as a hiring official. These are the things I look for and let me, if you would like, here are ideas to build up your resume. Such as write in bullets. Be succinct. Here are ideas for the interview process.

Lisa Eckert: In fact, when you and I were just meeting, over at the Santa Fe Hotel, that's what I was sharing, one of those ideas with Tom Banks, who's hoping to get an interview with a job he had applied. So, I let him know my perspective of is it okay or not okay to call the hiring official in advance. So, I've really enjoyed passing along lessons learned. I'm very passionate about investing in the next generation of leaders, and NPS Fundamentals really helped me think in that way even more. Probably another opportunity that helped me think in that way, I was selected as one of three instructors to go to Croatia to teach returning war refugees Ranger Skills. They were coming back to Croatia – Croatia had a very high unemployment rate, and the country's college-educated students, most often they left Croatia. So, it was an employment and conservation program with the World Bank to bring young people back to Croatia. After the war ended in 1995 there, some of the Yugoslav parks had become Croatian parks. So, I was able to help instruct mainly interpretive skills. But as the students asked about other things like, "How do you do search and rescue?" The omnivore part of my ranger career, then, I could

teach them this is how you set an anchor, and this is how you rappel. And this is how we can do a rescue. Or this is how we can go into caves with ropes.

Brenna Lissoway: So, lots of technical skills.

Lisa Eckert: As well, yes. I'm going to take a time out.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Pause there. [pause] And just continuing here. I wanted to ask, because I had asked you this previously about your other international experience. What from that Croatian experience do you feel like you may have brought back with you? What did you learn from that park system? Or that situation in that country that maybe you were able to apply at the United States?

Lisa Eckert: A real sense of humility and humanity, in the sense that the year I was there, it was 2001; we had three different trips back and forth from the US to Croatia. In between trip two and three, 9/11 occurred. And we had taken computers over to the students in Croatia, so they were able to have email, probably for the first time. They emailed the three instructors their sorrow, they were praying for us, they were thinking of us. Why I still think of that experience is I was in North Dakota at the time. I was at Knife River. I was nowhere near New York City. So that even made me speechless in a way, because I knew from them that one student, we would ask, "Oh, what are you using your first paycheck on?"

Lisa Eckert: That his reply was, "This goes to my mother. She's fixing the roof where the bomb fell through." So, they had their own tragedy with the wars, and they were thinking of us during 9/11. And I didn't live near New York City. So that feeling, that story I'll never forget.

Lisa Eckert: Another feeling I have, I think the experience in Croatia helped me realize the importance of feeling small. So, we were teaching interpretive skills and we were teaching in English. We had a translator into Croatian. And of course, we never quite knew if all of the theories and concepts were being grasped through the language translations. So, over the weekend, the Plitvice rangers had, their homework assignment was, they had learned about "tangibles" in interpretation. They learned that that's a piece. That's the factual piece of interpretation. But you don't want to do facts the whole time during a program. Otherwise, you'll end up like Algae in Wonderland. So, you need to then disperse your facts with emotion or an "intangible," or a story. So, their assignment over the weekend was to come back on Monday and let us know what is their tangible for Plitvice Lakes National Park, and then what is an example of their intangible. That went through a translator.

Lisa Eckert: So, on Monday, one of the students, when he gave his example, we all had tears in our eyes. So, his example was, and sometimes when I tell it, I like to speak as if he was speaking, and I don't mean to be insensitive about an accent or anything. But he would say, you know, "Doug, Lisa, Claire," (the instructors), "my tangible is Plitvice Lakes has wolves. We have," and I don't remember the number, but let's say, "we have 24 wolves and they have families and they have pups. They live here. And my intangible, though, is wolves, like us, need a refuge. We are all refugees. We need a place of refuge."

Brenna Lissoway: Wow.

Lisa Eckert: I wrote that in my Day-Timer and I have that right there every day. It's in my calendar. I read it every day. So, when I went up to Alaska, I spent ten years in Denali, and you know how people say, "Oh, you worked in fourteen different parks. What was your favorite?" And they're all favorites. But sometimes, I guess, (laughs) experiences merge. And from Croatia, I would say, the reason Alaska is so special to me and Denali's so special, because I feel small. You look at Denali at 20,320 feet. You're hiking on the tundra. You squish and you sink in the tundra. You look at the mountains and you feel small. And I think every human being should feel small, so we value each other, and we value other cultures.

Brenna Lissoway: You mentioned that you had had this wonderful opportunity to have basically mentorship for your first superintendency, you know, dipping your foot into that world.

Lisa Eckert: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Can you talk about some of the other mentors in your life that have been really significant? And why?

Lisa Eckert: Yes. There have been several, and then my philosophy is always to pay it forward. So definitely that supervisor, Noel Poe, was a mentor. Often supervisors aren't, but it worked out in our relationship. And that worked out really well. But I also signed up for the official ANPR mentoring program. Bill Supernaugh was the official mentor for me, and I really valued his examples, his honesty and his candor.

Lisa Eckert: I'd say in passing mentoring forward, I was really tickled at Knife River Indian Villages. We had an art logo contest for the 25th anniversary (1999). Whoever won the art logo contest would get a Lewis and Clark Bicentennial coin from the superintendent. So, when I presented it to then 15-year-old Kaylene Jaeger, her mother was with her and asked if I would join them for coffee to discuss careers. So, we had coffee. What happened there is not only did I have a family adopt me and include me and then

take care of my pet rabbits when I was on business travel, but Kaylene became a volunteer as a 15-year-old, then with another high schooler, a GS-2 ranger job-share as a 16-year-old ranger. She went into the National Park Service for her career. I'm so proud of her.

Lisa Eckert: But sadly, that story is, in 2013, she chose suicide six weeks after we returned from a Hawaii trip. So, she's no longer with us. But I think of her every day, too. Our friendship took us travelling to other places like Switzerland, New York, camping with her mom. I maintain contact with Kaylene's mother, brother and family, my North Dakota family. Through the years, it is still not easy as we all still grieve her loss.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. [pause] Okay, we're continuing on. I wanted to ask you if over the course of your career, you went to seven different regions and all these different parks and different career opportunities. Did you have a trajectory in mind? Did you always want to be a superintendent? How did you sort of envision your career unfolding?

Lisa Eckert: My career unfolded for the love of mission and the love of outdoors. A sense of space and place, typically, tip the scales. But the pathway often, so often it was maybe the place. Oh, I'd like to be in Alaska. But at one point in my life, I was married, and so what many people do with dual careers, which then it was more National Park Service, we were both in the National Park Service. Now dual career, I mean, most couples work, everybody works, and so dual career means also someone working in a city and someone working in a park. But what we would do to manage the dual career is leapfrog each other and alternate. So, if I got a job first, then Jon would try to catch up with me, and vice versa. So that's how we managed it. I also took the track of more the park ranger, and he was more in the resource management track.

Brenna Lissoway: Which would, hopefully you wouldn't be competing for positions at the same—

Lisa Eckert: Correct. Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Because you were in slightly different fields.

Lisa Eckert: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: And how did you meet? Where did you meet?

Lisa Eckert: We met in the Everglades National Park. I was a seasonal there. He was permanent there in resource management. I asked him out on a date on my birthday. We'd go bicycling and hiking and birdwatching (that is a "date" in the NPS). I think it's really common that – I mean, I can see why people meet within the National Park Service because of the values. We all have

those outdoor values and that passion for wanting to canoe out to Cape Sable. Or even the vacations we'd take, because we had traveled to East Africa together at one point. What do you think we did when we were overseas, but to visit national parks in Kenya.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. So, do you feel like the concept of dual career, did you feel supported in that in the Park Service? Or did you feel that it was more an idea that really wasn't put into practice very well? Can you talk a little bit about that? Because it was probably a program that was really kind of getting some traction, you know, during the period that you were just sort of getting going with your career fulltime.

Lisa Eckert: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Is that true, would you say?

Lisa Eckert: In fact, the Association of National Park Rangers had a dual career committee at one point, and they were an advocate for supporting this. I wouldn't have ever expected a job to be handed to me. Most often, when one of us was looking, we'd kind of look for the area and apply. So, it was more our initiative to find jobs. I think it was sporadic and inconsistent that supervisors throughout the system may have been aware of a dual career program or not. The move to Alaska, I went first. Actually, that was the most seamless dual career move ever. It was very well-supported, and even initiated from a Washington, DC, resource management intake program. So, we were very fortunate.

Lisa Eckert: But what I like to do in carrying that forward when I've been advertising jobs for staff to come work in my parks, is I always want to put a sentence in the vacancy announcement that says, dual career positions may be available. I know people can look themselves and see, oh, yes, the US Forest Service is in Panguitch, Utah, near Bryce Canyon NP. But I always like to put that little line in there to remind people that we're cognizant and aware that this is really, this is true life.

Brenna Lissoway: Since you've mentioned ANPR a couple of times just in the last few minutes, can you talk a little about how you first became involved with ANPR?

Lisa Eckert: I traveled to my first Ranger Rendezvous in Jackson, Wyoming, 1986. It was the tenth. I was a seasonal ranger, and I decided I should go so that I could find out from all the permanent staff how the heck you get a permanent ranger job. That was in 1986. I had been a seasonal at that point since 1979. Total, I was a seasonal for eight years. I learned so much there and I felt people genuinely wanted to meet me. I learned actually at that point I had career-conditional status, but didn't understand the value of it.

I had taken the clerk typist test. I had typed for 105 days in downtown Miami in 1981/82. My accomplishment there, I used to write on my application, was wearing nylons and working with chain smokers. But I got the piece of paper that said I had career-conditional status. But I found out at that Rendezvous that I can use that to apply non-competitively for seasonal jobs. Didn't know that. So, I did. Then that next, the winter and then the summer, I had so many offers. It was just, it was amazing. Seasonal offers without applying the typical way.

Brenna Lissoway: Right, right.

Lisa Eckert: But then the timing at that point, shortly after that I received my first permanent ranger job in Shenandoah National Park. I'm grateful to Linda Cowles Green for that opportunity!

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. So, what was the transition like for you, going from seasonal to permanent?

Lisa Eckert: I was really excited. I rented a U-Haul trailer. My parents had left some discarded furniture in Wisconsin at a storage unit when they moved. Traveled from Colorado – I had been a clerk-typist at Colorado National Monument – drove to Wisconsin, picked up a few small pieces of furniture, and headed out to Shenandoah National Park. I was ecstatic that I had a permanent ranger job. I remember when I was a seasonal applying for jobs and getting the gong letters, I used to say, "Oh, I could wallpaper a living room with all these gong letters." But I remember saying, I could be singing that song you used to sing as a kid. [singing] "Nobody likes me, everyone hates me, I'm going to go eat worms." It was like, I don't have to eat worms anymore. I'm now a permanent employee! Yes, I was really excited. And hence again kind of that pay it forward anytime that I can to share any information or tricks of the trade on making that transition or making that jump.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. Do you think that that has changed over the years? That path? Or do you perceive it as being just as difficult now to get a permanent position? Or have there been changes?

Lisa Eckert: There have been changes. The Flexible Workforce Act, definitely. The fact that that is there and available and people can use that to apply to a first permanent job, I think is amazing. There's a core of us. We were seasonals in the Everglades together, and we wrote monthly congressional letters. "Dear Senator, you don't understand seasonal park ranger work. And there needs to be a system that we can become permanent rangers. Why don't you think about something like 24 months of seasonal time counts toward being able to apply to permanent jobs?" Lo and behold, 30 years later, it's here. So, I think there's a difference today on becoming a

permanent NPS employee. I think there's some other hiring authorities that are available now that weren't available for me in the 1980s. That's why we all left being a ranger to go type! Which I actually didn't want to do. I chose not to do that for the longest time. I wouldn't. I wouldn't go there. Finally, I did. I decided, I guess I'm going there. I succumbed and typed for the Small Business Administration on a Wang word processor. So, I believe there's more opportunities now. Whether that means it's easier, you know, I've met seasonals at the Ranger Rendezvous and it's still a struggle. I feel there's more options. But it doesn't diminish that there are struggles out there.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Right.

Lisa Eckert: So, I would counsel and say persevere. I do remember applying to the Shenandoah job and thinking, this is the last application I'm putting out, and then I need to find something else. I thought, "I think I'll be a travel guide or a travel consultant." Most of the applications I was sending out in that time were within a couple days drive from where Jon was at Colorado National Monument. I had biked through Shenandoah once on a Kentucky to Williamsburg trip, and liked it so applied there.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you were very close to giving up on a career with the Park Service.

Lisa Eckert: I was. But as far as the Association of National Park Rangers, I do feel it was a very helpful organization for my career. I later ran for board members, so I was an Alaska regional board member, and then went into the educational and training slot when they went into functional board members. Again, wanting to pay it forward with training opportunities. [Dog barks.] Let's pause for just a second here. [Pause]

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, I wanted to just give you an opportunity to reflect on maybe how you've seen ANPR as an organization change during the time that you've been involved, some of the changes that you've witnessed.

Lisa Eckert: Comparing the first Ranger Rendezvous I attended, where there may have been three hundred people attending, I'm not sure, more highly attended, we'll say that, and then more recent Rendezvous, and also when I was on the board, you know, the number of attendees has dwindled. It has decreased. When I was a supervisor, when I could, I always tried to send at least one of my employees from the park on government time and funding, because I felt the experience was valuable. Again, it's like an intangible. I mean, how do you measure networking opportunities? So, I always tried to send someone officially.

Lisa Eckert: But attendance has declined. Travel and training funds have declined for parks, so it is very difficult to send employees to training. Some people

think, perhaps, it's because the 6C retirement was a big motivation back earlier, and perhaps because there was a cause, membership was high. I'm not sure. I feel invigorated and inspired by the youth that are involved with ANPR, and I thank them. I'd feel invigorated when I would see the newer employees at the NPS Fundamentals training courses. I would always think to myself when some of the retirees from ANPR are worried that what's going to happen when all the "gray hairs" leave, I'm really not worried. I have met some really inspiring, amazing young people in the parks I've been and at the training center. Why the decline in numbers and membership with ANPR, I'm not sure, except perhaps there's so much competition for other opportunities in organizations, or the fact that we've become so much more technical. Or, perhaps, because we all work sixty hours a week. Or we have other commitments that take priority. I'm not sure.

Brenna Lissoway: Do you think that the demands of a Park Service career have increased during your time with the Park Service? I mean, you said we all work 60-hour weeks. Did that not used to be the case? Do you see change there?

Lisa Eckert: I would say, I mean, as much as we try to have that work/life balance, I find that it's very hard to balance. I would say as a superintendent, and I'm sure division chiefs in larger parks, we're checking our iPhones and email way too much, more than we should. So, it's that technical, it's the technology that we've acquired, but then we're glued to it, but that's because of constant due dates, required computer training, or if an HR issue, the need to document. I would definitely be a supervisor that would encourage my employees to turn off their mechanical devices at the dinner hour, unless there was something urgent. But do I follow my own advice? Not always. I try. I would try to do yoga, take yoga. I used to run, and so I would have my physical activity to relax and charge my brain. But yeah, I would say with an increase in technology, an increase in replies due, political realities, definitely our jobs are much more complex and we're juggling so many balls in the air. Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Any other strategies that you found to be effective for trying to keep that work/life balance? Exercise sounds like it was important. Any others that you found useful?

Lisa Eckert: I adopted a border collie from an animal control in Cedar City, Utah. In Denali, we all had sled dogs we could help exercise. Or you could bring your dogs to work and skijor. But I'm hopeful and optimistic that everyone finds their own strategy for coping. For me, it's definitely been physical exercise. It's been challenging myself to, say climbing a mountain. Or actually, my very much physical goals have been what my recipe has been about.

Brenna Lissoway: So, we touched on mentors and how some of the mentors you've had throughout your career. I feel like we kind of went off on another topic that led us elsewhere. I wanted to give you another opportunity to just mention anyone else, or any other organizations. It doesn't even have to be necessarily a person, but other mentoring situations that you've benefited from.

Lisa Eckert: When I went to Colorado National Monument as a superintendent, retired regional director Karen Wade was offering her mentoring services to a few of us. I was the lucky recipient of having Karen as what I call a womentor, rather than a mentor, a womentor and a coach. The book that she had recommended us to read, I recommend to everyone as well. The book is titled How by Dov Seidman. I have always valued Karen's input and coaching, compassion. She remembered employees' birthdays, as a Regional Director. When I had major surgery while at Devils Tower NM, Karen sent flowers to my parents' home, where I was recuperating. So, her compassionate leadership style, I suspect I may have been trying to emulate. I really admired her.

Lisa Eckert: I do remember also, similar to, you know, other mentors, candor, I appreciated the candor. I attended the new superintendent academy in Astoria, Oregon, and Karen was a speaker. She was soon to retire from the Intermountain region as their director. But one thing she shared with us, one comment, another female superintendent and I still remember and talk about. Karen's word was that the most difficult job that she ever had was being a superintendent as a single woman.

Brenna Lissoway: And you could identify with that?

Lisa Eckert: I very much can identify with that.

Brenna Lissoway: Can you talk about some of the ways it was difficult?

Lisa Eckert: One way is, which is probably why I may have adopted a border collie, is there's the lack of a sounding board. Not that you'd want to come home and talk about work all night with your partner or significant other; in fact, I know most people actually have the rules that they won't. But if you needed a sounding board, or if you had a really rough day, where would you turn? I can't speak for our former regional director, but for me, the sounding board. But also, for me, having moved around so much, I have friends everywhere around the country, and friends that have become my family. So, I also know that I can pick up the phone. It's just, when you're so tired, and you've just had one of those really long days, do you come home and pick up the phone? No, I didn't. I know so many of us say, once instant messaging came about, "I keep meaning to call you and see how

you're doing." But it wasn't that I didn't have the sounding board, if I didn't pick up the phone, it was just so many hours in a day.

Brenna Lissoway: What about, I don't know, just perceptions among your professional circles, or any challenges in the workplace with being a single female superintendent?

Lisa Eckert: I might have to give that a little more thought, yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: Nothing springs to mind.

Lisa Eckert: Not at the moment. (Later added 12/11/17: Not that this applied to being a superintendent solely, but throughout my NPS career, I have faced adversity in the realm of sexual assault (seasonal employee Yellowstone), sexual harassment (various parks), and hostile work environment (various parks). Also, as a woman superintendent, I expect that women would help each other in a male-dominated field; at one park site, the former superintendent did numerous things to undermine me even though she no longer worked for NPS, and even called the regional and national director about my actions/items in my park – some totally false – and that is something I would never have expected to confront. In a perfect world of course, there would be that mutual respect, and sadly, that superintendent's actions had caused employees to leave (new job or retirement) prior to my arrival.)

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. So, I think you did begin to touch on this a little bit. Can you talk to me about, you know, sort of, you have sort of been hinting at this and talking a little bit about it, but I just wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about how you define good leadership. You know, people that you've seen exhibit good leadership, how you sort of feel like you tried to be as a leader through your career.

Lisa Eckert: Yes. I did choose to manage by accountability and responsibility, and in that way, "walk the talk." I often arrived to a situation where there were perhaps issues with an employee or employees that hadn't been handled. I was compelled to handle them, because I felt that that was the reflection of negative scores in the employee viewpoint survey. Or it definitely, not the morale booster that we all seek. So, I have handled very complex and difficult employee relations issues, hoping to make a park and a place a better place. I also wanted to lead with empathy.

Lisa Eckert: Another mentor, and I'll never forget Rick Gale saying to me at one of the Ranger Rendezvous, "Eckert, don't ever lose your enthusiasm." As a superintendent, you know, I think perhaps sometimes people think there's this other way of behaving, and keeping things close to the vest. I believe

I've been able to still wear my heart on my sleeve and still be a successful superintendent.

Lisa Eckert: I would recommend and remind people don't forget the power of thank you, or passing on something positive, like Rick Gale did to me. One of my seasonals in Denali, I will not forget something that Carmi Strom said to me once. "Lisa, what they say about you is true. You get things done." That was a seasonal saying something to me as a then assistant chief of interpretation. So, the power of thank you. The ripple effect. It really goes a long way.

Brenna Lissoway: Now you mentioned that you're really focused and proud that you tackled some very complex and difficult personnel situations, and other types of situations in your career. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts or ideas about why those situations persisted. It seems like such a, what you did was unusual, rather than usual. Do you see what I'm saying? Any ideas or observations about your career, about why that is, or why that was?

Lisa Eckert: I wish it was the usual, that's for sure. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of documentation. Persistence. Perseverance. Thick skin. It's also, I mean, it's also hard to know what your priorities are. I think every leader goes into their new position deciding what their priorities will be. Or perhaps if you're lucky enough, you might have a transition from a former colleague, or a former supervisor who was in that position, or a former superintendent. Some priorities are external and community-based, partnership-based, and some priorities are internal.

Lisa Eckert: I've always chosen my priorities to be, let's get this house in order. Let's get the park in order. Because I feel that if there are happy employees and a coalescing team, that the ripple effects will go off to the visitors, that would ripple off to and ensure that resources are preserved. So, when I can, that's been my priority. It may be that when I've arrived to different situations, the priorities may have been directed about something else. You know, it's personality, too, that we would work, we work with our strengths. It's a little more challenging to work with perhaps a part of what might not be our strength. But perhaps that's the issue that needs to be tackled as a higher priority.

Lisa Eckert: But I have, throughout my career, when necessary, handled suspensions, terminations, disciplinary actions, and also workplace violence – and putting the region on alert that I felt we had that situation. So those are types of items that I feel build and throughout decades, eventually led toward my retirement decision. I reached what I call my threshold of cumulative impact. It was far from the mission and the place of what drew me to this career.

Brenna Lissoway: Of having to deal with these issues.

Lisa Eckert: Yes. Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Do you feel like you always have had the tools that you needed to deal with these things?

Lisa Eckert: Sometimes yes and sometimes no, but mostly yes. There may have been a delay, though, with our human resources to get the right information or to get the right terminology in a certain proposal or document. And then too much time elapsed, and so something wasn't able to be done. But the contacts are there region-wide on whom to contact when you have questions. I also have brought in speakers and trainers at various parks I've been to not only have a refresher for me, but to offer that guidance and those tools for other supervisors, such as Bill Wiley's "The Uncivil Servant" (keeping government employees accountable).

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Interesting. So, I wonder if you could talk to me a little bit about some of the projects in your career that you're most proud of. Some of the efforts that you really feel like were really important at the time, or something that you were very personally invested in. just things that were very important to you.

Lisa Eckert: Certainly. Resource preservation, of course, anything, well, the National Park Service mission, you know, we're so invested in that, and the National Park Service core values. You know, tradition, respect, integrity, excellence, resource stewardship. It's just so much of who we are and how we breathe.

Lisa Eckert: What I enjoyed about being a superintendent is there was still the ability for me to be creative, which I had really enjoyed as an interpreter. It's the creative, connecting the dots for visitors' inquiring minds with the resources. But as a superintendent, there was still that ability to be creative, find solutions to complex problems, or simply have an idea. Wow, this could solve that! So, while I was at Devils Tower National Monument (DETO), between 2002 and 2005, we were preparing for the centennial of the Antiquities Act (also DETO centennial). I knew right front up and center from the regional office that a name change for Devils Tower National Monument, you know, don't go there. So, I knew that that was forbidden. However, I had an idea to expand upon the original concept for Devils Tower, the recognition that in 1906, when the first national monument was proclaimed, it was proclaimed for its geologic tower and significance. That's what was understood then. It was the one primary resource.

Lisa Eckert: A hundred years later, going on to 2006, perhaps what wasn't understood or known or valued in 1906 were the cultural significance, the cultural values. So how about if we proposed to be more inclusive and, in preparation for the centennial, a national historic landmark, perhaps called Bear Lodge, a more sensitive name and more accepted by most of the 21 culturally affiliated Indian nations.

Lisa Eckert: I shared that idea through the Regional Director, and it was approved. I was allowed to pursue that and vet that with the congressionals in Wyoming, and I did that. But it later was misinterpreted (even misrepresented), and how it was misrepresented is when Representative Barbara Cubin had a negative town hall experience in Sundance, Wyoming, at one point during a winter recess (a Washington topic, not local). I felt that to "make up" for that she issued a press release and in the next day's newspaper, the lead article read, "Devil's Tower is under attack." The first sentence said, "Superintendent Lisa Eckert vows to change the name of the park." That really spun out of control so much that I was never really able to retrieve the story to its accurate intention, nor did anyone within NPS desire me to.

Lisa Eckert: When the newspaper came out, I happened to be in Washington DC, at some training and I was called into the NPS Director's office. So, I went in and met with the Director about it (and at the time, IMR Deputy Director Mike Snyder was also there. So basically, the NHL idea went away, and it was not pursued, and it was pretty much dropped, because it was no longer supported.

Brenna Lissoway: So, after all of the work that had been done, the groundwork that had been laid, and seeming agreement between parties, then a misinterpretation basically ended the effort.

Lisa Eckert: Sure. It was time for a time out.

Brenna Lissoway: Uh huh. Wow. And how did you feel about that?

Lisa Eckert: I felt deflated. I mean, I understand time outs. You know, there's a time for everything, but in my opinion, I was a victim due to politics. So, I went away from that experience feeling like well, perhaps, along with previous superintendents that had tried for a full-blown name change, that perhaps between Deb Bird, Deb Liggett, Bill Pierce (former DETO superintendents) and myself that we had planted seeds for something to be more inclusive, more sensitive. And maybe that was really my goal. So maybe when you ask me how I was feeling, throughout my career when I feel there's a lack of mutual respect or a lack of inclusiveness, or that, it's like this clash of values, I really have to take a step back and a deep breath and consider where did this come from? What's the root cause? Where can

I find common ground to start over again? But it does take me a step back. Yeah. So, I mean, I did go with okay, we're going to take a time out.

Lisa Eckert: But what's happened off and on through my career as a superintendent, there's something that, there's something that's misunderstood. Perhaps the lesson there for me is perhaps I turn the heat up too fast. I read about that in one of my leadership books. Because I tend to embrace change, I embrace risk. You know, okay, maybe I turn the heat up too fast. Now let's turn it back to simmer. So maybe in that instance, you know, I was turning it back to simmer.

Lisa Eckert: So, we didn't pursue the idea. So, it did not happen. But there were some, I think out of that story, if I may share what would be just something to pass along to colleagues is that's, there's even more to this story. That's the story. But as a superintendent, I think we expect that yes, we'll have thick skin, and we expect to be beat up in the newspapers and misrepresented. And we expect the governor to point me out at a public dinner saying, "You! You're changing the name of the park! How dare you?" To have Representative Cubin say what she did for the newspaper, you know, we may expect that to happen. Obviously, we try to avoid it, and we try to let our superiors know ahead of time when it's going to happen. I didn't know I was putting Devils Tower under attack, so I was unable to tell Director Fran Mainella in advance what had happened in the newspaper that time. But I would say five years even after that incident, as late as 2010, '11, maybe even 2012, people within the National Park Service, my colleagues, would say to me, "Ah. You're the one who tried to change the name of the park. What were you thinking?"

Lisa Eckert: So, my advice to all of us is we think we know the true story, but quite often, we don't. So, to the best of our abilities, I would hope or suggest that we do some ground-truthing. We seek truth or call a reliable source.

Lisa Eckert: Or, in another example, at Colorado National Monument, even the Coalition of Retirees thought I was allowing professional bike races in Colorado National Monument. They heard that from a former colleague there who was retired, but no one called me to ask me. So, I was able to reach out to someone and say, "You know, you're not getting the full story. I'm not seeking a visitor activity and commercial services plan for professional bicycle races. The Denver Post says that, the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel says that. A former superintendent is saying I'm saying that. But I'm not. The goal of this visitor activity and commercial services plan is to be transparent, to allow a very controversial issue, but let's bring all the partners and users in the Grand Junction community together. And let's have a dialog about what uses are appropriate in this national monument." That was the goal.

Lisa Eckert: At the time I pitched that plan, I had support in Washington and received $240,000 within my first three months of being superintendent there. We did some work, but we didn't finish that particular proposal. We did a visitor use study instead as one piece of a framework.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. It sounds like you've had a couple of experiences in your career where you really have moved forward and tried to do what you thought was best, and for some reason or another, things just haven't been able to move forward. I'm just wondering how you continue to move forward from those types of setbacks. How do you do that?

Lisa Eckert: Well, one way I do that is I think about the seasonal in Denali who said, "Lisa, you get things done." So, it may not be this particular topic. But we'll go back to ground zero, so to speak, and we'll work on another topic together. Some of the topics, or some of the issues, you know, resource, preservation-related, or the items that I would really think about and really dwell on, it was a synthesis of listening to what other people were sharing. People might say what their concerns were in the community. Or an employee might say, "This is my concern." Because I would always ask, as most superintendents do when you arrive, what's going well, what needs improvement, and what would you do if you were me. So, it's very typical that you would ask those questions. But some of the issues were so complex.

Lisa Eckert: Another one that comes to mind, that actually has a happy ending, so to speak, or it has an ending during the time I was employed there, was when I was at Gateway National Recreation Area, the Jamaica Bay unit. There were groups of people that would come to the Floyd Bennett Airfield (FBA), typically, or the Jacob Riis Park, but not all had special use permits. So, there was one group, the Guyanese, it was like a family (country) reunion group. It was a group that would come every July. And they didn't get a permit.

Lisa Eckert: So, my first year, I heard from the staff that that was a huge problem. So, I worked with the group and met them. I said, "Well, this is what our process is. And may I help you with this?" We did a special permit. The permit number was for five thousand people, and we had all the parameters of the permit, and forty-five thousand people showed up. Because of the boulevard and traffic control outside the FBA and working with U.S. Park Police, basically what happened is everyone who came in buses or came in cars, they were allowed onto the airfield. So, we had about forty-five thousand people. Some people estimated fifty thousand. But we didn't have the restroom facilities. We didn't have any of the facilities. When that group left, with all the cars, there were so many unsafe conditions. There was a huge trash issue, litter, human waste.

Someone had started a charcoal briquette inside the Visitor Center. There were just so many things that had gone wrong. So, the cleanup fee was sixty-eight thousand dollars. I saw the faces of my staff that night, and I vowed that this would never happen again. So, it never did.

Lisa Eckert: The next year, they said they were coming, didn't get a permit. I put together an Incident Command exercise. We ran the incident (if they came) under Incident Command. We actually had U.S. Park Police participating under Incident Command. They had not been utilizing ICS at that time. The group didn't come. I didn't allow them to apply for a permit and we were prepared to have them come. That was a piece of it.

Lisa Eckert: During this process, and prior to July, Congressman Anthony Weiner came to my office and slammed his fist on my desk and said, "You will issue them a permit!"

Lisa Eckert: And I said, "I will not. They owe us sixty-eight thousand dollars I was recouping under 19JJ." I said, "We will not."

Lisa Eckert: He said, "Well, what if they just pay you ten dollars a month?" And I said no. So that's a story where that year they did not come back, and it hasn't happened. So, the special events had special use permits. The restrictions, as far as I know, were adhered. My first summer away from Gateway, when I had gone next to Albright Training Center, on July ninth, I got emails from the staff at the Jamaica Bay Unit. "You go, girl! No festival today. Thank you."

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. Quite an accomplishment.

Lisa Eckert: It had a lot of complex layers. Yes, and the other parts of it were that the emails came in, because you know, our email addresses are public. I had emails from around the world. I was labeled a racist and a bigot and a homophobic. The ugliness of the emails, which I know is not unusual for superintendents, but I was on the receiving end of that. But it was the right thing to do because a historic airfield was trashed, and it took all of us to clean it up. So that was an issue. Hugely complex. With the staff I had at Jamaica Bay Unit, it was solved, and I am extremely proud of that.

Brenna Lissoway: I'm just sitting here listening to all of these really difficult situations that you've gone through as a superintendent. And I'm thinking what compelled you to stay with that career trajectory? There was probably other options to you within the park service. And I'm wondering, because you retired as a superintendent, what compelled you to stay in that role?

Lisa Eckert: I always want to make a difference. As long as I had the energy and the inertia and felt I could, I always wanted to make a difference. I genuinely like people, and so as a leader, or if I'm asked to do something or go

somewhere, I truly want to help out. I was asked to go on a detail to Organ Pipe Cactus a year after park ranger Kris Eggle was murdered. And I accepted it. It was around the Christmas holidays. I canceled all my Christmas plans. I went down there on a 120-day detail.

Lisa Eckert: Again, in that situation, too, I wasn't even there permanently. But within three weeks of being there, I realized that the border patrol, there had just been an Arizona border control plan released, and they were about to use their ATVs and their motorized vehicles to go into designated wilderness at Organ Pipe Cactus. So of course, I called the regional office. The regional director flew in for a meeting. "We need to do a plan here." I think for some folks, "plan" is a nasty four-letter word. And p-l-a-n, I like that word. I see the necessity. I like the thought process and the critical thinking that it enables us to do. So, I started a plan, a border control plan, while I was there on a detail. Though after I left my detail, I heard from an ORPI employee that the IMR Deputy Director had spoken negatively about my actions. If that was the case, then why did he not take the time to have a conversation with me? It did have me realize that perhaps I was a decade ahead of what was currently happening in the NPS, and that the NPS is fairly conservative, not as innovative as I would have liked.

Lisa Eckert: So, throughout my career I've been compelled to go where I'm asked or needed, or feel I'm needed. Though I must admit, in one situation, I moved because I felt like, it was the necessary strategy to exit. I felt that in a situation I was in, that if I stayed, I wouldn't be doing that particular unit any favor. I felt I needed to leave and allow someone new to come in so that that park could go forward because of things that had been so misunderstood, and not being able to be reined in. So, I left that region (IMR) and took a risk and went off to another region (NER) and applied to another job.

Lisa Eckert: So, I do have employees ask, when they're in a really difficult situation, I mean, I think there comes a point, what to do? You can remain, and continue to try to navigate and persevere. But because we're a national agency and we can move to other areas, but of course many people can't move like I did. My choice in that situation was to move and start over, basically. So that was one of the ways I coped. For a variety of reasons, I felt I was the victim of a hostile work environment, I knew of others as well, we felt powerless, and I moved on.

Brenna Lissoway: Would you say that was atypical of how, it sounds like that that sort of a unique circumstance, and that the other moves that you chose to make throughout your career were under different circumstances. Is that fair to say?

Lisa Eckert: Well, all the applications I've done, I've wanted to move and have another experience/adventure. Often it was a choice of a place, sense of place, that I've mentioned. Or oftentimes, yeah, I guess the job. I guess in this particular case it was when I received a job offer for that location, I felt like someone was throwing me a lifesaver. I thought, I need to grab this, because I have an opportunity to start over, or redeem myself, if I felt I needed to. I still think that's a very strong word. But it was perceptions. Or it was the redemption may have been because of items that were said (or not said) to me from a supervisor. But I chose my course, so that's what I did. I did a self-rescue, self-belay.

Brenna Lissoway: That's a great analogy. (laughs) Yeah. Yeah. So, I wanted to ask you a little bit about how you see NPS organizational culture, and how it may have changed during your career with the Park Service.

Lisa Eckert: The organizational culture, it's changed off and on, but it's had similar roots, such as regions, parks, and that may have switched around a little bit. Though one, a function that's changed more recently, or at least I'm more aware of it, is the HR offices and the contracting offices being more centralized. I would not be alone if I asked, or if I had a crystal ball and said, if in the next ten years something could change in the National Park Service, if it could be those functions to be decentralized. It's really difficult for parks to get their information or their vacancy announcements recruited. Often a year, there's a lapse. So, if those two functions could go back to parks. I don't have the solution on how that could be. I know our current deputy director's very aware of that. So, there's been this yin and yang, or teeter tottering back and forth. But structure's fairly similar with a national office and the regional office and then the parks.

Lisa Eckert: Though I'd say for the organizational structure in individual parks, that may be adjusting and ebbing and flowing due to budgets. One example there is when I went to Bryce Canyon National Park, there were only three division chiefs. So, a park that was increasing visitation close to three hundred thousand people a year (40%), and this year, 2016, they'll probably break two million annual visitors, it was a real challenge for me as a superintendent to have three division chiefs. There was no administrative officer. That's not my background. And yet, superintendents sign the park assurance statements for RD evaluations. And I'm accountable. I'm accountable for all this. Yet I didn't have all the key staff. So, I was able to adjust that a little while I was there. Someone retired as a program analyst, so I did float a recruitment package to get an administrative officer, but it had not been completed by my retirement. I would highly recommend that, though the new superintendent may choose otherwise. But that decision to go to three division chiefs was budget-

based. It was the former superintendent who was handling a 97 percent fixed cost budget, and parks were supposed to be at least at the 85 percent level. So that was one strategy. I was able to change it up a little bit. But it's just really, really difficult if a superintendent, in my opinion, in a very busy park, even though a middle-sized park, but very busy, doesn't have the leadership circle in all the division chiefs and branch chiefs. So, in that sense, I felt I became an administrative officer. On some days, I was wearing a chief of interpretation hat as well and writing a park newspaper.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. Interesting. It sounds like you've had a lot of involvement with partnerships during your career. Can you talk a little bit about some of the more significant ones you've been involved with developing or maintaining? Yeah, maybe just some examples of partnership opportunities that you've been involved with.

Lisa Eckert: I've so enjoyed the partnerships with the American Indian tribes that I've been able to work with. Well, any relationship's a partnership, or any partnership's a relationship. But even at Knife River Indian Villages, there was such support from the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara, the Three Affiliated Tribes. And so much so that when the Sacagawea dollar coin was released, I learned about it in a newspaper article that it was going to be released at a Wal-Mart in Bismarck, North Dakota, within two days. So, I thought my goodness, we need to release the coin at the park, because this is where Sacagawea was when she met the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Lisa Eckert: So, calling up my contacts and friends at Three Affiliated Tribes, we ran down to the Wal-Mart and spoke to a manager, and then went to a bank to offer our location. Two days later, on a Super Bowl Sunday, we had in attendance the Three Affiliated Tribes doing a prayer ceremony, the bank issuing the dollar coins (we called it Swap Silver for Gold, you know, swapping four silver quarters for the gold coin.) I have found such delight in the support of various partnerships to run with ideas like that. Then it's a team effort, and it's just this huge, huge celebration of everyone's efforts. That was always such a fun experience for me.

Lisa Eckert: So, get this, the picture on the front page of the Bismarck Tribune was all these people, this huge line outside the Visitor Center to get their coin, their dollar on a Super Bowl Sunday, and it's like minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

Lisa Eckert: But also, Devils Tower, we had 21 Indian nations culturally affiliated with the Tower, a Sacred Site. But the other, just so many partnerships with natural history associations and with visitors and convention bureaus. It's

such a community. I mean, we all love that saying, "It takes a village," and it really does. It really does.

Brenna Lissoway: Have partnerships changed in any significant way over your career, would you say?

Lisa Eckert: I would say partnerships have changed in the sense that there seems to be more of the official sponsorships, though the National Park Foundation, there's more of that, and perhaps that is reflected in the 2016 NPS Centennial. So, I'll be curious to see where that goes.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah, it will be interesting.

Lisa Eckert: Whereas in the past, for me, it was almost a warning to be very careful, and to have memorandums of agreement in place, and that it's not a corporate sponsorship.

Brenna Lissoway: Hmm. Interesting. You mentioned the centennial. I would like to actually just sort of briefly touch on that, because here we are, nearing the end of the Park Service's centennial year. And you were involved for most of the year at Bryce Canyon, where you retired from. Sort of thinking about the centennial as an event, and how your park in particular was going to take that on. I was just wondering if you could comment a little bit about how you saw the centennial unfold, both in your park but nationally, too, if you want to comment on that.

(FYI – I thought that this oral history was going to be an hour . . . into the second hour, a note that I am really fading.)

Lisa Eckert: Mm hm. Well, at Bryce Canyon National Park, we adopted, what probably a lot of parks did, because we're so understaffed and overwhelmed, where we adopted the recommendation to celebrate something that was already occurring in the park. So, we had construction projects that were finalizing. At Bryce, we did ribbon-cuttings on a shared-use path of five miles into the park, the completions of a million-dollar solar array panels project, and newly completed visitor center exhibits. For the first two, the theme being sustainability. So, we picked items that we were planning to celebrate.

Lisa Eckert: The first two were a shared ribbon-cutting event in May as a National Park Service centennial event. And then on the August 25th exact birthday, we had ribbon cutting for new museum exhibits, and a new film, which was actually oral histories that the Southern Utah University had worked on.

Brenna Lissoway: What about nationally? What you've perceived as some of the major programs that the park service has undertaken in this centennial year, and

sort of how you see those. Find Your Park and trying to get kids into parks, those sorts of things that have sort of been born from the centennial.

Lisa Eckert: Yes. I applaud Every Kid in a Park, and the fourth-grade pass. It's just brilliant. When it's really busy at the entrance station, sometimes I go out and just help move cars through that had passes. Any time I met a fourth grader, I'd make sure she showed me her pass. It was just very exciting. Again, it's investing in our next generation.

Lisa Eckert: The Find Your Park campaign, I'm guessing it was very successful. I'm not sure if it was coincidental with visitation that's increased in parks nationwide, or if it had to do with 2016, or in our case, in Utah, there was a Mighty Five campaign. But all the national parks in Utah, visitation was going up around 30 to 40 percent. And hugely in the last two years.

Lisa Eckert: But I will say we celebrated, and as I would meet with visitors and say, "Welcome to the park. Today's our birthday. It's August 25th." The visitors I was speaking with, it was a coincidence for them. Most of them did not know it was the birthday, and many of them didn't know it was the centennial. Some did, and the ones that did probably wore park shirts and caps. But I would say in our particular situation, as we shared birthday cake and chatted, that maybe 80 percent of the people just happened to be there.

Brenna Lissoway: That's interesting. Yeah. I think I've kind of asked this in another way, but I wanted to give you just one more opportunity to comment about, you know, looking back at your career and the issues that the park service has faced, how have the management challenges for the Park Service changed during your tenure? Management challenges, different, more intense, how have they changed, do you think?

Lisa Eckert: Our management policies have changed during my tenure. So, that's definitely with our enabling legislation and management policies and, you know, kind of going to that source to make wise decisions. Also thinking about what's the science, or has there been, so that we can make the best decisions as possible.

Brenna Lissoway: So much more science-based management is what—

Lisa Eckert: Mm hmm. I would say that that's a part of it. I don't know if it's more, but it seems to be a part of it, because it's reflected more in management policies. Say, in 2006, than maybe when I started in the National Park Service in 1979.

Brenna Lissoway: How do you see the Park Service's, you know, one of the big challenges that's talked about a lot is changing demographics of our country, and also this real desire to change the demographics of the park service to be more

reflective of the actual population. Can you talk a little bit about how you've seen that evolve during your time with the park service? Those discussions, or—

Lisa Eckert: Definitely discussions have evolved, practices, hiring authorities. When I was in Alaska, there was an Alaskan native hire authority. Thinking of a park like Bryce Canyon National Park that's in southern Utah, fairly isolated, I would say thanks to the Student Conservation Association and the Geologists in Parks program, and reaching out to university students, that those pieces have really added to the diversity of the staff at our park. But as far as other permanent positions that we hire and try very much to recruit, I would say that the candidate pool may not reflect our nation's percentages as a whole. Interestingly, at a Garfield County Commissioner's meeting I attended, the commissioners directed the land management federal agencies to only hire people with children. That would not have increased diversity at the park as we understood what was really being stated.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. And I wonder, you know – we'll take a break. One second here. [pause] Okay, Lisa, just continuing, I wanted to ask you a little bit about, you've had a lot of positions in your career that were not necessarily traditionally held by women. Law enforcement, even superintendencies are relatively recently roles that women have been taking on more and more. I was wondering if you could talk about what it was like to maybe be some of those firsts, or among the firsts. What was that like for you in the various roles that you had in the Park Service?

Lisa Eckert: Well, definitely as a ranger with primary, with law enforcement duties, so as a law enforcement ranger, there were parks I was working where I worked with an all-male staff. I would say that it made me want to try even harder, just so that there would be no excuse to use my gender. And if I, you know, I'm just thinking. I would say, I'm thinking of maybe a technical rescue training course I went to. I would say that if I had a question on wanting to double check, okay, my knot for this anchor, I would not have asked that publicly. I would have gotten the book out, reread it, and then maybe asked one person that I trusted. Whether I did that to myself, or whether I had those feelings from others, I'm not sure.

Lisa Eckert: But I also think with our headway with Operational Leadership, for instance, and in the area of safety in general, it's so much now encouraged and everyone knows, I mean, we say it all the time, "If you have a question, please ask." If it was today instead of 1982, chances are I would ask publicly. And I'm hoping everyone does. But I would guess that when I was in certain situations where mostly men were, that I may not have asked a question in public.

Brenna Lissoway: Is a point where that changed? Or is that something that you sort of carried with you for a good portion of your career?

Lisa Eckert: Oh, no. That would have, maybe that changed with – well, let's fast forward to my first superintendency, I flew in for, it was a superintendent conference for the Midwest Region. This would have been 1998. I would say when I walked into that room, there were not that many women. Easily less than two hands, less than ten in number, is my guess. I felt extremely proud to be there. I wanted to do the best job ever, which may not be different than anyone else. But I really wanted to do the best job ever. And so that might be just a Midwest standard that I've held all my life. (laughs)

Lisa Eckert: But in my superintendent role, and going through the developmental superintendent program, no, I would say that that example of asking questions, I had such a comfortable feeling with my supervisor and mentor, and such a relaxed, comfortable feeling that no, I would have asked any questions. One could say perhaps my confidence increased. I'm not sure. I'm not sure what I was telling myself at the time. But I was aware of it. Definitely. I may not be as aware of it now that there's fewer females at a certain meeting. But I would say earlier on, I was aware.

Brenna Lissoway: Uh huh. Has there ever been a point in your career where you feel like you were asked to do something that you didn't agree with, or that you felt was maybe not the right decision?

Lisa Eckert: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Is that something that you feel like you could share?

Lisa Eckert: I was asked a couple of times in my career to hire candidates I did not want to hire.

Brenna Lissoway: And how did you handle that?

Lisa Eckert: I went ahead and hired the candidates. One in particular was an employee that had had not very respectful photos of women in the maintenance shop area. I had let my supervisor know, will you support me, or what's your take on this? His response was well, is it just a calendar picture? And I had taken photographs of the pictures to show him. And I said no, actually not. They're all over the walls. Even life-size. Anyway, sadly, that employee was hired (I did direct that the photos be removed and had a conversation as to why. This person thought it was because I was female that it was wrong, and did not seem to understand the legality or respect about the issue).

Lisa Eckert: Another employee (non-competitive STEP) I was directed to hire, even after I stated there were existing conduct issues and the park did not have the budget. The regional HR office phoned me to ask why I wasn't hiring. I explained why I wasn't and a week later, the Regional Director called and explained "You don't want to go there." I knew what was implied – that this employee was a favored employee from a former superintendent who challenged my decision and had called the RD to complain. Later when this employee was allowed to travel to another country to learn Spanish on her furlough (no travel authorization for international travel) unbeknownst to me (the supervisor did not tell me that the natural history association was paying), when I found out I confronted the issue. The regional office chose not to support the disciplinary action I had proposed on the intermediary supervisor for allowing the travel, knowing it was not allowed (they had checked with the park's administrative officer), and not informing the superintendent (me).

Brenna Lissoway: Wow.

Lisa Eckert: Yeah. Very disappointing.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah, it is. Wow. Do you feel like there's been other instances in your career where you were disappointed, I guess? By actions like that?

Lisa Eckert: As far as decisions made? I feel a strong commitment to hiring on merit system principles. It's interesting the flashbacks you get, especially now, because I just retired so recently, and I am flashbacking. But just again, the reminder of just being really careful. People need to be really careful what they say. But I do remember as a seasonal wanting so hard to get a permanent ranger job. And coming back from a week of scuba diving in Mexico and getting back and going oh my gosh, I have an interview for this permanent position at Dinosaur National Monument. And getting on the phone, and the first thing the hiring official said to me is, "Well, you took long enough to get back, and we've been waiting for you, so let's get this interview over with." Then it was like, how do I start on a positive foot to answer these questions? And then I knew I wasn't going to be hired, because I didn't do very well in the interview. But I was really devastated by that because this was a supervisor, and I was treated not well. Why wasn't I given the courtesy to have the interview I thought I was going to have.

Lisa Eckert: So, I've had those instances throughout my career as others have. I would guess we all suck it up and we learn from those negative experiences so that, I mean, probably in our heads we've all written a book of what not to do. In fact, I taught a supervisory course once that was like, how to be a

SUPERvisor, and s-u-p-e-r was capped, and it was actually based on a series of these types of stories. And so—

Brenna Lissoway: Other examples? I mean, other examples that you would include in that how to be a SUPERvisor?

Lisa Eckert: Well, it's been built on even from others that I've worked with. Someone who attended that course later had her own logo, a motto is, "Be a mentor, not a tormentor." I'm going to say I'm probably very idealistic, or I've certainly been told that, and up until pretty recently I would say that I kept thinking and hoping that because of the National Park Service mission, the people it draws have instilled the National Park Service core values, as an example. Even later in life when I meet someone who doesn't, it does take me back a little bit, because I want to ask them why. [Dog barks; pause]

Brenna Lissoway: Sorry for the interruption. (laughter) So I just want to move towards thinking about the sort of end of your career. I wonder if you could talk to me about how you made the decision to retire. You know, what was the thought process for you to make that decision?

Lisa Eckert: Much of my life it's been seizing opportunities, so much so, or not having as much of a plan as others, so that I'm the accidental superintendent. You know, I didn't plot my whole career, I'm going to be a superintendent. But an opportunity arose, and I seized it. For retirement, I had been starting to think about it. I was reflecting on my career. I was reflecting on my friend and protégée, Kaylene Jaeger. I was reflecting on my nephew, who's embracing the outdoors and backpacking in the West. I also had taken a retirement course so I could make sure I understood how it all worked. But there had been many, it was like a coalescence for me, it's a coalescence of many things. But the centennial year and – I think we need to start over. (laughs) I don't know what I'm saying here.

Brenna Lissoway: It's okay. I mean, just sort of thinking through because you don't just wake up and go, "I think I'll retire today." (laughs)

Lisa Eckert: It was a combination of age, realizing I wanted to live each day to its fullest. I wanted to travel. I wanted to continue seizing opportunities and learning. Thinking about Kaylene. And then probably what was bringing things forward, I always want to make a difference. There's still a part of me that wants to call up Chris Lehnertz at the Grand Canyon and say, "I want to be your deputy, because I want to help." But also, with everything coming public, more public with the sexual harassment and now hostile work environment, I felt like I had some scabs that were being ripped off. Because it's not an isolated situation, and I've had my situations. I decided that I wanted to continue and fully heal, and the best way to do that is outdoors. So, I guess I've let the scabs rip. I'm continuing to assess. But I

value my life so much and it's time to put me first. I have had a great career, though, with the National Park Service. But I decided in the last three months prior to letting the regional office know, that my intent was to retire on September 30. Interestingly, as busy as we are, and knowing again, and keep that in consideration, I understand how busy we are. But the last week of my employment, I did not get a phone call or an email or a note from the regional office saying thank you. And so perhaps for others, maybe somehow the time can be found to do so.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. It sounds like a real oversight.

Lisa Eckert: Yeah. "Thank you." They're powerful words.

Brenna Lissoway: Is there anything else you want to talk about, just in terms of, you know, even just in generalities, the things that you sort of feel like are freshly being opened at this point in terms of, you mentioned the scabs being ripped off? Is there anything else that you feel like it would be important to discuss in terms of that? Or not at this time.

(Later 12/11/17 – hearing all of the women coming forward about sexual harassment – why I thought the NPS would be any different I'm not sure – but as a seasonal employee I confronted sexual assault, many times through my career I faced sexual harassment and a hostile work environment. Mostly it was due to power. For the hostile work environment, it was ego and probably narcissism, but no one should be treated with so little respect. For the sexual assault, I happen to know of another woman who was a victim by this same permanent law enforcement ranger; for the hostile work environment, I am aware of several other people who also were treated like me. If the Weinstein era had occurred in those years, I suspect we would have come forward.)

Lisa Eckert: Well, I think the discussion point, in more generalities that may apply to all listeners.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Yes.

Lisa Eckert: But Deputy Director Mike Reynolds made a mention of it earlier in the week here in Santa Fe at the Ranger Rendezvous. I'm exhausted. We're all exhausted. So, if there's a way to address that. You know, we want to preserve our resources. And we want the best for our employees, and we want the best for visitors. But other people that would ask me, "What are you going to do when you first retire?" I'm going to sleep. I'm really, really exhausted. So, I would say that probably the threshold of cumulative impact, that threshold, is the chronic stress, and I feel it in my mental health. So, the best way to recoup, like we've talked about earlier, if I get out there and climb one of those 14,000-foot peaks with Luna in Colorado and touch the earth, touch the sky.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. That does sound really invigorating and inspiring. So, I hope you can do that.

Lisa Eckert: Yeah. Thank you so much.

Brenna Lissoway: Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

[END OF TAPE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]