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Dorothy Huyck's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1942-1987



Valerie Knight
April 10, 1978

Interview conducted by Dorothy B. Huyck
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[START OF TAPE]

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00 The date is April 10th, 1978. I am Dorothy Huyck. I am about to interview Valerie L. Knight, who is a budget analyst in the Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta, Georgia. May I ask how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service?

Valerie Knight: 00:19 When I decided to move to Atlanta from Richmond.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:24 What—

Valerie Knight: 00:24 Well, as far as going to work for them is concerned.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:27 Yes.

Valerie Knight: 00:27 That's what you mean.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:28 Were you familiar with the Park Service prior to working for them?

Valerie Knight: 00:32 Well, I knew they were part of Interior and that they managed the various parks, that type of thing. Just general information any citizen would know.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:41 Had you been previously employed somewhere else prior to working for the Park Service? Another government agency?

Valerie Knight: 00:47 Civil Service Commission and FAA.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:50 And any other private organizations? What factors went into your interest in working for the Park Service?

Valerie Knight: 00:58 Promotion potential mainly.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:01 You came into the Park Service in what type of position?

Valerie Knight: 01:04 Accounting technician.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:05 And was that a position you'd held previously with Civil Service?

Valerie Knight: 01:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 01:10 And since then you moved through other positions, is that correct?

Valerie Knight: 01:13 Yeah. Just from accounting technician to – What was the title of that? Budget clerk, I believe. I'm not really sure if it was a budget clerk and then on to the training series for budget analyst and then into the regular budget analysts 560.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:35 Which would be then in the professional series, is that correct?

Valerie Knight: 01:38 Mm-hmm (affirmative) That's right.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:39 So you came in a more clerical category?

Valerie Knight: 01:42 Accounting technician, technically.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:43 Yes.

Valerie Knight: 01:43 I guess you'd call it. I don't know if the accounting technicians in clerical. If it is, that's right.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:49 Can you tell me about something about what you're doing currently? Your responsibilities?

Valerie Knight: 01:55 Okay. Mainly it's reviewing the budgets of the various areas in Southeast Region. Handling the Cyclic Program, position management basically.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:06 What category of responsibility do you have with regard to the budget in these areas?

Valerie Knight: 02:12 I'm not sure.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:13 In that you review them and do you then make decisions concerning these budgets yourself or [crosstalk 00:02:18]

Valerie Knight: 02:18 Recommendations.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:19 I see. Your responsibility includes making recommendations concerning these budgets?

Valerie Knight: 02:25 Say the regional director has the ultimate – Even our budget officer doesn't have that. All we do is make – Even in my position, even in his position, we just make

recommendations to the regional director which in most cases they do what we recommend. But then there are times when they don't.

- Dorothy Huyck: 02:44 Have you received encouragement or discouragement from your supervisors as you've been working for the National Park Service or maybe some of both?
- Valerie Knight: 02:54 Well, when I was considering leaving finance and going into the budget office, I had discouragement. But it was from the finance officer and if you knew him and the things surrounding that. It was nothing really to—
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:12 Was he attempted to discourage you from leaving the office?
- Valerie Knight: 03:14 From leaving finance and going to the budget office.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:19 Have you received encouragement along the line somewhere?
- Valerie Knight: 03:24 Oh, yes. From Bill Edmundson, my present supervisor. A lot of encouragement.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:30 Have you been given opportunities for additional training of any kind?
- Valerie Knight: 03:33 Yes. Any time that I—
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:35 What kinds of courses or training have you taken?
- Valerie Knight: 03:38 Okay, well, there's not a lot that I can find and in our particular--But some Civil Service courses I've taken and then some Park Service courses. The Park Service has very few to offer. And I've been to various ones in the whole administrative program, not just relating to budget, like property courses.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:00 Do you therefore feel that your particular talents, abilities and training are being used well by the Park Service?
- Valerie Knight: 04:07 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:14 It seems that you had a rather satisfying experience in the seven years, would that be correct, that you've been with the Park Service?

- Valerie Knight: 04:20 If that's how long we've been in Atlanta, I lose track of the number of years, but I've been with the Park Service ever since they moved to Atlanta. But yes, I have. I'm well satisfied. Of course, I'm to the point now that I don't have anywhere to go.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:34 Which must be somewhat frustrating?
- Valerie Knight: 04:36 Well, in a way, it is and, in a way, it's not because I'm married and I can't leave Atlanta. I could go into the administrative officer positions, but I can't really leave Atlanta, so I can't transfer. So, I'm somewhat limited in that respect.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:57 The lack of mobility matters?
- Valerie Knight: 04:59 Yes. Which keeps it from being as frustrating as it would be to somebody that was mobile and could, but as far as right now there's nowhere within this office that I could move that I see when that something comes up.
- Dorothy Huyck: 05:16 Do you think that being a woman has affected your opportunities in the Park Service either pro or con?
- Valerie Knight: 05:20 I don't think so. No. I haven't had any.
- Dorothy Huyck: 05:27 You haven't had any?
- Valerie Knight: 05:29 Anything that I have noticed that would be just because I'm a woman one way or the other.
- Dorothy Huyck: 05:36 From what you know of the Park Service, do you think there are certain jobs that women can do well and others that they really should not tackle?
- Valerie Knight: 05:45 Not to my knowledge.
- Dorothy Huyck: 05:50 Have you yourself given or received assistance in identified – Have you given other women, or have you received from other women, assistance in identifying jobs that could be occupied by a woman?
- Valerie Knight: 06:01 No.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:03 May I ask when and where you were born?

Valerie Knight: 06:06 In 1940, in Atlanta.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:08 You grew up in Atlanta?

Valerie Knight: 06:10 Well, in a suburb of Atlanta, I was born in Atlanta, but then my parents moved to well Riverdale, which at that time was way out. Now it's just a little suburb of Atlanta, but at the time that I was growing up, it was in the country.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:24 And where did you attend high school?

Valerie Knight: 06:26 [Unintelligible], Georgia.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:28 Did you go to college?

Valerie Knight: 06:29 No. I didn't.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:31 Did your father attend college?

Valerie Knight: 06:32 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:33 What was his occupation?

Valerie Knight: 06:35 Supervisor in a steel – Let me see here. Ornamental steel

Dorothy Huyck: 06:41 And your mother?

Valerie Knight: 06:42 No, she didn't go to college, and she's never worked outside the home. She's been a housewife all her life.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:51 As you were growing up in high school, were you taking courses in math and science that some people would consider more oriented to courses that boys should be taking?

Valerie Knight: 07:00 Well, I took the regular academic course to get into college because I had plans to go to college and then I got married instead. So, I took things like Latin and sciences and math. You're right. I didn't take strictly a business course, no.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:16 And you were married rather shortly after you got out of high school?

Valerie Knight: 07:18 Yes. Within a year, I guess it was.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:22 During high school was the educational side of your life encouraged by anyone in particular? A teacher or members of your family or the community or church leaders? So, who would provide encouragement?

Valerie Knight: 07:34 The counselor at the high school.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:39 I suppose this person was interested in your going on to college also?

Valerie Knight: 07:41 Yes. And she was a woman too.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:46 Were you by any chance considered a tomboy as you were growing up?

Valerie Knight: 07:48 I don't know, really. I was interested in sports, and I participated in basketball and softball, but I don't know that I was actually considered a tomboy.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:00 Were you an only child?

Valerie Knight: 08:01 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:02 How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Valerie Knight: 08:03 I have two sisters and one brother.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:04 Were they older or younger?

Valerie Knight: 08:06 All younger.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:07 All younger. So, you were the eldest child?

Valerie Knight: 08:09 That's right.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:11 Do you think that possibly being the eldest child, you were given more responsibilities?

Valerie Knight: 08:18 No. Less, if anything.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:21 Why is that?

Valerie Knight: 08:22 Well, there's a reason. My parents were married 12 years before I came along and I'm sure that had a lot to do with it. And my mother always being at home so there was no reason for me to really help.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:34 Were there any extracurricular activities that you took part in, in high school that are now helpful since you've been working for the Park Service?

Valerie Knight: 08:46 Well, the Future Business Leaders, I guess. We had an FBLA club at school. That would probably be the only one.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:52 You were active in that organization?

Valerie Knight: 08:53 Not real active, but I was a member. I didn't hold an office.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:58 And did you start working immediately after you were graduated and married?

Valerie Knight: 09:01 Let's see I was out about a year I worked. I worked about a year, I guess. And so, like a secretary in a private concern. I guess yeah, about a year. And that was all and then I came – I moved to South Georgia. Of course, I didn't work then, and we came back to Atlanta, I took that Civil Service test and started then working.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:28 About when would that have been? Any idea?

Valerie Knight: 09:31 Let's see, I get my – I'll be 15 years with the government in August. So, whatever, subtract that 15 from what? 78.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:44 Have you children?

Valerie Knight: 09:45 One boy.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:45 How old is he?

Valerie Knight: 09:47 He's six.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:49 Did you take time off from the Park Service when he was born?

Valerie Knight: 09:52 Only the normal. The normal, well, eight weeks after and six weeks or so before. Whatever, it was the normal period of time.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:03 And what is your husband's occupation?

Valerie Knight: 10:06 He's a plant manager with Atlantic Steel Company.

- Dorothy Huyck: 10:10 You then have really experienced some upward mobility, so to speak from the clerical grades into the more professional.
- Valerie Knight: 10:16 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:17 However, if I understand you correctly, you're now quite limited by virtue of the fact that you're not mobile in terms of moving to another location of the Park Service.
- Valerie Knight: 10:25 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:27 When you look ahead, say five years ahead, with regard to the opportunities for a woman, do you see any changes taking place in the Park Service that should be taken into account?
- Valerie Knight: 10:37 You mean just for myself or you mean just for women?
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:40 Women in general. Yes. What are your observations of what's going on and how it may look five years from now?
- Valerie Knight: 10:44 It looks real good for women in Park Service.
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:47 Why?
- Valerie Knight: 10:48 Well just from the various things that you read, it seems to be really opening up for women. They're going to be considered. The fact you hear all these things about the next top jobs, they have to be – So many women have to be considered and that type of thing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:01 Can you tell me where that information comes from?
- Valerie Knight: 11:03 Well, a lot of it's gossip. But then just Whalen's speech, and the references he makes to women. It appears to be that it's really going to be better.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:14 So when you hear the director speaking on various subjects and he brings in women, you get the impression that he really intends to—
- Valerie Knight: 11:21 I feel like he does.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:25 So if you look ahead five years, can you project ahead at all and think about how it might be as an opportunity to say, if

you had a daughter, you have a son, but if you had a daughter, would you recommend the Park Service to her as a career?

- Valerie Knight: 11:36 I don't know if I would or not.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:42 You have mixed feelings about it?
- Valerie Knight: 11:45 Well, as far if that's what she wanted, depending on the type of – I would recommend – Well I think the park itself would be, would really be good but as far as working in a regional office, I don't know. Most of them are so similar, but the Park Service, when you speak of an area. Yes, I probably would recommend because I think that would be good.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:08 Many people do think or have thought of the Park Service as a rather male-oriented organization?
- Valerie Knight: 12:13 Yes. Because of the [unintelligible] park rangers.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:16 Would you say that's true in a regional office?
- Valerie Knight: 12:20 Yes. You're looking at the number of women we have in higher positions.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:24 It remains a relatively male-oriented organization?
- Valerie Knight: 12:27 Well it's beginning to move the other way, but I think right now it is still male only. Because a lot of the supervisors still will only consider me – Of course, a lot of the older ones are changing too and it's going – Because like in finance they've picked up somewhere – under the old finance officer a woman would have never been given a job above a six, where under the present finance officer, I don't think he would – I don't think the sex would sway him one way or the other. I think he would make the determination on the ability not—
- Dorothy Huyck: 13:06 So this is not so much a change in attitude, but rather a change in personnel?
- Valerie Knight: 13:10 A lot of it is, I think. It just seems to me that the younger people feel a little different, where women are concerned.

- Dorothy Huyck: 13:17 Do you know the field well enough to comment on whether or not that's likely to be true in specific locations in the Southeast region also?
- Valerie Knight: 13:30 Well from my own feeling with the two directors, the regional directors that we've had, I feel like under our present director that it'll be better for women because he seems to be as comfortable with women as he does men. Our past director was very uncomfortable with women. I don't know what he actually felt, but I mean his attitude to you, you got the feeling that he still had, you back as a housewife and not as a business person. He still couldn't look at you as just an equal. There was some line there, some line that he drew. But under the present one, he doesn't then appear to be that way all. And I think as far as Southeast is concerned it's going to make difference. I really do.
- Dorothy Huyck: 14:18 So looking ahead, you'd be fairly optimistic. Is that correct?
- Valerie Knight: 14:21 Yes. Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 14:22 I don't want to put those words in your mouth.
- Valerie Knight: 14:23 No, no. Yes. I think so. But not as far as my own job because I just don't see – Something would have to open up in order for me to – it'd have to be some reorganization or something like that in order for me to be able to move.
- Dorothy Huyck: 14:40 Now that I've asked you so many questions, what have I forgotten to ask you? Or what should we come in on that I have not asked a question on?
- Valerie Knight: 14:49 No, I'm satisfied, and I'm satisfied with the job. I'm not one of the ones that's dissatisfied. I know there are a lot of them, but I'm not one of those. I think the Park Service has been good to me as far as moving up, especially without any college behind me. Because it's based solely on my ability, not my educational background because I just don't have it. Just what I've gained through training courses and—
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:18 So the Park Service has been quite willing to recognize your training that you've gotten on the job?

Valerie Knight: 15:23 I think so. Sure do. So, I'm real satisfied with it.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:30 Very good. Well, thank you.

Valerie Knight: 15:32 Okay.

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]