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Roberta D'Amico  
October 22, 2014

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

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ANPR Oral History Project

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Audiofile: D'AMICO Roberta 22 Oct 2014

[START OF TRACK 1]

Lu Ann Jones: Real quickly a test. We'll just do an introduction.

Roberta D'Amico: Sure.

Lu Ann Jones: So, could you just give me your full name and the year you were born and where you were born?

Roberta D'Amico: My name is Roberta D'Amico. I was born in 1958. And I was born in Bronx, New York.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. Let's see what we got.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Lu Ann Jones: I do ask people their origin stories, if you could tell me a little bit perhaps about the family you grew up in and your early education. Just early years.

Roberta D'Amico: So, one of the questions I noticed [in sample questions supplied], had a question about my parents and so on and so forth. And I had a supervisor who said to me once that my parents were of peasant stock. So, they were blue collar, very hard-working folks. My father actually was not born in this country. So, I'm considered first generation. As a result, a lot of people who came in through Ellis Island wound up in New York City. And that's where they wound up with many Italian immigrants.

Roberta D'Amico: As kid I lived in New York City, in the Bronx. Then during the racial conflicts, it became very difficult for my older sisters, and my parents moved out of New York City. My parents were always self-employed, predominantly in what I would call the ice cream business. And they drove a mobile soft ice cream truck called Mr. Softee. And then eventually we would have a restaurant.

Roberta D'Amico: So, I started working very young for my parents. And that was a large part of the growing up environment.

Lu Ann Jones: When did your father come to the United States?

Roberta D'Amico: Let's see. Early 1920s. So, he was a child. So early 1920s. So, it would have been right around, he was from Sicily. So, it would have been right around some of the issues that were going on in Italy with World War One and headed into World War Two.

Lu Ann Jones: So where did you go to high school? Were you still in the Bronx? Or did you move by that time?

Roberta D'Amico: I moved when I was in elementary school. My sisters were in junior high school. We moved to a town called Pearl River, New York, and I went to Pearl River High School. So almost all of my formative years actually were in Pearl River.

- Lu Ann Jones: What kind of place is that?
- Roberta D'Amico: Suburbia. Although it's probably not suburbia now. It is much more urban than it was when I grew up in it. And a lot of people commute to New York City from there. So, it was a fairly idyllic environment. Not a lot of open space. I say that because looking at some of your questions and what my influence was for the National Park Service, that gave me some pause.
- Roberta D'Amico: I remember very clearly my parents would bundle us up in a vehicle. You know, in those days, everybody had station wagons, right? We would go up to what was called Lake Welch. It was this park area. It was part of the state parks in New York. And we would picnic or recreate there.
- Roberta D'Amico: Also, because they were self-employed in an ice cream business, every winter we would go to Florida. And my parents would pull us out of school.
- Lu Ann Jones: Interesting.
- Roberta D'Amico: Yeah, it's very interesting now, when you look at the way the school system is. They would write a letter and they would say, "Dear So and So, we are taking our vacation and our kids are coming with us. So please give us their school assignments.
- Roberta D'Amico: So, the influence of going particularly way down to South Florida, I can remember going, I couldn't tell you if we actually went to the Everglades, but we were in that whole area of the world. So, when I actually wound up working at the Everglades, it was really pretty, life had this whole big circle. So that's a little bit of the influence they had.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, I noticed you studied in college environmental science and biology. Were you interested in those topics in high school, even? Or kind of where did that interest begin?
- Roberta D'Amico: Probably like many children, I wanted to be a vet. (laughs) Liked animals. And then clearly my grades were not going to get me into veterinary school, and that's probably just as well. So, I wanted to do something environmentally. Part of that had to do with my parents taking us to these outdoor areas. My father liked to fish. You know, doing crazy things. They would be probably visitors who would get in trouble nowadays. I remember getting stuck somewhere in the mangroves and my dad's little boat broke down. So, I always liked that. And I always liked being outdoors.
- Roberta D'Amico: I fell into environmental science, particularly graduate school interdisciplinary environmental education, because I wanted to share it with others. And I wanted to teach. Then when I was in graduate school in particular and focused on learning how people learn, I started to realize there are lots of different ways to help people get educated. So, the Park Service just happened to be a fit.

- Roberta D'Amico: How I got into the Park Service is just, I look back to this day, it was very, very lucky. It was very bizarre. I have no idea; I don't remember who told me how to apply. Because back in those days you had the little dots and you applied.
- Roberta D'Amico: But I got my job, my first seasonal job, at Cape Cod National Seashore as a fee collector. And I've told this story many times. The person who did the hiring for that job called my parents' residence and I was there. I was out of college at that point. So, I started late in the Park Service. Called at 11:30 at night. And I will never forget that, because I was like, "Is this a joke?" You know. Or either that, he called and said, "Call back anytime." And so, I did. The concept of the fact that people worked 24-hour shifts and there was a whole law enforcement environment was new for me.
- Roberta D'Amico: Took the job, having no idea what I was getting into. I mean, zero. And then asked about housing. Again, this is one of the lessons learned many years later. What that particular supervisor said, well the priority for the housing would be lifeguards and the minorities. Which later on in my career, when I became an EO counselor and got very involved in the need to attract people of color to our organization, I realized how that was not really a good thing for somebody to say to me. Because it really, for a very brand-new person, I really didn't understand what that meant. He just could have said something else.
- Roberta D'Amico: So, there's no housing. My parents being the good souls that they were had this little, tiny 10-foot trailer, and they towed it up and left me there with my Vega, because the Vega couldn't support the trailer. I lived in this trailer in a public campground for the summer, because I wanted to work for the National Park Service. (laughs) I had no water. You know, I had to go and take a shower for 25 cents, and still show up at work and be presentable.
- Roberta D'Amico: But it was just such a great summer. You know, there were so many great people to work with. I was new and young, and "oh, my God, you're living in a campground?" People reached out and really helped me that season. It was just fun. I left Cape Cod thinking, I am never going to work for the National Park Service. It is never going to happen.
- Roberta D'Amico: I went back to graduate school.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did you get that next gig?
- Roberta D'Amico: Well, oddly enough, so I went back to graduate school, and I was in an internship in graduate school, which meant I was teaching an outdoor education school as part of my graduate internship. So, I went to Montclair State College, and they had an outdoor school where they brought kids in from that whole New York/New Jersey environment to come and learn in the woods. The school hired an individual who would come out at night and do kids' programs. You know, he would bring out live animals, some of the things that he had. Where I was living for the internship was right

next to Delaware Water Gap. Which of course I knew nothing about Delaware Water Gap, either.

Roberta D'Amico: One night he came in and he said, "You know, there's a register open in Philadelphia. You worked for the National Park Service. You should apply." And I said, "Okay. Sure."

Roberta D'Amico: So, for the scope of people planning out their careers even many years later, it was like oh, wow, that sounds like a great opportunity. I'll give it a shot.

Roberta D'Amico: I got offered a job as a GS-4 part-time dispatcher. Which of course to my family, having graduated with a master's degree, are like, "Why are you doing this?" And you know, it was just one of those things, in part who I am, you know, it's like, well, this sounds like fun. And I don't really know what else I want to do. And it's not like you make a lot of money in teaching in outdoor schools.

Roberta D'Amico: So, I got my status, you know, without any questions. And then from there I went, I got a park ranger interpretive position. So, I was very, very lucky. To this day, I cannot believe how lucky I was. You know, just right place, right time.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. So is that the one that you went to, Colonial National [Historical Park].

Roberta D'Amico: I did.

Lu Ann Jones: What year was that?

Roberta D'Amico: I want to say '83. I think that's right, 1983. So, I got permanent status as a dispatcher in 1982 at Delaware Water Gap. Delaware Water Gap was in this transition. They were taking over this road to stop commercial traffic. So, there was a slew of us that got hired. So, we all became like the little clique.

Roberta D'Amico: Then I went to Colonial. I was at Colonial for six years, the formative years of my career. I was extremely fortunate again to have really good supervisors. Looking at some of your questions and participating in the session this morning, it's just amazing to me how critical they are in your career. (Referenced morning session held at October 2014 ANPR Ranger Rendezvous on Supervision.)

Lu Ann Jones: Can you give me some examples? Like people who—

Roberta D'Amico: Well, so, one of my supervisors, I was there, and I was young, and I was alone, and I had to get my wisdom teeth out. And so, you know, I'm like, "I'm just going to get my wisdom teeth out." And she's like, "Well, you can't go home by yourself."

Roberta D'Amico: And I was like, "Really?" I was 26 years old. What did I know? So, she took me home. I promptly threw up in her house. You know, and that caring of people not just in their job but in their life really impacted me.

She had a very funny attitude, you know. I look back at it now and part of it was how she was able to thrive and survive in one park for so long. Because once I left, and I think for those of us who were able to be mobile in the early part of their career, a situation gets to the point where you're frustrated and you're like, okay, it's time to get another job. I can't do anything, you know. And if you're smart, you get out before you say something or do something that you'll be sorry for. I look back and her whole career was in one park. So, some of her cynicism now, in retrospect, I totally understand, more so now than when she was my supervisor. She had a certain degree of regimentation because where Colonial is, it's in a very military area. There are a lot of military bases. She's married to a master sergeant who also worked in the park. So, she was just really good and gave us opportunities. She was a mother hen, to a certain extent. A lot of times we never saw some of her frustrations, which now, in retrospect, I can see clear as day some of the things she went through. But at that point, you know, there were times when definitely we did not know what was going on with her, in her job behind the scenes.

Roberta D'Amico: I also had another supervisor who was very – they were almost polar opposites. He was very linear. He was also a former Marine. Which that type of regimentation in a high-visitation park when you're doing interpretation was really, really important. But he also would prepare and train us and do audits of our programs. And again, when you look back and you say oh, he didn't like my program. But what he really was doing was helping us become better employees.

Roberta D'Amico: So that was Colonial. It was a great place, you know. In part, you're in your twenties, and you're there with this peer group, and this peer group, at the time, it was before Ranger Careers. So, we were all GS-5s struggling financially. And you're with this group of young people who really became my peers for my career. Like versus the seasonals that I see at this meeting, (referencing the younger attendees, mostly seasonals, at the ANPR Rendezvous in October 2014) they have their peer group. It's exciting to see them have buddies that they're going to be able to network with for the rest of the career. That's really cool. It's very important.

Lu Ann Jones: By the time you left there, were you thinking this is going to be my career? Or had that kind of thinking clicked in yet?

Roberta D'Amico: Not really. So, while I was at Colonial, I worked in interpretation. We had two districts, and then I had a negative experience and I needed to get out of interpretation. So, I went, and I worked for maintenance. Maintenance and admin. That was a really good diversion. And then I would get the public affairs job at Colonial. Which then, it may be different now, but then the public affairs job at Colonial was not a very controversial type of a public affairs position like they are now. And I suspect they have their issues now. This is 25 years ago. But it was more of a tourism job. It was an upbeat job, and there were very few conflict type things that I had to deal with in public affairs.

- Roberta D'Amico: I found I really liked public affairs. It was fun. You got to “sell” (i.e. promote) the park and tell the people, you know, you would work with the tourism board in Virginia, which that was pretty new then, too, that whole “Virginia is for lovers.” And realizing that you’re there to open up the world – not just the park, but everything around it. And you’re partnering with everyone. So that was Colonial, as public affairs. And I liked it.
- Roberta D'Amico: Somehow or another, and I’m pushing the brain cells here, I got involved in incident management. So, I had taken a firefighting class when I was in Delaware Water Gap. What we would call ground pounders. I took a firefighting class. So, while I was at Colonial, I went on a couple of fire assignments, which was a hoot. And somehow or another, I’ll have to go back and look, the ground pounder role, it was a good experience. I didn’t do it very long. But it opened up my world to incident management for events, and then also for fire.
- Roberta D'Amico: Oh, now I remember. So, while I was at Colonial, get involved in fire, start to learn a little about incident management. While I was public affairs manager, we would have this annual event called Yorktown Day, which was a really big deal. The anniversary, the ending of the Revolutionary War, where they laid down their arms. So, everybody in the community, there’s parades and all the military’s involved. My last Yorktown Day, we had an incident command system where we had an incident commander. Everyone had their roles and responsibilities, versus when I was running the event previously, I had to do everything.
- Roberta D'Amico: So, in that public affairs role, not only did I like the public affairs position, but after I experienced the incident command – and initially it’s really hard, because you’re used to doing everything. All of a sudden you have to give up some of the things that you’re used to doing. Like oh, someone’s going to set up the chairs for me? And I don’t have to supervise that? I have to trust that they’re going to do what I asked them to do?
- Roberta D'Amico: But then I really liked incident command for events. So, from Colonial, I went to Mid-Atlantic Region as a public affairs officer. That would be in the early ‘90s, when the Park Service was actually getting much more engaged in incident command for events. It was always very much a law enforcement function from the days at Yosemite, where they had all the riots and such. [Suggest cross checking ICS history in the NPS.] So, we started, and it’s on the resume, I was in the inaugural—I always have to pause. At that time, they called it all risk management teams. Now we call them all hazard, because people are exposed to potentially dangerous things, like in the Deep Water Horizon, the oil spill.
- Roberta D'Amico: So, I started getting involved in doing events. I loved it. I just really loved it. Now events have potential to be negative. But at that time, I hadn’t experienced that. And so, I like the structure of being in an incident management team. You had this group of people that you worked with. And you knew what it is that you had to do when you were there to help



the park and so on and so forth or help with a big event and such. It was fun. It was really fun.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what kind of incidents are we talking about?

Roberta D'Amico: So, we did events at Colonial. And then when I was in Philadelphia, when we were starting those inaugural teams, I remember going out with a group of people to a search and rescue at Shenandoah. But actually, they resolved it before we got there. Oh, man, I'd have to go back and look at what I did when I was at Philadelphia.

Roberta D'Amico: Became much more engaged in it when I wound up at Everglades some years later. So, knowing incident command was really important when I was at Philadelphia. But it was still in its sort of early stages.

Roberta D'Amico: Then from Philadelphia, I moved to Nebraska, and they changed the title. (Referring to the change of job title in position in the Nebraska job.) It was basically a managing assistant-community relations type position. Backtrack to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, when I was public affairs officer, it was a very strange position, (for me then as it was early in my overall career experiences) because you're part of the directorate at the regional director level. They hired me, again, this is before Ranger Careers, in a 9/11/12 position. When I left, I said don't ever do this again. Because it was such a huge, steep learning curve to go from a GS-7 to a regional directorate.

Roberta D'Amico: I was in Philly for three and a half years, probably the hardest assignment for me, because it was just so much to learn. There were not a lot of people to take me in, and public affairs is a funny profession, because particularly in the Park Service, we're actually public relations people. But you can't be public relations in the government, because we're servicing our constituents, so they call it public affairs. (OPM standards also refer to these positions as public affairs.)

Roberta D'Amico: So, when I was in Philadelphia, the operations group actually adopted me. Because they were all I'd say 10 to 15 years older than me. And they recognized that I had potential. And I think you actually interviewed Maureen Finnerty.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm.

Roberta D'Amico: And she was the associate for operations then. And she had this very dynamic group who, they were just crazy and fun. They adopted me and took me under their wing and taught me so much, the entire group, because they knew I had potential, but I didn't know what to do with it. And that had a huge impact to me in my career. Reaching out to somebody who you saw as like oh, this person is in a really odd position. I was hired. But even at that point, the regional director, you know, you either know public affairs or you don't. And it was still a new enough profession in the Park Service where it was fuzzy. And the operations people, it just fit. I was able to go on park program reviews, and I just learned so much from

that group. But mostly, again, the people taking care of each other. And allowing me to grow.

Roberta D'Amico: So, while I was in Philadelphia – that was the old Mid-Atlantic region – and that was when we went through Operation Future. We went from 10 regions to seven regions. And I saw the writing on the wall, and plus, it was time for me to leave Philly. So, I applied for a job in Nebraska, part of a dual career move. My husband was working for Fish and Wildlife Service then. We weren't married. But it was like well, okay, I'll move to Nebraska. What the heck. Nebraska?

Roberta D'Amico: So, I applied for – well, actually, I went there, and I was able just to lateral into that position. A lateral worked. In my career I took two downgrades – which I also tell people, you know, it's okay to take a downgrade. So, everything I learned in Philadelphia really helped me a lot in Nebraska. As hard as Philadelphia was, then I moved to Nebraska in a management assistant position, doing community relations in a community that was not happy the Park Service was there for us. So once again, it was another growth experience.

Roberta D'Amico: But it was a wonderful place to live. And I look now, Niobrara National Scenic Riverways and Missouri Recreational Riverways are doing very well, but it takes a long time.

Roberta D'Amico: When I was in Nebraska, I got more involved in the incident management. So, it's sort of an interesting filter. And it was probably when I was in Nebraska that I was asked to come out and help in the incident management team for the downsizing of the regions. So, Operation Future was what they called going from 10 regions to seven. Then when we were looking to place employees, you know, here we're downsizing, they called it Operation Opportunity. That was when I met Rick Gale, probably, for the first time, which is interesting because there's a huge connection to this organization, and then there's some personal connections, which I'll get to later, and got involved in incident management during that period because I was an IO, an information officer. But doing Operation Opportunity was like nothing I would ever imagine. It was just a very, you know, there was this group of people and you're all working together. So how do you get the information out and what do you need to do? It was very different. You know, we were downsizing.

Lu Ann Jones: So, was it helping place people? Or helping see where new opportunities might be?

Roberta D'Amico: If I remember correctly, yes. It's a big fuzzi to me, to be honest. It's a very, I believe that's what we were doing. Because it was, at that point they hadn't, we still had the Boston office and we still have folks in Boston now, right? And we still had the Oakland and northern [Pacific West Region Office], you know, because we would have had that office. So, in part, yes. It was looking to help place people. That was a big deal then.

Lu Ann Jones: And so incident command can be used for any number of things. So how do you define that? How is it used in something like that versus a fire, for example?

Roberta D'Amico: So, it was interesting, because I was thinking about this this morning. It's like, your career impacts. So incident command is very structured. What I like about it is everyone has a very specific job, and yet you can be very flexible. So, for Operation Opportunity, it was a very small group of people. And Rick was the incident commander. We had a person doing finance and we had a person doing logistics. I was the information officer. What's even funnier to me, I can't even tell you what I did in that assignment. It's just really funny. I just remember that we had a lot of meetings and a lot of strategic planning. And then you would go out and plan things.

Roberta D'Amico: So incident management, as I became more and more familiar with it, so I was there for Operation Opportunity. And then I would go to Everglades. Everglades, as a park, like many big parks, and even small parks, they would, we would go into what I would call incident command mode. Particularly for hurricanes. You wouldn't bring an incident command team. Different people in the park would take on different roles, and that allowed us to figure out what we were doing. So, you could use incident command. And depending on who you work with, you sort of mesh what goes what and you make sure every, you have little lists of who needs to do what. But what it taught me was how important roles and responsibilities are.

Roberta D'Amico: Transferring that knowledge into a managerial position has been critical. Because you walk into a situation like when I was a supervisor at Everglades. And no one knows what their job is. It's like, okay, your job is to do frontline supervision. That's your job. And then your job is to do frontline interpretation. But we had all these different jobs in the district that needed to be done. So, you assign people roles and responsibilities. Because I really didn't have a lot of training on how to be a manager or a leader or anything like that. And just that knowledge that you should give people really defined roles and responsibilities, I think is a direct result of having worked in incident command.

Roberta D'Amico: So, at Everglades, we would go, like I said, into incident command mode all the time. Hurricanes. Special events. Presidential visits. Always, we had a lot of visits back then. Secretarial visits. Who knows what else? Then while at Everglades, I became part of one of the early teams. What were some of the other things I was involved in? At Gettysburg the team, the incident management team went – (find link for this event) there used to be a high tower that would blare rock and roll music. Do you remember this? And after years of debate, the park got permission to take it down. So, they imploded it. So, we had a team, what you would call a short team. So, we had information – we actually had a pretty good information group – and logistics. It wasn't a very big team. There was like maybe 10 or 12

of us, I don't remember the exact number. But we were there to help the park. Because it was a really big deal for them. And we never took over their job. We were there to help them. Because the company that was brought in to implode—

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[START OF TRACK 2]

Roberta D'Amico: —the tower. I mean, and we had the secretary of the interior there, everybody. It was a very big deal. That was how incident command was used. It was a small team. Where typically when people see fires, you have like really big teams. So, it waxes and wanes, the need. Everglades was where I got more training in incident command, was able to do more of that.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, say, for example, when you went to a position like Everglades and here you bring in your own management style. Whether it's one that you've kind of formed in the midst of previous experience. How do you respond if you get pushback from people when you come into a new position? And how do you get people on your side?

Roberta D'Amico: I think I've grown over the years. (laughter) I know I've grown over the years. When I was going to Everglades, actually, I was working in Nebraska, and we were doing planning for the parks then. We were actually planning for five different parks, one of which was a proposed park which was not established. There was a planner on board. He was a cultural resource person for Midwest region. And I was like oh my God, I'm going to Everglades. I'm going to have to supervise a group of people. I've never really done this. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. He gave me the best advice I ever got, and it was, "*treat people how you like to be treated.*" (That piece of advice resonates with me every day.) Think about your good supervisors. Think about what you liked. And just treat people how you like to be treated.

Roberta D'Amico: And so when I got the job at Everglades, the supervisor who hired me, I had known from my interpretive days at Colonial. We talked about it. Everglades is not the type of park that gets a lot of applications, because it threatens people. You're right outside of a very urban environment of Miami. It is a hot and buggy place to live. Expensive. We could probably say that (expensive) about a lot of parks. But unlike the mountainous parks, it didn't / doesn't hold appeal to some folks to work in. I loved it. Part of it was because I went to Florida as a kid.

Roberta D'Amico: So, when he hired me, he said that one of the things that I stood out was for my managerial skills and the community relations. So, I went in and I had a district, it was a district interpretive job. I was in what I would call the spotlight district, the headquarters district, which is typically the spotlight district in any park, due to location near HQ. Pros and cons. Pretty busy. I was very, very fortunate to have a sub-district interpreter.

So, we worked very closely together managing the staff and the operations. We would do the good cop/bad cop thing, when you had to do that. It was always like how are you doing as employees, what is it that you need? We did, not the best job safety analysis now that I look back on that, but the interpreters would take visitors out into the swamp into what I would call a slog--which, I'm amazed that we do that, because there's so many safety issues. (If not properly prepared – we are much more aware now. And likely those who did more slogs than I, were more astute than I!) And take care of employees and make sure that we knew what was going on with them and have some social activities. But because we had a good support staff, and we actually had personnel right in the park. So, if you ever had any questions about what you were doing, you could just go down and say, "Is this right? Am I doing this right? I have a problem with this employee," or whatever, and get good guidance. But I always go back to treat people like you would like to be treated. And recognize their strengths.

Roberta D'Amico: We had one employee whose native language was not English. That was pretty challenging when it came to writing. I mean, and you know, we struggled with that, myself and my coworker. Finally, I was like okay, what is it that, what productive work can we give him? Because we're not going to change who he is. That was one particular example. Because after a while, it's just like you're just batting your head against the wall.

Roberta D'Amico: Another experience I remember is we had a placement of an intern who wound up being one of the best employees. Everybody was like, "Oh, we don't want this person, we don't want this person." And making sure that this person felt at home. Before he got there, I was like, okay, we are making space for this person in this office. We're going to find him a desk. We're going to make sure that this person feels like he is part of the team.

Roberta D'Amico: So, from that experience and from subsequent experiences, particularly Everglades, because you do have a diverse staff there. So, you have a staff that has family in different parts of the Latin American countries, and different cultural pieces, which was really fun, actually, because I live in a relatively non-diverse world now. Just recognizing different people's needs. Like even recognizing certain people wanted to go to church. And it was like okay, how can we work around that? How can we split your schedule, and how can we work around that or rotate schedules? Just working to make it a decent environment for people. And taking care of people.

Roberta D'Amico: Since then, always working to focus on people's strengths. Recognizing their weaknesses. But they have to have the initiative to be willing to change, you know, or how you can compensate.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, is part of what you were doing, there, too, I mean, just in terms of the content of the interpretative programming, was that part of your job

there? Was that what people are actually saying when they were giving interpretive talks?

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Or was that somebody else's—

Roberta D'Amico: So actually, when I was at Everglades, I was district interpreter and then I became the chief of interpretation. So, in the interpretive world, there's usually specific themes in the park legislation. So, at Everglades, it was very specific themes about the water and the changing environment. Everglades was one of the first parks to actually talk about a compromised ecosystem. I didn't realize what a big deal that was until we went to rewrite the brochure and were talking about the impact of everything around us. You know, we talk pretty freely about compromised ecosystems now, but the folks at Harpers Ferry – I had to sign this document that I was authorizing all the language, and so on and so forth, because the concern for them that we're putting out this public comment about a compromised ecosystem, and to actually talk about an ecosystem that's endangered, and to talk about that publicly. So, the basic themes were there. It was how we talked about it and how we helped employees improve in how they were talking about it. (Recognized now as political concerns – we've come a long way since those days.)

Roberta D'Amico: That was around the time that competencies for interpretation was coming about. And that's just taken off. That's just doing great.

Roberta D'Amico: Then as a chief of interpretation, one of my biggest nemeses, which is also one of my dislikes, but is so important and I recognize that, was the budget. Not having any budget training, probably throughout my career I have never had budget training. In Everglades, because this was not in the total electronic era before AFS and FBMS and all that stuff, you had to go, as a district chief, you'd have this notebook. You would go to the budget officer, and page by page, you had to justify how many employees were working overtime and how did you figure this out. It was so micromanaged. (As it had to be.) It was my least favorite part. And yet in retrospect, I didn't know to ask for training. You know, there are so many things you look back on, you say oh, that would have been so much easier for me if someone would have said, "Well, you need to get budget training so you understand what you're doing." And I had a weak budget assistant, too, so that didn't help me. But I survived. You know?

Roberta D'Amico: So, a lot of coordination. Because actually, when I got to Everglades, it was after Hurricane Andrew.

Lu Ann Jones: I was wondering.

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah. So, it was rebuilding the visitor's center, which was part of the draw. I was like oh, wow, I get to see a visitor's center built, because the old one was demolished. So, talking about the hurricane. And you know, hurricanes are natural things and that people just happen to be in the way.

But it was also interesting to see, going to a park where probably 50 percent of the staff turned over, because after the hurricanes, the folks who weren't local wanted to get out. They were like okay, that was traumatic enough, I'm leaving. But then you had all the other folks who were local folks who were not going to leave. It was a very high-intensity park. I mean, during that era.

Roberta D'Amico: Because – oh, Bob Krumenaker, because he's at Everglades [on detail, as acting superintendent]. (This interview occurred at Ranger Rendezvous 2014 and Bob Krumenaker was at the RR.) I've asked him about things, because there was so much going on. How they were going to reroute the water to save the Everglades, and how they were going to raise bridges. All this discussion and land acquisition. It was always, always busy. Always busy. And then in the middle of that, you have hurricanes.

Roberta D'Amico: Then also being in a community typical of many parks, and I think that's changed over the years. A lot of our visitation was from outside the community. And working to reach out to the community, but a lot of the community, it's a high-immigrant population in South Florida. Which is great. I mean, no big deal. But they weren't interested in the Everglades. They were interested in, some of them were just survival, you know? And how to make a park of interest to people who you know, that's our value system. But just to let them know that it's what's in their backyard. So, we did things like that.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Do you remember any programs in particular?

Roberta D'Amico: We did some community programs where we invited people into the park. Everglades in and of itself, and it still exists to this day, was, and I had nothing to do with it. I benefited from it only because it was an amazing program. The environmental education program. And it's probably easy 35 years old now, if not older. So, they started this program with elementary school kids where they would bring kids in from Miami who had never been into the Everglades. And they would camp on these platform tents for one or two nights. And these were big, monumental experiences for kids and their parents.

Roberta D'Amico: What I remember about that, being there after it had started for 25 years, because the icon of the Everglades, a woman by the name of Sandy Dayhoff who started that program, because she was born and bred in the back country of Everglades. That was such a strong program. There was one class in particular that I remember because the teacher who came, she had come out to Everglades as a child, and as a result of that experience, that educational experience, you know, she became a teacher. She became part of the Florida culture who knew how important Everglades was.

Roberta D'Amico: So, over the years, the laws changed. Learning about Everglades was part of the fourth-grade curriculum. It takes so long to change that and educate. I think that's part of the frustration we have as employees is that education and getting people to understand things just takes a long time. It just

doesn't happen. You know, they have to, you have to allow people to change at their own pace. So that was a pretty significant program for the Everglades.

Roberta D'Amico: And then there was, again, these were just things I inherited, so I have no credit for. But we had a district called Florida Bay. At the time, it was just this one poor interpreter who would work with all the media and had a radio show and do all these things. The days before social media, things were very different in reaching out to the communities and reaching out to the anglers and the commercial fishermen about this is why Florida Bay is important and how we work together, and so forth.

Roberta D'Amico: The other big event of my life at Everglades was working both shutdowns. In the '90s, in the late '90s. Because the shutdowns, and we went into incident command mode, right? So, because we were a winter park, that was our visitation. So that was at Thanksgiving and Christmas, which was like the high points of the season. And you know, when we had to shut the park down, we also had to shut Florida Bay down, which was the economy for many people. So that was a big deal. And it was just an interesting experience. You know, we were in this incident command system with our park colleagues. And you were the only ones in the park. It was so different. It was just really—

Lu Ann Jones: We just did some interviews over the summer with the senior leadership about last year's shutdowns.

Roberta D'Amico: Oh, wow.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. And now hearing you say, for many of them, it was like, "Oh, it was winter. It didn't have that much impact." And then of course depending on where you are—

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah. So which shutdown are you talking about? This past one, or the '90s?

Lu Ann Jones: Well we were. But we asked them, if they had been in the Park Service that long, where were you during that and what was your experience?

Roberta D'Amico: Oh, it was a huge hit at Everglades. I mean, huge! Because the highlight of visitation to South Florida was Thanksgiving and Christmas. And that's when they were closed. So, yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, when you were making transitions from one job to the next, how did you decide it was time to move on and where you were going to go next?

Roberta D'Amico: Because actually you had a question in here which I laughed at. Which is, I think it, I don't remember the exact wording. You'll remember it. Did you have a conscious career plan, or did you take advantage of opportunities as they arose? So, I didn't get through all the questions. I did not have a conscious career plan.



- Lu Ann Jones: I think that's reassuring for people. Because so many times people talk as if one should have a conscious career plan. And I find more often than not that people do not necessarily.
- Roberta D'Amico: You know, in the program I work in now, there's very few people. And actually, the few people who are involved want a very defined career path. It's like, probably not in the program you're in now. So, my motivation (career wise) personally was financial security. Was, you know, my parents, as my former supervisor said, they were peasant stock. They were blue collar folks, worked their butts off all their life. Always encouraged us. We were the, you know, big deal for all of us to go through college, let alone graduate school, you know. Always encouraged us to do what we wanted to do, but to find that financial security. Because they didn't have it when we were kids.
- Roberta D'Amico: And so, I started to look at jobs primarily that fit, that were promotions. I think now, after Ranger Careers, because I was not a student or a product of Ranger Careers, things have changed a little bit in the law enforcement and interpretive ranks. At that time, there were certain bottlenecks at certain career grades. And now there are bottlenecks at different career grades. So, I would just apply, apply, apply. Things happened in part because when you apply long enough, you get better at your application. I went to places that were not really hot on people's ticket. Not many people would go to Philadelphia, you know, to a regional office in Philadelphia. Let alone, I wasn't even 30. I turned 30 in a regional office totally overwhelmed by what I was doing. But I went to Philadelphia because it was a 9/11/12, and where was I going to get a 9/11/12 anywhere? (During that era?) (Postscript – it was also one of the very, very few PA jobs in the Service!)
- Roberta D'Amico: Then from there, I went to Nebraska, because they offered me the position at an 11 grade, I think. Yes, I took, that was my first downgrade. At that point in my life I was thinking well, I would sort of like to have a life, you know? So, my husband-to-be was out there. He was working for the Fish and Wildlife Service, and said, "Hey, there's this Park Service office. You know, it's two hours away. Maybe you could get a job there."
- Roberta D'Amico: I went (and visited) in person there and they hired me. So, part of that is taking a downgrade. It was a great job. It was in a not a very expensive place to live. And taking that risk of I'm going to go to Nebraska! (laughs) You know, I mean, it (Nebraska) was so foreign to me, and it was such a great park. So, doing things a lot of people wouldn't do.
- Roberta D'Amico: Then from Nebraska, going to Florida. Which again, it's not like 100 people applied for the job that I applied for. But it was a great experience. I don't really know enough about what it's like out there now, but when I was coming up in my Park Service career, nobody wanted to work east of the Mississippi. I was like, okay, I'll work in historic parks or whatever. And then going to Florida, again, it was a promotion. So that equaled out

my grade level. And then I left Florida (to go to work in NPS Fire and Aviation at NIFC) and I took a two-step downgrade, actually. Which, you know, it was like well, that was crazy. But it's worked out to be a really good job.

Roberta D'Amico: Over the years, the job has increased, and I got the grades back, never thinking I would. But again, it was like wow, what is this crazy job? And you know, I put in for it and was not, well actually, when I applied for that job, there wasn't a lot of people doing incident management and fire, (in the National Park Service) to be honest. So, when I applied for that job I was working in Everglades, which is a huge fire park. I mean, fire was part of our interpretive story, particularly in the district I worked in. I had that experience, about how to tell the fire story. And then I had the incident management experience. I remember, still to this day, because I've saved all the job announcements that I applied for. (laughs) Because I looked at it recently and they asked you, one of the KSAs at the time was your knowledge of, at that point it was called NPS 18 versus DO's & RM's. And it said knowledge of 18, which was the fire management one. So, I scoured that particular policy and tried to write whatever I would and all that kind of stuff.

Roberta D'Amico: I went to the job that I'm in now for 15 years, amazingly enough. Going and building a program has been, is very exciting, very challenging now that we're in a downsizing mode. And then realizing that I've turned over the reins. (to those who are doing the job(s) in the field.)

Roberta D'Amico: Because when I got there, it was just before Cerro Grande, which was a turning point in the National Park Service in the fire arena. Just like Yellowstone was a turning point for the National Park Service fire program. After Yellowstone, everyone was like oh, maybe we should have a fire program.

Roberta D'Amico: Then in Cerro Grande, the fire in Los Alamos, what we realized is we didn't have enough people talking about fire. That particular summer was just a bad fire season. Very intense fire season for so many agencies that we received a lot of funding. So, my first couple of years was oh, what is this program about, and then how are we going to train people. We had very specific people dedicated to doing fire communication. So, it's been a really good job. It's changed from when I started in just doing wild land fire. And now I do aviation and structural fire communications.

Roberta D'Amico: In that role, in the role I'm in now, in the role, I advocate. I love to talk about communications. Our job is to help you tell your story. (In rereading this in June 2016, this is such a fundamental piece of who I am and what I believe is important to the NPS employee to feel valued in their job.) So, like if I was LuAnn, help me explain to people what oral history is. You know, our job is to help the subject matter experts tell their story in a language others can understand to the public and to the internal community. Then there's all the other things you have to deal with, like,

you know, you'll get a request from the media, which is very common. Or you'll get a request from the department. Or you work in these inter-agency teams, which has been an extremely valuable experience. Just because you're in a team, but no one has authority over each other. So, you get in these teams and it's like okay, what are we supposed to accomplish? And that jockeying of who's on first and – great experience, you know? And so much of it is personality-based. You know, who feels they have the territory or whatever. It's like okay, let's just figure out what we're supposed to do. I don't really, you know, that type of thing, you know?

Lu Ann Jones: Going back, when you say communications and kind of the origins of this [program?], was this internal communications? I mean, kind of communicating to people in the Park Service the need for more awareness of fire issues?

Roberta D'Amico: The primary focus was internal. So, there was two things. So, my job initially, I got hired in the end of 1999, September 1999. And still, actually, I was delayed in moving because of a hurricane. I couldn't travel. So, I had to hole up in my house. It's like, I'm sorry, I can't travel. Don't want to drive in a hurricane. So really when it started, it was like people really didn't know. It was actually, again, as I continued on and identified what we needed to do, my PD [position description] changed. So, I started off as an interpretive specialist. But it melded or went into more public affairs. So, there was the Yellowstone fires. And 10 years after, I think, the Yellowstone fires, there was a program review at the Fire Management Program Center, which is what the National Park Service group is called. At NIFC. [Yes, NIFC is the National Interagency Fire Center, where NPS WASO VRP has a satellite office]. And they recognized that we have to like participate with our partners who are talking about fire. Nobody knows that the National Park Service is doing wild land fire.

Roberta D'Amico: So, part of the defined need was to go and work with my colleagues in the other agencies. I had no idea that in the federal land management agencies, particularly in fire, the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] and the Forest Service compete. You know, because they both have very big land masses, big fire programs. The Forest Service is technically the designated folks for fire (for the nation.)

Roberta D'Amico: So, the first few years, it was developing relationships with my colleagues and other agencies. Of course, that happened pretty quickly, because when Cerro Grande happened, it was like oh, gosh, this is a Park Service fire. We were so unprepared to respond. But afterwards we learned like what do we need to do? And that's why we got employees hired and everything else. And then built the program, which – I mean, it takes years. That's the thing that's so amazing when you think about it.

Roberta D'Amico: So, you get there, and I have this philosophy for information communications. People either target the communications, or they do what

I call shotgun. It's like, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow. So, after a few years, we started to recognize that we needed strategic plans. We needed a strategic communication plan. And for wild land fire.

Roberta D'Amico: Then shortly after we finished the strategic communication plan for wild land fire, we got a new division chief who I was working for who said, "You know, our three branches should really be more integrated. We should be working together." So, we had wild land fire, and structural fire, and aviation. So, we would do independent strategic communication plans for each of those three groups. You know, what is it that you want to communicate? Who do you want to communicate to? What's important for employees to know? Etcetera, etcetera. Then we would roll that all up to one big communication plan for the division.

Roberta D'Amico: And what the commonalities were for the division, which are leadership, safety and collaboration. Which is, that's been really fun, because although I don't think all of the employees recognize it, I know the division chief now recognizes the importance of having that common message for a group of employees. That we are tied together. It's not just a – and that's probably the beauty of where I work.

Roberta D'Amico: I did a detail assignment once a long time ago as an acting superintendent at Hampton National Historic Site. And with the employees, it was not a functional environment. Where I work now, people get along. They know that there is a common mission for the division. We are good leaders. Safety is the number one focus, which is really important, and I'll tangent back to that in a minute. And that because we work in an interagency environment, with agencies that have very different missions, you know, the collaboration and the respect that you have to give to people who have a different mission, yet you have that common objective, managing, particularly wild land fire.

Roberta D'Amico: I have to share this, because safety. You know, we have a horrible safety record in the National Park Service, and everybody knows that. But it becomes more imperative when you get to know a family who has lost an employee. And I have a coworkers who's been very engaged in—

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Roberta D'Amico: The after action and the serious action investigation teams at making things happen. There was an 18-year-old young man on his very first fire who died on July 25, 2008. His brother was in the Park Service. Watching that family over the years and getting to know them and feeling like you know the person who died and it's something I never want to have to do again for an employee. That would have been my second fatality. The first one was, I wasn't as engaged in that, because that was in Sequoia, and they took care of it. I mean, I assisted with the release of the report. But with Andy's family... Every year at Emmetsburg, Maryland, the National

Firefighters Association does a dedication to firefighters that have been lost. And it's usually structural. But there's a handful of wild land firefighters. His family asked me to be the liaison. And I've kept in touch with the family. But to watch people suffer like that, it's like, oh my God, we have got to do better. I was probably, without any doubt in my mind, that was a life-impacting event for me. Because it was like, to see a parent lose a child is something just, it's awful.

Lu Anne Jones: What were some of the other kind of markers, do you feel like, in terms of your career?

Roberta D'Amico: Hmm.

Lu Ann Jones: Is that too broad a question, or—

Roberta D'Amico: I don't know. What do you mean by markers?

Lu Ann Jones: Well, things that you, you know, that you could look back now and say I grew from that. Or, I mean, not that you haven't been talking about those things all along. But yeah, I guess, kind of specific incidents where you felt like things worked really well or things didn't work well. I mean, I think one of the questions is something like things don't always go like you want them to. Is there an incident where things didn't go like they should have, but you learned as a result of that?

Roberta D'Amico: Hmm. I think I've given you some of my markers, things that I learned from. And I feel like I'm all over the map. I hope everybody's all over the map. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Don't worry.

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah, I feel like I'm all over the map. This morning I woke up and I said oh, what do I want to share? So, you know, I touch upon how much incident management training helped me become a better professional. That's very clear. Some of the other markers, I think at some point recognizing personal responsibility. That's what the discussion was this morning [at Ranger Rendezvous]. It's like you need this little mental refresher of reframing your attitude and reframing things. Working with the media and learning to work with the media has actually transferred well into other aspects of my job. Okay, what is it that you need as a media person? So, I like to think that I respond to people like that, also. What is it that you need? And then what are the messages and things like that?

Roberta D'Amico: A couple of big, weird markers was just odd things that happened in my life. One was working at the interagency fire center. We have a general information line for fire information. And this would have been five or six years ago. I picked up the phone. And a long story short, it was *60 Minutes* calling. They wanted to go out on a fire, and they wanted to talk about climate change. Now this was during the George Bush administration and we were not allowed to talk about climate change. There was no such thing as climate change then. And the craziness that surrounded working

with *60 Minutes*, just that. And then realizing how much everybody in the department, too, probably the White House, perhaps, because I had no idea until after what a big deal it was. It was like, "You can't talk about climate change," and all of that. So that was a success.

Roberta D'Amico: The other weird thing when I look back, another weird one again, where I just happened to answer the phone. And if you remember the television show *West Wing*. They did a whole series about Yellowstone having a fire. And you know, it's fictional. But people watch that stuff and survive that. So, there was more, I don't remember what I would call a professional smack down. There was more like personal disappointments of, you know, I had that situation in Colonial where I had to leave interpretation. I had a negative experience. It was pretty much known that I was not a happy camper. So, I had to get out of interpretation and what I did, part of it is my personality, is I withdrew. I knew that I had to be very careful as to how I managed that situation for perception, because I didn't want to become known as a malcontent. And I recovered from that, but that was hard. That was really hard to maintain a professional level of interacting with people.

Roberta D'Amico: So, one of the things that I did, because the administrative officer at the time – God, I was like a GS-5, you know, is I was pissed at people. And I asked for a meeting with the superintendent and the administrative officer. And there was somebody else in the room. There was like three people. And of course, I was maybe 27, 28. And they're all older, white gentlemen. I went in there and I just got to the point where I said, I've got to get beyond my head. So, I don't know what made me do this. But I went in and I said, "I want to have a meeting." At this point, we were talking about complaints and everything else. And I said, "Okay, I'm moving beyond this, and I hope you do, too. I want to go on and I want to have a career," and blah, blah, blah, whatever. And that was a way I was able to move beyond a bad situation. But I had to withdraw from it for a while and recover from it.

Roberta D'Amico: And then, but the AO [Administrative Officer], who I still keep in touch with, sort of, I remember he was very supportive of, you know, "That really took a lot of moxie." He goes, "That was a really good thing to do." Again, that person reaching out to me and saying, you know, you did well, that was a brave thing to do.

Lu Ann Jones: Are you able to say specifically what happened there? Or would you rather not?

Roberta D'Amico: I'd rather not.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay.

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah. I'd tell you, but I'd rather not. It's something. There was something else. Hmm. The other piece I want, I don't know how to throw this in, so I'll just—

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. Fine.

Roberta D'Amico: And it had to do, you know, in this morning's session and we talk about Park Service family. And there's a bigger piece than the Park Service family. There's this whole interagency family. I really didn't feel that until listening to three seasonals last night and who they know and what agencies. And that was really very exciting because for all land management.

Lu Ann Jones: And the section you were in this morning, for the record, what was this session? Is it Jack Harris?

Roberta D'Amico: It was Jack Harris' session. It was "Keeping Good People Good." So, it was just very interesting in that respect of I think like you need mental refreshers on how to keep your attitude up. And how so much of that is yourself. And recognizing that you cannot control everything. Or, not to get spun out of shape at the things you absolutely have no control over. You can only control your response in how you get over things.

Roberta D'Amico: So funny things, there is sort of a Park Service family. But it's changed over the years.

Lu Ann Jones: Can you talk about that some?

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah. I do. Because when I first got in fire, a guy by the name of Steve Holder said, "Oh, it's not like it used to be," because everybody used to live in the park. I never really lived in a park. So, like at Colonial, even though I didn't live in a park, we had parties, we had socials. We would reach out and help each other. Philadelphia was much different because people lived so far away, you have such a bigger area to live in. But I think it almost mirrors society. You know, families are changing. How you become that Park Service family.

Roberta D'Amico: Rick Gale was really one of the people who was involved in hiring me for fire. And so, he had, there was Rick and then there was Sue Vap, the woman, you know, who's very supportive for me. I did long distance elder care, back and forth. And she was the one who said, "Oh, your parents are peasant stock," because it was this up and down thing.

Roberta D'Amico: So, they (Sue Vap, Rick was second line supervisor) hired me, and then he retired a few years after I left. But so, his daughter would wind up working for my husband in Fish and Wildlife Service. So, it's a very interesting story because when he passed away as a retiree, it was such a huge impact on so many people, including his family. And how we pulled together and did a memorial service for him.

Lu Ann Jones: Are you talking about Rick Gale?

Roberta D'Amico: Mm hmm. Yeah. Because he had retired from fire. And it's just sort of funny how that evolved over the years. Because she's (his daughter) was no longer with the Park Service, but she's married to somebody who works in our office. So, his father-in-law was Rick Gale. It has nothing to

do with me. Nothing. But it's just funny how that is, and how we're all traveling in those circles. And how do you make those circles together.

Roberta D'Amico: I mean, I still think there is a Park Service family. It's just different. It's not you know, I think somewhere in here [in sample questions] about the future or as an organization, and even a society, we struggle with how to be more inclusive. Not just with people of different ethnic backgrounds or gender orientation, but even people who think differently. You know, it's like you grow up in Philadelphia, you're going to think differently than if you grow up in the backwoods of Virginia. Or you know that type of thing. I think that's a real challenge for an organization. I think it's a challenge. You know we still have to have operations. We have frontline, you have to keep your visitor's center open, you have to have law enforcement people. You know, people who are in operations, I know, get the brunt of it. Because they have to staff the parks. But how do we adapt to this new society where you have, what if you have two incomes because you need the two incomes, or you have two incomes because women's roles have changed, you know? We're two incomes and no children. Even some of the perceptions and things that have been said to me over the years, it's like, really? If you want to do this, your husband's going to have to give up the job. It's like, really? I mean, this is like 2014. Is there some way we can try to figure out how to adapt to where society is going?

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I was going to ask, I mean, do you think that your experience at the Park Service has been different as a woman working your way into different positions?

Roberta D'Amico: Yes. Yes, I do. I think it's gotten much, much better for women. I am thrilled witless to see, more women in law enforcement, more women in managerial positions. Certainly, I read this very funny article recently about the era when women wore power suits. That was sort of the Philadelphia dress code then was like power suits. It's like, oh, God. You know, women taking care of women. It really, really makes me feel good to see all the young people here. But young women in professions that they can do well in. I think the next challenge will be, personally I think for the Park Service, welcoming people who have different gender orientations. I think we've made some you know, that's who they are. We've made some significant changes. There was the article in the *Ranger* magazine, which was fabulous. There are still people who have difficulty with that.

Roberta D'Amico: Coming up as a woman, I grew up in a very traditional, conservative home. So, there were some leaps I had to make as a person. And I think the Park Service is doing much, much better. But it's still, it would be interesting to know what the percent is.

Lu Ann Jones: And one of the things I saw was leadership training. Is it Rappaport?

Roberta D'Amico: Rapport.



- Lu Ann Jones: What is that?
- Roberta D'Amico: So, Rapport was, I'm just checking the time. Wild land—
- Lu Ann Jones: When do you need to leave?
- Roberta D'Amico: I think that class begins at three. It's somewhere in here. The wild land fire community does a really good job on leadership training, because after 1994 when we lost 34 firefighters that year, recognition became about leadership and leading a crew. So, I've been able to take great advantage of that.
- Roberta D'Amico: Rapport International is an independent school, like a lot of others. The training officer in our office introduced us to it. It's a series of three trainings. It's called Leadership Breakthrough 1, Leadership Breakthrough 2, and then Power Communications. And I liken them to mental boot camp. So, the Leadership Breakthrough 1 was all about you as an individual. And it was, it was mental boot camp. First of all, they have you work these really long days. I was very adverse to it. And then you have this breakthrough. I mean, it's sort of funky. But it is, where you realize what are the things that are holding you back as a leader. More often than not, everyone in the room, it had nothing to do with our job. Nothing! You know? Every single person in that room in my class had some emotional thing that was holding them back from being a more significant leader. I remember mine. Because they put you through this – I mean, it is such a mental head game. And my coworker would – but it was. And I'm not into that. It was like a mental boot camp. But you have to demonstrate these ability to speak and skills like that. And you're tested.
- Roberta D'Amico: It was just a really weird thing, because my breakthrough for me, personally, was dealing with elder care. Was at the time, I was probably, my mother was in a nursing home. And it was just like, oh my God. The end of her life was just not pleasant. And it was just interesting, because that first one, that first leadership class, was figuring out what's holding you back as a person. And to a "T," every single person figured out what it was that was holding them back emotionally. So, it was this whole big psychological thing. And you had to sign a psychological waiver, because it was three very intense days. And about day two and a half, I was like, "This is bullshit!" (laughter) Then I said, all right, well.
- Roberta D'Amico: Then there was this one called Power Communications which was really interesting about becoming a better communicator. Again, a lot of it was how you take care of yourself, how you take care of your family, what are your priorities? And it's always easy to fall back into those work traps.
- Roberta D'Amico: And then Leadership Breakthrough 2 was all about doing things as a team. And so, in short, they give you these obstacle courses. And how are you going to, and you know, you have people's strengths and weaknesses. One was a wall, which I did previously as a teacher in an outdoor ed school

with kids. But it was much lower. They just gave us all these physical obstacles that we had to get through as a team.

Roberta D'Amico: My favorite part about that whole experience was there was nobody I knew in it. There was nobody from the Park Service. So, it was very different to go to a situation where you couldn't talk about Park Service, and you couldn't talk about how we do things. You were just focused on learning. And you were safe because you sort of keep in contact with them, but you're going through these emotional experiences. But it was safe. And it was big self-development type stuff.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah, it was crazy. (laughs) It was fun.

Lu Ann Jones: How long have you been, and I know you have to go, but how long have you been involved with ANPR?

Roberta D'Amico: I've been a life member for a long time. I actually became a life member when it was really cheap. It was like \$125. So, I need to become a Second Century. I want to say easily since the 1980s. And I'm so glad you asked that question, actually. ANPR is another safe place. Bill Wade, who I met through ANPR, and I would actually be a dispatcher in Delaware Water Gap, and he was a superintendent there. And meet him outside of the work environment, and he sort of looked out, you know, even for me. And he was always someone, like when he used to come to Mid-Atlantic region, I still remember him coming, and I was in this period of disarray. I was frustrated about something. His advice to me then was learn from other people's mistakes. You know? So learning, Bill Wade. Meeting Rick Gale (at ANPR). You know? And how instrumental he would be in my career (later on).

Roberta D'Amico: Being able to be in part of a mentoring program and help other people become better employees. Like the woman sitting next to me in the class this morning just got into a long-term position. Bright! And she's like, "The afternoon class is a management class." She goes, "Do you think I should go to that? I'm not a manager." I said, "Absolutely! You want to know how to be a manager before you become a manager."

Roberta D'Amico: It's an organization that I think right now, I've talked to Erika [Jostad, ANPR president], is struggling as far as where it fits. And I'm hoping that it finds a place. But it is a little bit of like, when I come to Rendezvous it reminds me of Popeye and spinach. You need that sort of like oomph! It's nice to see people and to be able to talk to people. And see people at different levels. And it's actually sort of freaky to me now that I'm like at the different level. Because technically I'm a senior person and I'm in a national office and blah, blah, blah. And I just spent three months in DC. You know. So that's a different place for me, too, as to how to engage people in conversation, because they're at a very different place than I am. And not to, to figure out, I mean, just like at dinner last night, I'm like

wow, what they have to do now is so dramatically different than what I had to deal with 25 years ago. And how do you help facilitate that?

Roberta D'Amico: It's a good organization for that and it's an organization that's struggling. But I got involved very early. I was a board member many, many, many years ago. I did a mini Rendezvous when I was stationed in Philadelphia. At that time, the way the board was structured, we were structured by region. So, it was a little bit easier to do that geographic outreach. A lot of the skill sets I gained as far as events; I was able to practice on--like doing a Rendezvous. Like Alison [Steiner, who chaired Rendezvous program in 2014], you know? It's like oh my God, Alison, you've done an unbelievable job. But this is something you have on your resume now. Where else would she get that skill set?

Lu Ann Jones: Right.

Roberta D'Amico: Lots of people that I never would have met and reached out to me quite a bit early on in my career. Then as you sort of get to a point, I know there's a lot of people in ANPR who kept in touch with each other throughout. But I've waxed and waned in my enthusiasm for ANPR, and I would say that mirrors my waxing and waning as far as where I am in my career, too.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to say here at the end?

Roberta D'Amico: I hope I met your needs. I feel like I was all over the place.

Lu Ann Jones: Not to worry.

Roberta D'Amico: Yeah. I think, it's interesting now, I have retirement in my sites. So, one of the things I was thinking about this morning again in "Keeping Good People Good," he talked about where your life is. And how when so many people retire, they have nothing left, because their job is their avocation. I think that's something, you know, there's a lot of retirees here. And it struck me this morning is how do we make that mesh? How do we take people, how do we work with people from the beginning to the end of their career? One thing that's been important to me is figuring out how to end my career on a high note – I've seen so many people go out disgruntled – and taking care of employees. And I think ANPR could help do that. I don't know how. I know that Eriks and Ken are going to talk to Mike Reynolds, because employees are really important and they're really the backbone of the organization, and sometimes I think they get lost.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well thank you very much.

Roberta D'Amico: Thanks.

Lu Ann Jones: I learn so much from doing these interviews.

Roberta D'Amico: Oh, good.

Lu Ann Jones: It's been a pleasure. I am going to ask you just to, if you could write your name and then sign and address down there. And also, if you could include, well, I have your email, but like a phone number on that.

Roberta D'Amico: Sure.

Lu Ann Jones: Great.

[END OF TRACK 3]

[END OF INTERVIEW]