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Telling Our Own Untold Stories:
Civil Rights in the National Park Service Oral History Project



Kym Elder
October 29, 2020

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
508 compliant version by Lauren Pash

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

KYM ELDER

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Interview conducted by
Lu Ann Jones

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The narrator has reviewed and corrected the transcript.

[START OF TRACK 1]

00:00

Lu Ann Jones: I have a recorder, a digital recorder here that is going to be recording. We're seeing each other through the videoconferencing, but I'll be using the recorder to record. So that's how we're going to pick things up. I begin the interview just by saying that this this is Lu Ann Jones. I'm a historian with the Park History Program in Washington, the Washington Support Office. And I am doing this interview for a project we're calling Telling Our Own Untold Stories: Civil Rights in the National Park Service. Kym, would you like to introduce yourself today?

Kym Elder: Certainly. Good afternoon. My name is Kym Elder. I am currently the program manager for the Civil War Defenses of Washington. I'm with the National Park Service. Specifically here in the National Capital Area. I am a proud thirty-three-year career employee with the National Park Service. And even prouder to note that I'm a second-generation National Park Service employee, and specifically a national park ranger. So it's a pleasure to join you today and be a part of this project.

Lu Ann Jones: Great. Thank you so much. Do I have permission to record this interview?

Kym Elder: Yes, you do have permission to record this interview.

Lu Ann Jones: I will be sending you a release form. But you'll also, once the interview is transcribed, I'll ask you to review it, make any corrections, etcetera. So you'll have a chance to take a look at the transcript, etcetera. I'll also provide you with a copy of the recording just for your own files. And maybe family might be interested in hearing it, etcetera.

Kym Elder: Okay. And Lu Ann, could you do me a favor and give me the full title of this project again? Telling--

Lu Ann Jones: Telling Our Own Untold Stories: Civil Rights in the National Park Service.

Kym Elder: All right. Exciting.

Lu Ann Jones: It is.

Kym Elder: Okay. I got it.

Lu Ann Jones: Great. So you said that you were second-generation. So if you could just start back, I always ask people to start at the beginning. When you were born, where you were born. And a little bit about that first generation of Park Service personnel.

Kym Elder: Sure. So, I am a proud native of Washington, born right here in the Washington, DC area. Southeast Washington, in fact. I have always been engaged in history. So even before my mother went into the National Park Service, we were always engaged in our history. African American history. And so very early on, my first six years of formative

education, I was educated in the DC public school system. So back then, the early '70s, DC public school was very, very adamant about ensuring the children, students of the DC public school system knew the DC history and even more important, the African American history, and how African Americans relate to the DC history. It's always just been something that was normal to me. To celebrate Black history throughout the year was normal for me. It was normal for my family to talk about history and the impacts that slavery even has on the society today, and how it is our job with each generation to break some of those sort of generational curses. Or in this case, the remnants of what happened in slavery and African American communities that it was my responsibility to get an education, to know and respect my history and to ensure that it's passed down and that I am doing my part in the community, whether it's sharing history, whether it's sharing resources, or being respectful in your community. So, from very early on, again, it was just a normal part of life for me. It wasn't anything different about it. It wasn't like, this is odd.

Kym Elder: Ironically, my first position with the National Park Service was with the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site in National Capital Parks East. I remember visiting the Frederick Douglass home every single year in school. Then when my mother became a National Park Service employee, we participated in the day camps in Fort Dupont Park. One of the regular visits was a visit to the Frederick Douglass home. So we talked about me being a second generational ranger. My mother became a National Park Service employee in the mid-1970s. It was before the Bicentennial; I remember it was before the Bicentennial. Because believe it or not, my mother took my sister and I down onto the National Mall. We probably had another adult family member with us. But she was working that Independence Day in 1976 as a ranger. I remember her in her uniform. I remember running into her every now and then as we explored the Washington Monument grounds and enjoyed the festivities that were taking place in commemoration of the country's Bicentennial. I remember at the end of the evening, as clear as day, there were three or four children who had gotten lost and separated from their parents. I remember my mother, my sister and the family member who was with us kind of just waiting with those children who were at the lost and found center. It was probably at the lodge. I remember it very clearly. We waited with them, because my mother was so adamant that she didn't necessarily want to see them be taken to Child Protective Services with the Park Police or MPD. So, we sort of waited and waited and waited, and two children ended up going home with us. I'm sure that was not supposed to happen, I'm sure it wasn't. But we're talking 1976. Two of the children went home with us; I remember them going home with us. I remember their parents picking them up at like three or four o'clock in the morning from my home. But whether it was actually legal or not, I just remember my mother being that caring ranger, and going above and beyond. So, I saw that very early on. I probably associated, not necessarily with her being my mother. But I probably associated it with that's just a part of her job. My mother's just not the kind of person that's going to leave two children there. Okay, it's time to go, the shift is over, and my two children and I are going to head on home. I remember very well, Lu Ann, over thirty plus years ago, forty plus years ago, taking those two children home with us and their parents picking them up like three o'clock in the morning. I couldn't imagine what they were doing. How do you lose a child and you can't pick them

up until three o'clock in the morning? But they went home with us. So, I just have stories of that.

Kym Elder: I mentioned my mother working at Fort DuPont Park, the same park that she visited as a child, and managing the park as a supervisory park ranger at that time. And my sister and I taking part in the day camp. They had an urban day camp inside the national park that children of all ages, races, nationality, there was no cost whatsoever to attend this day camp. They took us, and we explored the parks, all the DC parks. We went to the Frederick Douglass home. We went to the George Washington Memorial Parkway, over to the Arlington House. We visited Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. I remember we'd go on out to Great Falls on the Virginia side. My sister and I were used to this—but some of the children who had never left Southeast DC was seeing the falls, and Great Falls, Virginia, and not knowing that they were just twenty, thirty minutes from their home. So, I guess I saw that and while I, I think I mentioned to you, while I always said, oh my goodness, when I become an adult, I'm definitely not going to drag my children around from park to park to park to park, like my mother did us. Here I am now, a thirty-three-year federal government employee. Yes, I took my sons to just about every single park that I've ever worked in, they've enjoyed the resources of that park as well. They, like me, are saying, oh, it was just normal. It was normal. That's what we did. Our mom took us, and we explored the national parks. I'm looking forward to possibly having my own children say, "Mom, hey, we're going to go out to visit a park. Would you like to join us?" That day is going to come real, real soon, Lu Ann.

09:27

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) That sounds great. Well, you've given me a lot to ask some follow-up questions with. So thank you so much. So early you're influenced by your mother. But I interviewed a woman, Mrs. Georgia Ellard, who I believe was in your church. Is this correct?

Kym Elder: That's correct. That is correct.

Lu Ann Jones: So, there are these community institutions. Your school influences you, your family and your church, too. Can you maybe talk about that some, just in terms of career, but also in terms of knowledge of, respect for African American history?

Kym Elder: Sure. So I am a life member of, I've been there all of my life. My parents brought me to the church and I was baptized in the same church, Brown Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church, located on Capitol Hill, Northeast DC. I've been in that church my entire life. My parents brought me home from the hospital and I was christened at the same altar. I was married at that altar. And christened my two children at that altar. Again, I've been a member now for fifty-four years. Again, that's the Brown Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Church. One of our mothers of the church is Mrs. Georgia Ellard. Mrs. Georgia Ellard is also one of the first African American female superintendents in the National Park Service. She served as a superintendent initially of

Union Station, when the National Park Service managed the Union Station, and then she went on to become the first African American female superintendent for Rock Creek Park.

Kym Elder: But my church is very instrumental in the shaping of me as well. I mentioned my parents, my mother and my father, I was raised in a two-parent home. And my church. Again, I've been there all of my life. My children have been there all of their lives. I married my husband there. We renewed our vows there. Our twenty-year anniversary vows. We renewed them at the same church, same day, just twenty years later. Same wedding party. So all of these pillars, my church, my community, have been very instrumental in again reiterating what my parents taught me very early on: That your roots, your heritage goes a ways back. But not only do you have to pay homage to your roots, but you have to ensure that you bring all those things forward, and you pay them all back and you pay them forward.

Kym Elder: So, I have been blessed in that the same church that raised me, I am now considered an elder. Not just in name, but an elder of the church as well, having served as a Sunday school teacher. I've served as the youth missionary director. So the director of the youth missionary society in which we help young people to learn the importance of missionary work in the church and in their communities. And just recently appointed as the Pastor's Steward. So the Pastor Steward is literally the armor bearer for the Pastor. And what an honor that is, Lu Ann! My church is 137 years old. Our church was built just twenty years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in its same location on Capitol Hill. For the first time in history, we have an African American female pastor. We've never had a female pastor in our church's 137-year history. We've never had—I'm sorry, 137-year history. We were, again, just twenty years after the Emancipation Proclamation. To serve as the Pastor's steward is probably one of the best titles that I've ever been given in my life. Because I know that it's a great honor that your pastor would name you as the Pastor's steward. So again, sort of an armor bearer. I accompany her and I pray with and for her. I serve as the eyes in terms of not the ordained ministry, but the lay ministry. That's a great privilege. I feel like it is an honor to take all these roles on because someone paved the road for me to do it. So now I'm simply paving the road for it so that one day, my children and grandchildren will see the example. And two, the future generations, just like I looked up, and I still do look up to Mrs. Ellard. I just remember Mrs. Ellard marching into the church. You've had an opportunity to talk with her. To see her on a Sunday morning is a whole different persona. It's always beautiful attire--almost regal. Beautiful hats. I've watched her literally all of my life walk into that church with such royalty. For her to come up and say, "Hey, what's going on with the Park Service? I saw you in the newspaper," or "I heard about the programs you've done. You keep up that good work, young lady." That is such an honor. I am truly blessed in that I have a career that expands well across family and my job, but into my church as well.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. That's really wonderful. I was going to say, I think it's been probably four or five years at least since I talked with Mrs. Ellard. She had such a presence and such a beautiful voice. I mean, it was just—

Kym Elder: Mm hmm. She's had that voice all of my life. (laughter) You know, and we're getting ready for Easter Sunday recitations for the Sunday school. I remember standing up in the front of the church and literally Mrs. Ellard and others were in the very back of the church. They insisted that we pronounce our words correctly, that we not use a microphone. That we not have paper to read from, that we would memorize. And this was church. Then we're doing these things at school, we're doing them in our homes and we're doing them in church. People always say, "Oh, Kym, your voice speak so well, and so articulate." I say, "It's the church." Same thing for me. It's the church. So it's really important. Particularly as I've said, I know in other cultures, as well. But in the African American culture, your church is a center post of your life.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. So how old were you when your mother decided to join the National Park Service and start working towards being a ranger?

Kym Elder: So, I believe my mother actually came into the Park Service probably around 1972, '73. Because as I recall, one of the very first things I remember is accompanying her down on the National Mall for the Bicentennial, so 1976. It had to be the mid-19, early 1970s that my mother became a national park [ranger], so that would have put me somewhere around six or seven. So literally I've been in the Park Service since I was probably about seven years old, literally. (laughter) It's funny to work and be assigned in these same parks that you actually grew up in. My mother did a detail with Rock Creek Park and Klinge Mansion---where I am duty stationed presently. It's The park's administrative office now. But at one time, the Klinge Mansion served as the park's nature center. And as a park ranger, she was assigned there. I remember running up and down the halls, and up and down the stairs in Klinge Mansion. Now, as an employee of Rock Creek Park, I'm the Program Manager with the Civil War Defenses of Washington, we meet there every Tuesday for staff meetings. So, I get nostalgic just about every single month at work. Whether it's Klinge or whether it's me currently managing the Fort Dupont Park summer concert series--we're now in the forty-eighth year of producing and bringing free family-friendly musical concerts east of the Anacostia River; communities that wouldn't normally have the opportunities to experience, live music like programming offered at Wolf Trap and other places of that nature. But to be able to program and offer these live, free concerts for so long in the community I lived and work in is a real pleasure!

Kym Elder: I remember as a little girl, I think I was in the sixth grade, my mother up on that stage and welcoming tens of thousands of people to Fort Dupont Park because they were bringing free concerts. Stephanie Mills, Al Jarreau and Staci Lattisaw and Johnny Gill. I mean, these are national artists that we know and love today. That's the type of caliber of artists that they were bringing to the park some thirty-five, forty years ago. Here I am now, this is my fifth year, managing that same concert series. We've been able to bring it back to that stature. We went through a period where they were bringing in just local Boys and Girls Clubs, and just local talent because the National Park Service didn't have the

monies to bring in the caliber of artist that we've now begin to bring in again. This year was a highlight for my career, because where everybody else was canceling everything because of Covid, we were able to pivot, working with our contractors we were able to produce a virtual concert series. So we did not miss a beat. My mom called me up and said how proud she was because we were able to continue that tradition of offering these free family-friendly concerts in Fort Dupont Park. But this year we went even a step above that, because we were able to introduce it to the World Wide Web. So we had over thirty-five different states here in this country to view the website and offer the concerts for free via live streaming Then we had up to four or five different countries. We had several countries within Africa log in. It was just incredible.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Well, Kym, one of the things that your mother told me, and you mentioned when we talked a while back, was spending time at the Grand Canyon when she went there for her Ranger Skills. So that's a particular kind of indoctrination into the Park Service that you experienced at a young age. Can you talk about that experience?

20:53

Kym Elder: Sure. That's what probably did it for me. That was when I was just determined that my mother did not love her children. How could she uproot her two African American children, who had attended DC public school, which is a predominantly African American population of students?

Kym Elder: In my DC classroom, we didn't have a lot of diversity, but we were respecters of people of all [backgrounds]. But I certainly had not experienced what I was soon to experience in Grand Canyon, Arizona. And that was that my sister and I traveled to Grand Canyon, Arizona, with my mother, who was attending--at that time, the Park Service had the Ranger Skills program that I believe was almost fifteen to eighteen weeks long. So, I spent my first semester of my sixth-grade year attending school in Grand Canyon's public school system, where my sister and I were the only African Americans in the entire school system. It wasn't a very large school system, as you could probably imagine. Grades K through twelve, and my sister and I were the only African Americans in the entire school system.

Kym Elder: But we had an opportunity to see the other side of the country. We were able to visit the canyon every single day, and just experience nature a way in which the average kid in my neighborhood would never be able to experience it. The whole experience of being a minority instead of the majority in the school was eye opening! It was there in Grand Canyon, Lu Ann, that we soon realized that we couldn't get good reception on TV. I believe the only thing that we could probably watch on TV was *The Lawrence Welk Show*. Who does that to their ten year-old?! Who does that? My mother does that. But I know that was not her intent. But it certainly helped us to see that there was far more than TV and that sort of entertainment. I became an avid reader out there. Because unlike my sister, who was with the younger classes—she was in the second grade, I was in the sixth grade—they were more accepting of her. So, I have to admit that the students weren't very kind to me out there. I think it was just because they had never experienced having a

Black kid in their classroom. So they weren't very kind. But I again made the most of it. I literally read everything. Their library was a doublewide trailer, I remember it. At recess, I would go inside the trailer after I had my lunch and I would read until recess was over and go back to class. And I found I did have a sense of accomplishment there. Because they were working on school projects and assignments that we had done the previous year in fifth grade. At some point, my mother realized that too. She then contacted our DC teachers, and our teachers began sending work to us out there to Grand Canyon.

Kym Elder: So, we've just been blessed. My dad, who is a retired DC fire chief for the fire department in the District of Columbia came out to visit us I remember for Thanksgiving and we went over to Phoenix, Arizona, had Thanksgiving dinner at Phoenix that year as well as a family. But my mom took us out there and we experienced, again, a different perspective of the country. It was an experience that taught me a lot of tolerance. To this day, I can always say that I can work with anyone and everyone. My parents just didn't raise us to see color. They just didn't raise us to see color. You respect everyone. It's ironic. I just had my performance appraisal with my supervisor. She just noted that you're just not a great employee, Kym, you're a great person. I thought that was so very kind to have your supervisor say that to you. But yeah, that was an experience that I had, it had confirmed for me that my parents just didn't love us, to send us out there to Grand Canyon. Uproot us from our homes in Southeast DC to spend the next twelve to fourteen weeks in Grand Canyon, AZ. But it's an experience that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Kym Elder: There were a few other park rangers who brought their children out. Maybe four or five of us. One young man from California and two children from Hawaii, Frances boy and Norma girl. How do I remember those names, the kids' names and the activities that the rangers put on for us, because there was only four or five children there. But the wives, the spouses of those—because my mother was the only female ranger who brought her children out—and so I remember the wives being very nice to us and even caring for us when they had to do a two-day hike down to the canyon. So we had to stay home. But the park rangers' spouses were very caring for us and ensured that we were fine while my mother was down in the canyon.

26:37

Lu Ann Jones: Well, your mother was learning how to do some really interesting stuff. I mean, in addition to interpretation programs and things like that, she was rappelling off the cliffs (laughs) and learning a lot about various activities of the National Park Service.

Kym Elder: Again, a native Washingtonian leaving her, the comforts of her home and learning things. I remember my sister and I going out, because they had to train, they had to get physically fit. They had to pass a physical fitness test to participate. I remember us going out jogging with her. That's not something we did at home at all. But it was an opportunity to spend time with my mom after work, after school. Again, anything to not have to sit in the house and watch *Lawrence Welk*. So we began to train with her. I remember that very, very well. Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: That's great. Well, I was going to, well, did there come a point before you went to college, say, that you started thinking about the Park Service as a career? Or what were you beginning to think about, say, at the high school level about what your future might hold?

Kym Elder: Well, in high school I always dreamed of going to medical school and being an obstetrician and delivering babies. That was what I thought I wanted to do in life. I got to college and realized well, chemistry, organic chemistry at that, wasn't my best suit, and so I begin to think well, what could I do to ensure that I have a sound future in front of me? So, I changed my major from medicine to psychology and began to look into public health. How I was going to use my undergraduate degree to earn a degree in public health and work through counseling--I had this desire to want to help my community in that so many people in my community where I grew up in Ward 8, I looked at the rate of teenage pregnancies. This desire I had that I wanted to help change the dynamics of an unborn child possibly being born second, third generation of welfare and low housing and unmarried parents. I was going to help change, make that world a change.

Kym Elder: I still had that desire. But I also realized that the National Park Service was hiring college students. And, wow. You mean that I can work at the Frederick Douglass Home and tell my history? A hero of mine, Frederick Douglass, and get paid doing it? And so I applied for, even before high school, I did YCC. That's the Youth Conservation Corps. So I did some work at Frederick Douglass Home as a YCC. After that summer I graduated from high school, I came back home as a freshman and the Park Service offered me--It was actually my sophomore year they offered me a job and I worked there every single summer. I even worked Thanksgiving breaks and Christmas breaks. Upon graduation, they said, "We've got to have you. You can't go anywhere else. And we're going to help you. We'll help put you through grad school when the funding becomes available." And all that good stuff.

Kym Elder: So, it was just an easy fit for me, Lu Ann. It was a very easy fit because the Park Service allowed me to work in areas that I could be of benefit to others and to help tell American history and African American history. Ironically over the last thirty-three years, my career has always been around African American history and the Civil War. And women's rights. I must say, it's just been a great career, because all of my roles in the Park Service have always been around civil rights. And again, American history and African American history.

31:04

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. So what did it mean to you that you were there, and were you a park guide or an interpretive ranger there at the Frederick Douglass Home?

Kym Elder: I literally came in because they were trying to give me a permanent--they'd brought me in under a clerk-typist---position. I think that my interest was known but they noted, we've got to have you doing some clerk-typist work, too. You've got to do that. We'll let

you help out when the crowds are big for tours. But we'll need you to help us get some of these files together. At that time, the Park Service had only had the Frederick Douglass Home maybe twenty-five years at that time. Had just acquired it maybe twenty-five years before I started working there. So we still had files that were mixed with historical files were mixed with administrative files. That was my job, to get those files together.

Kym Elder: But in the process, Lu Ann, I'm pulling out clearly historical files and things that literally needed to be archival things for history, because they were closely associated with the management of the home after Douglass' death. Some of the letters that the organization that took care of the home after his death were all kind of mixed in, and the information was so intriguing to me because it wasn't something that you'd find in the history books. I thought wow, I thought I knew all about Frederick Douglass, when I really didn't. It just sparked my interest. At that point, I began to develop tours around Frederick Douglass' life versus Frederick Douglass' artifacts and his home.

Kym Elder: That got the attention of the regional director, and within the first two years of my working for the National Park Service, I was nominated for the Freeman Tilden Award. I'm not sure you're aware of that, but that's the highest award you can give an interpreter in the National Park Service. While I didn't win it, the nomination alone spoke volumes to me. Because wow, here I am, this wasn't even my necessarily career choice, my career path. But yet I'm enjoying it, I'm doing very well. I was bit very early on. I have enjoyed creating, developing programs around some of these lesser known sites that tell the story of people that look like me. Because we're often left out of the history books. Now when you speak of Kym Elder with the National Park Service, well, she's got a story to tell. She's going to go to that park and she's going to find a way to tell the stories that we don't necessarily find in our history books. So I don't have a problem being that ranger, that manager that's going to be able to find that piece of history and develop a program out of it. I take a lot of pride in that.

Lu Ann Jones: That's great. Well, I'm always interested in how people's careers develop and who were the people along the way who helped them develop. So at that site, that was your first site. It's an important site. You clearly got the attention of the regional director. Who were some of the people who were playing a role in helping your career emerge and develop at that early stage?

34:54

Kym Elder: So, when you're working at a site like the Frederick Douglass Home where at that time, we were probably seeing as many as seventy, eighty thousand visitors a year. The visitation has dropped drastically and I'm not sure why, versus when I started there in 1987. But you tend to become a very close-knit family. Because you're literally doing tours from 9am to 5pm. If it's February and every DC public schoolteacher wants to get on the bus to visit the Frederick Douglass Home during Black History Month, we could have tours starting at nine all the way to five o'clock. So you become a family because you're spending so much time together and trying to figure out how you're going to get this busload in and get that busload out. So, there were many there who not only

remembered me as Tina Short's daughter but she's a young lady who loves what she does, and you can tell it in her work.

Kym Elder: So, there was one ranger there, Martha Alston, who's now deceased, rest in peace, Ms. Alston. But her mother was the original caretaker for the Frederick Douglass Home. While I didn't know Miss Alston initially, I knew her mother, Mrs. Parham, because as a child, when we visited the Frederick Douglass Home, her mother always had cookies when we come out the back door. It was incredible. Her mother had cookies or food or something. I fondly remember Mrs. Parham. So coming back there to work, and there's a plaque on the caretaker's cottage that pays homage to Mrs. Parham. Returning as an adult to work at the Douglass Home, and her daughter is there as well. So we had something in common, in that our mothers were very instrumental in our decisions to take on these roles as park rangers. So, Ms. Alston became a second mother to me, a surrogate mother. But also, a coworker.

Kym Elder: Then I just had, I've always just been blessed with great supervisors. NACE's superintendent was there. I remember it so well. He would say, "I'm going to come by and pick up," telling my supervisor, "I'm going to come by and pick up Kym. I'd like for Kym to take a ride with two or three of us this afternoon. We're going to go visit some other parks." And I would ask, "Why'd you come pick me up?"

Kym Elder: And he says, "Because one day you're going to be the superintendent of this park." Literally, I'm a sophomore in college and I'm thinking no, that's not what I want to do. This is a great summer job. He said, "No, you've got what the National Park Service needs." This was him telling me this back in the late '80s. Eighty-seven, '88, '89.

Kym Elder: I mean, literally, Superintendent Gentry Davis coming by, picking me up along with a few members of his staff. They would go out and survey the parks. We'd ride out to Green Belt. We'd ride up to the Mary McLeod Bethune Home. I'd be questioning in the back. "Well, why'd you bring me?" He said, "Oh, because one day," I remember him saying it. He looked back at me and said, "Because one day you're going to manage this park, just like I'm managing it now." And I'm thinking, wow.

Kym Elder: So yeah, I had a lot of people who had served as mentors and just encouragers to me along the way. I don't take that lightly, because I'd like to be able to have someone say, "Wow, Kym Elder helped give me an opportunity." I have a few colleagues, they're colleagues now, but I actually brought them into the National Park Service, who are doing some great things. Like Dr. Joy Kinard, who's a superintendent down at Tuskegee now. I hired Joy. And Dr. Eola Dance, who's the acting superintendent down at Hampton. Just to be able to say, one of the young ladies just called me up two days ago and said, "Hey, I got a temporary detail to serve as the supervisory ranger at the Arlington House when it reopens in a couple of weeks. I'm going to serve as a supervisory ranger." So to be able to, again, pay it forward, Lu Ann, has just been really, really important to me. And the Park Service has given me such a great opportunity to do that.

39:21

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well I believe you told me that you stayed at the Douglass Home for about ten years. Is that right?

Kym Elder: That is correct. I came in as a clerk typist and left as the park manager.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. So I was going to ask you how your positions there evolved. So that's a pretty good evolution there at the site.

Kym Elder: It is very good. Yes, ma'am.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did you start learning how to be a manager yourself? Again, I'm interested in the way the Park Service trains people, the way people train themselves, learn from other people on the job. So what was that process like, as you began to take on supervisory roles. And again, learning how to do that.

Kym Elder: I tell people that I probably have one of the toughest shifts from going from an employee to a supervisor. Because I literally went from a peer, a coworker, to the next pay period the following Sunday to serving as a supervisor at the Douglass Home. Probably the youngest one on the staff at that time. And if you want to cut your teeth with supervision, that's no better way to do it.

Kym Elder: But I should also note that in the process of earning that promotion as a supervisory park ranger at the Douglass Home, that the Park Service afforded me a great deal of training. I mean, and others probably can attest to it as well. But I was never, there's not been many trainings that I can say I applied for that I was not able to attend. And so the Park Service ensured that I not only had National Park Service training, but very generalized training as well. So I went through the executive leadership program, through the USDA, so the USDA grad school. I went through their executive leadership training. It used to be called the federal women's training. But they changed it to executive leadership training. I believe that was a fifteen-week training class that the Park Service paid for. There're countless other trainings to be the best manager that I could be.

Kym Elder: Again, I just had my performance review today. My supervisor noted to me that you're simply outstanding when it comes to this first criteria. The first one is management, managerial, supervision. She says, because you are a mentor, you ensure that your employees had what they need to succeed. I'm only emulating what was done for me. I can't say that I've had too many bad supervisors. I've never had a really bad supervisor in NCR in my career at the National Park Service. Again, always afforded opportunities for trainings. I'm really good with finding free training, Lu Ann. So, you really can't say no to a free training. So I'm really good with finding lots of free training and now ensuring my employees take advantage of that. So yes, I've had quite a bit of training through the National Park Service. Then as a supervisor, and now a manager, I believe in continual learning. That there's never a day that you should not be learning something. So for me now, it's just being really instrumental in helping others recognize where we

all have shortcomings and developmental needs. So as we're now facing this new changing world and serving on Rock Creek Park's Workforce Enrichment Committee, I serve as the chair for that committee, and helping to identify training that would help employees. So unconscious bias training and other sort of diversity and inclusion trainings, that's big for me. I make it so that employees know that it's really crucial that we have to do some self-training for ourselves, and understand ourselves so we can be better employees of the National Park Service.

Lu Ann Jones: So, remind me where you went after Frederick Douglass.

Kym Elder: So, I left the Frederick Douglass Home. Lu Ann, I was convinced that I would never leave there. Because the superintendent at the time says, "Oh, we can't let you go. You're indispensable. You just can't go anywhere." And I'm thinking, I don't know. Ten years I'm thinking, maybe he's got a point.

Kym Elder: But an opportunity came available down at the regional office as the special emphasis recruitment officer. That role was to be an ambassador for the National Park Service and go out to the historically Black colleges, the Indian tribal colleges, Hispanic colleges, persons of color, and recruit students to come work for the National Park Service. At that time we had lots of funding. I was traveling to HBCUs and tribal colleges across the country, recruiting and hiring students on the spot. What an opportunity was that for me. Again, I was, you know, given authority to hire on the spot temporary positions, of course, for the summer. The EEO manager at the time, Mel Reid and I would work together and would give superintendents here in NCR report cards--diversity report cards. So together we would let a superintendent know if he/she got an A, a B, a C, a D or an F in diversity, and where you can do much better, where you can improve. That was a very interesting position. So, I did that for approximately two years.

Kym Elder: The new ARD [Assistant Regional Director] for administration came in. That job fell under the ARD for administration of National Capital Region at that time. She says, "Well, you've done a great job in this job, but we've got to get you back out in the field. We need you in the field. It's been great what you've been able to do, but we need you in the field."

46:00

Lu Ann Jones: So, Kym, can I ask you, because I think that whole issue of employee diversity in the Park Service is such an important issue, but—

Kym Elder: It is.

Lu Ann Jones: --it's one that just bedevils the Park Service, it seems.

Kym Elder: Mm hmm.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you were able to increase diversity in that effort. But just kind of standing back, why is it that you think the Park Service workforce continues to lag in diversity in many categories?

Kym Elder: Well, we don't put our money where our mouth is. We say it, but we don't do it. I'm just being very honest. We say, "Oh, yes, we embrace diversity. We support it. We want to make sure it's happening in the parks." But there's saying it and not doing. I'm very comfortable in saying that. That parks say it, park superintendents say it, but they're not doing it. They're not putting their money behind it. They're not asking those hiring officials so you have a cert of thirty-five qualified employees, and of the thirty-five you're only sending three up, and of those three, you didn't find any persons of color? Those questions aren't being asked. Until those questions are asked and until people are held accountable, we're going to continue to fall short in the diversity area.

Kym Elder: We took some major strides I'd say ten, fifteen years ago. We are back where we are. I don't know how the Park Service can state that we're puzzled as to why it's not happening. It's not happening because we haven't fully embraced it--- to make it happen. We're not holding managers, those hiring officials, we're not holding them accountable. We're not saying, hey, you have this cert of two hundred people. The Mall's hiring every day. The Mall is hiring every day. And you go down to the Mall and many other parks right here in Washington, DC, in the National Capital Area, and I can even say across the country, and you're still going to walk into visitors' centers, contact stations, that don't reflect America. So we've got to be able to put our money where our mouth is. We've got to be able to do it in our actions.

48:24

Lu Ann Jones: Well, was that initiative, was that something that came out of the region, or was it coming out of Park Service headquarters? Where was the energy for that effort that you were part of in terms of recruitment? Where was that energy coming from?

Kym Elder: That was service-wide. That was service-wide. That's an initiative that we still have. It's a presidential initiative that we would hire students from HBCUs and Tribal colleges and Hispanic colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions. Again, that was nationwide. The National Park Service along with every other federal agency is by law required to hire students from HBCUs, and again, Hispanic-serving institutions and Tribal colleges. We just find a way to say oh, we tried it and we couldn't find the right candidates. Because I know I served in that role for two years, it's because those managers aren't committed to doing that. You know, I've heard from superintendents, as I know that we would go to the various, we went above and beyond in NCR. We would go out to these parks, to the superintendents. The EEO officer and the special emphasis recruitment officer would go out and we would observe what was going on in the parks, their workforce makeups and who they were hiring for seasonal positions, who they were hiring for permanent positions. And we would give them, again, these report cards. I've heard superintendents say, "Well, I couldn't find any qualified diverse candidates." That's the excuse that

they're still using today. They're still using those excuses today. They couldn't find them. Well, are you looking?

Kym Elder: If you find one, are you even willing to give them an opportunity? Because that's also another thing. I'm not saying someone who's not at all qualified to do the job. But we also need to give them an opportunity to do well. And so you bring them on. If they show some potential, you bring them on and you train them.

Kym Elder: So that's why we're having a problem. But that was a national mandate. And it's still in existence, that we are to hire interns from HBCUs, and diverse candidates. And so the parks simply say, "Oh, we couldn't find any diverse candidates." It's a poor excuse. And when you've got a cert of a hundred people, you're not going to tell me that of that cert you couldn't find one diverse candidate.

51:11

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. So your supervisor after a couple of years in that program told you that you were needed back in the field.

Kym Elder: Yeah. She came into the office and she said, "You're doing a marvelous job, but we need you back out in the field. We need you to be making a difference on the front lines." So an opportunity came up for me to manage the Clara Barton Home in Glen Echo, and the Glen Echo Park in Glen Echo, Maryland. Units under the George Washington Memorial Parkway. That's where I got my first bite with interacting with partners. So I'd always interacted with our students and interacted with our communities. But here I had an opportunity to interact with partners and represented the National Park Service and working out cooperative agreements and other sorts of MOUs memorandums of agreement] and MOAs [memorandums of agreement]. Memorandums of understanding with partners to better do our job. Because as the National Park Service, we can't do this work alone. So, if we've got partners, then the partners can help us with the diversity goals as well.

Kym Elder: I went out to the George Washington Memorial Parkway and served as the site manager for the Clara Barton and the Glen Echo Park. It was there, again, maybe that was a piece of the history I may had forgotten. But I get there and it wasn't the park who said it to me, it wasn't the region who said it to me. It was my church that said, "Did you know the history of that park that you're out there managing?" And I was like, "Heard a little bit about it. I know it had some issues with segregation out here."

Kym Elder: "No, that's the same park as African Americans we couldn't visit. Now you're the site manager out there." The next thing I know, it just blows up. And *The Washingtonian Magazine* does an article on me. And I talk with my parents, because my parents were out there during those riots in Easter of '66 when the park was shut down because African American students had decided to convene on the park and shut the park down if they weren't going to be allowed to go inside. So that was a part of the history maybe I'd sort

of missed somewhere along the way. And my mother and my father claimed they'd talked to me about it, but I didn't recall that.

Kym Elder: So, I got out there and was able to bring in--we did some research and we found some of those same students from Howard University who did the boycott in the park. We did an anniversary of when the park closed down because they refused to desegregate. As a result, we told that history and made some great friends out there. The state senator of Maryland, Gwendolyn Britt was one of those students. She was a student at Howard University. So she was able to find us money to do even more. That was just incredible.

Kym Elder: Those are the kind of opportunities that always afforded me, wherever I go, Lu Ann, wherever I land in the National Park Service. So I'm able to connect with people who can help us tell these stories. I'm just thinking back on sort of, it's been a very rewarding career, I should say.

54:53

Lu Ann Jones: Well learning about, so interpretation is certainly part of what you're supervising. But also just operations or maintenance. Making sure that buildings have integrity, etcetera. How did you begin to learn that part of all that the Park Service is in charge of when it is managing resources at a site?

Kym Elder: I'll use Glen Echo as an example. So again, because I didn't have this skill set, per se, at the Douglass Home. But I certainly have obtained it over the years. But when you come out to the park as a manager, you begin to work with these various disciplines. So maintenance and resource management, and working with them and listening to them and hearing, well, what's your take on this building? What do you think we need to do to get the carousel up and running? Or how can we run the carousel longer hours than what we're running it right now to generate funds for the park? So you get that insight from those various team members. Then again, you're applying your management skills. So while resource management isn't my area of expertise, I certainly can manage the resources because I now know that you get the right people in the place and you've gleaned from them enough to then say okay, well maybe I need some training in this area, or I need some training in that area. But that's basically you get it. It's a lot of on-the-job training. And some formal training as well. I've had a lot of formal training.

Kym Elder: But again, it goes back to treating your employees well. Because if you treat your employees well, they're going to do their jobs well. They do their jobs well, as the manager, everybody looks good. So that's just basically, it sounds really simple. But it is what it is. If you've got a great relationship with your chief of maintenance, your chief of maintenance is going to keep you apprised of the fires that need to be put out before the fires become uncontrollable. Your chief of maintenance is going to make sure that he's doing what he's got to do so it doesn't come back that oh, my goodness, you're in the *Washington Post* today because you let that building fall down and someone got injured. So it's been that sort of partnership that we also have when you're working across the disciplinary lines.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well, one of the things that in talking with the other people that have been at sites in the Washington area, they talk about how being so close to Congress that you are very visible to people in Congress. (laughs)

Kym Elder: We're in a fishbowl. I say the NCR is a fishbowl. National Capital Area is a fishbowl. I mean, the George Washington Memorial Parkway, how these congressmen and congresspersons are traveling back and forth to work. And so they hit a pothole and they got a flat tire, you're going to hear about it. They're out visiting the park and they're just taking a walk in Rock Creek Park and something's not right, you're going to hear about it. So, management of these parks inside the Beltway particularly, you really have to stay sharp and on top of your job.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I was thinking, too, about Glen Echo, where virtually weekly people were coming in for dances, for example, or arts camps and arts workshops and things. So a lot of very specialized visitation coming to that park as well.

Kym Elder: That's all managed by our partner. So the Spanish Ballroom and the nightly dances. The National Park Service isn't doing that, but we oversee it. Again, if you don't have a good relationship with your partners, it's not going to be a thriving program. So again, I got out there and I've still remained friends with those folks out there at Glen Echo. Our partners in Montgomery County now. They call and check on me and I call and check on them. But you have to have that. You have to have that relationship. And when those relationships go south, you've got to build it back up. And it's primarily trust and just respect for one another. So those programs, the dance programs, the camps, the arts programs, they're all run by our partners. The National Park Service is responsible for ensuring that the facilities are up to par. And then they do the programming. But again, you have to work hand in hand together.

Lu Ann Jones: So, when it came to the next move, was that something—

1:00:00

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Lu Ann Jones: --that you began to look for? Kind of next moves to build a career? Or were other people looking to move you? Or how did that begin to work?

Kym Elder: So, the next move, I went to Ford's Theatre. And the National Capital Area had decided that they wanted to make Ford's Theatre an independent unit of the service. As NPS was preparing for the commemoration of the Civil War, the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. Obama had just been elected and he was following this track of Abraham Lincoln,

including taking a train ride and coming into DC. And he patterned his life very much so after Lincoln. And so his focus was on Abraham Lincoln and the sesquicentennial, the Civil War. The National Capital Area decided we have to pull Ford's Theatre out from under the National Mall and Memorials Parks. It was decided to the historic theatre an independent unit.

Kym Elder: The job was advertised. I applied for it, not having any idea that I would be called for an interview. I was told that I was selected for the job because of my history with partnerships, that we'd done such great things out at Glen Echo, and that my relatability with the community. And that Ford's Theatre was under reconstruction, well, under construction to rehabilitate the theater just in time for Lincoln's bicentennial. And so I was selected to that job. We did a really good job. No one could foresee again, this political arena that we're in, no one foresaw that we were going to, the hopes were that this park would be an independent unit, and that we would be able to request for federal appropriations to support the theatre/site as an independent park.

Kym Elder: So, at that time it was okay, well now how much does it take to run Ford's Theatre? Okay, we'll carve that out and we'll run Ford's Theatre on this dollar for this year. We're going to apply for more money so that it can have its own operating budget. And we get millions of people visiting the theater. Literally, a million people visiting the theater a year. And we'll certainly get some funding to support it as an independent unit.

Kym Elder: That didn't happen. There were just so many different things that were going on, so many different challenges. Because we had a partner there as well. The partnership started out really well. But when the partner saw that the National Park Service couldn't even match the dollars that they were putting in, it made for a really unhealthy situation, an unhealthy relationship. They felt like we weren't, the National Park Service wasn't putting the dollars where the dollars needed to be. And they didn't quite understand the federal appropriation. So, the National Park Service made the decision to go ahead and put the Ford's Theatre back under NAMA.

Kym Elder: And something Lu Ann I'd never seen before in my career, and I've seen a lot of things happen in this career, particularly in Washington, DC. But the regional director calls me down to the office. We would normally, this time of year we would normally be preparing for our budgets when he called me down. So, I had all my information to share with him what I needed for the budget, how I was going to make it work yet again with no additional funding.

Kym Elder: He says, "Oh, put all that away. We're not going to watch a good manager"—and these were his exact words—"We're not going to watch a good manager, a great manager, continue to bang her head up against the wall. It's not working. And I've got two options for you. You're going to keep your grade. You're going to keep your pay. I'm not sure about your title, because it depends on which one of these jobs you accept. I've got two positions for you. I think you'll do wonderful in both of them. I've got my preference on one, because I know that you'll do exceptionally well in this one. But we've got two

positions that we'd like for you to consider. The superintendency at Monocacy National Battlefield or the program manager for the Civil War Defenses of Washington.”

Kym Elder: I had two young children, one just going off to high school. And I'm a very engaged mom. I'm right there for every activity, PTA meetings and every game and activity. And I just thought well if I took this Monocacy gig, I'm going to be on the road traveling back and forth to Monocacy, not able to be at home with my family. And so I chose the CWDW. And I didn't take that lightly, Lu Ann. Because I don't know how many, I don't know many of my colleagues that a job didn't work out and the regional director brought you in to give you an option, two options of where you could go and, in both cases, you're going to go, because we know you're going to succeed, we're going to make sure you're going to succeed.

Kym Elder: So, I chose the Civil War Defenses of Washington. The country was preparing for, the area was preparing for the commemoration of the only Civil War battle to take place in Washington, DC at Fort Stevens. We were going to be preparing for the 150th anniversary of the historic CW battle.. And Kym, we don't have the staff for you right now. But you go out there and you beat those drums and you start rallying up folks and you get people rallying around you and identify some partners that can support you. And we'll find some funding for you to commemorate this 150th anniversary. And we hit it out of the ballpark, as the only NPS staffer and a few partners. I worked with the District of Columbia government. Again, I had an opportunity to partner with the District as a part of that executive leadership training class I'd taken years ago. I was able to call up some friends in the mayor's office, and they helped us out. And we partnered together, the District of Columbia and the National Park Service. We were able to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Fort Stevens, the only Civil War battle to take place in Washington, DC. Lu Ann, I was able to fire a cannon, 150 years to the actual date of the last cannon fired in Washington, DC!!! To the actual date. I've not said before, but I just believe that my spiritual faith was also—again, I as the only employee for the Civil War Defenses of Washington. I had no staff. I had no staff. It was me. The regional director said, “We're going to support you. You bring it back and if we can make it happen, we're going to make it happen.”

Kym Elder: And I went back, and I said to the regional director at that time, Steve Whitesell. “Hey, I think we should be able to fire a cannon.” He said, “Kym, now I can support you on a lot of different things. But firing a cannon, I'm not sure. We are in Washington, DC. Do you know how many people we'd have to get approval from?”

Kym Elder: I said, “Well, let me work with it. Let me work with it.” I began working with park police and Secret Service and the Metropolitan Police Department. It was just a matter of educating them. Because so many of them thought we were going to be firing a cannonball. No, no! We're not firing a cannonball. And once I helped them understand we weren't going to be firing a cannonball, no projectile was going to come out of this cannon, everybody rallied behind me. We literally, again, fired a cannon in Fort Stevens Park, 150 years to the date it was last fired in Washington, DC. Unbelievable. Made the

front of the Metro section of the *Washington Post*. Unbelievable. Literally. I still wonder, how did I make that happen as the only staff member of the Civil War?

Kym Elder: Of course, after that, I got lots of staff and lots of support, and more increase in funding. So now we're making it happen, there's four of us, but it's no longer one of us—me—and we're still making things happen. We made that summer concert series happen this summer. When everybody else had to cancel. From the annual waterlily festival, the Cherry Blossom festivities to the Independence Day parade. I think we did have the fireworks on the Mall. But literally everything else was canceled this year because of Covid.

Kym Elder: My supervisor says to me, "However, Kym Elder made the concert series still happen." Not only we were able to put the concert series on, but people from around the country, not just Southeast DC, not just Washington, DC, got to see it. So again, I am truly blessed in that I've had a really great career.

Kym Elder: I know that we're talking civil rights. And the story's not always perfect. Because there were a lot of down days, a lot of things that I think our agency, my agency, my beloved agency, the only agency I've ever worked for, could have done a lot better in terms of supporting me. But I think a lot of it just was again, not putting our money and efforts behind our actions. We say it but we don't do it. Because there was a lot of support that I could have gotten at Ford's Theater that I did not get. So I'm glad the regional director came through and said, "We're not going to let you beat your head up against this brick wall anymore." But that was after I was literally in triage, literally holding up by the skin of my "skinny skin skin" because I did not get the support that I really thought my white counterparts in the National Park Service would have gotten. But as an African American, "Well, she's tough. She'll hang in there." Or, "We'll just close our eyes to that." Or I'll go down and complain about that and, "Oh, Kym, that's your perception. That's not how it really is." And I'm like, "What do you mean, that's my perception? Racism is racism." But I was told that that was just my perception and they weren't going to pursue it.

10:15

Lu Ann Jones: Interesting. Well in a situation like that, did you develop a network of peers that could give you support? Where did you look for support when you came up against a situation like that? Where you felt like you had been treated unfairly because of race or gender or a combination of those things?

Kym Elder: So, the Park Service realized how bad things had gotten at Ford's Theatre very early on. Because again, we could not, the partners simply said to us, "We're raising millions of dollars. Even in these difficult times. We're partners but when will the Park Service step up?"

Kym Elder: As the executive director of the Ford's Theatre Society said to me, "I don't want you to take this personal, Kym, I have a problem with," he literally said to me, "I don't look at

you as my peer. I only look at the Secretary of Interior as my peer. So I can't even treat you as my peer. And so, I'm going to go over your head each and every time."

Kym Elder: So, the Park Service realized right away that it just was not a good situation. I've been raised you don't quit, Kym; you hang in there and you make it work. That's just my upbringing. The Park Service finally decided to bring in a contracted facilitator. She had worked previously, you may know her, she had worked previously for the National Park Service. And she left and went to the National Park Foundation. Julia Washburn. Does that name sound familiar to you?

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Mm hmm. Yeah.

11:59

Kym Elder: Yeah. So Julia Washburn came in. She was working for the National Park Foundation. She came in. The region realized we need a facilitator to have these discussions. One, we've got to have respect for one another. And I should just say, that the Park Service had created this, and had allowed this partner for years to run the theater. We just didn't do anything about it. So, now we're at this very pivotal time and the spotlight is on the theater and we're going to bring in an African American superintendent who we know has got a track record for working with partners, got a track record for working with communities, has a track record for being a compassionate leader. And we know she can do the job.

Kym Elder: This society is saying, "But we don't need that. We just need you all to give us money. We don't need you all to bring in somebody to tell us how to do it. We just need you all to give us money."

Kym Elder: So, it was bad from the very beginning. But I didn't know that. It's so funny, Lu Ann, because my mother has got many more years than I had experience with the National Park Service, she called me up on my very first day of work as the superintendent. I'm so happy, I'm excited. I know she's excited for me. She's proud of me. And she says, "Kym, don't go down there," I'm going to use her words exactly. "Don't go down there and try to change those white folks. The Park Service is not going to support you."

Kym Elder: I'm like, "Oh, no, Mom. That's not how it works. I'm the superintendent. We're going to make this work. The partners, the superintendent." I'd never worked in a park where the superintendent was openly disrespected and the regional director didn't come and say, "No, we're not going to have this, this is not how it's going to work. We're going to do this. We may be coming up short to the table financially, but we're going to bring these resources to the table in place of the financial dollars."

Kym Elder: My mother said that to me on the very first day of work. So I'm now in year two and I'm remembering those very same words. I kept thinking the partners, the partners, the partners. But it wasn't the partners. After I had an opportunity to step out of the situation, Lu Ann, it wasn't the partners. It was the agency! It was the National Park Service. We

allowed these partners to run this site for so long. And now you want to bring in someone to tell them how to do it. And then, not only bring in someone, but bring in an African American woman. And tell her she's empowered, she's the superintendent. But yet we're not going to support her.

Kym Elder: It was a very dark time. I made the most of it, because that's what I do. Made the Park Service look good. We opened up the theater. The place looked great. We hosted the mayor. We hosted President Obama. Thirty days into his presidency, I was hosting the United States President at Ford's Theatre. And again, we made the most of it. But the Park Service certainly did not support me. And it just didn't get any better. Because we had the employees who were upset because you've got a superintendent down there who's telling them, "You just can't go AWOL." Because nobody, no one was paying attention to Ford's Theatre. So we had an employee who decided he wanted to take a couple of days off and not put leave in. Following protocol, I bring him in, we counsel him. And then we said well no, we've got to do more. "You've got to counsel him, Kym. You've got to put it in writing." So we put it in writing. And next thing I know, I've been called a Black B-I-T-C-H.

Kym Elder: I go down to the regional like, "This is crazy. We can't allow an employee to get away with this. He's made threatening comments to others about me. 'Wow, look at that bus driving down the street. I wish that Kym was in front of it so it could run her over.'"

Kym Elder: I'm bringing all this to the regional director and HR. And they're telling me, "Well, that's your perception, Kym. The HR official said, he wouldn't really consider that a threat. That's just your, perception. We're going to walk him, we'll walk him for two weeks." This white male employee said, "Well, if you're going to walk me, I want you to divide it up so I'm not hit financially in my pockets. I want you to break it up over a couple of pay periods."

Kym Edler: The only reason why they decided not to do that was because I was in the room. And I said, "Enough is enough. We're going to allow him to tell us how his punishment is going to happen? We need to hit him in the pockets, because this is how people learn that you don't do this." That was the only thing that the regions supported me on. They walked him for the two weeks, consecutive two weeks, and a whole pay period. But he came back to work. Again, shortly thereafter, I was given that opportunity to come out and to this day, Ford's Theatre's back under NAMA and the partners are pretty content. Because again, there's no direct senior management there. There's no superintendent there. The superintendent is the superintendent of the National Mall and the Memorial Parks. And we all know that that's a pretty expansive job. And that superintendent can't focus on one site, because he's got the ironic national monuments and memorials, let alone the Washington Monument that's got an elevator that's not working, and you're trying to figure how you're going to get people safely back down in the park. And you've got Lincoln Memorial, where people are defacing the inner chambers because Covid-19 is going on. So, they've got their bigger fish to fry.

Kym Edler: But again, my mother said that to me on the first day. I brushed it off. “Oh, Mom, that’s your old-fashioned talking. This is the 2000s, Mom, we don’t do that anymore! That’s not happening in the Park Service.” And it is very much so happening. I’m sure that that’s just not my story alone, that others have those same sort of stories.

Kym Edler: I think I mentioned to you that just as we had all this civil unrest in the country, we have about twelve African American superintendents and managers, and they’ve included me, who was just getting on the phone. We’d talk about some of the challenges we have as African Americans managing these parks. And how we can work together to make things happen. And so that’s been very, very refreshing. That just started right after the George Floyd literally murdered, that the world watched his murder on TV.

18:58

Lu Ann Jones: Right. So you didn't have anything that would be the equivalent of that when you were at Ford's Theatre, any kind of network like that to call upon.

Kym Elder: No. The only thing that the agency was able to offer me, because they knew that I was literally falling apart, and it was not Kym. They did offer me a coach. So, I had a coach. I tell everybody in the world, I believe in coaching. Because I’d never met this person a day in my life, we never met face to face. But we only did this coaching over the phone. But it was so helpful to me because I could just talk to--I couldn’t come home and talk to my husband about it, because as a husband, he’s like, “To hell with this. You just quit. I don’t want you having to go through this.” I didn’t want to quit. I loved my job. I love what I do. I didn’t want to quit. And so having this neutral person to talk to through coaching was very, very helpful. And again, we didn’t have this body of African American managers meeting and talking like we have now. I’m talking 2009. It’s like 2009 during my tenure at Ford’s Theatre.

20:14

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. I’m going to say something that will show just how naïve I am and stupid I am.

Kym Elder: No, nothing is stupid.

Lu Ann Jones: Because I have heard variations on this theme from other people I’ve interviewed. But somehow I thought, well, maybe the National Capital Region. You know, we’re here in Chocolate City where there’s more critical mass of African Americans in the Park Service workforce here. Surely it must be different. But you’re saying that that is not the case.

Kym Elder: No, that’s not the case. So, Lu Ann, if you just go look at statistics at NCR. Again, Chocolate City. We have maybe three to four African Americans at the senior management level. Meaning GS-13 and above. Three, maybe. Males. And maybe four,

maybe four GS-13 and above female, African American females, in the entire region. That's crazy.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Kym Elder: And African American females, for African American superintendents, it's just two of us, myself, and Tara Morrison. That's not good.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Yeah. Right. Well, right. That's just how naïve I am. I'll put it that way.

Kym Elder: No, and people probably all assume that that's not happening. Not in the nation's capital. It is happening. I walk in a room, I walk in a room where we're having a Civil War discussion and they think that maybe I'm in the wrong room. What does this African American woman know about the Civil War? Well, she's knows quite a bit about the Civil War. Let's have a seat and let's talk about it. (laughs) Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you get those kinds of reactions where people will assume that you are out of place.

22:22

Kym Elder: Mm hmm. Or, "What made you get into the Civil War, Kym?" "Well, I'm an African American and slavery impacted my family for generations. Like four hundred years. Just like the history book says." I'm not as snide as that, but that's what I'm thinking in my head. What made me get into the Civil War? What made you get into the Civil War? You like history? I do, too. And this history had an adverse effect on generations, that preceded me for four hundred plus years. And maybe that's a part of the reason why I'm in it. But I also want to make sure that—and I tell them. I'm here because I want to make sure that the African American experience is included in your depiction of the Civil War. Because it's not all about the generals and the battles. It's about the people who were feeding the generals, clothing the generals. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, one of the things that I think I know about the Civil War Defenses is that in recent years there has been research on the contraband communities who came to those defenses. My sense is that that's a new direction of research and interpretation, and realizing that there are descendants of those people who came here and came to the forts in the mid-19th century. Is that something that has been happening there in recent years?

Kym Elder: Yes. And a lot of interest and newly documented research around it. Again, the contraband ethnographic study was funded through the PMIS process. So you know that process, it's almost like you have to apply, you put in, you see if you get the funding. We now have this whole brand new funding source called Civil Rights funding source. So I'm literally tapping into all resources available and every chance I get. We're looking to now come up with this like mobile visitors center. Because the Civil War Defenses of Washington does not have a traditional visitors' center. So we're looking to maybe do a mobile visitors' center where we outfit a caravan, some sort of truck that we could personalize and open it up and it's a visitor's center. You could see how all these forts are

connected across the three states, Maryland, DC and Virginia. And how these--show maps of slaves coming up south or finding refuge in these encampments, finding refuge on these forts. And taking up life on these forts. Even after the Civil War, continuing to raise their families on these forts. And why Chocolate City is Chocolate City. That's primarily one of the reasons. The slaves found refuge here in DC as they were making their way, whether they were fugitive slaves or just freed African Americans. But they found Washington, DC a safe place to raise families, even after the Civil War.

Kym Elder: So, yes, funding is available. I'm quite proud of the National Park Service for that. This is before George Floyd where we had these funding sources that would help us tell the stories of civil rights struggles in America.

26:00

Lu Ann Jones: Well, you mention, I do want to come back to the events of this summer and the pandemic. You're right, the murder of George Floyd there before our eyes. But going back on a more pleasant subject are your children. You said that you again combining career and family, and family very important. So can you talk a little bit about how you did that? You still do that.

Kym Elder: My husband and I have been married for twenty-eight years. And met in college as undergraduate students. So we've been together for thirty-three years. We now have two young adult sons. Alan, Junior is twenty-eight and Aaron is twenty-three. My family, like my sister and I, are big supporters of the national parks. We travel, we love going to visit national parks. The boys are traveling with their families and friends. "If you're going to San Antonio, you definitely have to visit X, Y, Z park while you're there. Go over and take a picture of the park for me when you get over there. Get my passport stamped for me." So yes, my family is very engaged in the National Park Service. I think I mentioned that my youngest son has decided to major, he's actually working on his master's degree at James Madison University in parks and recreational management. While I think he's going a different course more geared towards the sports facility management. I think he noted that one day he'd love to be an athletic director at the collegiate level, I also think he's been bitten by that Park Service bug. Because he asked me a couple of days ago. He's like, "You know, I think I'm going to put in, I saw a position with the National Park Service. I think I'm going to put in for it."

Kym Elder: I said, "You should. You've had three or four summers working in a national park. And so you've got some experience behind you." Because my kids were able to take advantage of the YCC program. My oldest son even did two summers on the National Mall and Memorial Parks at the White House, at the White House visitors' center. They absolutely loved him. But he, unlike me, he didn't get invited. He did it summer employment. He loved it. He was very well at it. They're still talking about him down at the White House Visitors Center. But he went on to get his master's degree. And he has an MBA in business and he's a contractor, something like that, with the patent office. So he's enjoying his position and doing very, very well.

Kym Elder: Since you mentioned my children, my oldest son and his wife are expecting, they're expecting my first grandchild. They just made that announcement I guess a couple of weeks ago. So I'm just over the top excited that he got—

29:14

Lu Ann Jones: So will it be a later winter, spring baby?

Kym Elder: It's going to be a spring baby. May 2021. So we're excited. So my youngest will graduate with his MBA during the same timeframe. And there shortly after, a grandbaby will be born. So I'm ecstatic. But I didn't know if I answered your question about family and engagement and the fact that we took our boys out and about in the national parks. And I'm almost sure they're going to do the very same thing with their children.

Kym Elder: In fact, when I was at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, over in National Capital Parks East, my sons were the prototype that we used to design the visitors center. So we needed to bring in some kids and have them try some things out. What worked best, and how low should the chairs sit, or how high should the chairs be? And my boys were part of that to help us get the right feel for kids using the visitors' center. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: That sounds great. Well, can I ask you, and you know, how to put it, if there's a kind of cone of silence, or if there's a—

Kym Elder: Go ahead, Lu Ann. I'm good.

30:34

Lu Ann Jones: In terms of the group that you've been talking with over the past few months in the wake of Mr. Floyd's death, can you tell me something about just how that began to coalesce, and the kinds of issues that you all discuss? Again, I mean, if there's, how to put it, kind of confidentiality or whatever, I don't want to intrude on—

Kym Elder: I understand.

Lu Ann Jones: But just kind of how that evolved.

Kym Elder: So, one of the very first discussions we had after Mr. Floyd's murder was how do we embrace Black Lives Matter. How can we incorporate that into telling the parks' stories, and not appear as the angry Black man or the angry Black woman? Because so many people associate Black Lives Matter, because of our current administration, with being people who come to, who just want to riot and who want to protest. And you and I know that that's not the case at all. We're simply stating that all lives matter, but when you've got a particular demographic that's literally being targeted, we have to say that yes, Black lives matter. And even more specifically, Black men's lives matter.

Kym Elder: So, there's one scheduled for today. But one of the first discussions we had was just how do we tell that story and how can we continue to support each other? Because some parks aren't going to deal with it like other parks are dealing with it. So the superintendent in San Juan in Puerto Rico is on that discussion. He's an African American male superintendent. And how the Black Lives Matter, how he was thinking of how he could incorporate it into the message there. Not being here on the mainland, but having its impact and integrating it into the history of San Juan and how it could relate to the people over there. And they're disenfranchised with the Puerto Ricans. Just different things of that nature. So those are the kind of things that we've been talking about. Again, just being of support to one another.

Kym Elder: Judy Forte is probably one of the more seasoned rangers. She's the superintendent at MLK. She's been sort of, ever since we had the women's history, women's superintendents [Women's History Month program] that you referenced before, she and I have just managed to stay in touch. She literally called me afterward just to see how we were doing here in Washington, DC. She's always the more vocal one, saying, "Well, I don't have much to lose. You all are younger, you're younger in your careers. I want you to be careful. But I'm going to tell them like it is." Because in her eyes, she doesn't have a lot to lose. She's closer to retirement than anything. So I do know that in the wake of all that, we of course had Congressman [John] Lewis' death, and they were dealing with that, and having to oversee that with the funeral happening right on Park Service property. So it was just very interesting, and the conversations are very interesting. But it often goes off to just how we're coping together. And it always circles back to--how can we help others? How can we ensure that not just African Americans, but you know, persons of all colors, and anyone, just take advantage of the opportunities that are available in NPS that aren't always as visible.

34:34

Lu Ann Jones: I think that's interesting that, right, you said that's managers, superintendents, and that that conversation is happening at that level. So in other words, the senior manager is saying, "It's okay for us to talk about this." Because I think sometimes frontline staff aren't sure, necessarily, does this superintendent support this?

Kym Elder: Exactly.

Lu Ann Jones: So being able to have that kind of support from the top seems a very important development to me.

Kym Elder: And I'm sure it's happening around the country. Even at the regional levels because I know here in NCA, National Capital Area, while I'm not a superintendent, I don't sit in that circle anymore with the superintendents, they are meeting and I'm hopeful they're having similar discussions. They're meeting and they're talking about how not necessarily Black Lives Matter, but how we can continue, how they can continue to support staff. So it's trickling down. Here at NCA it is, I do know that.

Kym Elder: Julia Washburn, who is now my immediate supervisor, so it's ironic how the circle goes around, because she was also the facilitator when I was at Ford's Theatre. Now she's serving as my superintendent at Rock Creek Park. She sits on that committee of superintendents discussing racial equity. I'm fully confident that they are working at it. She'll come back and she'll share with us what are the things they're working on. If we have any ideas, suggestions, anything of that nature that we need to make sure that they are able to do. So, it's happening. And it's a really good thing.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Well, I'm not going to keep you a lot longer. You said you have other—

36:22

Kym Elder: I'm good. I had actually allowed for a couple of hours. I knew we'd be talking for a while. So I'm good.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. That's good to know. Well, are there, well, I was going to ask you, well, clearly we've kind of talked about you some, just the difference that your supervisor makes in terms of your, well, your health and wellbeing, but also your own kind of career development. Can you just speak to kind of the, I guess the characteristics of supervisors that you have come to appreciate. I'll put it that way.

Kym Elder: Yes. So my current supervisor, as I mentioned, is Julia Washburn. And she and I have known one another for quite some time and work really well together. Like I said today she just said to me, "You're just doing an outstanding job, particularly as a manager. And you are compassionate and you're just a good person," she told me. And I told her I appreciate that. But to know that you have a supportive supervisor makes all the difference in the world.

Kym Elder: So, I know that sometimes I'll come back and say, "Oh, yeah, I forgot to tell you, I'm meeting with a council member because we need to get X, Y and Z done, and I'd love to be able to work with this specific school and community." She says, "Okay. I wish you'd told me in advance. But I know the intention that you've got. So go for it."

Kym Edler: So, I've always had, I've just always been blessed to be able to have good supervisors. And those who, I'll share with them, as everybody should do at the beginning of the program year, the beginning of the fiscal year, as you're talking about your performance and expectations, "These are some of the things I'm looking to do this year. I'm looking to do X, Y, Z and I'm going to need your support on this." Or, "Let me know where you think you can help me out with that." Or, "I'm going to be reaching out to the council member or the ANC commissioners for this or for that." I've always just gotten support. I think it's just because I'm always honest, and I'm always sharing. And I'm always sharing the bigger picture. So we want to ensure that we get some publicity around this issue of this African American woman who owned this property after the Civil War and she was never compensated. So I just want to let you know I'm going to be pushing the button on this because we've been down to the Library of Congress and we've done our homework. While the Park Service is saying she was compensated, we have no

documentation of that. So we're going to rip that wayside out. And to have a superintendent say, "Yep, you're right. I'm in support of it. Thanks for keeping me apprised." I've always had that kind of support from my managers and specifically in Julia.

Kym Edler: Then of course you know our former director, acting director, we just talked about him today as well, David Vela, was my superintendent at GWMP when I was there. So, I was able to do all the things I was able to do with that partner because David simply empowered me to do those things and so much more. David came out to a park--they wanted to meet with the park superintendent. And, "Kym was a great person to work with, but we know the park superintendent makes the decisions, so we're going to need you to come out here." They were very insistent to meet with the superintendent. And I said, "Well, what is it that I can do to help you all?" "Oh, no. The park superintendent. We need to see him. We know you can't do all that that we want to do."

Kym Edler: David came out to that park that afternoon. We had an evening meeting that night, I remember it so well. He says, "It's a pleasure to meet each and every one of you all. The refreshments," he was so funny. "The refreshments are absolutely delicious. But I want to let you all know, I'm not coming back out here for any more meetings after tonight." He said, "Because that young lady that stands over there, she speaks for me. When she speaks, she speaks for me. She knows exactly what this park needs. There's no need to doubt her. And I want you all to have a good evening."

Kym Edler: I mean, the room was quiet. And I never had them ever say, "Well, what does the superintendent think, Kym?" Or, "Can we do that?" Or, "Do you need to get permission first?" I never had any other issues with that at all.

Kym Edler: So, I had come from that to go to Ford's Theatre. And not get that kind of support from the regional leadership., it was just sort of odd for me. Because I had gotten that support from my previous supervisors. And I thought that that's basically how things went. And it didn't. But that made a world of difference for my career. And I've now had to do that in meetings with my supervisory ranger where the partners are saying, "Well, no, we need to see Kym."

Kym Edler: And I say, "She speaks for me. And she's not going to bring anything to you all that she's not already talked with me about." Because I know how that empowered me. And I know it empowers her. And it also said to the partners that we can work with her. We don't have to wait, every little thing has to be approved first. And then again, that empowers the employees to do a little bit more as well.

41:48

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well do you think in an instance like the doubts that people had when you were there, it's like manager at Glen Echo, do you think that some of the doubts stem from the fact that you were fairly young? That you were female? That you were African

American? A combination of all those things? Do you have any sense of where that doubt came from?

Kym Elder: I don't think any of, I really don't think any of those things that you named were the reasons. They were partners. They didn't know the government. They wanted to just make sure that before they listened, before they trusted my word, they heard it from the superintendent. I don't think it was because Kym was African American. They were all fairly young and very, very, I would say very liberal and open-minded. I don't think that was it. I think their issue was well, we don't want to have to go down this road and then someone says, "Oh, no, but have you checked it with the superintendent first?" I think that was a lot of it. I think they wanted to see the superintendent. And they felt like wow, we can call a meeting and the superintendent's going to come. Because you know with partners, it's a matter of they want to stake their claim in the game, too.

Kym Elder: David knew that. Maybe I didn't know it at the time. But David knew that. And he said it. He just said it just as nicely. "I'm not coming back out here anymore. I don't need to come back out here anymore. She speaks for me. And I wish you all a great meeting tonight. Have a good one." And he walked out of the room! And he left. It was incredible.

Kym Elder: And we had a dynamic relationship after that. I was there for the next two years and we just made some great strides. And we had the commemoration of the unrest at Glen Echo as a result of the segregated park. And they were all, they were very supportive. Again, because the way that partnership is set up out there, again, they're responsible for all programming, we're responsible for the facilities. So to be able to cross over the line and say, "We're going to do some programming that's not necessarily related to the arts and not related to dancing and not related to glassblowing. But we're going to talk about the history of this park." It had never been done. Nobody wanted to talk about the fact that, you know, everybody wanted to think of Glen Echo as the fun, happy place where the carousel is running in the summertime and the kids are running and everybody's having fun. They were so wary that bringing up this dark part of the history would do something to the whole feeling of the park. Maybe people would stay away. We still had African Americans who didn't feel comfortable visiting the park after all these years. and it did all those things and more. It made people more intrigued and excited to visit and experience the new Glen Echo.

Kym Elder: We still had, I can't think of his name, the writer at the *Washington Post* who had written articles years and years ago in the op-ed section and said that he would never visit Glen Echo. As a Black American, growing up in Washington, DC, that if he wasn't welcome then, he was never going to come back. And he held true to that. But he actually wrote some really good articles about what we were doing in the park. But he held true to his feelings. But we brought Juan, which Juan, the—

Lu Ann Jones: Juan Williams?

Kym Elder: We brought Juan Williams out to facilitate. It was incredible, Lu Ann. Just incredible. We had folks write him and he said he'd be honored to come out and facilitate the discussion. And it was great! Phenomenal! And we had more African Americans visiting Glen Echo than ever before in history, because people were like, "Wow, didn't know that part of history existed. We just weren't coming because it was too far out. But we're going to make a point to come out there and visit that park. And put our children on the carousel."

Kym Elder: So again, my leaving there, I mean, they were literally in tears, and writing the regional director and asking him why did he have to make me leave, and could we stay just a few more years longer? And they're like, "Well, she can't. She applied for the job. And the way the federal government works, if she's qualified for it and she's offered a job, we have to put her in that job within the next pay period." So, we've stayed in touch all these years.

Kym Elder: It's been good to stay in touch with them. And oftentimes, it's so funny because I remember one gentleman said to me. He said, "Kym, here we're talking, it's 1999, and I've never had a Black person in my home. And here you are, and I'm welcoming you." And I'm saying to myself, are you serious? He says, "No, I've never had a Black person in my home before. I'm so happy to have you here." It was like, wow. And so, I felt like I was helping Park Service make a difference as well.

47:08

Lu Ann Jones: Well, another topic that we touched on that I wanted to bring back to you again was how you were able to make a career within a pretty bounded geographical place. When we talked about how many people in the Park Service move around the country, and are constantly on the move. So were you ever concerned that you would not be able to flourish within one region? Or how were you thinking about just where you were going to work?

Kym Elder: I always worried that when that next opportunity came up, would they look at it and say well, gosh, she's not had any experience outside of NCR. I've always worried about that. But it was never an issue. Not to my knowledge, it was never an issue. I mean, I think I've done fairly well over these thirty-three years. I've had a very diverse career, even in the same region. And some pretty amazing accomplishments in this one region. But yeah, it always worried me. And even today, it worries me like wow, people are going to say, she's just spent her entire time at NCR. But I've had an opportunity to manage several types of sites. So, historic sites. Historic homes. Museums. Natural. Cultural. And so it's always been at the forefront of my mind, particularly early in my career. But by the time I started working for the Park Service in 1987, my husband and I were married in '89. We had our son in '91. By the time I was here, and these were my roots. I've applied for other jobs. Even today, my husband will say, "Well, I'm pretty mobile." Because he works remotely. "I'm mobile. If you're ready to go to San Juan, I'm ready to go to San Juan with you. We're empty nesters now, so let's make it happen. If that's what you want to do, let's do it." Because every now and then I'll go to USA Jobs and say you know, it

would be interesting, I've done five years now. I try to say five years, six years, is the limit for one site. You should be looking for other opportunities and work experiences . So I'm in the business of looking now. And I say "Wow, there's this great superintendency in San Juan." Like, "You should apply. Go to San Francisco. Let's go!" So, who knows?

49:56

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah, yeah. Interesting. Well, are there other things that you think we should talk about as we think about just career development. And again, this theme of civil rights in the National Park Service.

Kym Elder: No, if I had to say to my agency, I'd say we've made great strides, but we're not done. And we shouldn't rest on our laurels and we definitely shouldn't rest now. I say it all the time. We can't rest on this arrowhead. For a long, long time, this arrowhead spoke volumes. And people would say, "Oh my gosh, the National Park Service, the beloved National Park Service." But our newer generations don't have that same revel for this arrowhead. And we've got to be willing and able to make the shift as well. I'm not sure how ready we are to make the shifts in 2020. But we certainly need to be prepared. We need to be preparing to do so.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, do you think that people, in the wake of these horrible murders and continuing unrest, do you think that people are coming to national parks for different reasons today than they might have even a year ago? And again, thinking also in the time of Covid. Any thoughts about that?

51:29

Kym Elder: I think right now people are in survival mode. While we still have some populations that are going to come out just because they're tired of being in the house, the average African American family right now is trying to make sure that they have a sound base and then safety. So they're not going to be coming to the parks. They're just not. But we need to make it so that they know that when they're ready to come, they're welcome. And how do we make sure that they know that they're welcome is that the park's got to look like them, or at least have some resemblance of America. And the park has got to be willing to say what can we do to make your experience even better? We don't do a good job of that. We don't do a good job of just asking. Not that we're going to be able to implement everything. But we can certainly say, how can we make your experience even better? As an agency, we just don't, I don't know if we're ready to do that.

Kym Elder: One of the first things I ask visitors, any visitor--it doesn't matter what you look like, what part of town you came from, what kind of car you drive--how did you hear about the Civil War Defenses of Washington? Because that tells you a lot about that family. How did you hear about it? What made you come out to visit us today? And not everybody asks that question upon a visit to the park. And I'm not even doing the programs. I might just stumble out. My office is located at the Battleground National

Cemetery. A ranger might be out there doing a program where I'll say, "Hey, there's a family that just pulled up. Can someone go outside and greet them?" They'll say, oh, yeah, we'll go out. And I may be leaving out for a meeting, or I may have just decided I wanted to come out and get some fresh air. I'm going to ask them, "Hi, how are you all? Where you all from? What brought you to the park today?" That tells you a lot about what you're doing in terms of your advertising, how you can better advertise.

Kym Elder: Or, you know, if they say, "Oh, we read about it and we wanted to come and see it," then we need to make sure that we get your questions answered. So that you can go back and tell others, "Wow, that's a great park to visit." But not everybody's willing to do that, Lu Ann, unfortunately.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for this conversation. And I might have told you that one of the inspirations for coming to you was again that program on African American women superintendents several years ago. And I just thought that was such a fabulous program. But talking about the Park Service has made an effort to explore civil rights history more. As I thought about that, I thought, but we need to tell our civil rights story.

Kym Elder: We do.

Lu Ann Jones: We need to document our stories. So, that has really been part of the inspiration for sort of telling this parallel track of stories from the National Park Service. So I can't thank you enough. And it will again be part of a cluster of interviews with your mother and Mrs. Ellard and that will be a nice piece of serendipity, too.

Kym Elder: Mm hmm. It will be. It will be. I thank you for your time. Thank you for the work that you do as well.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, thank you.

Kym Elder: Yeah. Like I said, it's very important for us to tell our story as well. Because they hear our story, they'll be happy to share theirs as well.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes.

Kym Elder: So yeah, we have to start within.

55:27

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[END OF INTERVIEW]