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Phil Francis
October 23, 2015

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones and Thea Garrett
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
Digitized by Casey Oehler

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ANPR Oral History Project

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The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript.

Audiofile: FRANCIS Phil 23 Oct 2015

[START OF TRACK 1]

Lu Ann Jones: So how about if you give me your full name?

Phil Francis: My full name is Philip A. Francis, Junior.

Lu Ann Jones: What's the A stand for?

Phil Francis: Augustus.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh.

Phil Francis: I'm a junior. There was more than one person given the name Augustus.

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) Let's see—

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Lu Ann Jones: One of the things, I think I told you last night when we talked briefly, just to start out with, is some background before you came to the Park Service, and when you were born, where you were born.

Phil Francis: Okay.

Lu Ann Jones: Some family background.

Phil Francis: All right. Sure. I was born in Shelby, North Carolina, but lived in a little town named Grover. Grover had about 600 people. No traffic lights. There was a bank twice, and it was robbed both times and closed. My grandfather was mayor there for 30 years. It's a little textile town. I used to play in the textile mill growing up. I would ride my bike through the mill while people were working and play hide and seek. And it was a very small town. I went to Presbyterian church. Was a Scout. And I think one of the reasons I became interested in the National Park Service when I was 11, we went on a 50-mile hike which began on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We hiked from Linville Gorge all the way down to Quaker Meadows in Morganton, North Carolina. And that's the route that the Overmountain victory men followed on their way from East Tennessee to the Battle of King's Mountain, which is where my first job occurred.

Phil Francis: So, I grew up in a little town. Went to high school in King's Mountain. I was a basketball nut. I played basketball all the time. Played on the high school team. Played a little baseball.

Phil Francis: Then I went to college at Clemson. My grandfather had gone to Clemson. My father went to University of South Carolina, which is the rival school to Clemson.

Phil Francis: But my grandfather won out, I think principally because he would stop in Spartanburg, South Carolina, on the way back home, and buy my sister and I ice cream. At Howard Johnson's. You know, the 27 different varieties. And so, we always got ice cream. Or he would stop in a little town in Blacksburg, South Carolina. And there was Kelly's Steakhouse, and he would feed us shrimp and steak. So, we were associating Clemson with good food and good times and being with the grandparents.

Phil Francis: So, I ended up going to Clemson and I majored in business. Pre-med to start with. But I spent too much time on the basketball court, so I changed to business.

Phil Francis: During my second year, in 1972, I came home from spring break and living next door to where I grew up was my uncle, Uncle Charlie, who had polio in 1952, was in a wheelchair. He was a very successful businessman, though. Standing in his driveway was my elementary school principal, a guy named Jim Scruggs. He's six feet, six inches tall. Jim Scruggs had been a seasonal ranger, as many, as was often the case back in those days. You know, there were a lot of high school teachers who would work for the national parks in the summertime. Jim Scruggs, being a principal, had responsibilities in the summer related to the school year upcoming. So, the school board had lengthened his job from nine months a year to 12 months a year. So, he no longer could continue to work as a seasonal ranger at King's Mountain National Military Park.

Phil Francis: I just happened to see them there together. I pulled in the driveway, and Jim Scruggs told me about the seasonal job. He says, "You should go apply."

Phil Francis: I said, "Well, what do you do?"

Phil Francis: He said, "Well, you know, you give walks and talks. And you might do a little law enforcement." He said, "You should go apply."

Phil Francis: I said, "I can't do that. Speak to the public. Are you kidding me?" I had not had a public speaking class. Then I asked him, you know, when you're 18, 19 years old, you're interested in money. I said, "How much does it pay?" I think it was three dollars and 15 cents an hour. I had been working in my family's textile mill earning a buck 65. So, three dollars and 15 cents sounded pretty good.

Phil Francis: So, I said, "Well, maybe I can learn." So, I went over and completed my application. And because I was friends with the principal who had had the job, I got the job as a seasonal ranger on June the second or June the fourth, 1972.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what were you doing that summer?

Phil Francis: That's what I did. I mean, I gave one day 56 programs. In one day. It was living history. I was dressing in 18th century clothing and talking about the American Revolution and specifically the Battle of King's Mountain. And Cornwallis and Ferguson and the Over the Mountain Victory Trail men and telling stories about the battle and how they informed the Congress, Continental Congress. And a guy

named Joseph Greer, six feet, six inches tall, was sent to Philadelphia from the Battle of King's Mountain to let the continental congress know that the right side had won. And his horse was shot out from under him by Indians and he hid in a log from the Indians. And he finally gets to the Continental Congress and there's a doorkeeper and he being six-six, this guy was six-six and the doorkeeper was average height, probably about five-four back in 1780, he just sort of swept the doorkeeper away, went in and informed the Continental Congress of the victory of the Battle of King's Mountain and got a standing ovation. So, I still remember the stories we used to tell. You know, way back in 1972.

Thea Garrett: How did you develop the skills to do the public speaking that you were initially—

Phil Francis: It would be similar to learning to swim and be thrown into the pool. Gene Cox was my first supervisors. He was an interpretive ranger. Very demanding. Very intent on making sure that we greeted every visitor. And that if a visitor wanted a program, we gave it to them, if they requested it. Or if we had a small group, we would go announce a program, and we would present a slide program in the basement of this building. It was 20 minutes long. And there was an eight-page typewritten speech, and on that speech were little dots, and where the dots were, that's when you forwarded the slide. And so, there was a carousel of slides. We finally graduated so there was a more sophisticated slide set. But he gave us a week. We could use the typewritten speech for a week, and then we couldn't use it anymore. He took it away from us. We had to have the eight pages memorized.

Phil Francis: So, it was easy to give three of those programs an hour. And oftentimes, we did. We would fill up the day standing downstairs. There were 56 seats in the room where we would give the speech.

Phil Francis: The hardest speech I ever had to give was to a history professor. There was only one person in the room – the history professor and I. I had memorized the speech. This guy knew history. (laughter) So it was difficult. But that's where I learned.

Phil Francis: Then we transitioned from that program to giving, doing living history. We had a historian, a guy named Jim Parham, no, that's not right. Anyway, a historian. He worked for us in the summer. What he would do is research the Battle of King's Mountain, and he would feed us stories. Then so we would take those stories and incorporate those in the presentations.

Phil Francis: I loved it. I loved talking to visitors, especially kids. Kids would come walking down the trail beside the US monument at that King's Mountain. There was an opening there and we had set up a camp. We were dressed in period clothing, and we would cook, and we would demonstrate how to fire the British Brown Bess and the Kentucky rifle, or the Pennsylvania rifle. The rifle gun, it was appropriately called back in those days. So, we would do those demonstrations. They could be five minutes long, they could be 15 minutes long, it really depended on the level of interest that the crowd displayed. We would just talk all

day long. And fire weapons, eat chicken, make cornbread with a Dutch oven. And it was a lot of fun.

Lu Ann Jones: Were there other seasonals there that you worked with?

Phil Francis: Oh, yeah. Sure, sure. We had, usually there would be two people there. Sometimes three. And so, we had either someone in the British outfit or, you know, we were like the patriots. You know, we just had non-uniforms, but the clothing of the time. We also talked about camp followers quite a bit, too, because there were a number of camp followers at these battles, including the Battle of King's Mountain. And two of them were killed with patriot Patrick Ferguson, who invented the Ferguson rifle. And the story goes that they're buried with him under a cairn there at King's Mountain. I'm bringing back a lot of old stuff here.

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) Once you'd had that first experience, was there an idea that you'd come back? What happened after that?

Phil Francis: Well, I think the first summer, I thought it was a great job, a fun job. They liked how we performed, our bosses. Since the total number of permanent employees was only seven at the time, they really didn't have enough people to cover seven days a week. So, the seasonals would work on the weekend. So, they offered, if I was interested, for me to come back periodically during the weekends, during the school year, while I was in college and continue to work. And I did that. Which was great, because I never ran out of money like many of my friends did in college. I always had some money.

Phil Francis: So, the first year passed and it was great. Second year passed, I did it again. Next thing I knew, I was graduating from college in '74. And in the fall of that year, in '74, in about October, I got a phone call from the park superintendent, Ben Moomaw, who was a Virginian, and whose father – this is ironic – his father was instrumental in helping to establish the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia. But he called and offered me a fulltime job. Which is very different than today, right? I mean, he said, "Do you want a job? A permanent job."

Phil Francis: I said, "Doing what?"

Phil Francis: He said, "We want you to be our administrative officer." Actually, they called it an administrative services assistant.

Phil Francis: I'd been a GS-4 seasonal park ranger. So, I was being offered a GS-5 job. And so, I said I was interested. He said, "Well, send me your application and we will send that application to the Civil Service Commission," which preceded the Office of Personnel Management, down in Charleston. They did, and they name requested me. Somehow, I made the list. I started January the 18th of 1975. Had my first permanent job as a GS5 administrative services assistant. With promotion potential all the way up to the GS-6 level. (laughs)

Phil Francis: I took the permanent job. I had a degree in business, and I was doing budgets and personnel and contracting and bookkeeping and property management, those kinds of things. I found it pretty easy to do. I provided services to the park staff of seven. Then we added two more people and became nine. We managed Cowpens National Battlefield, too. At that time, it was only five acres. But later, we bought the 850 acres to create the park as it is today.

Phil Francis: And then, I did a lot of things as the administrative officer. It was an easy job. I ran the YCC [Youth Conservation Corps] program a couple of summers in addition to doing the administrative officer job. We built trails and bridges. And I liked the variety.

Phil Francis: The superintendent then, Ben Moomaw retired because of mandatory retirement. When he turned 70, he had to retire. That happened in ’76, ’75 or ’76. Then as superintendent became Mike Loveless at King’s Mountain.

Lu Ann Jones: How do you spell his last name?

Phil Francis: L-o-v-e-l-e-s-s. He’s deceased now. Both he and Ben have passed away. But Mike was very interested in railroads. He didn’t stay in the park. He was a great procrastinator, to the point that it embarrassed me because we were always late getting our reports in. And I wanted us to look good at King’s Mountain.

Phil Francis: So, I started doing his reports for him. One of the things that we had to do was we had to create a statement for management for King’s Mountain. It was the first one they had done. They had a, they didn’t call them general management plans, master plan is what they were called. One was done in the ‘60s. But this was a new requirement. It was more just of a statement of our purpose and mission. But I did it.

Phil Francis: Well, Mike had gone to Europe for 30 days. And while he was gone, I called up the region and said, “Look, Mike is gone, and I want to get this done before he gets back.” (laughter) I didn’t know any better, you know? I’d be shot for that today.

Phil Francis: So, I did. I wrote the first parks statement for management with the assistance of folks in regional office and sent it in. Had it all approved when Mike returned. (laughter)

Phil Francis: So, and then I learned of the centralized intake program, which was occurring back in 1977. Do you remember that?

Lu Ann Jones: I don’t.

Phil Francis: I know you [Thea Garrett] don’t remember that. But in ’77, there were, I think, a hundred jobs offered around the country. Most of those jobs were in the ranger field. But about a ten of those jobs, I think that’s right, were administrative kinds of jobs. I was called and asked to apply. I had always been in my hometown, and I

was very reluctant to leave, because all my friends were there. But I decided to apply. If I remember right, there were 6,000 applications for those 100 jobs. And I was lucky enough to get one of those jobs.

Phil Francis: The real shock to me was, when I was offered the intake position, I was asked where would I wish to work. You know, there are only six administrative officer jobs, that's how many there were. Six. And I said I wanted to go to the Blue Ridge Parkway, because the administrative officer at the Blue Ridge Parkway, a fellow named Ray Brotherton who's still alive, he's 85, 86 years old now, was considered by many to be the best administrative officer in the country. I had called Ray many times over the years seeking advice and counsel, and he was always able to answer my questions. So, I wanted to go work for him.

Phil Francis: But the service had other plans. They felt that people who joined the intake program should be willing to move. And they wanted to make sure that we were willing to move by offering us jobs away from where we were from. Instead of going to Asheville, which is what I'd hoped I would do, I was sent to Washington, DC. I was sent to the National Capital Regional Office, and there I worked for the associate regional director, Ed Donnelly, whose son, Mike Donnelly, worked for the National Park Service, too.

Phil Francis: I remember leaving to go to Washington. I had decided to get married, because I was going to leave my girlfriend behind. So, my girlfriend, my fiancée, my mother, were in a U-Haul truck, because people moved themselves a lot back in those days. Because you'd actually make a few dollars doing that. They drove to Manassas, Virginia, which is where I had made arrangements to live at one of the historic houses on the battlefield. We got up to I-66 and it was snowing. Well, where I grew up, there wasn't a lot of snow. We're going about 35 miles an hour on Interstate 66, and everyone else is going 70 miles an hour in the snow. I'm thinking, oh, my gosh, you know, I'm not going to survive this. (laughs)

Phil Francis: But I went to Manassas, and went into the office. Ed Donnelly was detailed to the Washington office to be the associate director for administration. A guy named Scott Tilly had been detailed to be the acting associate regional director at NCR. So, Scott asked me to do a development plan. This intake training assignment was supposed to be two years long, but when I looked at the criteria, I felt that I had already done much of what this plan required.

Phil Francis: So, I talked him into cutting it from a two-year program to a one-year program for me, which was good. But I had been a GS-6 by that time. They had moved me back to a GS-5. So, I think I was earning $8,000 a year. My rent was $6,000 a year. But you know, the price of food and the price of gasoline wasn't so high.

Phil Francis: My wife got a job. Her name was Vickie. She worked for the Manassas YCC program. She got a job in the summer, and she later got a permanent job on the lightship Chesapeake. You [Lu Ann] probably remember the lightship Chesapeake.

Phil Francis: So, we commuted from Manassas all the way into DC. This was before I-66 went all the way. You know, back in those days it stopped at the Beltway.

Phil Francis: I was there 54 weeks, working at NCR. And it was very different than working in the Southeast Region, because NCR, National Capital Parks, was like one big park in some ways, and in other ways, it was not. But the parks downtown were very centralized and very much controlled by their headquarters, which was on 1100 Ohio Drive, the regional office. So, all the decisions that were made had to be approved by the headquarters. Parks like National Capital Parks-East, or National Capital Parks-Central, or C&O Canal, or Prince William Forest Park, all had to prepare their budgets and take their budgets into the regional office and present their budgets for the year, and the regional director would approve them. A team of people working in the NCR would sit in the room and question the superintendent and the administrative officer about their budgets. That was very strange to me, because in the Southeast Region, we just sent our budget in, and it was sort of rubber-stamped and we were approved. So, it was very different.

Phil Francis: So, I go to NCR and I'm to spend time at each of the administrative functional areas. Sometime in finance, some time in budget, some time in contracting, personnel, labor relations and so forth.

Phil Francis: But after about three months, my boss called me in and said, "Phil, I know that you are in this program and you've got this plan," he said, "but would you be willing to," and he says, "you don't have to, but would you be willing to go to parks and help us do some problem-solving?" And I said I would.

Phil Francis: They sent me first down to Prince William Forest Park, and I spent about a month there, working with the administrative officer and helping them.

Phil Francis: I was then sent to National Capital Parks-East for three months because the park could not get their budget approved before this regional committee. So, the chief of maintenance then was a guy named Bernie Kearney. His assistant was Kip Hagen. You may know that name. Kip's father worked for the National Park Service. They were very capable. A woman named Barbara Sheehan worked in interpretation. We created a little team of people and worked 12 hours a day until we got this budget in the kind of shape that we thought it might be approved. And took it to the regional office and we got it approved first time.

Phil Francis: And I was a GS-7 by then and was supervising GS-12s, which was a little awkward. (laughs) A little awkward. But it was a great experience.

Phil Francis: Now, NCP-East had the Brentwood Warehouse, you know, and we did a cost study and found that the cost of operating Brentwood Warehouse was more than if the entire region bought a new vehicle every year. Employees in that region, some of which were at the Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, and we would go check on them once a month and make sure that they were okay. You know, Saint Elizabeth's is a mental hospital, and these people had drug problems. There was

such an array of problems in that region. It was very different from what I was accustomed to. So, I learned a lot.

Phil Francis: While I was at NCP-East, I met members of Congress. People like Elizabeth Chittick, who ran the Sewall-Belmont house. She was president of the National Women's Party, I think. For the first time I really was exposed to political realities. Get calls from the Washington office, which was a big deal for me. And back then, I was so naïve. I used to think that everybody, I'm sure this is true, in the Washington office, really had to know what they were doing. (laughter) And in the regional office. Otherwise, they wouldn't be working there. But I learned that, you know, people are people.

Phil Francis: And so, it was just a great experience. Fifty-four weeks in Washington, DC. I was sent up to Harpers Ferry National Historic Park for a few months. There was a problem there with the superintendent, and so I was sent there. So, my training program was sort of suspended so that I could help the regional office solve some problems out in the parks.

Phil Francis: One of the reasons why I was able to do that is that the delegations of authority in regions other than NCR were much greater. So, I had been given a lot more authority as a GS-5 than GS-12s were in NCR.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, a couple of questions. I really think that your supervisor during the intake program kind of saw in you that he could identify skills that, saw you as a problem solver, that you could go somewhere with a specific problem to address.

Phil Francis: I don't know. I had a degree in business. That probably helped. I had volunteered to do things. I had been exposed to a lot of different things at King's Mountain. I developed budgets. I'd written a statement for management. I had developed these track-analyze programs, spreadsheets, which was sort of a new thing back then. I just had more experience because of the delegation of authority. And because I volunteered—

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Phil Francis: —to do things, and I guess that's why. The more they knew me, the more they learned about what I had done before. I suppose that may be why, and maybe because I accomplished things.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Got things done.

Phil Francis: I guess. I'm not sure. I didn't ask that question. I just thought it was a great opportunity to go, go learn. And so, I eagerly said yes.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Well, not to name names or whatever, but can you give an example, like you said in the instance there was a problematic superintendent. What would

be an issue that needed to be addressed? And certainly, this isn't the first time I've heard something like this.

Phil Francis: Okay. Well, for example, the superintendent at the time at Harpers Ferry had been accused by several of the women at Harpers Ferry of improper behavior. Sexual harassment kind of things. Not to get into the details, but, and so I think they wanted me to go take a look for myself and come to my own conclusion and report back to them as to whether or not I thought there was some validity to them. And there was. There clearly was. They had removed the superintendent from his job. He had a house inside the park, a government house. His office became his house. He couldn't go to work anymore. Then they finally transferred him into the Washington office. So, he had to commute from Harpers Ferry to downtown DC every day.

Phil Francis: But so, I interviewed all the women that were involved. I felt that they were being honest and that they were truly affected by this fellow's behavior. There were a number of people who were also affected in addition to the superintendent, like the administrative officer, because she had not reported it and she was aware of it. So, she sat on her hands and didn't take action to the extent that regional office thought she should have. And so, I became the acting administrative officer at that park for a while, until they could—

Phil Francis: I remember going to the regional office. Jim Dunning, I think his name was, was the deputy regional director. I remember going in and telling him that they needed to change their approach. I wasn't very shy. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) But what they were doing was – when they moved the superintendent, they made the division chiefs acting superintendent on a rotational basis. So, for a month, the chief ranger would become the acting superintendent. The next month, the chief of interpretation would become the acting superintendent. The next month, the chief of maintenance would become the acting superintendent.

Phil Francis: Well, what was happening was, when the chief of interpretation became the acting superintendent, he would change the organizational chart to benefit himself. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) When the chief ranger became the acting superintendent, he would change it to benefit him.

Phil Francis: So, I went down to, I went to Jim Dunning's office – that doesn't sound like the right name – but I went to Jim's office and I said, "I think you should send someone from outside the park to be the acting superintendent." And they did. They sent Rock Comstock, who was working as the chief of interpretation in the National Capital Region up there to be the acting superintendent. He really did a marvelous job of settling that place down.

Phil Francis: But once again, I found that the parks in that region were very different than what I was used to. The maintenance crew, I remember, would come to work really early. They would take a break after being on duty for about an hour. They would send a guy to this restaurant in Harpers Ferry, and they'd pick up breakfast for

everybody. Everybody would take a breakfast break. I thought well, that's sort of odd. (laughter) But it was a great experience, you know. I got to live in Harpers Ferry for a while. They put me up in this old, old house in the downtown section, right beside the cemetery. It was supposed to be haunted. I was in this house all by myself, and it would creak and make all kind of noises all night long. So, it was quite an experience.

Phil Francis: So, another assignment I had was to work with the interpretive design center. They actually had a nurse on staff. And her name was, last name was Bottomer, I think it was, Nurse Bottomer. Her job was to screen people to see if they were really sick. They had a lot of absenteeism at the interpretive design center. A lot of accidents.

Phil Francis: I was asked to evaluate that program and write a report on the occupational health and the illnesses that were being experienced at the interpretive design center. And so, I did that. It was like being in a MASH unit for a year. I got about six years' worth of experience just in that one year's time.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what were they experiencing?

Phil Francis: What people were actually doing was, they were going to the nurse instead of going to the doctor, because it was free. So, people would bring their children in or would go over to see if they needed to go to the doctor. The nurse would treat some of the folks and then there would be no expense. They discontinued that. It was a pretty expensive program. It was unclear what they should do.

Phil Francis: But they have a lot of accidents. Oh my gosh. Strained backs. They'd fall on ice. You know, at Harpers Ferry, there's a lot of ice at Harpers Ferry. The safety program was not very proactive. It may be that program helped address some of those safety issues. But they decided to discontinue that program. It was very interesting. I didn't know that you could hire a nurse and have her on your staff and have that person available to your employees. Interesting.

Phil Francis: They also had, at the interpretive design center, they used a lot of chemicals.

Lu Ann Jones: I was going to say.

Phil Francis: Yeah. And so, the air ventilation system was a problem there. I think that they were able to help resolve that air ventilation problem as a consequence of their efforts.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, what was the expectation once you finished that intake assignment? What were you expected to do?

Phil Francis: Well, you would be reassigned to another job. You would become a GS-9. You know, today people were promoted pretty fast. I mean, you become a 9 pretty quick. But back then, I was a 4 and a 5 and a 6 and a 7 and then a 9.

Phil Francis: And so, I went to Chickamauga in Chattanooga National Military Park.

Lu Ann Jones: Was that your choice or somewhere they assigned you to?

Phil Francis: You know, I was called by the superintendent there, a guy named Bob Deskins. Bob had a great reputation as being an outstanding superintendent. Interesting guy. So, I said, yes. Even though I'd only been in the program the 54 weeks, I said yes. So off to Chattanooga we go. There I became a GS-9. The park was bigger. We had about 33, I believe was the number, permanent employees at that park. The administrative office, there was three of us. So, I became a supervisor officially. Not in an acting assignment for the first time. I ran the YCC program there in the summertime each year. We had about 25, no we didn't; we had 50 kids. So, we did that, too, on the side. That was a lot of fun.

Phil Francis: After three months, Bob Deskins left to go to be superintendent of Mammoth Cave National Park because of an interesting deal that a congressman from Kentucky was holding the National Park Service budget hostage. The only way he was going to allow the budget to proceed was if Bob Deskins became superintendent there. And that's what happened. Yeah. Different back then. I used to remember the congressman's name. I'll probably remember it in a minute. Natcher. Congressman Natcher.

Phil Francis: In fact, I was sitting at my desk at Chickamauga and Chattanooga. The phone rings and it was Ann Belkov. Ann Belkov worked in Washington. She had worked in Summer in the Parks program for a former director, Bill Whalen. And Bill Whalen was not the director when she worked, he was in the Summer in the Parks program. I had met Ann over at the Union Station, which was a unit of the National Park Service for a while, because my counselor during the intake training program was a woman named Georgia Ellard and worked there.

Lu Ann Jones: We've interviewed her.

Phil Francis: Georgia was a wonderful person. Very helpful to me. I'm sure she told you all about Union Station.

Lu Ann Jones: She did. (laughs)

Phil Francis: That was quite the time, when the homeless moved into Union Station, and all the turmoil about whether or not it should be a unit of the national parks. Whether or not they should cover some of the statues. Did she tell you that story?

Lu Ann Jones: I don't think she told us that.

Phil Francis: Well, yeah. You know, if you walk into Union Station and you look around the top, there are like soldiers, I believe. Their private parts were on display, if you remember. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) And you [Thea] wouldn't remember. But the controversy was that they felt that that was inappropriate. And they covered them

with shields. (laughter) So if you go in there today and you look and you see the shields up there, those were added.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, wow.

Phil Francis: Yeah, those were added. That happened while Georgia was there. But anyway, Ann Belkov was on the phone. She said, "Phil, this is Ann Belkov. Do you remember me?"

Phil Francis: And I said, "Yes, Ann. How are you?" And she said, "Well, aren't you going to congratulate me?" And I said, "For what?" She said, "I'm going to be your new superintendent."

Phil Francis: I said, "Really?" I said, "Hold on one second." So, I put my hand over the receiver. My office was adjacent to Bob Deskins', and I could actually see him. I said, "Bob, do you know that you're leaving?" (laughter)

Phil Francis: He says, "Who are you talking to?" And I said, "Your replacement." (laughter)

Phil Francis: He didn't know that he was leaving. He had not received official notice that he was being reassigned to Mammoth Cave.

Phil Francis: You know, back then it wasn't uncommon for people to be reassigned. Back in those days, there was a system in Washington called the branch of employee, BEE, evaluation system. You had to complete a form every year. Your superintendent would evaluate you as to how well you performed in your current job and what your career goals were, and in essence whether or not it was time for you to leave.

Phil Francis: When there was a vacancy, they would go to this stack of cards, and they had little holes punched in them. They had this long needle. They were able to slide the needle through these holes and lift it. Those holes represented specific criteria. Those people who came out on those cards on that long needle, they were people who were eligible to go fill a job. And you were expected to move. If you didn't move – after three times you turned them down, then you weren't considered anymore. You were put in a different file. So, your career was really, that system and being reassigned was just part of your career. You had to decide at some point during your career whether or not you were going to stay put or keep moving.

Thea Garrett: And that was the BEE?

Phil Francis: BEES. BEES. I think the "s" was system. I think Branch of Employee Evaluation System.

Thea Garrett: What were the qualifications or criteria that would make you a good candidate for moving? Or did it just depend?

Phil Francis: It would depend on the job. They would match the job, what the job required, and then what the skill sets of the various people were. And try to, which makes pretty good sense. It's a good idea. It preceded the KSA system, the knowledge, skills and ability system. Which came about in 1976, I think. Maybe a little later. '78. I think it was '78. And that's when the Civil Service Commission went away and the Office of Personnel Management came into being, as I recall.

Lu Ann Jones: Well at what point did you decide that this was going to be a career? I mean, was there a moment where you had—

Phil Francis: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: You said, okay, I'm in it for the long haul.

Phil Francis: Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: And this is what I'm going to do to make this work.

Phil Francis: When I was in Washington, I really got the bug. One of the things I volunteered to do in Washington was to be a teacher in administration and to help write a training course. But there was a trained instructor class, for a class titled "Horses and Hula Hoops." (laughs) And Bill Sayler, who had been the administrative officer at National Capital Park Central, and other administrative officers, had put this class together. I went to Harpers Ferry, to Mather Training Center, and took a class on being an instructor. And so, I became an instructor. And once I started teaching administrative classes to people, I was really hooked. I was really hooked. I had worked some with the Washington Training Office during that year, and spent some time with Terrie Barr, who was one of the training people in National Capital Region Office. So, I think that's when I really knew that – and the fact that I could seem to compete well with the folks in NCR, I thought I could compete well and become a high-grade employee.

Phil Francis: So, then I went to Chick-Chatt, you know, and I really, once again, what I would do is I would go to a park. And if I saw a void, a leadership void, for example, I would try to fill it. I always had my nose in something that I shouldn't. If I saw a need, then I would volunteer and try to fill that need. Selfishly, you know, in some ways. Because the administrative occupation, while interesting and very important, I would get a little bored with it at times. So, I would try to do, I would try to do more things.

Lu Ann Jones: Was there a moment where you began to think about becoming a superintendent and what that would entail?

Phil Francis: At Chick-Chatt. At Chickamauga and Chattanooga, I certainly did. And I think I acted. My job description only had administrative duties. But I was used by Ann, I think, as sort of her assistant. Because of some other employees there who were problem employees, I helped her deal with those problem employees and sort of became an operations assistant. Helping her hire employees, helping her provide

some oversight. For example, we had Summer in the Parks concerts. We would have anywhere between 10 and 20,000 people show up for those events. So, I would be out there helping to direct traffic and help planning the events. That was fun. That was fun to do. And doing the YCC things.

Phil Francis: Ann exposed me to – in 1983, '82, there was a world's fair in Knoxville. In 1983 or four, there was a world's fair in New Orleans. And during the 1982 world's fair, we were asked to plan for impacts that might occur since we were within 90 miles of the world's fair. So, a delegation of people from New Orleans came up and wanted to learn from people who had worked in the surrounding community around Knoxville, they wanted to learn from us what we did in order to prepare for the world's fair, and what kind of impacts did we really experience.

Phil Francis: So, Ann she asked if I would go take her place and tell this group what our experiences were. So, I said I would.

Phil Francis: So, this meeting was at the Chattanooga Choo Choo. So, I go to the door and it's a big door. I had been told by Ann that people were going to sit around a table, and we were just going to have a discussion. I open the door and there's seats for 100 people in there. And there are white tablecloths and there's a program. And I pick the program up and I am the keynote speaker. (laughter) I had prepared nothing! (laughter)

Phil Francis: And so, I gave a speech, you know. I have done that many times now in my career, where you walk in a room and you're asked to give a speech, a 10-minute speech, 15-mintue speech. I think I could talk about a pencil eraser now for 15 minutes. (laughter) You just learn how to do that. I remember kidding about Jim Watt, Secretary Watt, and I having the same hairstyle. He was bald and I was bald. And got the crowd laughing.

Phil Francis: Then I got involved in the tourism business. Ann allowed me to represent her to be part of the Northwest Georgia Travel Association, which had about 130 businesses and organizations involved, covering the 16 counties of Northwest Georgia. And a guy from Martha Berry Museum in Rome, Georgia, Dan Biggers, he was the president. And you would see Dan Biggers on *Matlock* later. He was the doctor on the *Matlock* TV show. But Dan was great. He had a wonderful voice. So, I attended meetings. I would go to tourism travel meetings with people who really knew Carl Gibson from Ruby Falls, for example.

Phil Francis: And two years later, they elected me president of it. I couldn't believe it! But I had a great time doing that. So, I was growing the YCC program, was president of Northwest Tour and Travel Association, being the administrative officer and sort of helping Ann out with the park. So, I did that for five years. Another great experience.

Phil Francis: And we dealt with some pretty difficult personnel issues there. I learned a lot.

Lu Ann Jones: I'm always fascinated, because I usually work around people that seem fairly unproblematic. So, what kinds of personnel issues, and again, I know you can't talk specifics, but just—

Phil Francis: Well, one member of our management team (laughs) had a wife that was, hmm, odd. And very feisty. Her husband, the member of the management team, was not a very good employee. He would, even though he was forty-something years old, I suppose, he would try to make advances on seasonal workers – even young women who were 16 years old. And he actually exposed himself to a couple. And he would call them after hours.

Phil Francis: When we began taking disciplinary action against him – he was later fired – but we just didn't have any tolerance for that. We just weren't going to allow that to occur. But at one point during the preceding, one of the preceding superintendents, this guy's wife had come into the office and started swinging her handbag and hitting the superintendent with it. And attacking him. So, this was a really difficult problem. This guy was a very aggressive man. He was dangerous. Ann took him on. Fired him, to her credit. I was there beside her much of the way.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Phil Francis: It was difficult. We had, one of my employees, her husband came to work, he had a gun. Drawn. Walking down the hall. And so, we arrested him. Things happen. I had a young woman who worked for the administrative clerk, and she had been abused by her parents. And she was thinking of committing suicide. I remember taking her home and having to hold onto her because she was going to jump out of the car. I took her home to make sure she got home safe. But yeah, I mean, you never know what's going to happen during the course of your stay. Every single place I've been, there have been unusual events occur like that. Every one.

Phil Francis: So, I next move to Shenandoah National Park. And there I learn something new. Up to that point in time, I had worked in parks where my strong personality allowed me to get my way. You know? I didn't have to make good arguments. I could just say, "This is what we're going to do," and that's what happened. (laughs) When I got to Shenandoah, everybody had strong personalities. I could not, I tried that, and that did not work. And I was put in my place pretty darn quick.

Phil Francis: And the chief of maintenance there was a very strong personality. He had a double master's in engineering and business. The chief ranger was working on the incident case management system for the National Park Service as a whole, using computer programming. The chief of interpretation, Dennis Carter, was a really strong interpretive ranger, division chief. Been in place for a long time. The superintendent, Bob Jacobson, a very strong man. Bill Loftus, former engineer, deputy superintendent. They knew what they were doing. And here I show up. And I thought I knew what I was doing. But I had a lot to learn.

Phil Francis: So, I was a GS-11 when I went to Shenandoah National Park. And the other division chiefs were 13s. The reason I was an 11 had to do with the fact that the superintendent just didn't respect the occupation of administrative officer. So, the position description was written in such a way that the administrative officer had very little delegated authority. The superintendent had reserved that for himself because he didn't trust administrative officers. And so that was quite, I spent five years there. And it was quite a battle, the entire time.

Lu Ann Jones: Was that the place that you had sought out? Or did they—

Phil Francis: Yeah, I applied for that job and my friend, Ray Brotherton, you may remember I mentioned Ray Brotherton, the AO [administrative officer] at Blue Ridge who I wanted to go work for, one of Ray Brotherton's friends was the deputy superintendent at Shenandoah, Bill Loftus.

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Phil Francis: They'd worked together on the Outer Banks earlier in their career. And so, Ray had called Bill and said, "I know you've got a vacancy for the administrative officer. You should hire Phil Francis." That's pretty much how it worked, I think.

Phil Francis: There I worked for three different superintendents and three different deputy superintendents. Bob Jacobsen and Bill Loftus were there in the beginning. Then Jerry Tays and Ron Wrye who later became regional director in NCR. And then Bill Wade and Paul Anderson. And Paul Anderson and I had gone through Introduction to NPS Operations together at Albright. Which is a class which should still be going on. And it's not. You spent eight weeks, nine weeks at Albright being indoctrinated, you know, about the purpose of the National Park Service, the Organic Act, you know, what maintenance division did and what resource management did or should do. Fitness programs, goal setting, decision making. It was a great class. It should still be going on.

Phil Francis: Anderson and I had gone through Albright together. Peggy O'Dell was part of our class. Tessy Shirakawa was part of our class. We had a lot of really good, strong leaders in our class. But Shenandoah was very difficult experience, because there was so much disharmony among the division chiefs. The team. Bill Pierce was there as assistant chief ranger. Very, very, very capable human being. John Chew, who later left to the Department of Transportation, one of the early leaders, pioneers, in search and rescue. We created one of the very first employee assistance program while at Shenandoah. We created probably the first critical incident stress debriefing teams while at Shenandoah.

Phil Francis: That happened partly because of Bill Pierce and John Chew. But also, because we had two employees commit suicide there within two weeks of each other. One was an interpreter. One was a ranger, protection ranger.

Phil Francis: I became really interested and concerned about our employees when the first suicide occurred. And even more concerned after the second suicide occurred. I had attended, at Bill Pierce's suggestion, a critical incident stress debriefing workshop, at the University of Maryland at Baltimore County by Dr. Jeffrey Mitchell, one of the godfathers of CISD, or CISM, was teaching that class. And it made a huge impact on me. He said to us our very first morning, he said this is not for everyone. He says, at any point you feel like this is not what you want to do, just no questions asked, just get up and leave. And about six mental health professionals did that. They did leave. Because he was showing real scenes, real interviews. And they were pretty gruesome. I stayed through it, became a peer debriefer.

Phil Francis: So back to Shenandoah. Two suicides had occurred. I began helping to organize the debriefings for our staff. But I felt like we needed professional assistance to do the debriefings, and we shouldn't try that alone.

Phil Francis: So, I went to the University of Virginia Medical School and found a woman named Eleanor Crocker, Dr. Crocker. And she, I believe, was the staff psychiatrist for the university. She was very, very, very helpful. And she put me in touch with a guy who was a national expert. Had been on television talking about suicide. We began looking at statistics in the National Park Service to see if there were any clues, looking at the demographics, to see if there were any clues as to why people were committing suicide. Because we were aware that not only had these two employees committed suicide, but there had been others. And so, we tried to see how many of our employees nationally had committed suicide and why. We found that we had a 300 percent greater rate of suicide in the National Park System than the general population.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow. What was the conclusion about why that—

Phil Francis: Okay. Well, that's right. So, in talking with this expert, he began outlining why people commit suicide. What are the really high stress factors in your life? We all know. Getting married, changing jobs, getting a divorce. You know, moving, and so forth. But the group that committed suicide the most frequently, I believe, were senior citizens with terminal illnesses. Behind that were black women, single mothers with a bunch of kids. Very stressful. But coming in about third place were single white guys who were loners. And we had a bunch of them in the Park Service. A bunch of them. And if you looked even further, people who had a lot of training, who were very ambitious but were overworked, or people who had that same degree of training and who were under-utilized. There was a sweet spot in between. But people on either end were high risk.

Phil Francis: We tended to hire people that were high-risk people. Now I suppose that that's changed now. Our demographics have changed. It would still be interesting to know what our rate is and what we've done. But anyway.

Phil Francis: So, we got involved in that in a big way at Shenandoah. I interviewed some other folks who, there were at least five other people who had expressed some interest in suicide. And had discussed it to the extent that they were possible risks.

Phil Francis: I remember one night I left home about midnight and interviewed someone at one o'clock in the morning because they were really a concern.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, that's a big, big switch from budgets and spreadsheets.

Phil Francis: (laughs) Yep.

Lu Ann Jones: One of the things I'm often struck by is that because there are any number of, I mean, there's a vast array of jobs and assignments whether they're formal or informal, whatever, that people do have these opportunities to tap into different talents and things. Did it surprise you that that was something that you, or kind of where does it fit into who you are and kind of what you were becoming at that point?

Phil Francis: Well, I was really interested – good question – and there is an answer. First of all, my classes in Clemson, I had decision-making classes. I found that was a topic that many people in the park service didn't know a lot about. That they didn't have a system for making decisions. They made decisions, but they didn't have a system to make decisions. You know, they didn't look at alternatives, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives, and what are the costs?

Phil Francis: I had read a lot of books by Tom Peters. *In Search of Excellence,* for one. *Thriving on Chaos* was another. And then I read books by Ken Blanchard. I was just really interested in management and leadership stuff. So, I read everything I could get my hands on.

Phil Francis: A lot of it spoke to cultural change within parks, organizational change. And one book I read was *Teaching an Elephant to Dance.* You may remember that one. But it talked about how long it took organizations to change. I got interested in creativity, and read books on that. Customer service. A book by Carl Sewell, *Customers for Life* was its name.

Phil Francis: At Shenandoah I was supervising 14 people, so my responsibility was growing. I felt like I needed to improve my skill sets. I needed to know what I was doing. Because I went to Shenandoah and all of a sudden I wasn't, I needed to do more than just have a strong personality. I needed to know what I was doing.

Phil Francis: So, I did. I did a lot of reading. Went to a lot of classes. Whenever I could go to a class on leadership or management, I went.

Lu Ann Jones: Now was the Park Service offering these classes? Or were there other places that you could turn?

Phil Francis: Mostly Park Service classes. Bill Wade, I went to managerial grid at one point. Then I got in the SES program later. But up to this point at Shenandoah, no, it was a lot of self-study.

Phil Francis: I was asked for the first time when I was at Shenandoah to be part of operations evaluation teams. And going to other parks. And for some reason, people began calling me and asking me for help. I remember, one of the AOs in another park had trouble with her superintendent, so she would call me about once a month trying to figure out what to do. I finally convinced her she needed to call the regional office and turn the guy in, and she did. And the guy wasn't a superintendent anymore. He was abusing his employees. That happens more than you think.

Phil Francis: So, becoming part of the operations evaluation team, I went to National Capital Regional and did an operations, I was on that team to evaluate the regional office. And I liked that a lot, and I thought that was important. And it played into some of the courses I had back in college. You know, about the functions of management, planning, staffing, organizing, directing, controlling, evaluating. The evaluating piece seemed to be a missing piece in the National Park Service. How well were we doing? How could we improve? You know, someone looking and holding people accountable.

Phil Francis: So, all this time I'm getting more and more interested in management. In Washington, I was exposed to a lot of different leaders, too. Wade and you know, Deskins. I mean, all of these people had different styles.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I was going to say, what do you think are kind of good leadership styles? And how did you begin to craft your own leadership style?

Phil Francis: You know, one of the things I learned from Mike Finley later on, he was probably the best at this. One of the thing a leader needs to do is where he's going, or she's going. They've got to have a vision. They've got to have a picture. They've got to be able to communicate with the employees what that picture is and how they fit in. When I say communicate, that does not mean that you just say whatever you want. But it has to be simplified and it has to be understandable, and they've got to be inspired. You know, to help you go there. Because if you don't inspire them to help you go there, you're not going to get there. Because none of us get anything done by ourselves. Very, very few jobs you can do things alone.

Phil Francis: So, I think that you've got to be curious. I think you should never stop learning. You've got to care about what you're doing. It's got to be more than just a job. You've got to be enthusiastic. You know, the enthusiasm really counts for a lot. When you're standing in front of a group of people, you're being a leader, you've got to care about them not only as employees but as people.

Phil Francis: One of the things Bob Deskins did to the point that I thought it was maybe a little bit too much, but he knew what every employee's spouse's name was, where they

worked, how many children they had, how they were doing in school, whether or not there were any problems at home, about all of his employees. Now there was 33 employees. But he did that. People loved him. They would follow him and do things for him. Unlike any other leader I knew.

Phil Francis: Finley was able to simplify and really describe where the parks should go in simple terms so that people got it.

Phil Francis: I remember being with Bob Deskins once he became superintendent at Mammoth Cave, as I mentioned. We were going over to the Job Corps center and there's a barge, you had to cross a river. And there's a barge operator. You drive your car on the barge. I remember Bob was driving and I was in the passenger seat. And the operator said, "Hey, Bob, how are you?" You know, like a friend. Not like a boss.

Phil Francis: The thing that I remember Bob saying to him was, "Oh, we're going over to grab some lunch." He says, "Can we get you something? Can we get you a sandwich?" And I thought, wow! A little thing. But you know, it wasn't like I'm too important to care about your lunch. He was thinking about this person. Pretty cool. Pretty cool.

Phil Francis: So, you know, I think all of these things are important. A leader has to be real. You know, we've all got areas that we're good at and some areas that we're not so good at. I think the good leaders don't pretend. It's who they are.

Lu Ann Jones: But did you work with, I know you had a stint at Yosemite.

Phil Francis: Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Were you there with Mike Finley?

Phil Francis: I was.

Lu Ann Jones: You were.

Phil Francis: Oh, I had a great time with Finley.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you go to Yosemite after—

Phil Francis: After Shenandoah?

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah.

Phil Francis: Uh huh. And there was another interesting place. I mean, there we had one of the Park Service's largest budgets, biggest operations. One of the most political places. I had 56 people on my staff. They were, had been led by an administrative officer that had been removed from his job because he was not well liked. He was a control freak. Very autocratic. Not at all helpful to divisions outside of

administration, which I mean, our entire purpose almost in administration has to do with providing service.

Phil Francis: So, I got there, and I began evaluating people based upon the quality of service they provided to other divisions. It changed things around. It's funny, I saw Dave Lattimore a minute ago. He was in Yosemite when I was there. And he just made a comment that you should have stayed there longer because when you left, things returned to the way they were.

Phil Francis: And I remember drawing a – one time I was standing in the personnel office, and I looked out the window and there was a law enforcement ranger's car there and he was looking in and he was shaking his head. And I stood there, and he walked inside and came into personnel. I observed he and this personnel person having a dispute. The personnel person was not being very helpful. The personnel office would require the employees, when they applied for a job within the park, instead of walking to the personnel office and handing them the application, they would require the employees to go to the post office and mail it 200 yards to get a certified return receipt that they could have in their possession because of situations that had occurred in the past where personnel had lost the application.

Phil Francis: The operating divisions did not receive good service. It was long in coming. It was inconsistent. People were not nice in providing service. And so, we fixed that. There was a lawsuit that Yosemite Tenants Association had filed against the federal government. It had to do with rental rates for the government housing. That all started in the department. Up to that point in time, rental rates were based upon subjectivity. And they professionalized it so that it had to be equal to going market rates. And so rental rates in government housing went way up really quickly. And there was a big response by employees who lived in government housing.

Phil Francis: And the Yosemite Tenants Association filed a lawsuit in Yosemite. It had been ongoing. And my predecessor was one of the main causes of that lawsuit because of the way he handled implementing the new rates.

Phil Francis: One of the things that I did there was I decided to fix it. We got the chief of maintenance and the buildings and utilities foreman and the housing officer and people from the Yosemite Tenants Association and a handful of other people who live in government housing. We went on a weekend retreat. And when we finished up, we fixed it. It went away. It had been going on for seven years. It was a simple issue, and the issue was, people didn't feel they were getting value for the increased amount. Everybody had always assumed that the problem was the rates were too high. That wasn't it. They were paying more money but when something went wrong, maintenance never showed up! They would never be fixed. If the screen door had a hole in it, a maintenance person would be sent there to fix something else. The resident was like, "Hey, could you fix this screen door?" And they wouldn't! They couldn't. They weren't given the authority to. So, we fixed that.

Phil Francis: So, we had the annual work plan posted for each of the districts, so that everybody knew where their project stood at their house. We required the maintenance folks to address everybody's needs. This was an interesting thing is that we had really serious problems and we had other problems. So, we had category A, B and C. A being really big problems, B being, less important issues, and C being the holes in the screen.

Phil Francis: I changed something else there and that was we were going to do more than just the A category issues. The things that drive people crazy are often the little things. So, we're going to do some of each. You know, we'll do more As than Bs and more Bs than Cs, but we were going to do some Cs. So, we did that, and that helped resolve the seven-year problem.

Phil Francis: Doing the customer service training and measuring people's performance based upon customer service feedback completely changed the dynamic within the park so that people started being more consistent. We put teams of people together and they had to talk about the kind of phone calls they got from the field. What are the questions, what are the answers? Making sure people are on the same page, giving the same answers. We did a lot of work, a lot of work, trying to improve customer service in the administrative field.

Lu Ann Jones: I'm going to ask, do you know what time it is?

Phil Francis: I do.

Thea Garrett: I think it's probably about 10:30.

Phil Francis: 10:30, right on the button.

Lu Ann Jones: We've got at least another hour. Fabulous. Excellent.

Phil Francis: I should turn this down.

Lu Ann Jones: I think we may be coming to a, for somebody who's had your career, this probably seems like a routine kind of question. I'm always interested, you come into a difficult situation like that. How do you begin to turn things around? I mean, people must have been just cranky. How do you not only just in the job performance, but just in the general atmosphere?

Phil Francis: I guess the first thing I did was, maybe one of the best moves I've made was I decided to live, as a member of the management team, I decided to live in the south end of the park. In Wawona. No one had ever done that before. No member of the management team had ever lived at Wawona before.

Lu Ann Jones: And what was the significance of living in the south end?

Phil Francis: Well, you know, most people lived either in the valley or down in El Portal. Wawona was just being ignored. So, I thought well that's not right. We ought to

have somebody down there, and so I went down there, and so on the way to work in the mornings, I would stop by and have coffee with the maintenance crew or the rangers or whatever. And I would ask them, how are we doing? What are your problems? What are your issues? And so, wherever I went in the park, I would ask people; if I saw people working on the side of the road, I'd stop and talk to them.

Phil Francis: My grandfather, who ran a mill, had about 900 employees. He owned the mill. Every Friday he would walk around the mill, talking to employees. I think it was Tom Peters said in one of his book, managing by wandering around, MWBA. So, I did that. I did that. I would learn what the issues were. And from learning what the issues were, and of course I'd go back and double check it all, that helped me decide what my agenda would be. Then I had that decision making model that I used from day one. And then the leadership stuff, turning the pyramids upside down, turning them on their side, you know? And I just began making a list of things that I wanted to accomplish.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you get pushback from employees who, even if it was dysfunctional, they were used to that dysfunction and they resisted change?

Phil Francis: Oh, sure. Some of my staff. Sure. Sure. Absolutely. Some people felt that we should just tell people what to do and some people actually had as part of their philosophy, just say no. I said, "You can't say no. The only time you can say no is with my approval." I used to teach this in a class. You can say no, but always put a comma after the no, not a period. And, but here's how. No, we can't do it the way you've suggested, but here are ways that you can accomplish it. So, you can say no, but you've got to put a comma after it. And I did that first at Shenandoah. And Bill Wade still talks about that. That I wouldn't let people say no.

Phil Francis: We had some amazing personnel issues in Yosemite. Oh, my gosh. We had an occasion where we had two people, a man and a woman, both of ethnic minorities. They were neighbors in government housing. And the man was a single parent, the woman was a single parent, and their kids were friends, but—

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Phil Francis: —the man would drink too much, and he'd smoke pot, and the woman worked in the ranger operations. The woman's daughter was visiting with the man's daughter. She was 13 or 14, I believe. So, he held her down on the ground and fondled her. She got up, went into the bathroom, locked her door, and then when she thought it was safe enough, bolted out the door.

Phil Francis: He was arrested by the sheriff's office. He was taken to jail. He was released. This all happened off duty. It happened in government housing, though. But government housing in Yosemite is like a town. I mean, we issued utility bills.

We resolved property disputes between people, my division did. So it was much like a town, and we were the city government.

Phil Francis: When this kind of an event happens in a city, you don't kick the person out of your town. And then the question arose, what should we do with this guy? His former wife did absolutely nothing with regard to – he had custody of his daughter. His former wife did nothing. There was no notoriety to the government, you know. Was the incident egregious enough for him to be fired? There's certain criteria you must meet. And then the minority situation. Because both were filing EEO complaints against us. (laughs) Holy cow, what a mess! And we resolved that, but it was tricky.

Lu Ann Jones: How was it resolved?

Phil Francis: Well, we took the guy, we kicked him out of government housing, kicked him out of the park. We did that. And we moved him so that he would receive close oversight in his job. Because the maintenance division wanted to keep him because he was otherwise a good employee. It was not a perfect answer. There was no perfect answer. There was no perfect answer. Had we fired him, then his little girl, I mean, would have a jobless father who probably wouldn't be able to get another job. Sometimes you have really, really hard ones, and that was one of the really hard ones.

Phil Francis: Another time, another event occurred where one of our best employees in maintenance had taken $1500 worth of tires from our automotive shop and sold them and kept the money. We caught him and we fired him.

Phil Francis: Once when I was doing my wandering around, I went into the automotive shop in the valley and said, "Well, how are you?"

Phil Francis: And they said, "Why did you guys fire this guy?"

Phil Francis: I said, "Because he stole things. Felony theft. And he occupies a position of trust." Right?

Phil Francis: They said, "Well, he just happened to get caught." So, you think about that, I mean, what does that say to you about the culture of that part of the organization? So, we had to go in and clean up that operation. So, every park I worked in, every single one, we had issues.

Phil Francis: So anyway, Yosemite was great fun. I got involved with the rangers, the Fraternal Order of Police. I would go to their meetings. That was unusual to have management present for that. I would talk to the search and rescue folks quite a bit. You know, had a terribly difficult job. They were not only the law enforcement staff and the search and rescue staff, they were also the coroner. If someone died, they would have to handle the body. We had these body boxes in Yosemite Valley. And when people would fall, whether it was over Yosemite Falls or Vernal or Nevada Falls or climbing El Cap, you knew it was pretty

horrific. And some of those folks would take pictures. Of course they had to take pictures as part of their criminal investigations. But some people would actually keep those pictures.

Phil Francis: I remember showing interest in their work and a guy brought three big notebooks full of pictures and plopped them on my desk and went from one terrible picture to the next, showing me what they had to endure.

Phil Francis: So, you know, that wandering around was really important. And getting to know what people were doing. And to better understand, you know, what they were facing, was really important. And that came from critical incident stress debriefing training in Jeffrey Mitchell. Because he said, "You can only be a debriefer if you go to the scene and actually see what's happening. You've got to read the newspaper articles. You've got to insert yourself in that situation." So, I did that in my management job, too, because I thought that made good sense.

Phil Francis: So, I stayed there a couple of years. Let's see if there's anything else in Yosemite. Gosh, what a place. It's the most environmentally sensitive place I've ever been to. I really became interested in natural resource management in that park. Since I had majored in premed, I'd taken biology and botany and zoology and entomology in college, so I became very, very interested in natural resource management. The riparian zones were really in terrible shape in Yosemite. I remember we brought in guys from, congressional staffers to look at that, hoping to get more money for the park.

Phil Francis: Mike Finley, great leader, learned a lot from Mike. Very strong. Very resource-oriented. Protect the resource, number one, always. He had a certain amount of Teflon to him. He could do things that other people could never get away with.

Lu Ann Jones: Why do you think that was?

Phil Francis: I'm not sure. But he's just very skilled. Very smart. For example, when he was at Everglades [National Park], on one day he's cutting a deal with the governor about protection of the Everglades. The next day, Mike is working with the Justice Department to sue the governor. And one day he calls up Bob Baker, the regional director in Atlanta and tells him, "Well, I just had lunch with the president." He called him *after* the fact. Mike had met a fishing guide. George H. Herbert Walker Bush was down fishing, and the fishing guide somehow helped Mike onto the boat and had lunch with the president. Mike was amazing. He was very, very close to the Secretary of the Interior at that time. Anyway, I became good friends with Mike. My last six months in Yosemite I was the acting deputy superintendent. That was interesting. I didn't take on any real initiatives during that time because that was a much bigger job than I'd ever, ever had. So, I did a lot of learning.

Lu Ann Jones: What type of responsibilities did that give you?

Phil Francis: So that was the operational chief, you know, for all the divisions. We had a really strong management team. Kevin Cann as the chief of maintenance who became the deputy superintendent there later. Roger Rudolph, you know, was our chief ranger. B.J. Griffin, who later became a regional director in two regions was our assistant superintendent. We just had a really, really, really strong team. So, it was easy. We would have meetings and talk about issues together.

Phil Francis: On Fridays, this was sort of neat. We had a thing called the Dead Poet's Society meeting. We would buy pizza and beer and we would go to someone's house, and we would tease whoever had taken themselves too seriously. Len McKenzie was often a target because Len was our chief of interpretation, great guy. We had nicknames for people. It was a great time. A really, really, really strong, cohesive group of people working for the same cause.

Phil Francis: The employees there were amazing, though. We had one employee that was breaking into files at night. Getting information and feeding it to the local newspaper. We had a situation where we had one dead tree that needed to be taken down because it was leaning toward a housing complex at Crane Flat. And we sent a crew up to take the tree down. It was potential habitat for an owl. We had sent people up to look for the owl, and there were no owls, and we were going to take the tree down. But chained to the tree that day was a guy dressed in an owl outfit. There were protestors and there were newspapers, and TV cameras were rolling. And we arrested that guy. Had to cut the chains off.

Phil Francis: Then later while I was acting, later in the year when it was winter and a quiet day, I quietly called and said, "Go cut the tree down today." And they did. They got it down.

Phil Francis: But people would fight over adding 10 square feet of development footprint in Yosemite Valley. It was very, very, very sensitive. I had never seen anything like that. It changed the way I looked at parks, that experience in Yosemite.

Lu Ann Jones: Can you articulate exactly how it changed?

Phil Francis: I just became much more conscious of that part of our purpose, of protecting the natural, cultural resources and wildlife therein, by such means and in such manner as to leave them unimpaired for future generations. And part of the Redwood Act which says that management should do nothing in derogation of park values.

Phil Francis: So, when I left there, you know, to go to the regional office in Santa Fe, it really served me well. And when I went to the Smokies and then to Blue Ridge Parkway, it even served me better. But I didn't pick that up so much at Shenandoah. Because the Park Service was going through a transition then, still, toward better resource management. Now we still had not done a very good job. Richard Sellers wrote about that in his book, of course. And so that was a big change in my life. Looking at the resource management.

Phil Francis: NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] took a whole different meaning. And Section 106. The way we used to deal with Section 106 compliance would be to put in a water line and if we happened across something, you know, we might stop the project and then do compliance at that point. Not before. It was always during. And maybe not during. So, the whole compliance issue had raised an importance to me during that time in Yosemite.

Phil Francis: So, then I moved to Santa Fe. I had only been in Yosemite for a couple of years. I became the associate regional director for administration in Santa Fe. I think I was 39 years old. (laughs) Santa Fe was a great town. I love Santa Fe. It was the best place I'd ever lived up to that point from a personal standpoint. It's just a great town. The culture there, the diversity of people there. The food. Oh! And I loved the landscape, that Southwest landscape. What a place! I lived in an adobe-like house, looking house. I fell in love with Southwestern food. And just couldn't get enough of it.

Lu Ann Jones: Red or green?

Phil Francis: Red or green? Both was my answer. (laughter) Yeah. And gosh, one of my favorite places was off of Guadalupe Street. God, I love it, great local place. But anyway. And I worked there for John Cook. And Rick Smith, who had been my instructor at Albright during the eight weeks there. We were now team members. He was an associate regional director for resources. Ernie Quintana was the associate regional director for park operations. Doug Ferris, who became later superintendent of C&O Canal, was the chief of planning. Mary Scott, she was Mary Gibson then. She was Doug's assistant. Of course, she retired as superintendent of Grand Teton. Mary Bradford was a deputy regional director. And Mary had a law degree from Stanford, another degree from Georgetown. Hmm. I think that was most of them. John Crowley was our personnel officer, worked for me. John was a great personnel officer. Super guy. But it was an interesting time. There was sort of an inner circle and outer circle there in Santa Fe. And that was just the way John Cook operated. We met, had our management team meetings three times a week.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Phil Francis: Seven-fifteen in the morning. (laughter) Yeah. We supervised, I think, 38 parks in the Southwest. All the way over to New Orleans. You know, Padre Islands, Big Bend, Guadalupe. I mean, it was a neat place.

Phil Francis: I had a staff of about, oh, gosh, I think there was about 60 people there. There we, I refined my idea about customer service even further. I bought everybody in my division a customer service book, the one by Carl Sewell, *Customers for Life.* At the back of each chapter are questions, and if you answer the questions then and put it all together for all the chapters, then you have a customer service plan. I used that book and taught them myself about customer service. And before we started, we did a one-day session on creativity. And we used examples like the

person who invented the bicycle seat that had two parts, you know, as opposed to the one solid seat. And the one about the yellow sticky notes.

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm. Post-it notes.

Phil Francis: Post-it notes. You know, that was a mistake. By 3M. They were trying to develop an adhesive that really worked well, and it was a failure. But they took that failure and made it into something good.

Phil Francis: So, we talked about being creative. I had everybody think of the best customer service example they'd ever had. And then how they could improve on it.

Phil Francis: We had an employee at Yosemite who was a law enforcement ranger. She was driving in the south district there in Yosemite. Came across a couple whose car had broken down. This was my example to them. She stops to help, and they explain that they're on their way to a reunion. They hadn't seen their family members in 40 years, and they were going to miss it because it was going to take so long for someone to come up and tow the car and get it fixed and so forth.

Phil Francis: This ranger took that couple to her house and gave them her car. (laughs) Gave them her car! And they drove down and got to the reunion. Now that's pretty good customer service. That's pretty good. I'm not sure it's so smart, but it was pretty good customer service.

Phil Francis: So, we went through that exercise. We sent out surveys to all the parks. We collected data from the surveys. We graded people on their performance plans in part by how much their division improved from one year to the next. And it completely changed how people did business. They tried to make their customers happy and be responsive and be consistent and courteous and so forth.

Phil Francis: Working there during the Cook years was – I mean, John had a very different style. Once again, very strong leader. Knew more about the national parks than anybody I'd ever met. Made some mistakes in my view. Had and inner circle and an outer circle. I didn't think that worked very well. We, once again, had significant personnel issues. One of my colleagues, whose name I won't mention, was found guilty of inappropriate behavior at work. And John, he was really funny. John hated conflict. So, on three different occasions when it was really his job to deal with employees who had not done the right thing, he sent me to talk to them. (laughs) So I'm dealing with one of my peers, and telling him that he's going to be suspended for 30 days. And that he's going to have to go home and tell his wife what's happened, and he's going to have to go to counseling. The counselor is going to have to, before he can come back after 30 days, going to have to certify that he's safe.

Phil Francis: Had a superintendent strangle one of his employees. Didn't hurt here, but scared her, over a dispute, a work dispute. We had a superintendent that drank too much and we had to fire him. When you get to the regional office level, you know, you

learn that the parks are full of human beings, with all the fallacies that human beings have. We're not exempt in the Park Service.

Thea Garrett: Was there a shift to the way that personal issues were handled over the course of your career? Or was there—

Phil Francis: Oh, yeah. That's a really good question. In the early days, everything was handled administratively. It was all handled within the personnel system. You know, we might suspend someone, write a letter of warning, etcetera. In the latter days, we'd send a law enforcement person to investigate. So, it became criminal. In that case that happened in that park regarding the superintendent strangling one of his employees in government quarters after hours over a dispute on the job, you know, we sent the law enforcement people in there. Because that's assault.

Phil Francis: But back in the old days, that would not have been handled that way. It would have been completely administratively handled. So, yes. And I think that what has happened in my opinion is that we have gone maybe a bit too far. We were real quick to send the law enforcement folks in in cases where I don't think they should have been there.

Lu Ann Jones: When did that change?

Phil Francis: Oh, in the late '80s, early '90s. There's actually a document that was sent out to all the parks which made the process official, that we would send law enforcement staff to investigate those kind of cases. That may have occurred even later in the '90s. But it began sooner than that.

Phil Francis: Anyway, Santa Fe was a wonderful place. I walked in the office one day. Rick Smith and I were called to the regional director's office. Rick's just a great guy, great Park Service employee. John Cook asked us to write a reorganization plan for the National Park Service. Back in those early '90s, you know, when Al Gore and Bill Clinton were in office, Al Gore had a report about cutting red tape and producing results. And you may remember Roger Kennedy was the director at that time. And the National Park Service lost 1,700, I believe it was, permanent positions. And Roger decided that those permanent positions were not going to come from the field. That those permanent positions were going to be taken from the Washington office. I think like 800 jobs out of the regional offices, or just Washington office. It was a huge number. And we were going to reduce the number of regions from 10 to seven.

Phil Francis: John and Rick and I that morning wrote a plan for reorganizing the National Park Service that included keeping the old Santa Fe Trail Building, our regional office. The Park Service owned that building, and it's quite the cultural asset.

Lu Ann Jones: It's a beautiful building.

Phil Francis: It's a beautiful building. However, we lost. Other people had written plans. And the Santa Fe, that was one of the regional offices that closed. So that great team, I

thought we had a great team and were doing some really good work. Helping to support the parks.

Phil Francis: I'm going to tell you another good story about Santa Fe. But it was unfortunate. I disagree to this day about closing Santa Fe. Because that region was really unique. I mean, it was culturally different. And I felt should have been, and it had all small parks. And they needed that assistance.

Phil Francis: One of the exercises that we took while I was there was, we asked the parks how well we were performing as a region. Not only in my division, but as a region, and performing advisory assistance to the parks. And if we weren't, what did they recommend we do in terms of staffing? And had we done what the parks wanted us to do, we would have added positions to the regional office. Like 60 more, we had fewer than 260 employees, and the parks actually needed 60 more to help them do their jobs out in the field. But instead, almost all of those jobs were cut.

Phil Francis: So, while I was there in Santa Fe, we had the first administrative conference they had had in a bunch of years. And at the administrative conference, we had a, you know, AOs from each of the 38 parks and staff from the regional office. Always in the past, the regional office would go to these meetings and they would speak to the parks. We turned that around. We had the parks speak to us. Tell us how we were doing and that they needed from us. What were the problems that got in the way?

Phil Francis: I remember putting some flip charts on the wall. We identified issues that the parks had. Now we at regional office had our own issues, too. But we had the parks do that. We decided what the most important ones were. By voting. With little dots, you know. We all put dots on flip chart paper before.

Phil Francis: I created three zones for the region. I put one of the AOs in charge of each zone, and that person's job was to be in touch with all the parks within their zone to help each other and to help themselves. And learn from each other. And one of the people who was leading that zone, which later led all three zones, was a woman named Mary Bomar, who—

[END OF TRACK 5]

[START OF TRACK 6]

Phil Francis: —became director. And you could tell Mary had a lot of talent. Very, very smart. Loved parks. Really cared about people. Great communicator. I had a Halloween party at my house and Mary Bomar was in town. And I invited Mary Bomar to my party. She was a GS-9, she may have become a management assistant at San Antonio Missions by that time. And there was John Cook. I introduced Mary Bomar to John Cook, at her request. That helped Mary go from being a management assistant/administrative officer to her first superintendency at Oklahoma City Memorial, which is sort of interesting.

Phil Francis: So, Mary often would say when she spoke to superintendents, and she did this at an all-superintendents meeting out in Utah, and I was there she called me up and gave me an award for helping her become director. (laughter) But once again, and that was my last administrative job.

Phil Francis: I left there in '94, and it was hard for me to leave. But it was because of the downsizing. My division was being essentially abolished. We were going from 60 employees to five. There wasn't going to be much for me to do. Jerry Rogers was coming into the office to run it and asked me if I would stay and I said no, because I knew I would be really bored with five people left.

Phil Francis: So, Karen Wade called. Karen Wade was superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains. She knew about the downsizing. Karen and I knew each other at Shenandoah. Karen had been an administrative assistant there, management assistant. She and I and an assistant chief ranger, Bill Pierce, were sort of rabble rousers at Shenandoah. We tried to change that place.

Phil Francis: Karen had an assistant superintendent of the Smokies, a guy named Frank Pridemore, but Frank was going to be leaving, she said. Don't know if he knew that or not. But she wanted me to come be her deputy at the Smokies. So that's what happened. That happened in, I think I arrived in October of 1994.

Phil Francis: I'm not sure Karen really knew what to do with me. We weren't clear about how we were going to divide, you know, the responsibilities in the Smokies. We had two states. We had three different congressmen and of course four senators. We had boundary issues. We had long-standing issues with an eastern band of Cherokee. We had a 1982 general management plan provisions of which had not been implemented. Karen, I think, decided we were going to implement the GMP.

Phil Francis: We got the GMP out and we made a list of the issues, and we picked which ones that we were going to tackle. The first one that we were going to tackle was Elkmont. Elkmont was an inholding within the park at one time. It was occupied with cabins, very rustic hand-built cabins. Very unique. Owned by a lot of wealthy folks in Knoxville. People who were members of the Cherokee Country Club set. The general management plan called for the removal of all those cabins at Elkmont and to restore that area to a natural area, like the rest of the Smokies had been. The natural resources there – remember the Yosemite piece, this is important – because the natural resource piece there was of world importance. Very rare natural lands. And regionally important structures.

Phil Francis: We're torn with what to do. You know, should we do what the general management plan says? Or should we keep a representative sample? Should we keep them all? Should we turn them into concessions? What should we do? How were we going to protect those natural resources, too?

Phil Francis: So, we started down a compliance process. And it turned into an EIS [Environmental Impact Statement], it was so controversial. There was so much

political clout involved. And the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. And the, ACHP were all involved. The Washington office. Everybody was involved in this issue. The natural resource folks were involved. We held a conference in the park talking about what happens when you have both cultural and natural resources occupy the same place? How do you manage that? I was a speaker at that. It was a very, very challenging and long, long, long process, to come to a final decision. In fact, it took over ten years to come to a decision on what to do in Elkmont. So very controversial. A lot of political weight.

Phil Francis: People like Sandy Beall, who is the founder of Ruby Tuesdays, his first job was at the Wonderland Hotel in Elkmont, the old hotel there. Called me one day and wanted to rebuild the Wonderland Hotel. He was going to pay for it. Except he wanted to alter it and not make it the way it was. He couldn't do that. So that was one issue.

Phil Francis: Another issue we decided to work on, and this was, Karen and I decided that I would work in North Carolina, I would deal with the North Carolina issues. She would deal with the Tennessee issues. From time to time, we might have to switch off, depending upon whose skill sets matched the problem, or who had time and who didn't.

Phil Francis: So, I went over to North Carolina and the North Shore Road issue. There's a road in Swain County, North Carolina, that enters the park, and it goes, oh, gosh, just a few, seven miles, I think and then it stops. There's a tunnel, then it stops. So, the local folks call that the road to nowhere. So, the original plan was to build that road, it was going to be like 28 miles long and go over to Fontana Dam and go through property in the Smokies on the North Shore of Fontana Lake. Now I'm trying to think. I think around 30,000 acres of land had been acquired by TVA when they needed to build the dam, help support the Second World War. Some of that land was flooded by Fontana when they built the dam, for hydroelectric power. Other parts of that land were not flooded. And so, TVA gave that part of the land to the National Park Service.

Phil Francis: One piece of land that was flooded contained old Highway 288. Swain County had a bond indebtedness to pay for that road of $750,000, and they lost use of this road. But they had to continue to pay off the bond. So, they were always upset about that.

Phil Francis: So, the idea was to build a replacement road through the park, going through the old communities on the North Shore, all the way over to Fontana Dam. Back in the '80s, and the '70s, there were disputes about whether or not that road should be built. There was an agreement signed by the secretary of the interior in the '80s that had 10 or 12 provisions. One of the provisions was that the road would be rebuilt subject to appropriations by the Congress. Well, the Congress appropriated money for the first two sections, and that represented the seven miles. But they didn't appropriate any more money because when the road got to that seventh

mile, the end of the seventh mile, it ran into what's called Anakeesta Rock, which is acidic rock. And when exposed to air and rain, the acid would kill plant life and would kill aquatic life. So, they stopped the project.

Phil Francis: So, to me, who likes a good challenge, you know, went over to Swain County. I met with the county manager, Linda Cables, and said to Linda, said, "I'm going to be working in North Carolina. I want to have a monthly meeting. Do you have meeting space where people from this county and the adjacent county can come ask me questions or raise issues?"

Phil Francis: And she says, "Yes, you can use our room."

Phil Francis: So, the very first night I went, I think there were five people from the county that showed up. One of those people raised the issue about the North Shore Road. I knew nothing about it. So, I said, "Well, that's very interesting. maybe we can resolve this." I really did not appreciate how difficult this issue was.

Phil Francis: So, a fellow named Claude Douthit who's now deceased, heard that I was there and that they had raised the North Shore Road issue. He came to my office with a stack of papers about a foot thick that had all the history. Claude had been working on that issue since the '50s. He had been a TVA employee. He'd retired. He sat down with me I don't know how many times to explain all the nuances of the North Shore Road. He was against building the road, and it took me years to really understand why. I finally figured it out. People who had once lived on the North Shore of Fontana were displaced by the lake when the TVA bought the land. There were a lot of graves there on the north shore. And people were given a choice. They could have their loved ones be relocated, and many were. There's a graveyard in Bryson City, North Carolina, where those graves are. Or you could leave them there. Many chose to leave their loved ones in place. There's 155 or so cemeteries in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and every year, people come, and they decorate those graves, put flowers on the graves, and visit their loved ones.

Phil Francis: In many places in the park, you can drive to it. But on the North Shore Road, you could not. The park had been providing annual trips via boat and then truck all along these old roads on the North Shore of Fontana in order to go to all these grave sites. People wanted to be able to go whenever they wanted to. And that's why they were advocating to build a road back into the north shore of the park so that they could have access those old cemeteries.

Phil Francis: So, what was formed was a North Shore Cemetery Association, and they took on the National Park Service over building that road. So this thing, this very innocent meeting with great intentions led to the reopening of a big sore wound in the community. And it led to an EIS. It led to an exhaustive study, lots of analysis. Public meetings. The cost of the road was going to be over 600 million dollars. One side wanted to get a cash settlement. The other side insisted on having the road. The National Park Service really wanted neither one. But of the two, we

opted for a 52-million-dollar settlement. But that is subject to the appropriations by the Congress. The Congress has appropriated only a small portion of that to date is still an outstanding issue. I can't tell you, dozens of public meetings that I stood in front of irate groups talking about the north shore of the Great Smokies, Fontana Lake.

Phil Francis: There's some sensitive things here. But the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee for National Parks was the congressman for that district. Charles Taylor. And Charles Taylor would call me to his office in Asheville and tell me that we had to build a North Shore Road. And even when we began the NEPA process, he called me over to his office one time. And he said to me, "Phil, I want you to go build the road."

Phil Francis: They had appropriated 16 million dollars. He and Senator Helms, Jesse Helms, said, "We want you to go build the road."

Phil Francis: And I said, "Congressman, I can't do that. We have to go through the environmental compliance process. We're going to do an EIS. It's going to take four years to do that." With me was a guy from the Federal Highway Administration. Jack Van Dop. I can't remember Jack's last name. Jack and I were there.

Phil Francis: The congressman got really upset with me. He says, "You go build that road." He says, "You're going to get sued either way. Go build that road."

Phil Francis: I said, "Congressman, I will not do that. We're going to go through the compliance process."

Phil Francis: When you start telling the chairman of your appropriations committee for an entire agency, "no," you know, you typically would have prepared the director and the secretary for that. But I did not know it was going to happen.

Phil Francis: So, within minutes after our meeting, I'm sure he was on the phone calling the director's office, Fran Mainella, talking about that damn acting superintendent. But I wasn't going to do it. I didn't care. They were going to have to go through the compliance process.

Phil Francis: Fran Mainella came down to the park later. And we went on a tour with Congressman Taylor, Charles Taylor. I think she ended up staying in his house. So, the job came open. I would had been acting superintendent for a couple of years. Karen Wade had left by this time. And I was a candidate. And a lot of people in the local community was advocating for me to get the job. For some reason, I didn't get the job.

Phil Francis: Now, Mike Tollefson came. And Mike Tollefson was a great fit. So, we had the EIS going for Elkmont. We had a second EIS going now for the North Shore Road. So, what were we going to do with our spare time? So, we started a third EIS. We decided to do a regional transportation plan. The Smokies is like a hub of

a spoked wheel. You've got people coming from Atlanta and Charlotte and Knoxville and Ohio and down Interstate 81, and up 75. They're all converging on Gatlinburg and the park. The Smokies was the most visited national park in the country. Not the most visited unit of the National Park Service--that was the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was 56 national parks at the time.

Phil Francis: So, we began working with the state of Tennessee and the state of North Carolina and the metropolitan planning offices and the Federal Highway Administration to do a regional transportation plan. And one component of that had to do with the Foothills Parkway in the Smokies, which led all the way from Interstate 40 for 70 miles through the ridge tops. Only a few miles of it had been built. We decided that we wanted to do a study and get public input to see if we should finish the remainder of that road. That was going to be hundreds of millions of dollars.

Phil Francis: But we also looked back in the park history and noticed that there was once a plan for a road around the park. And so, we wanted to, you know, look at the regional transportation project. So, we worked with North Carolina, their transportation center, University of Tennessee Transportation Center, and we began looking at Cades Cove. Have you been to Cades Cove? It gets two million visitors a year. It's 11-mile circular road within the park. Beautiful. Farmland. You saw deer, and you saw bear there. Kids would picnic there. Camp there. It's just, there's more visitors, at the time, there were about as many visitors to Cades Cove as to Yellowstone.

Phil Francis: We began looking at doing a transportation system. Because it could take, for the 11 miles, it could take three and four hours to get around it. So, we began looking at a transportation system. We began looking at parking lots outside the park and inside the park, and how to connect to connecting roads. And working with local communities to have bus systems. We looked at rail. We looked at monorail. We looked at closing and making it bicycle-only. We looked at everything.

Phil Francis: So, guess what? We end up with EIS number three going on at one time. The Eastern Band of Cherokees decided that, and this was nothing unusual – from time to time the Eastern Band would talk to the Park Service about acquiring and using more land inside the park. And the tribe had opened its first casino and had made 30 million dollars or so from that casino. And it was a very small casino. [loud noise, vacuuming]

Lu Ann Jones: I'm going to go see how long the vacuuming is going to last.

Phil Francis: Okay. Do I need to quit in two minutes?

Lu Ann Jones: No. [unclear]

Phil Francis: Okay. I haven't even gotten to the Parkway yet. (laughs)

Thea Garrett: I think it recently had the casino at 30 million dollars?

Phil Francis: Thirty million dollars. And so, they had resources. So, they hired consultants. They were going to build a bigger casino, which turned into a casino with the biggest hotel in North Carolina attached to it. They hired Harrah's to manage the casino. Once the casino was up and operating, they came to the park and said, "We want to exchange land with you. And we want," and here again was a natural resource lands issue, some world-class natural resource lands, "we want those lands, and we want to build our school system on those lands. Because we need the lands where the existing schools are for business reasons."

Phil Francis: And so, we enter into EIS number four. All going on at once. I led at least 75 public meetings. Some had fistfights, protestors. It was unbelievable, during my time there. We reintroduced elk, first time since 1830. It was a busy time. Eleven years in the Smokies.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Phil Francis: Eleven years. I was acting [superintendent] twice for about three years. Our partnership program expanded greatly. In 1994, when I arrived, we got about thirty thousand dollars in cash. I think last year it was more like 2.6 million. We changed how we did business with our cooperating association, which was giving us just a small chunk of change. I remember talking to their board and saying, "We need to change our formula."

Phil Francis: They said, "Well how much do you want us to give?"

Phil Francis: I said, "Well, you're giving about two percent, one percent now. I want you to give us 17 percent." And they did. They did. So instead of giving us a small amount of money, which was thirty thousand dollars, they were giving us about a million dollars instead.

Phil Francis: So, we completely transformed the partnership program. We started the first volunteer program. We went from a handful of volunteers to two thousand volunteers. We created the first partnership position in the park.

Lu Ann Jones: You know, I guess I'm going to stop right there for a second.

Phil Francis: All right.

Lu Ann Jones: How about if you kind of wind up? I was going to go down to the association [meeting]—

Phil Francis: Okay.

Lu Ann Jones: —because Erica had asked me to say something about the oral history project. So, do you want to wind up the Smokies and the Blue Ridge Parkway?

Phil Francis: How much time? Five minutes? Ten minutes?

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I'm going to run out, then if I could get back. But if I don't get back before you all finish up, here's the release form.

Phil Francis: No problem. I hope I've addressed what you wanted.

Lu Ann Jones: It's very good.

Thea Garrett: Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: It's excellent. So, yes, let me just duck out for a little bit.

Phil Francis: All right. Well, we'll move on to the, well, one of the things that I think I learned in the Smokies during those four EISs is that while we may strongly believe in protecting resources and the environmental process, the political realities that occur in Washington were more important than I thought. I learned that lesson the hard way.

Phil Francis: I went to Washington while I was in the Smokies. I was meeting with the director, one of the directors. There was the chief of the Eastern Band of the Cherokees there. Standing in the director's conference room were six paid consultants. Lobbyists. High-powered lobbyists. What I later learned was is that the director before the EIS had ever been done had already agreed to the exchange. So, we spent a lot of money, a lot of anguish, for nothing. For nothing. It was one of the most frustrating times of my life was to do what I thought was right, to protect park resources, protect the park, only to have it taken away. Very, very difficult. Yeah.

Phil Francis: So, then I went to the Blue Ridge Parkway. I think I was maybe superintendent number six. Several superintendents had been superintendents there for a long time. Gary Everhardt for 23 years. Sam Williams for 23 years. So, but I was there in the Parkway, and it was probably—

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Phil Francis: —my most fun job was being superintendent of Blue Ridge Parkway. What a great park. Biodiverse. Great stories. We had 4,000 neighbors. We went through 28 counties. We had nine different members of Congress we dealt with – the House and four senators. I don't know how many dozens of communities. Twelve planning organizations. We were the headwaters of like 16 different watersheds. Air quality issues. The most visited unit in the national parks. We had 20 percent of all the tunnels in the national park system. We had eight visitor centers. I mean, it's just a huge array of assets and challenges.

Phil Francis: But I wanted to speak really about one thing in particular with regard to the Blue Ridge Parkway. And that has to do with this anniversary, the 75th anniversary of the Blue Ridge Parkway. When I got to the parkway in 2005 and I was appointed,

I was offered a job, I think, in October and we made it effective Christmas Day. I thought it would be a good Christmas present.

Phil Francis: Soon thereafter, once I knew I had the job on a permanent basis, I pulled my management team together. I wanted to identify what the issues were on the parkway. Let's make a list, and let's decide which ones are going to be most important, where we're going to focus our time and energy.

Phil Francis: I put on the flipchart paper, the 75th anniversary celebration. So, we had the little dots again, and this time to vote. We all voted, and the 75th anniversary got one vote. Mine. (laughs) They wanted to spend their time, because they were very busy and underfunded because of all the budget cuts that had been occurring up to that time. We had done a study that showed the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park were the two most underfunded parks in the entire nation. Yet they're the most visited. I didn't want to have them go through this process and identify priorities and then for me to change it right off the bat. So, what I did was, I began working with our partners and we created a nonprofit organization, a coalition of communities and tourism folks and nonprofit partners and we created a 33-person board to plan and execute our 75th anniversary. We went to each state, and we got an employee assigned from North Carolina to work for this board. We got an employee from the city of Roanoke in Virginia. Penny Lloyd, and she and Leesa Brandon were the workers. Very impressive, the former superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway became chairman of the board.

Phil Francis: So, we planned this huge party up and down the parkway. It lasted for over a year. We did, I think there were two different documentaries done on the parkway during that time. We had international visitors and publications. We spent over a million dollars' worth of advertising that we were able to raise because of this partnership.

Phil Francis: Meanwhile, our staff, who didn't have time, were able to focus their efforts and energies on the daily running of the park. It really worked out well.

Phil Francis: So, this whole idea of partnerships which began to grow back in the early '90s, and even when I was in Yosemite because we had some nonprofit partners back then. Bob Hansen and the Yosemite Fund had begun their work, good work. In Yosemite. That's my first exposure to the nonprofit partners.

Phil Francis: But anyway, it was just a huge success. We had a great time on the parkway and involving the communities and protecting the parkway and protecting the lands and the viewscapes. Because most of the viewscapes on the parkway are not owned by the federal government. So, we had to work with neighbors to protect those views. We passed through national forests that we had partnerships with the US Forest Service and so forth. But anyway, it was a great experience.

Phil Francis: One other thing that we did on the parkway that was a little different, maybe worth mentioning, is that we changed the definition of our management team. The parkway is so linear. It's 469 miles long. We had 16 offices up and down the parkway. Our employees are spread out. We had district rangers and district maintenance people in each of the districts. I decided that our headquarters team, being so far away from the field, couldn't fully appreciate what the field managers were going through. They really didn't understand. So, I made members, the district managers, members of our management team. So, every month we would have a phone call and we'd go up the parkway, district by district, talking to them about their issues, what they were facing, how we could help them. Which gave our management team, I hope, a better understanding of what they were facing.

Phil Francis: Each year, when it was goal setting time, we would bring everybody in and we would organize the goal-setting process so the rangers would meet together, maintenance would meet together, interpreters would meet together, resource management people would meet together. Then they would have to split up and create four interdisciplinary teams, and so that's how we began doing our strategic planning and our annual work plans. So, a big change in the way things have been done there because in the past it was more of a traditional top-down approach. I'm such a strong believer in a bottom-up approach.

Thea Garrett: And you'd been doing throughout your career a lot of integration of different divisions. Where did that really start for you?

Phil Francis: I think at the Chickamauga and Chattanooga. Where I sort of got my fingers involved in informally being the operations person. I mean, it became clear to me then that they needed to work together. They weren't working together because of the personalities, and I tried to force that. But I recognized way back then how important that was. But I wasn't in a position to try to do a lot about it until I got to Yosemite. Then I took it to a different level when I was in the Smokies, and even to a different level when I went to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Phil Francis: And I was always trying to be a strong advocate for more money for the national parks. I was once ordered by Fran Mainella to leave the park, the Smokies, because the National Parks Conservation Association had come in and they were going to do a state of the parks report. In that state of the parks report, a big component of that was budget. I had spoken out to local groups many times about the state of our park, the Smokies. My message was inconsistent with what the Bush administration was communicating during that time. So, I was told to leave the park and not to go back in the park until NPCA left and had finished their presentation. Interesting, huh?

Thea Garrett: It's fascinating. At what point did you start to feel threatened, or the impact of who was in office?

Phil Francis: I think it changed over the years. Back in the early days, the director's position was really a strong position. It's my opinion that it's become much weaker, and

that the power has shifted upward, and there's been more of an emphasis for there to be a one department as opposed to strength at the agency level. So, I guess that probably started changing, it's hard for me to know, because I really wasn't at a place back in the late '70s, early '80s, to see it firsthand. My guess is, it probably started happening when Jim Watt was the Secretary of the Interior, in the early '80s. But the Bush administration, but the Clinton administration, too, to some extent, they really began controlling the message. Now the message is really, really, really controlled. I mean, the White House controls the message. It's amazing how much control there is.

Phil Francis: I think when I was in the Smokies was the first time when we were sent talking points. This is what you're going to say when you're asked these questions. And then later, not only were there talking points, but then there were told that if we got any inquiries, you know, that we were not allowed to speak about those, but to refer the caller to the Washington office, in some cases.

Thea Garrett: What would be an example of the topic that would have to be directed to the White House?

Phil Francis: A budget piece. About the national budgets. The policy change that occurred when Fran was director. Yeah, the messages were very, very, very controlled during those times.

Phil Francis: Of course, some of us, we would talk to NPCA quietly on the side, and they would help us. It's been fun since I've retired because I've continued to speak out. I did a radio show one time. It was a NPR show, and it was about the budget. It was here in North Carolina. Someone from NPR in New York heard it. And the next thing I knew, I was getting called from this New York station, so I did. Then the next thing I knew, I got a phone call from an organization that was promoting funding, adequate funding, for the non-defense discretionary budgets. Next thing I knew, I was doing a press event with other agencies represented, just like the National Institute of Health, Department of Education. So, I did a press thing in Washington and spoke to 200 congressional staffers.

Phil Francis: That led to an invitation to go present to the White House. So, I went to with a group, but I had a chance to talk about the parks, importance of the national parks, to President Obama's staff in the West Wing, in the Roosevelt Room. That was pretty cool.

Thea Garrett: And that was in your retirement?

Phil Francis: Yes. Yes, it was. So that was, and now I'm the vice chairman of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, which is the retiree group. I'm on the board for the Institute at Tremont in the Smokies, which is an environmental education program. I'm on the board for an organization called Discover Life in America, which has found over 900 species new to science in the Smokies. I helped start that way back in the '90s. The goal is to inventory all species of living things in

the park. I'm on that board. On the Southeast Council for National Parks and Conservation Association. And then I found myself on a board for the Clemson University Institute for Parks, and I'm on a curriculum committee. So, I continue to fight for resources for the parks whenever I can.

Thea Garrett: That's an incredible amount of involvement.

Phil Francis: I'm about done, I think.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay.

Phil Francis: And I'm sure you're about done listening to me.

Lu Ann Jones: Where are you all?

Thea Garrett: We were talking about all that's been done since he's retired. And so, reflection of being invited to the White House to talk about the state of the parks.

Phil Francis: Yeah. That was cool. I've had a chance to meet President Obama and Michelle. I met Laura Bush. I've met Bill and Hillary over the years. Once in Costa Rica with the President Clinton and Hillary was there, First Lady at the time. We were there to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Costa Rican parks. They were having a big party. The Costa Rican parks had created their system based upon three parks in the U.S. – the Smokies, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. And so, they invited the superintendents. Karen Wade couldn't go. She sent me. And they were doing an all-taxonomy biodiversity inventory in Costa Rica. Which led to Discover Life in America in the Smokies. But I'm not trying to say that I deserve primary credit. I don't. A guy named Keith Langdon does.

Phil Francis: One other thing in the Smokies. Let me mention that, too. Is that there was an air quality agreement in place between the state of Tennessee and the Department of the Interior. Governor Don Sundquist, at the behest of the Tennessee Council of Business, unilaterally dissolved that agreement. The Smokies had lost 80 percent of its visibility.

Phil Francis: So, I remember walking through Bob Miller's office – he was a public affairs guy – and I said, "Bob, let's take them on. Let's do a press release about this." Just began talking about it. So, this was on a Monday. By Friday, they were drawing, doing cartoons, in *The Tennessean,* the Nashville newspaper, writing editorials about the governor canceling this air quality permit.

Phil Francis: I happened to be there late on a Friday afternoon. The phone rang. I always answer my own phone, whenever I can. "Phil Francis, how can I help you?"

Phil Francis: "Phil, this is Governor Sundquist." I said, "Oh, hi, Governor." He said, "We need to put that air quality agreement back in place."

Phil Francis: I said, "That's right, Governor. We do." He says, "By tomorrow morning." Because there was so much heat that he was getting.

Phil Francis: I said, "It's going to take a little longer than that, Governor." All that led to, at the good work of Don Barker, who's downstairs right now with NPCA, and Jim Renfrow on our staff, and Dr. Stephen Smith down in Knoxville, and a group called the Southern Appalachian Mountain Initiative. And we've played a role, too. The air quality has been improved. So, all that visibility that we lost, we gained almost all of it back. So, 80 percent lost, in my lifetime, we've restored that. And so that's not only helped air quality and visibility in the Smokies, but the American Lung Association indicates that a third of the people were suffering from respiratory illnesses because of that air quality. So, we've helped the health of the people. When you drive now here in this part of the world, it's noticeably different. You know, the views. That was probably maybe the most important thing I was ever involved in was the air quality issue. A guy named Hugh Morton, remember Hugh? Grandfather Mountain?

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm.

Phil Francis: He was really involved in that. He got the governor involved in that. I mean, that was quite the fight. We took on Eastman Kodak, TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority], you know, we got EPA involved, our air quality office out in Denver, AirDen, you know, they really played a very, very, very big and important role. But the park service should be really proud of that. That was good.

Lu Ann Jones: What about paper mills? Do they play—

Phil Francis: Oh, yeah. And not only the manufacturing plants, but cars and trucks. Especially trucks. All of that was factoring into our transportation planning when we were doing the Smokies. That was part of it. There's a lot of stories after 40 years in the park service.

Lu Ann Jones: I was going to ask, what difference did you think it made that your route to the superintendency came through the administrative, as opposed to some other route?

Phil Francis: That's a good question. I think, first of all, many of the superintendents during my early years didn't understand administration. There were a few around. Dick Ring was one who did. And so, I didn't have to rely upon anybody. I had that body of knowledge with me when I became a superintendent. So, I knew what the alternatives were on the administrative side of things. And I could take advantage of that.

Phil Francis: But also, I had learned the importance of connecting with all the employees. Because when we were doing personnel, for example, we were dealing with all the employees. One of the things I used to say all the time, you know, "If you are in personnel, you need to like people." We used to have people who didn't like

people doing personnel. I always wondered, what in the heck are you doing working in personnel? That was something that I thought was important.

Phil Francis: Labor relations came out of the administrative side. So, I'd been through all kind of labor relations training. I'd been a trainer for the park service. I'd learned how to speak, you know, during teaching administrative classes or doing seasonal ranger stuff. Public speak. I'd spoken before the chief scientist of the United States and his staff. I eventually had to speak at the commencement address at Appalachia State with eight thousand people out there. So, you know, it all ties together.

Phil Francis: My business background in college. Decision making. You know, the Snell problem solving model was the one I used throughout my career. I would ask people to do a white paper. I remember being asked to do a white paper. I said to someone, "What is a white paper is?" You know what a white paper is? Yeah, well see? No one knows what a white paper is. (laughter) It is a problem document, really. Here's an issue. You'd have the background, what the issue is, and you discuss what that issue is in a short format. But what people need to have in that document is the same thing contained in a decision making model. What alternatives do we have? How much is it going to cost? Who else is involved? Who's going to be affected? So, I can't tell you how many times that I've put that problem solving model on a board, a flip chart or something, trying to teach staff to think about how do you do your work, how do you do your business.

Phil Francis: So, all of that tied together really well. My background in pre-med in college. I was able to talk to scientists and resource management people. I knew what in the heck they were talking about.

Phil Francis: There's one thing I wish I'd had more of, that I would really recommend to people that they learn. That's the planning process, the planning and compliance process. Which involves the public. You really need to have good skills there. I once led a public meeting on, we did a little management plan for Cataloochee Valley. And we were in a high school. The meeting began at 7:30 pm. At 7:25 pm, there were five people there. I had more staff there than that. At 7:35, there was 300 people there, and they weren't happy. You've got to be able to stand up in front of a group of people who may disagree with you, and may be emotional about it, and you need the skills to be able to handle the situation. Some people aren't good at it and shouldn't be doing it. So, I guess all that sort of came together.

Phil Francis: The other thing is being in administration in a park, you're always in a management team meeting. You are part of the management team. Even as a GS-5, I was a member of the management team. I got to see, I don't know how many different superintendents I worked with. It was a bunch. They all have different ways of leading. And you know, you steal the good stuff and you remember not to do the bad stuff. I think that at a very early age, I was able to be exposed to a lot of people.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you have questions?

Thea Garrett: I think that it's lost.

Lu Ann Jones: I was wondering, what difference did it make that when you were a superintendent that you were close to home as opposed to a park that was somewhere far away from where you had grown up?

Phil Francis: Well, there were both positive things and challenges associated with that being close to home. I was able to communicate easily with communities. I talked like they did. I used the same phrases they did. Sometimes I was related to them. And so that made it a lot easier. I knew where they were coming from. I think that because of my personality and where I was from, they trusted me pretty quickly. I would do things that Southerners would do. I remember going to the Outer Banks on an acting assignment when the superintendent got in trouble, and he was moved and there was a big controversy about off-road vehicles in the Outer Banks. So, I went out and I spent six 12-hour days a week going to people's offices and talking to people.

Phil Francis: They wanted to go out to the spits and look at the birds. You know, the nesting plovers and the least terns and all those birds covered by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Phil Francis: I went out, agreed to meet these folks. And so, it was time to go. And I hop in his truck, and he says, "What are you doing?"

Phil Francis: I said, "I'm getting in your truck." "You're going to ride with me?"

Phil Francis: "Well, of course!" (laughter) Of course. But no one else had ever done that before. So, I mean, that was just my natural instinct, because that's the way we would have done it.

Phil Francis: The difficult side was, you know, sometimes when I was doing fundraising, I felt really uncomfortable asking for money from people I knew. You know? It was just not easy to do. You know, I've got some friends who did well for themselves over their lives. I called them and said, you know, I just didn't feel right doing it. Some gave me a little bit of money, and some didn't. But that was usually, I would say about the only problem I had was the nonprofit partner piece of it.

Phil Francis: But yeah, it helped. You go into somebody's kitchen and they're cooking creamed corn and country-style steak. And I knew what they were always talking about. (laughter)

Lu Ann Jones: Well, Phil, you've been such a good storyteller, narrator here today. Thank you so much.

Phil Francis: You're very welcome. Thanks for asking me.

Lu Ann Jones: What time is tee time today?

Phil Francis: Oh, gosh, that's right. (laughter) One o'clock.

Lu Ann Jones: I think that when I started this I launched in and didn't say, which I should have said at the beginning that this is LuAnn Joes of the park history program here with Thea Garrett, seasonal Acadia National Park and Phil Francis, our interviewee, and it is October 23, 2015. We're at Black Mountain for the 37th, I believe, Ranger Rendezvous, ANPR, so thank you so much for doing this.

Phil Francis: You're welcome. You're very welcome.

[END OF TAPE 8]

[END OF INTERVIEW]