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



Imogene La Covey
November 8, 1978

Interview conducted by Dorothy B. Huyck
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[START OF TAPE 1]

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:00 The date is November 8th, 1978. I'm Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Imogene La Covey, which is spelled capital L-A, capital C-O-V-E-Y. Mrs. La Covey retired in 1975 from the National Park Service. She was the first woman appointed as assistant director of the National Park Service.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:22 Let me ask you how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service.

Imogene La Covey: 00:00:33 Really, it was purely, I guess, an act of fate. I was graduated from high school during a depression. And I came to the Washington right out of high school seeking employment. Park Service had a vacancy, and I was hired by them.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:51 What vacancy was that?

Imogene La Covey: 00:00:54 It was just a clerk-typist or clerk-stenographer, I guess it was, in the Legal Division of the Park Service.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:59 And when was that?

Imogene La Covey: 00:01:01 Oh my gosh. 19, let's see, 35 I guess.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:07 And what grade was that?

Imogene La Covey: 00:01:10 I think I came on as a GS-2. I'm sure I did, two or three. At that time, it was CFA designation.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:22 And how long did you stay in that position?

Imogene La Covey: 00:01:24 Not very long. I was married in 19 – I have a terrible memory for dates. Really, you should have asked m – Oh golly. It was 45 years ago, so that would be what? 1933?

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:48 '33?

Imogene La Covey: 00:01:49 No, because that's when I came to Washington. It must have been 1937.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:50 Did you continue working for the Park Service?

- Imogene La Covey: 00:01:59 Yes, for a few years after that. I can't remember just what year I resigned, but I did resign and raised a family. I returned to the Park Service in about 1940.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:23 Just before the beginning of the war?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:02:26 No, it was after the war. Is that—
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:30 After 1945?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:02:32 It must have been after 1945 then.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:34 And in what position?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:02:36 I came back to the Legal Division as a secretary. I was there probably about a year and transferred to the Lands Division as an administrative assistant.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:56 In effect, you rather broke out of that secretarial series.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:03:01 Right, right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:03 How was that accomplished? Not everybody can be [inaudible 00:03:14].
- Imogene La Covey: 00:03:14 The only really answer I have to that was – Charles Ritchie was the chief of Lands at that time, I went from Legal to the Lands. It was then called the Lands Division. I knew him. He had a vacancy and he made quite an effort to get me. It was simple as that.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:03:31 I was with him for about two years and my husband was transferred to Alaska, so that's when I resigned. It was about 1950 when we came back from Alaska. These dates are all just very vague. If you want them precise, I'll have to go home and check them out. It was about 1950 when we returned from Alaska. I had no particular plans to go back to work and George Hartzog at that time was the chief of concessions, assistant chief I think he was at that time. And I had worked with him in the Legal Division, and he had a vacancy.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:04:10 He was very persuasive. He almost made it to the point where I practically couldn't refuse, so I decided well I'd come back to try for a while. I felt Concessions was the last

place than what I wanted to work. But when I got involved in it, I found it the most interesting spot I've ever worked.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:04:32

What were you doing there initially?

Imogene La Covey: 00:04:33

In Concessions? I think I came back as a secretary. I wasn't there long; I might add to it. At that point in my career, Mr. Ritchie was still in Lands. He was also trying to get me back. So, I was in this spot when I at least when up a grade every year because Mr. Ritchie would find a spot for me and Mr. Hartzog would do just as well to keep me in Concessions. So, I was going up a grade a year till I got to about a grade 9 or 11. Probably an 11.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:05:05

And what were you doing at grade 11?

Imogene La Covey: 00:05:14

I think it was contract assistant, I think was the title. Like I say, it was in Concessions.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:05:27

You must have moved beyond a grade 11. At what grade did you retire?

Imogene La Covey: 00:05:31

I retired at the 15. Yes. The [inaudible 00:05:35] in Concessions, I was – I can't remember how many years I was even in Concessions. But about the 11 or 12 level. I can't remember when I went to 12. But it was very male-orientated, as you can imagine. There was a succession of new chiefs in the division. All of them were totally unfamiliar with what was going on. I was sort of the link to continuity, and I spent a lot of years training a lot of people.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:06:11

A lot of women have spent a lot of years training a lot of people and yet stayed in the same position themselves. You managed to move on beyond that.

Imogene La Covey: 00:06:20

Right, I did. Well, part of that was a result of reorganization. The division was small at first when I came in. It expanded and contracted over the years, and a period of expansion when I was at a grade level that certainly merited consideration for branch chief responsibility. I don't think I was ever called a branch chief. I don't recall that I ever was, but in effect this was what I did.

Imogene La Covey: 00:06:51

You would have Branch of Contracts, Branch of Financial Management Operations. I was involved almost entirely in contracts, but as I say, I sort of functioned at branch level.

Actually, when I was finally promoted to chief, or to assistant director, it was after Nixon's second election. They brought in an assistant director who was a political appointee. He left the division after about a year, year and a half. At that time Ron Walker was the director.

- Imogene La Covey: 00:07:40 So I guess the simplest the way to put it is, I had worked with Ron in connection with training [inaudible 00:07:50] who was an assistant director. Mr. [inaudible 00:07:54] and Mr. Walker offered me the job at that time. I'm not so egotistical to think that it necessarily would have happened with any director. I don't know who much of this you'll write up, but I just assume this will be off the record. But I don't think George Hartzog would have ever done it. Ron Walker [inaudible 00:08:09].
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:08:09 Once you [inaudible 00:08:09] in Concessions after all those years?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:08:28 There's a tremendous amount of variety. No two situations are ever the same. Often in my career, I always thought that I was probably working above grade level. I never really thought about it in a definitive way. I recognized it was there, but I enjoyed it. As I say, every situation that you encountered, there was some little way of it that was different from everything else you would have done before.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:09:01 I'm about to be blinded by that light.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:09:03 Oh sure.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:09:05 And 'course I found the work interesting. Like I say, I enjoyed doing things that were a challenge, and as a result of this, I learned. Also, I developed the reasoning and the management capability that's required in heading up a program. It was the sense of that, I enjoyed it and did it and [inaudible 00:09:33].
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:09:34 When you were working within the concessions area, did you follow a given contract through from an early stage to completion?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:09:45 Frequently, yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:09:45 And therefore, do you came to know a given concessioner—

- Imogene La Covey: 00:09:47 Oh yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:09:49 —fairly well. Were you doing those concessions throughout the country in [inaudible 00:09:56] at one time or another?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:09:56 Yes, at one time or another pretty much. Because the very small ones. The very small ones, they [inaudible 00:10:02] them. Their management responsibility was basically with the park or region. Of course, if they had a problem they came to Washington and got the treatment everyone else did. But yes, almost all them.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:10:22 You must have seen quite an evolution in Concessions from the mom-and-pop space to the [crosstalk 00:10:23] corporation stage.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:10:24 Yes. As a matter of fact, it was really the big swing came when conglomerates became a way of life in the corporate sphere.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:10:33 Can you identify when the conglomerates really got [inaudible 00:10:37] in the parks?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:10:39 I can remember the specific – the first one we had actually. I can't remember – Probably in 1960. Right about that time. '60, '62, some time in there.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:10:54 Is that one or more conglomerates?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:11:01 Well, the first one, if my memory serves me correctly, was the Yellowstone Park Company, which is a subsidiary of the General [unintelligible]. And even at that point in time then, of course there was – Griffith – Yosemite Park and Curry Company which was individual company. Their stock was traded on the Pacific Exchange. They were bought out by MCA [inaudible 00:11:30].
- Imogene La Covey: 00:11:30 The same thing happened to AMTRAK in [inaudible 00:11:35]. Really most all these cases it was the question of controlling interest through stock holdings by the parent companies.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:11:52 This must have brought about a lot of foreign buyers [crosstalk 00:11:52]—

- Imogene La Covey: 00:11:53 Well, it did. It did. And as a matter of fact, it was hailed as a concept, as probably the thing that concessions needed. Concessions, because of their lack of interest in the real estate or in land, all they had was – They don't have fee simple title, they simply have an interest which is recognized, which is unique. Bankers are very frightened by them. It's very seldom accepted as security by bankers. It leaves the financing needs up to the individual concession. We thought if conglomerates came in it would be large companies with lots of dollars to invest in things with their own financing, which they did. But of course, there are other disadvantages of that model. Just like anybody else, as I've often said, in a conglomerate if you're not making money, you're like Little Orphan Annie, you don't get money to make improvements.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:12:55 This is what happened at Yellowstone. They never made enough money to make it attractive for General [inaudible 00:13:03] to pour a lot of money into it. I must say, in all honesty, that they put a lot more money into it than I would have, but you can't see it. It needed such a huge infusion of funds [inaudible 00:13:14] that those funds weren't available in the day. But they did put a lot of money into it, it simply wasn't enough.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:13:29 Am I right in thinking that in the case of Yellowstone there is currently legislation being considered for the Park Service to purchase and release the [inaudible 00:13:30] function?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:13:30 Well, basically they have it—
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:13:31 Is that the concession land?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:13:33 Well, I understand that they have – and I haven't seen the legislation, but they have legislation passing that should have been enacted to purchased their own piece of land.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:13:42 They passed it [crosstalk 00:13:43]?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:13:44 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I don't know where they stand on it, but that's been – as far as Congress is concerned, it's been taken care of. I think there was a proposal in the appropriations bill which they recently enacted, I guess. I don't know if it's still in there or not to buy out the rest of the Yellowstone Park Company. This does not include

Hamilton Stores, just the Yellowstone Park Company. But I don't know where that stands. I don't know if they got the money or not.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:14:18

During the winter [inaudible 00:14:18].

Imogene La Covey: 00:14:18

Definitely. The length of the season, and there are huge old facilities. All of them are very expensive to operate simply because of their obsolescence. And as a result of course, it takes more help and they've done a lot of things to try to cut down the overhead, such as going to convenience foods and fast foods. All this did was result in a human cry and a lot of complaints. They're still doing it I guess, as far as I know. But it's the things that they did to try and cut down on overheads. The season just isn't there.

Imogene La Covey: 00:14:57

As a matter of fact, they told me at the Yellowstone Park, and I never checked this out but I'd have to believe it, that by the time they closed down in the fall, maintained the facilities through the winter months, open them up in the spring, those expenses are not recaptured through revenue until August. That only gives them August and what they've got in September to turn a profit.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:26

[inaudible 00:15:26].

Imogene La Covey: 00:15:27

Did it? Yeah, probably. They've been doing a little better I think last – They were at least the last time I knew they were doing. But for years their return was around 5%, which is in today's market, is pretty poor.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:43

[inaudible 00:15:43].

Imogene La Covey: 00:15:43

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Correct.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:46

You've got another large outfit operating at Yosemite.

Imogene La Covey: 00:15:51

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:51

Is it a different situation?

Imogene La Covey: 00:15:56

Yes, it is. A matter of fact, I haven't been out to Yosemite in four, five years but the facilities are much better, the service is better. Of course, you hear a lot of complaints about Yosemite. But basically it has to do with planning –

at least when I was here – with what the concession wanted to do. It wasn't really with service to the public.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:16:22 What about the concessioners saying [inaudible 00:16:22]?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:16:22 The concessioners?
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:16:22 Yeah.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:16:30 Well, you know, I knew you were going to ask that question, and I'm sort of – I don't know what I should say I am. I'm a fence straddler on this one, I guess. But no concessioner will say anything without the Park Service's permission. They don't provide any service without Park Service's approval. So, what is there and what's been done has all been done with the Park Service's blessing.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:16:54 Now, there's no concessioner that's any sort of a businessman and doesn't look for opportunities to improve its service or to relocate or to do anything that he thinks will result in a better operation. Perhaps it's profits and perhaps it's some other motive. It could be any motive any normal business would be effected by. But anyway, the plan of the Park Service now, the direction they're currently going to move concessions out of the parks, I think it can be carried to the extreme. I'm not saying it has been yet. I think it can be and I think, for myself personally, I don't care to camp, I don't care to backpack. I love the parks. I love them just as much as anyone else does.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:17:49 And to not have an opportunity to go along and enjoy the comforts, the creature comforts, while I'm there, does not appeal to me. And I really don't think these planning should go to such an extent that it should be made to discomfort people to enjoy them. As I say, to what extent they're presently damaging the resource, yes, I think there should be something done about that. But to the extent that – well, okay we'd like them something that is going to be less intrusion but there's no real damage, well then I can't – I don't have the feeling that it's—
- Imogene La Covey: 00:18:20 I feel it's right and proper the way they are. It's the same service things driving it. I'd hate to see them go in and take a virgin area and develop it if it was going to be a serious intrusion. On the other hand, the planning should be such that they can do this without it and still make them

available [inaudible 00:18:43]. In other words, I think [inaudible 00:18:47] concession facilities in most of the parks.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:18:53 I just come back to [inaudible 00:18:53].
- Imogene La Covey: 00:18:53 I know, it really is.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:18:56 [inaudible 00:18:56].
- Imogene La Covey: 00:18:56 I went to Manassas one time. And it was one summer, I was with my family, my children were probably 10 to 12 at the time. There was no place down there to buy anything. And it was hot, and humid. We had to leave because the kids were so miserable and so hot and so thirsty and there was no place to get them anything, so we just had to leave. I really don't think that's conducive to what – public enjoyment of the parks. I really don't. I can't believe that a little refreshment stand in Manassas wouldn't be a benefit.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:19:28 The same thing with – actually I went over even to Fort McHenry one time. Had the same experience. There were busloads of children down there, and 'course it's right in the city of Baltimore. I was there on business, but to go to lunch, we had to drive for 30, 40 minutes to find a place to eat. Just to say I don't really have to have a restaurant in Fort McHenry but still some sort of facilities to recognize that the public might have a need here and in order for them to enjoy it, they need it. I don't think it's out of line.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:20:05 [inaudible 00:20:05] the whole area [inaudible 00:20:06], you grew alongside of the evolution.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:20:09 Well, I did. And the evolution is not a pretty story. It goes back really before my time when the concessions first got at loggerheads with the Park Service and Department, in 1930. As a matter of fact, it all came about when the recommendation was made from the departmental level, that the concessioners, when their contract expired, that the government would no longer recognize any interest in facilities that they had constructed.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:20:44 Is this during the depression?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:20:48 No, this is right after – Let me think. Christ, I used to know these dates. '56 or something.

- Imogene La Covey: 00:21:06 This was in the late '30s. Yeah, it must have been right after the Depression. Maybe right after World War II, I guess. Many of the concessions were closed during World War II, so it must have been right after that that they decided they would – when the contracts expired, they'd no longer recognize the interest in the facilities. As I say, this was at departmental level. Solicitor Krug was secretary at the time.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:21:34 This resulted in a long and protracted period of hostility really between the concessioners. They wouldn't sign the contracts. Many of them were operating without contracts. There was legislation proposed by Congress. There were hearings held by the – Then it was what preceded the Interior Ministry of Affairs, Lands Committee I think it was.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:22:07 Anyway, finally, in 1950 I guess it was, Krug was fired, the solicitor was fired. I don't think the director of Park Service was. But anyway. There was a whole shakedown of the operational arm. And that's when Chapman was appointed secretary. The first thing he did was issue a statement of basic outline of policies, which among other things gave the concessioners back this recognition in their facilities that they had constructed.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:22:49 This got the whole thing back on track, and at this time Congress issued a resolution or passed a resolution to the effect that so long as the Park Service followed those policies that were developed as a result of Mr. Chapman's memorandum, they would not proceed with legislation. That same situation has developed, since that time, at least twice. The time that I'm most familiar with was of course is just prior to the enactment of Public Law 89-249, September 30th – What was it 1956? Yeah.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:23:37 It was the same situation that had developed at that point, basically. So, Congress then took it upon itself to enact the legislation. What it did was to give legislative effect to most of those policies that Chapman had announced back in 1950. Same situation is evolving again. It could possibly result in a review or an amendment to 89-249, I don't know. You can tell what the outcome will be. But when 89-249 – Have you heard of it? In other words, I'm not talking Greek to you.

- Imogene La Covey: 00:24:18 Okay, when 89-249 was enacted, the – Udall, Mo Udall, was a fairly new congressman, but he was very familiar with the concessions' situation and he was one of the authors of the bill. Of course, now he's chairman of the – What is it? Energy and Natural Resources subcommittee, whatever it is.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:24:40 Anyway, at that time that committee was at loggerheads with the Government Operations Committee, headed by Jack Brooks. Jack Brooks is still over there. Jack Brooks never accepted the legislation has – Well, it's the will of Congress and we'll let it go at that. He never did. He doesn't like the possessory interest feature. He doesn't like the fact that the contracts are negotiated and not let by public bid and he doesn't like the fact that they have a preference over any [unintelligible] that have been satisfactory. Several phrases of it he doesn't like, and so he still doesn't care for it. And as I say, it's still a matter of legislative differences of opinion.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:25:34 How can the possessory interest factors be explained?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:25:44 Well, it's basically just a recognition of a concessioner's interested in the facility he constructed with his own money. It's on government land, so he can't have a free title to it, and it's lieu of that. One school of thought, one theory, is that after he's gotten his money back it should belong to the government. Just like you may have a 99-year lease. The Rockefeller Center's, as I understand, has got a 99-year lease. When the 99 years are up, that land, I guess, belongs to New York University. I'm pretty sure it does. And anyway, that 99 years is up, the building will belong to the university.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:26:32 But concessions don't have them. Not one of them have 99-year leases. They're 30 maximum, there are very few of those. Number two, they've only got a three-month season.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:26:47 Huh.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:26:48 Yes. Well, most of them, basically, it's a short season. So, you know, it's just a question of judgment really is to have on your land, you recognize they do have an interest because of the investment. I think the possessory interest feature, I think came from California. I think there is some legal and historical background on "possessory interest"

that originated in California. Of course, many of the concessioners were Westerners, when we were searching for a way to recognize this investment, I think the thing was some of the lawyers from out in that area fiddling with it and came up with this—

Imogene La Covey: 00:27:35

They never called it that. They did the same thing the in prior years, but they never called it that necessarily.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:27:44

Was that one of the most controversial aspects of concessions?

Imogene La Covey: 00:27:50

That's one of the most controversial, yes, the fact that they're not led by competitive bid. And honestly, I have thought about this. I spent years thinking about it. I didn't any way you could let a concessions contract competitively. If you did it on the basis of, "Okay, who's got the most money to invest?" That doesn't fit in with the park concept.

Imogene La Covey: 00:28:12

You could build a \$10 million facility on the river at Grand Canyon, and that could be the best you could get. But goodness knows, Park Service wouldn't want it and I think I'd be the first to be horrified of the suggestion. If you did it on the basis of the highest franchise fee, anybody can pay any franchise fee the government wants if you recognize it's got to come out of the investor's pocket. There's only one place for it. And so the concessioner could offer an extremely high franchise fee one year and cut it back the next or when the renegotiation of rent came up.

Imogene La Covey: 00:28:49

So franchise fees are – of course, by law they're secondary. So, I don't know how you could have done it one franchise fees. Same way with rates. If you let a concessioner really cut his rates way below those on the outside, you've created just as big a problem as you have having rates too high, because all the outside operators are complaining that the government's cutting their throat. So, you've got to tread a little tight line on rates just from that point of view. Of course, there are others too, but nevertheless, you can't just undercut the outside and you can't eat out his profit, or you try not to. And I don't think the Park Service is—

Imogene La Covey: 00:29:29

I've done an awful lot of traveling and I don't think staying at some of the parks, the rates are much below what you'd pay at a resort area outside.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:29:42 That's still true today?

Imogene La Covey: 00:29:49 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. It surely is. You know, they go to a resort area now and pay 65 set dollars a day for a room. There's nothing [inaudible 00:29:56]. I've done a lot of that.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:29:59 In your responsibilities, you were trying to juggle a fair return for the concessioner and a reasonable rate for the charges to the public.

Imogene La Covey: 00:30:07 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Still recognizing that also the outside operator is to be considered. He doesn't have an interest in it, but he's got an indirect interest in it, not a direct interest but an indirect interest in it. It could be very direct if you started gouging him and he went over on the hill and you have the responsibility within the planning section of the Park Service not to do that.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:30:24 What if a concessioner does do that? [inaudible 00:30:36].

Imogene La Covey: 00:30:39 You mean what he builds or what he does?

Dorothy Huyck: 00:30:42 Could you change the [inaudible 00:30:43] and maybe out of order?

Imogene La Covey: 00:30:48 Oh yes, he certainly would.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:30:48 And does that how?

Imogene La Covey: 00:30:48 You make up numbers.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:30:56 It would whitewash the economy.

Imogene La Covey: 00:30:59 Yeah. And some of the [inaudible 00:31:01]. However that was nothing that we did. I mean that was just concession. We didn't even know about it until after it happened. But that was, I presume, the superintendent gave permission for that. I don't know. I've no idea. That's not the really interesting fact of the concessions operation. Oh, a whole many varieties of things have happened. Up until very recently, concessions activity in Park Service bears a responsibility in the planning. If the planners came up with a proposal for development, after they finished with it, we'd go to the concession with it and we'd negotiate a contract based on investment and what have you.

- Imogene La Covey: 00:31:47 If it didn't work out – We had no way of knowing whether it would out or not. We weren't involved in that. Like I say, concessions wasn't involved in that phase of it. But with Andy Wolfe now in Denver, that's being overcome. And I said—
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:32:04 Who's that [inaudible 00:32:05]?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:32:05 Andy Wolfe is now – They now have a concessions operation within the Denver Service Center. And I had said for years and years and years, and I'm still saying, until Park Service gets its planning straightened out they're never going to solve all the concessions problems. There's just no way. They may have it under control now. I know they're making progress. Whether they're working on it, I guess it remains to be seen. It's too early.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:32:29 But for example, Park Service had the greatest talent for putting a marina right up on a spit of land that the first strong wind that came along would destroy it. And it's happened time after time. And of course, you can imagine the financial disaster that would create. But we, in Washington, had no way of knowing that that spit of land was subject to high winds and the things going to be destroyed perhaps until it happened. So, there was never any coordination between those two activities and in many times it was disastrous.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:07 Is some degree of coordination being achieved now?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:33:09 Yes. I don't know to what extent, but there is some.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:15 And let me go back in your own history, if I may.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:33:18 All right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:18 Can I ask where and when you were born?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:33:20 I was born in Oklahoma.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:22 Where?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:33:23 Foss. F-O-S-S. You sound like you're familiar with Oklahoma.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:28 Slightly.

Imogene La Covey: 00:33:29 Are you? I was born in Foss, Oklahoma on November 29, 1916.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:34 How many children were there in your family?

Imogene La Covey: 00:33:37 Well, three living. Myself and my two sisters. I have a sister who died before I was born.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:43 Are you therefore in fact the eldest?

Imogene La Covey: 00:33:46 No, I'm the middle. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:48 And how many years older are you than your younger sisters?

Imogene La Covey: 00:33:54 Seven.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:00 Did you grow up in Foss, Oklahoma?

Imogene La Covey: 00:34:00 No, I grew up in Tulsa.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Was either of your parents a college graduate?

Imogene La Covey: 00:34:06 No. They both attended college, but neither was a college graduate.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:10 And what was your father's occupation?

Imogene La Covey: 00:34:13 Well, you know he died before I was old enough to remember him. He went to Oklahoma A&M, so did my mother. That's where they met and married. And I guess he was the – They told me and I – It was right at the time of the automobile and he had opened up a garage in Southwestern Oklahoma. He died before I was old enough to remember him.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:40 Did your mother pursue any sort of a career?

Imogene La Covey: 00:34:42 Yes, she was an employee for the Bell Telephone Company.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:50 Mm-hmm (affirmative). What did she do for AT&T?

Imogene La Covey: 00:34:51 Well, she started out as operator and then she was – During the oil boom in the Southwest, she went around the

Southwest opening up telephone offices. And she retired from the telephone company as a – I'm not sure what she was. I guess supervisor perhaps. I don't remember. And then she worked for the government for a few years, at National out in Bethesda at the Bethesda Naval Hospital as civil service operator.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:35:28 Did you attend high school in Tulsa?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:35:31 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:35:31 And did you attend college?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:35:32 No.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:35:36 While you were in high school, was your mother or someone else an encouraging person in your educational background at that time? Was there a teacher or member of the community? Or maybe no one could provide encouragement?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:35:52 Well, yes, the whole family. My grandfather was an ex-college professor. He was a very inventive, very unique, special individual. None of us ever grew up with the idea that we wouldn't get the most education that we could possibly get. As I say, my mother was widowed when I was young. So, this youngest sister, the one that's seven years younger is a half-sister. She did remarry, but the marriage didn't last too long. But anyway, none of us ever had any – We always grew up with the idea we'd get all the education we could.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:36:29 I'm sorry, looking back on it, that I didn't on my own go to school, work at the same time which had been necessary. But it really never occurred to me. It really didn't, to put myself through college. I don't know why, but it didn't.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:36:50 Did you go to business school or something?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:36:53 No.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:36:53 Your background in the high school [inaudible 00:36:55]?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:36:55 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:36:57 Did you take a commercial curriculum?

- Imogene La Covey: 00:36:59 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:37:03 And having accomplished the commercial curriculum in high school, you were prepared for the work as a secretary when you got out of high school?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:37:12 Yeah. That was one of the best high schools in the country, I am convinced. Having three of my own who've finished college, when they got out of high school they didn't have one half of what I had. Of course, it had a reputation for being an outstanding school. But you don't know how much of that is true and how much of that is wishful thinking until you get it back and get a perspective on it. And certainly looking back on my own experience and what my children got, it was a fantastic school.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:37:36 And as you were growing up, did you play with boys as a child?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:37:41 Not particularly, no.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:37:42 Were you a tomboy?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:37:42 No.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:37:48 Were there any extracurricular activities that went alongside your commercial curriculum in high school that later proved helpful in working for the Park Service?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:37:56 No. I went through high school in two and a half years. That involved going to summer school and taking a full course during regular school year. So there really wasn't any time for anything except to study.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:38:13 You must have been quite young when you graduated from high school.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:38:16 I was 17. But at that time when I went into school, we were at the point where you could enter at the end of – in the mid-year. They don't do that anymore. But because my birthday's in November, I went out of sync. But I either had to do it in two and a half years or three and a half years, so I chose to do it in two and a half years.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:38:36 Was your Park Service job your first employment?

- Imogene La Covey: 00:38:39 Not really. I worked for Frigidaire here in town for a few months prior to going to work for Park Service.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:38:50 What brought you to the District of Columbia in the first place?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:38:52 I had an aunt and uncle that were helping me find a job in that area where it was practically impossible to find one.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:39:05 I'd like to ask about people who were your supervisors during your Park Service career. And I might suggest we not include their names necessarily.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:39:12 Okay.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:39:12 Did you have supervisors that you found to be encouraging or discouraging or possibly encountered some of both?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:39:23 I'd say basically they were encouraging.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:39:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative). How did they show that encouragement?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:39:40 Well, how would you really express it? It was, as I commented earlier, I thought I was working above my grade level. But it was through giving me assignments that were a challenge and that feeling when they were accomplished feeling that they were well done or satisfactorily done.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:40:01 That was expressed to you?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:40:03 Yes, right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:40:05 In other words, you were given praise?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:40:07 Right. I was encouraged and praised and expressed appreciation. You know, one thing and the other. But I can't remember any that were particularly discouraging.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:40:19 There are some people who think the Park Service is something of a male-orientated organization. Do you?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:40:28 Yes. No question about that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:40:31 But you survived and got along very well, nonetheless.

- Imogene La Covey: 00:40:35 Yes, I did. Actually, I think I prefer working with men to women, I think. As I say, when I came back to Park Service, Mr. Hartzog twisted my arm and convinced me to come back. I came back with the understanding that my family would come first and felt this was necessary. I would do the same thing again.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:40:59 Fortunately, they were good kids and they had supervision at home. They were healthy. There was very few occasions where the family had to be put first to the detriment of my job. In fact, I can't remember any. But nevertheless, this was the understanding. I was comfortable with this, and it was accepted. And of course, this put me in a feminist position of course, immediately.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:41:21 I know one time I rather consistently used to get outstanding performance ratings. And one time I got one that was whatever the next step down was, which didn't bother me at all except that the checked item was my reliability. And so, I thought, "Oh gee, wonder what in the world this is all about?" So, I went and asked about it. And the response was, "Well, it's because, well you never have had to stay home with your family, but the potential is there. So, we can't depend on your being here every day on the count of your family comes first."
- Imogene La Covey: 00:41:59 I didn't challenge it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:41:59 Did they count on a man being there every day?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:42:02 No, I don't think so. As a matter of fact, the individual who—
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:42:06 I want to be sure I want to understand it. You were marked down on reliability because your family—
- Imogene La Covey: 00:42:10 My family came first.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:42:12 —and therefore it could not be assumed that you would be there every day, even though, in fact, you were there.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:42:18 I was, right. And matter of fact, the individual who did it had a wife who was much more demanding from the standpoint of physical requirements. You know, she was not well, one thing or the other, than my family ever was. But I never challenged it. I let it stand. But this is the kind

of thing that I've encountered. I'm still good friends with this man, too. He's retired. He called me just the other day.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:42:48 Should it have been challenged?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:42:53 Well, I would have if it would have been anything lower than excellent or whatever it was. I would have. I didn't feel that I necessarily had to have an outstanding performance rating every time. It was just the fact that it was a rating that you should be ashamed of, I didn't challenge it. But yes, I think probably it should have and it would be today.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:43:11 It would be today?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:43:13 I think so.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:43:14 Times have changed?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:43:16 Yeah, times have changed. Right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:43:20 What has changed?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:43:20 Well, the recognition that the feminine role is – Well, we hope it's on a par with the male role. I don't know we've necessarily achieved that, but I don't – Men are taking more responsibility for the things at home than they used to and it's just – But I don't think it would happen. I think if it did, you'd have to prove to me that it was warranted, based on the record, you know?
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:43:54 Some people might have interpreted that as discouraging, but as you say, it was not a poor rating.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:44:02 No, it wasn't a poor rating, no.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:44:04 Mm-hmm (affirmative). No.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:44:06 And as I say, I had previously gotten outstandings. I figured that they had to find something to – That don't mean to sound it's egotistical, come out as egotistical because it sounds it either. But I'm sure there were other areas that they could have used, but they did use that one.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:44:20 Do you think that the fact that the Park Service has been male-orientated is also changing and basically [crosstalk 00:44:31]?

- Imogene La Covey: 00:44:30 I don't know. I don't know. Certainly, on the surface they're changing. But I'm not just sure how deep that goes, not a bit sure. I know that the whole system for filing a discrimination charge and pursuing it is absolutely – You couldn't win it if your life depended on it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:45:03 Have you seen such cases?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:45:08 There's just no way. Just time and heartbreak and money, is all it is. I don't know whether that's – That's when I was in Park Service, nobody – As a matter of fact, on one of those sheets that they used to send around asking about you, "Do you know about your rights?" and what have you, and "Would you file a discrimination charge?" I put on that, "No way." The way that it was set up, you were licked before you started. There was just no way to win one of them. And I don't know that any has ever been won, I don't know. I know someone who filed, I don't know what the outcome is. I really don't want to know.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:45:45 I think an awful lot of the Park Service and I'm not trying to tear them down in any respect. But nevertheless, if they're changing on the surface, I'm not sure how deep it goes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:45:56 That's a good question. Were you given opportunities to take training courses?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:46:04 Oh yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:46:04 What kind of things?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:46:06 Management training.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:46:07 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Did you have trouble getting into those courses?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:46:10 No. I didn't take very many of them though. There weren't any problem with it, it was just I didn't have time. I was just getting – from the time that – Well, I guess it was really after Nixon's election and there was a pretty major upheaval and a lot of people left and were transferred out. I think there two or three of us left in the activities that had any kind of ability. I felt like I was pulling a whole operation myself, literally. And I was because nobody else knew what anything was about. I didn't have program responsibility, but I was the only one that knew what it was

all about. It was just a tremendous level. I just really never had any time to take any. I did take a few but not nearly the number that I would have liked to have or should have.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:47:03 Do you think that being a woman has made a difference in your opportunities for added responsibility and promotion while you've been with Park Service?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:47:18 Being a woman has done anything to that?
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:47:19 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Imogene La Covey: 00:47:24 I can't think of any situation where that would be the case.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:47:26 You would not include this instance where somebody felt that your responsibilities at home might at some time be detrimental?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:47:39 Well, pose that question again. I really don't see how that fits.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:47:41 Let me see it again. Do you think that, in your case, that being a woman has made a difference, has effected your opportunities for added responsibilities and promotion?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:47:54 Not added responsibilities. Definitely promotion, yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:47:58 We should separate those two out?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:48:00 Yes, right. I don't think there's no question about it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:48:02 Mm-hmm (affirmative). You were given added responsibilities.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:48:07 Without the promotions.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:48:08 Without the promotions.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:48:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Many times.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:48:11 Then being a woman did effect you?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:48:13 Oh yes, definitely.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:48:21 Is there any good explanation as to why that happens?

- Imogene La Covey: 00:48:27 Well, probably. Number one the fact of my lack of formal educational background. I think that if I were in a supervisor's position making a judgment, I think this would have a very profound effect and I think it did in my case. The second thing is that I just don't think women ever – my name or any other woman's name ever surfaced as a program responsibility position. I think they always saw it in terms of men until really the non-discrimination reasons surfaced, and they got the word that they meant what they said.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:49:13 I don't think it would have happened to me in a – If I had come into the Park Service ten years before, it would have never happened. I was at the right spot at the right time. There's no question about it. I'd say particularly, let's just say in view of the fact that I didn't have formal education.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:34 So towards the end of your career, you were in the right spot at the right time.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:49:37 Right, right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:38 Earlier in your career, you probably were given responsibility without necessarily being given the promotions that went with them.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:49:44 Oh yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:45 Am I phrasing that correctly?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:49:47 Right. Mm-hmm (affirmative), you are.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:48 So with great patience it all finally paid off, so to speak.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:49:51 Right, right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:52 As far as grade and salary are concerned.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:49:54 Right,
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:56 Presumably a man might have achieved that earlier on by virtue of being a man?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:50:00 Oh yes. As a matter of fact, there – Well, I don't know any man that did it – Well, I do too. After I'm saying a man that

did it without formal advanced education like I had. But I do know a couple that did.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:50:23 So by staying with this job and the growth possibilities that were offered, you finally reached a period where you were at the right time at the right place to see some fruition of all this pay off for all of that.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:50:41 Right, and I enjoyed what I was doing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:50:42 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Are there any jobs in the National Park Service that you think a woman really should not have?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:50:49 Not if she wants it. No. There were some that I wouldn't tackle. But if a woman wants it, I don't know of any.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:50:58 Did anyone act as a mentor for you during your Park Service career?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:51:05 Yes, I'd have to say probably. Some of that I didn't know about at the time. I learned about it later.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:51:19 Was there anyone who would actively encourage you and make suggestions on how you might increase your opportunities?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:51:33 No, I don't think there was ever any of that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:51:36 Do you think that your specific talents and training were well used by Park Service?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:51:41 Oh yes. Whatever talents there are. Training, I would have to say was – background and training was probably the most important of those two.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:51:54 Were you aware of women giving assistance to each other among groups of women within the Park Service?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:52:01 No, ma'am. No, ma'am, and as a matter of fact I would have to say just the opposite. At the time I became the first female member of the directorate there were several repercussions came from females in several areas.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:52:18 Were these professional women?

Imogene La Covey: 00:52:20 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:52:20 These were not clerical women?

Imogene La Covey: 00:52:21 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:52:24 Were the repercussions as such suggestions these persons were unhappy with your achievement?

Imogene La Covey: 00:52:32 Yes. Definitely, and don't ask me why. I don't know why. No, I don't know why. They were in no position to have any exposure to what I had done or know what my capabilities were. I have to assume that at least part of it was envy.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:52:51 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Imogene La Covey: 00:52:55 But there was two areas that this came from and I was amazed.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:53:02 Did this just come through the grapevine or were people fairly open about it?

Imogene La Covey: 00:53:09 Well, I never got it direct. I got it second-hand from the office of these people that – It's amazing.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:53:21 Is there something of a traditional with women that women don't like to work with women?

Imogene La Covey: 00:53:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:53:28 Although I think things are changing. But was this by chance a reflection of the fact that some people are going to have to work with you?

Imogene La Covey: 00:53:32 No, I don't think so.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:53:35 It comes closer to envy?

Imogene La Covey: 00:53:36 I think so. As a matter of fact, I think in one particular case, this individual was hoping to be the first 15 female, expected to be perhaps. And she finally left the Park Service never having achieved it. So, I think probably that's it. And she was in a position to – She was administrator in Park Services. She was in a position to know what's going

on and really to make it rather difficult. She didn't make it difficult for me, but she tried.

- Imogene La Covey: 00:54:08 I know I had gotten a congratulatory note from the assistant secretary and this person was saying, she was an administrator, she was saying that the appointment had never been approved by the Secretary's Office. And I said, "Well, I got a congratulatory note from Reed. Here it is." It was very unpleasant to say the least.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:54:38 When you look ahead, say five years from now, what would you anticipate the status of opportunities for women within the next five years?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:54:45 Within the Park Service you mean?
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:54:46 Yes, exactly.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:54:49 Well, I would say they should be greatly increased. I think there are a lot of sharp women down in the lower echelon that if somebody gives them the opportunity to surface, and I don't see how they can avoid it, I think really there'll be rather sparkling possibilities. I really do.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:12 Are the attitudes changing now so that, as you say, they won't be able to avoid it?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:55:16 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think so.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:21 I'd like to ask about your family. Was your husband a Park Service employee?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:55:25 He was when we were married.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:27 He was?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:55:27 Mm-hmm (affirmative). When we were married, he worked in what amounted to accounting. They called control division, but it was the accountant section of Park Service. And shortly after we were married, he went out to the Bureau of Land Management as their administrative officer.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:44 And never returned to Park Service?
- Imogene La Covey: 00:55:45 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:47 You have three children?

Imogene La Covey: 00:55:48 Right.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:48 What are their current ages?

Imogene La Covey: 00:55:51 Jack, Jr. is 39. My oldest daughter is 36, my youngest is 29.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:56:03 Is that's a daughter also?

Imogene La Covey: 00:56:06 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Her picture's in this morning's paper.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:56:07 Really?

Imogene La Covey: 00:56:09 Yeah. It's in wedding announcements. She just got married on October 7th and the wedding picture's in the paper this morning.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:56:15 I see. If one of your daughters expressed an interest in working for the Park Service, taking into account she is a female, would you encourage her?

Imogene La Covey: 00:56:23 Oh yes. As a matter of fact, I've had a little granddaughter that swears that's what she wants to do.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:56:28 Would you encourage here?

Imogene La Covey: 00:56:29 Mm-hmm (affirmative). The only reason I wouldn't encourage her, and this applied to the boys also, it's so hard to get into the Park Service. There's so many people waiting in line to get in. If you direct your whole career efforts trying to achieve a Park Service career and you're disappointed and you never make it even into the door, why, this can be kind of devastating to people. And it does happen. And I would imagine that the intake level for Park Service will continue to be heavily male for a long time.

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:05 The girls that come in are going to be like me, who didn't come in through the intake level, who came in through a stenographic or clerical. And there's some girls in the Park Service, in Concessions right now that came in through this same route. But to get in, as I say, at the ranger intake level is difficult.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:22 There are of course some women coming in.

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:25 Yeah, there are some, but it's heavily male. Am I not right?

Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:30 I believe at the moment it should need to include more women. I was just at the Albright Training Center.

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:35 Oh yeah. How many women do they have in that intake, do you know?

Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:39 It's not half the class, but—

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:41 Is it? There's enough—

Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:43 —a sufficient fraction.

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:45 Well, good.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:46 It's just no longer one or two in a class of 40. It's closer to a third.

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:48 Good.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:54 But you do see women who are coming up through the stenographic ranks, is that right?

Imogene La Covey: 00:57:57 Well, I know some that have come in the Park Service through that way, that road in them now going over to the—

Dorothy Huyck: 00:58:05 They were able to move out of series.

Imogene La Covey: 00:58:07 Yeah. Move out of that series into the—

Dorothy Huyck: 00:58:10 For some women, that's a really different thing to do. To move out of that series and into another series.

Imogene La Covey: 00:58:13 I know it is. But they've achieved it. Of course, actually the ones that I'm most familiar with are in concessions, but I know of some others. But there are so few people qualified in the area of concessions and so few people are interested in it. I guess they had the same attitude I did before I really got involved in it. This was one of the last places I wanted to work. As I say, I found it the most interesting. But those people who have that same reaction, these girls that get into it, is that they've been able to move from one series into another and they're—

Imogene La Covey: 00:58:46 Jane Ring is one. You know Jane?

Dorothy Huyck: 00:58:48 I know of her. I've never met her.

Imogene La Covey: 00:58:51 Well, she's one. And Judy Townsley [phonetic].

Dorothy Huyck: 00:58:58 Concessions must have one major advantage that I can think right away, and that is that you do not have to be mobile in terms of moving from one park to another. You can move depending on your capabilities without having to move physically and geographically.

Imogene La Covey: 00:59:12 Right.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:59:13 Which is something that's held up to many women as being [crosstalk 00:59:17].

Imogene La Covey: 00:59:16 That's right. Of course, the opportunities to be mobile are increasing all the time in Concessions simply because they're trying to expand and get more expertise in the area out to the parks and the regions than they previously have, which is certainly necessary. Of course, one of these days, I'll live to see the time where they'll pull it all back in. I've seen it go back and forth like this numbers of time.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:59:39 Centralized and decentralized.

Imogene La Covey: 00:59:39 Right. Never seems to be any real answer.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:59:44 A woman like yourself with three children, of course an additional commitment, would have had at one time a difficult time convincing superiors that mobility wasn't a problem, that you could move through the Park Service ranks without being in different areas.

Imogene La Covey: 01:00:05 I don't think—

Dorothy Huyck: 01:00:06 Concessions offered that opportunity.

Imogene La Covey: 01:00:07 Well, it did. And that was purely and simply coincident of course that I ended up there. But I don't think there was anyone when I came in that was in the position of where the Park Service would offer a position which would require moving. And true to my time, and true to my age, I'm sure if – Just as I resigned and went to Alaska when Jack was transferred up there, I wouldn't have gone.

- Dorothy Huyck: 01:00:43 Did you work while he was in Alaska?
- Imogene La Covey: 01:00:44 Mm-mm (negative). No. I wasn't particularly interested in coming back to work when I came back. Jack never had any objection to my working, he never particularly wanted me to.
- [END OF TAPE 1]
- [START OF TAPE 2]
- [NOTE: Audio quality of tape 2 is poor.]
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:00 I'm curious about what it's like to be a women working full-time and keeping the household going full-time, in an era I gather when husbands weren't particularly prone to sharing the household jobs.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:12 Right. In my particular case, the understanding in the family was that if I wanted to work, that it was fine, but it was understood that I would still have to take responsibility for what we had – as a home, take responsibility for it as if I were not working. And that was the way it always was. Never posed a problem. We understand it from the beginning. And it never was a problem.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:34 It required you a dual role—
- Imogene La Covey: 00:37 Right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:38 —Which I gather you kept quite separate.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:40 Yes, definitely, very – by design, I did not mix my career with my family, family life.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:46 I would think that you must have had a tremendous amount of energy to keep these two full-time roles going.
- Imogene La Covey: 00:52 Well, I enjoyed my work, so I wasn't tired when I went home. To get home with the children and the family responsibilities was just like a new day almost, and I never minded. I always looked forward to that too because – I suppose I never thought about it myself as having a lot of energy, but I must tell you, I don't know if I could do it now, but I did. Going home was just something I looked forward to. It was a change, and the children were a

pleasure because I wasn't with them all day and the little irritations hadn't worn me down, and I enjoyed them, and same thing, I enjoyed my work too.

- Dorothy Huyck: 01:32 You retired from the National Park Service in 1975, what are you doing currently?
- Imogene La Covey: 01:37 Well, mostly I'm playing bridge. No, I'm working part-time for the Conference for National Parks Concessions as the Washington liaison representative.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:50 How long have you been doing that kind of work?
- Imogene La Covey: 01:51 Since last March.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:53 March? Of '78?
- Imogene La Covey: 01:54 '78, right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:55 And what all does that involve?
- Imogene La Covey: 01:57 It involved the clerical responsibilities having to do with conference, which was the financial side. Not all of that, but some of it. Keeping in contact with the Park Service enough that if they don't like what is happening, if the concessioner has a particular problem, trying to find out where it is. I specifically, when I took the job, made it clear that I would never do anything that would put me in the position of being an adversary of the Park Service by going in connection with specific or individual concessioner requests. I'm glad to do what I can to find out where it is, but if he wants representation or if he wants to take issue with the Park Service, why then he has to go someplace else for it because I'm not going to put myself in that role.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:42 Are you able to maintain that distance?
- Imogene La Covey: 02:48 Yes. No way that's going to open. As a matter of fact, Don Hummel, who's the chairman of the conference, they – also I made it perfectly clear that I was not going to be a [inaudible 00:02:57]. He wanted some information from over on the Hill, and he asked me about calling over there. He said, "Do you mind?" And I said, "No, I don't mind. I don't mind calling for information." It's just that I'm not going over there and take a political role advocating something. I know the people over there well enough that I'm comfortable with

them. But I'm not going to go over there and politic for a concessioner's cause. So, it's been how we – basically, we evolved from here from into for arranging the conference for the concessioners in March.

- Dorothy Huyck: 03:36 Is that an annual conference?
- Imogene La Covey: 03:36 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:38 [inaudible 00:03:38].
- Imogene La Covey: 03:39 They have a media [?] conference. It was in Glacier in September. I went out to Glacier for that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:47 I was going to ask you about some of the people that you remember. I'm particularly interested in the early period when you were in the Park Service and when you came back from Alaska, because the most difficult section of research from 1918 to the present time, is the '30s and the World War II period and immediately thereafter. [inaudible 00:04:18] there were very few women in the Park Service after that legislation went to through in 1933 that prohibited two persons in one family from working for the federal government. And it also related to the fact that during World War II, women working for the Park Service were in positions that they did not hold after the war – they were airplane spotters and fire tower watchers and that sort of thing. And the women who were here in Washington throughout that period were maybe more interesting because they were more numerous and held more interesting positions than any place else.
- Imogene La Covey: 04:47 Well, I worked—
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:49 [Crosstalk 00:04:49] if you had a word about that [unintelligible 00:04:49].
- Imogene La Covey: 04:49 Well, I worked prior to World War II, but I did not work during World War II. I came back to work after World War II.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:57 Oh, in the '50s.
- Imogene La Covey: 04:59 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:59 Going back to the period before World War II, do you remember when you held positions at that time, did you talk to Isabelle Story?

Imogene La Covey: 05:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I recall Isabelle Story. There was a female lawyer, in the National Capital Parks, Mary McCulligan—

Dorothy Huyck: 05:16 —Mary McCullin [phonetic].

Dorothy Huyck: 05:17 Mary McCulligan.

Imogene La Covey: 05:18 Have you come in contact with her?

Dorothy Huyck: 05:20 I know the name, but that's all.

Imogene La Covey: 05:22 Mary McCulligan and Isabelle Story. Isabelle Story had a assistant.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:32 Mary Ryan.

Imogene La Covey: 05:34 No, it was – Mary Ryan was one also, but she had a position of greater responsibility than Mary. I can't think what her name was.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:44 Dorothea Lewis?

Imogene La Covey: 05:46 No. McGuire?

Dorothy Huyck: 05:48 Yes.

Imogene La Covey: 05:52 She was a very charming person. I remember her.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:56 Do you remember anything of what these persons were doing at that time?

Imogene La Covey: 05:59 Yes. Mary Ryan, McGuire, and Isabelle Story all three worked in what they called the Office of Information, which is the public relations today. Isabelle Story headed it up. The interesting thing about Isabelle Story, this is purely hearsay, but it's my understanding that she came to work for the Park Service when the agency was established as a secretary.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:22 I think the records show that.

- Imogene La Covey: 06:24 Well, I haven't seen her records, but this was one – and of course, she would make her one of the person who came up through the rank. She was a writer of course, which was her ware, I'm sure. She had quite a reputation nationwide. She was respected and what have you, much more in that day than was expected for that kind of person.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:51 A number of Park Service photographs were chiefly men—
- Imogene La Covey: 06:54 Oh, yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:54 And there would be one woman—
- Imogene La Covey: 06:56 Isabelle Story.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:57 Isabelle Story, or maybe Isabelle Story and [inaudible 00:06:57].
- Imogene La Covey: 06:57 Those women – Mary McCulligan and those three women in information are the only three I can recall in any—
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:19 Any recollection of what kind of legal work Mary McCulligan did?
- Imogene La Covey: 07:22 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:22 Oh good.
- Imogene La Covey: 07:23 She did an awful lot of land – She worked for the National Capital Parks. She did a lot of lands leasing, land descriptions, purchasing, this type of thing. Basically, I think it was lands work and regulations. She did a lot of regulations for the parks. [inaudible 00:07:45].
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:45 And Mary Ryan?
- Imogene La Covey: 07:49 She worked under Isabelle Story and that's basically – basically press releases, news stories. And I think they handled things [inaudible 00:08:01].
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:04 And McGuire too?
- Imogene La Covey: 08:08 That is right. That's exactly right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:13 Do you remember her too?

- Imogene La Covey: 08:14 She worked under Isabelle Story and she and Mary Ryan and Isabelle Story were all sitting in the same office and doing, I don't know if it's the same thing, basically the same thing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:25 [inaudible 00:08:25].
- Imogene La Covey: 08:31 But what do you know about her? Did you place her anyplace like same bureau same office?
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:36 [Crosstalk].
- Imogene La Covey: 08:36 Same office?
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:36 But I really don't know much about her.
- Imogene La Covey: 08:41 No? The name, it doesn't—
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:42 And then when you came back in 1950s, are there women in professional jobs that you remember [inaudible 00:08:47]?
- Imogene La Covey: 09:01 [inaudible 00:09:01] again, I think. She's dead now. I can't recall a single female.
- Dorothy Huyck: 09:20 [inaudible 00:09:20].
- Imogene La Covey: 09:20 I think it's probably [inaudible 00:09:40]. I think [inaudible 00:09:45]. I sort of end up by saying that I think that the good Lord must have been smiling the day that I came to the Park Service because as I say my career with the Park Service has been good or excellent but circumstances – like needing a job and they had one. But it's – as you're probably aware, it's sort of a unique agency. Much more – at the time that I've been in the Park Service until here, it's comradery was much stronger than it is now. It's sort of been – Much of the charisma has gone out of it which is a loss but nevertheless the memories to work with [inaudible 00:09:57]. I came back to work the second time, I didn't [inaudible 00:09:57] and I called up the Park Service. No, I called up the park [inaudible 00:10:47] told them [inaudible 00:10:47] I'd like to come back to work. They said, "Well, go down to the Park Service. [inaudible 00:10:51]."
- Imogene La Covey: 10:51 So we went down to the Park Service [inaudible 00:10:54]. I wasn't really at that time searching--didn't have in mind

specifically coming back to the Park Service. I didn't mean that I didn't want to, but I hadn't, at that point in time, [inaudible 00:11:08] good and [inaudible 00:11:11] sent me down there, which I think [inaudible 00:11:16] been back [inaudible 00:11:21] to this Park Service personnel office. I since I've worked before he went through all of the – he must have had the papers out – you know, the background and what have you – so he got to the end of the thing and he said "Well, go ahead and type something, something like this." And when we got all through he says, "Well," he said, "We still don't know whether you can spell, we still don't know what you are going to do about your family." And I said, "Well, [inaudible 00:11:48] I can tell you my family comes first. And if it comes to it I still know how to use a dictionary." Well, after I got accepted [inaudible 00:12:00], his whole attitude just changed. I mean it was like Jekyll and Hyde, his whole attitude changed. [inaudible 00:12:08] this sort of thing, from then on. I didn't even want that job that day, you know, because his attitude was like he was challenging my ability. And basically, I was [inaudible 00:12:21] good employee. I had to prove myself. And I thought, well, I've done this before. I worked for the Park Service before, you know. Is this necessary?

Dorothy Huyck: 12:39

[inaudible 00:12:39].

Imogene La Covey: 12:43

[inaudible 00:12:43]. And then they couldn't bring me forward for it fast enough. And I wasn't ready to come back. I said, "I got to go home and get my family squared away before I can come back [inaudible 00:12:54]." But [inaudible 00:12:56].

Dorothy Huyck: 12:57

[inaudible 00:12:57].

Imogene La Covey: 12:58

I didn't stay at that time. I really didn't. I was [inaudible 00:13:04], but I never worked [inaudible 00:13:04]. That was another thing that was [inaudible 00:13:08] handle it as well as other [inaudible 00:13:12] always had [inaudible 00:13:13], but there was [inaudible 00:13:17].

Dorothy Huyck: 13:17

Was that [inaudible 00:13:18]?

Imogene La Covey: 13:17

Oh yeah, [inaudible 00:13:27]. I think [inaudible 00:13:30] really couldn't help it. Anybody in that situation. Keep on doing it, and I got on with it.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:45

[inaudible 00:13:45].

Imogene La Covey: 13:46

[inaudible 00:13:46] came back and I [inaudible 00:14:25].

Dorothy Huyck: 14:25

[inaudible 00:14:25].

Imogene La Covey: 14:25

[inaudible 00:14:25] but other than [inaudible 00:14:25].
And when I retired, I was ready to retire. Basically, I retired
for two reasons. Number one: my husband was ill, however
[inaudible 00:14:43], all of these [inaudible 00:14:55].
Going back to the 1940s [inaudible]. The satisfaction had
gone out of it. I hope it's [inaudible 00:15:01], I really do
because the satisfaction [inaudible 00:15:04]. Everything
that you're doing was [inaudible 00:15:10] you don't
[inaudible 00:15:16] retire [inaudible 00:15:19] and my
husband [inaudible 00:15:21].

[END OF TAPE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]