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



Shirley Beccue  
March 1, 2022

Interview conducted Perri Meldon and Lu Ann Jones  
Transcribed by Rev.com  
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

SHIRLEY BECCUE

March 1, 2022

Interview conducted by  
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The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

[START OF FILE 1]

Shirley Beccue (00:00): It is now.

Perri Meldon (00:02): All righty. So, I'm going to start off with a little intro, as we did last week, and then we'll jump back in. Okay. So, today is March 1, 2022. My name is Perri Meldon, and I am interviewing Shirley Beccue. This is part two of our interview. We are conducting this oral history by Zoom. NPS staff historian, Lu Ann Jones, is also joining us. This oral history recording will be stored with the National Park Service.

Perri Meldon (00:36): So, Shirley, in our last interview last week, we left off by describing chickee building and accessibility compliance, and you were describing Deb Wade's particular support of hiring people with disabilities. I just wanted to confirm with you, what was her role, and was she at Everglades? I didn't catch if she might have been at Acadia as well.

Shirley Beccue (01:04): Okay. Deb was at Everglades, and Deb worked primarily with the environmental education group. At some point, she became the environmental ed district supervisor. But her interest in access I think came into play with a friend that she had, either in high school or in college, who had a disability. Deb was always very supportive of this young woman, of her friend of hers, and I think it just carried over into her work aspect of thinking about access, whether it be something to do with hearing, or something in terms of a physical disability.

Shirley Beccue (02:04): We talked about it briefly the other day, and she said, "It just was kind of a part of what I grew up with." She said, "It wasn't something I kind of decided that I was going to be kind of this advocate. It just kind of came naturally to me."

Shirley Beccue (02:24): But Deb worked at Everglades. She was there when I got to Everglades in '79, and she left in '87 to take the position of the chief of interpretation at Acadia. At some point, when I decided it was time for me to start looking for another position--I hadn't thought about Acadia, but Deb was down in Everglades. Her parents wintered in the area, and she stopped in at the park, and she said she had a position coming opening. She encouraged me to apply.

Shirley Beccue (03:03): But as you know, in the Park Service, you can't just ask someone to come and work for you. You go through this whole process of

applying, and so forth. And so, I did, and eventually, Deb did hire me for that position.

Shirley Beccue (03:17): And in Everglades, she initiated, through SCA, Student Conservation Association, hiring a young man who was blind, and he was with us for part of the summer. And I don't recall exactly what his position was, what he did, but I'm assuming he probably was up at the visitor center, working in helping visitors plan their visit.

Shirley Beccue (03:44): But she also hired a young woman who was legally blind, and she became a permanent position. She was on an appointment like mine, I'm probably thinking, where it was a temporary thing, and then if you did well, there was a possibility of the position becoming permanent. This young lady, her name was Denise, she coordinated all the environmental education programs with the schools.

Shirley Beccue (04:12): And she had a special reader, kind of looked like a large television, that would read papers that she would get from the classes and from the teachers, setting up their schedule to come out to the park. And she did very well, and so, she was hired on permanently. She stayed with the park for several years.

Shirley Beccue (04:38): But then she got married, and she needed to move to another area, because her husband needed some special services, which weren't of available down in the Miami area. So, she did leave the park service at that time. But she was really fun to work with, and did an extremely good job, and she was very well supported by the park staff, and she contributed a lot to the environmental ed program.

Shirley Beccue (05:04): So, Deb was instrumental in a lot of ways like that, to kind of see where there was a need that the park had, in terms of perhaps a position. But then also, is that a position that could be held by someone who had a disability? So, she just was always, as I said, she was a very forward-thinking person, I guess, is how I would describe her. And very compassionate.

Shirley Beccue (05:31): She was the only chief here at Acadia that was a woman, and so, I often sat in on the meetings, because I was her assistant at that time. And it was interesting to be the one or two women in a group of men, and she held her own all the time. I think she was very well respected by the fellows in the group.

- Shirley Beccue (05:57): But that dynamic was always kind of an interesting dynamic, to see how men viewed issues, and how women viewed issues. Most of the time there was an agreement on things, but she was somewhat a very strong personality, but I had never met anyone who could be moved to tears more easily than Deb. She was and is a very compassionate person, and I think a lot of that has to do with just not only her upbringing, but other people that she associated with. It became a part of who she was and is. Yeah.
- Perri Meldon (06:42): It sounds like she was an advocate, for one, a mentor, and also, she's been, it sounds like, a lifelong friend.
- Shirley Beccue (06:52): Yeah. She has been. Yeah. Definitely.
- Perri Meldon (06:56): Can you elaborate when you say that you were the only two women in the room? Can you recall particular instances where you noticed kind of this difference in gender either in [inaudible 00:07:09] or just in the workplace?
- Shirley Beccue (07:11): I do remember one incident. I don't remember what the topic was, but there was some discussion about something that needed resolution. It might have been something that physically needed to change in the park, or an approach to something. I remember Deb was probably the first or second person that threw out an idea that might be workable for this solution.
- Shirley Beccue (07:36): There weren't many comments, but it went around the room. Different people said different things. It got around to maybe the last person, and he said something, which was the exact thing that Deb had said at the beginning of the meeting. All of a sudden, quite a few of the men jumped on board. Like, "This is a great idea. We need to follow through on this, and we could do this, we could do that."
- Shirley Beccue (08:06): So, it was like, well, there wasn't the same kind of reaction when Deb said it. Maybe people just had a chance to kind of think of all the possibilities before they wanted to jump in, but it was noticeable that there was more support when it was said by a man, than it was said by a woman. So, whether or not that was just that particular incident.
- Shirley Beccue (08:31): But I think sometimes it's been hard for women to get the same type of recognition for things, not only in the Park Service, but I think in general. I mean, you see it in pay equality in many instances. Not necessarily in the Park Service, but--. So, it just kind

of stood out that like, "Wait a minute. We talked about this a half hour ago, and there wasn't this kind of support that there is now."

Shirley Beccue (09:00): So, that was one incident that I recall. Sometimes you have to be, I think, a little tougher as a woman, to get things across, or to get heard. And I think that's probably true probably in other circles as well. Other businesses. Yeah.

Perri Meldon (09:28): Interesting. Well, do you get the sense, looking back, that accessibility initiatives at Everglades was unique, or did you hear about similar projects underway at other parks?

Shirley Beccue (09:43): There was quite a bit--. I don't know if you knew Dave Park, or knew of his work, but there was quite a bit of training that went on that I was able to go to. Deb and I went to several of those trainings together, and there were other parks involved in those trainings as well.

Shirley Beccue (10:07): So, I think there was an awareness that it was an issue that parks needed to be aware of, and some things were probably pretty obvious, in terms of eliminating steps, and putting in ramps, and so forth. But other things were things that I think that kind of grew out of some of these training sessions, and some of people's personal experiences, in terms of either themselves having a disability and challenges they faced, or comments that visitors made about, "Why don't I have access to this?" Or "Is the park doing anything to make it easier for someone with my particular disability to be more included in visiting a park?"

Shirley Beccue (11:00): So, I think it was kind of a combination of a number of things. And there was just, I think, generally things were happening around the country in terms of access. Especially with eliminating physical barriers, was primarily what I think caught the public attention pretty quickly. Yeah.

Perri Meldon (11:24): You mentioned you attended some of these trainings. Where did they take place, and did you actually help participate in them, besides attending?

Shirley Beccue (11:37): Some were in Lowell, in Massachusetts. There were some there. We went to one in St. Augustine fairly early on. That one was particularly interesting, because we stayed at a hotel in St. Augustine, and they had a little conference room in a separate building on the grounds. Well, it turned out that the room that was scheduled for us was on the second floor of this building, with no

elevator. So, for the three or four days that we were there, I got carried up to the second floor.

Shirley Beccue (12:16): It was a wakeup call for not only those who had scheduled it, but the whole class was like, "We're doing an accessibility training, and the facility isn't accessible for this woman in a wheelchair." So, I don't think that probably ever happened again, in terms of having the training at a facility that wasn't accessible.

Shirley Beccue (12:43): Actually, I did a presentation down in Lowell about access, and I did one other one. I think it was in Georgia. I don't recall exactly what I spoke about, but I was asked to be a speaker at that one.

Shirley Beccue (13:02): In the parks, we did access training as well. In fact, at Acadia, we had a woman. She was the wife of the division chief for resource management, and she worked with the state on accessibility issues, and she came out and did a day-long training for park wide permanent staff. It was in the winter that she came out and did that and did a really good job. That was nice to have the whole park involved in that particular training.

Perri Meldon (13:47): I'll start by saying that story about the hotel is infuriating, also not terribly surprising, and also those issues, they still happen, which is decades later. But here we are. Had you intended to make accessibility part of your NPS career, or how did you get involved?

Shirley Beccue (14:10): Well, I wasn't aware really of what the park's policies were about access. I mean, they knew before they hired me that I was disabled. And so, it kind of grew out of that.

Shirley Beccue (14:28): There were different kind of like--not study groups, but groups of people that would get together to work on various projects in the park, and if there was something to deal with access, I was a part of that group. I mean, it just kind of became a natural thing to be a part of those projects when they came up. But I wasn't aware of the park's accessibility issues, or their philosophy on any of that when I started with the park. So.

Perri Meldon (15:09): I see. Well, before we continue, I'll turn to Lu Ann, and ask if you have any questions you'd like to ask as well.

Lu Ann Jones (15:18): Thank you. I'm wondering, and I don't know exactly where you're headed Perri, but in talking about training, I'm very interested in Ranger Skills, and what ranger skills was like for you. And who were the people there at Albright that was making accessibility--I don't know if it was a priority, but they were working with you.

- Shirley Beccue (15:47): Right. At Ranger Skills--seems like such a long time ago.
- Lu Ann Jones (15:57): Shirley, maybe you can tell Perri what ranger skills... Describe what that whole fleet of programs was. Yeah.
- Shirley Beccue (16:05): Okay. Well, Ranger Skills was down at the Albright Training Center at the Grand Canyon. I went there in '85, and at that time, I believe it was a six-week program. Every week, or every few days, we looked at another division in the park. Maintenance division, the ranger division, the interpretive divisions.
- Shirley Beccue (16:33): And within that, there were a number of speakers that came to talk with us, but there was also a lot of practical, hands-on involvement, so that we got really a better look at what issues might be facing the various divisions, how they were handling them, and how they interact with all the other divisions within a park.
- Shirley Beccue (16:55): It was very comprehensive. And one of the best things was that we, quote, became "a little family within the family," because the networking you do on any training is one of the really valuable aspects of going to training. This was a long training. Five weeks, six weeks long. So, you got to know people really well.
- Shirley Beccue (17:19): But we did things--like for law enforcement, we did scenarios. Scenario might be that someone was in the campground that was drinking and causing a real issue. How would you handle that? Or, interpretation, we did little scenarios where we were just called randomly in the room to come and talk to someone who was giving a program, and how you might approach a difficult subject that came up within the program that they were presenting to the public.
- Shirley Beccue (17:53): For maintenance, I think we actually went to the train station that was at Grand Canyon, and at that time, I believe they were refurbishing or remodeling parts of it. So, we got a hands-on look in terms of some of the issues that faced them in keeping the integrity of that building, and yet updating it, and making it more usable than it had been, I guess, for a while.
- Shirley Beccue (18:20): We got to play with the fire hoses, and sprayed buildings. The last day, it was all search and rescue. So, we repelled into the canyon. We did litter carry outs. We did Tyrolean transfer from tree to tree, but it might have been ship-to-ship type of rescue or whatever. So, it was very comprehensive.

- Shirley Beccue (18:43): We even took field trips to other nearby parks, and there's a lot of them surrounding the Grand Canyon area. There were oftentimes speakers that came and spoke with us about their parks. Some of the issues, some of the various aspects of that park. On the weekends, a lot of us got together in small groups, and went to some of the parks too. So, I had driven out there, so I had my car at that time, with hand control, so I could get around.
- Shirley Beccue (19:20): So, as I said, it was very encompassing in terms of the information we were getting, and really getting to know other people, some of the issues that they faced in their park, and it was a wonderful experience. I think at one time, it had been maybe two or three months long, I think. Do you recall? It was, I think, extensively longer at one point.
- Shirley Beccue (19:47): But I think with our group, probably on about week five, people were starting to kind of miss home a bit. So, I think the six week was probably a good timeframe for that particular training, as it was being presented at that time.
- Shirley Beccue (20:05): So, I remember Mary Badami. I don't know if you're familiar with that name. She was a professor out of a small college in Pennsylvania, but she was a real sought-after speaker for interpretive training. She was just very dynamic, and just a real positive person that really lit up the room, and just engaged people. So, she gave several presentations, and I believe she came here once, very early on when I was here. She's probably retired by now, but one of those people that you're glad that you had rubbed elbows with her, so to speak, through the park service.
- Shirley Beccue (20:50): But yeah, Ranger Skills was very, very worthwhile. I think now it's more of a two-day, three-day thing. I'm not sure how it's constructed right now, but it's a lot different. I don't know that they do many of the hands-on things that we were able to do at Albright.
- Lu Ann Jones (21:11): Yeah. I think you're right. I've heard people who went through Ranger Skills before you did, and you're right. It's probably two or three months. It was a really long, comprehensive training.
- Lu Ann Jones (21:20): Now, it's kind of been truncated to what they call Fundamentals, which is, when I did that, there were actually two weeks at Albright, but you did a lot of stuff online, and we were not repelling down the side of the Grand Canyon. (Chuckles) That was not part of the training. But even though there was a fair amount of speakers and hands on.

- Lu Ann Jones (21:45): But I was wondering, before you went, did you alert them that you were in a wheelchair? And how were those accommodations--what kind of conversations preceded that?
- Shirley Beccue (22:00): Right. I don't recall that they personally spoke to me about accessibility, but I'm sure they obviously knew that before I came. They weren't surprised when I showed up. The accommodations, we stayed in little apartments. I had a roommate who was working at Carl Sandburg. She was great. Her background was in drama, so sometimes she would break out into song, and I'd wonder what's happening here. She was really fun.
- Shirley Beccue (22:34): As far as the classroom, that was not an issue. The only, not issue, but the only thing that did come up was there was a trip down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, and they said they were going to rent a helicopter to take me down there, which sounded kind of over the top. Anyway, we didn't end up doing that, and myself and two other people stayed behind. One girl wasn't feeling well, and then the other person, I think the other person had to temporarily go back home. He lived not too far from the canyon, so that was an issue there.
- Shirley Beccue (23:19): But it wasn't an issue for me, in terms of not being able to do that. But otherwise, when we went on trips, it was either I was driving my car when we were doing it on our own, or if it was a group thing, we must have been on a bus. I honestly don't remember, but I know I didn't drive my car to some of the other places when the whole group was going. But I didn't encounter any real issues with the Albright setup at all.
- Lu Ann Jones (23:54): Okay. Repelling. Can you just tell me about your repel over the edge of the canyon?
- Shirley Beccue (24:01): Well, I guess at first, I have to say that I'm terrified of heights. So, they were a little nervous about me going down because Dave--is it Churcher, his name? I can't recall. T.J. Reynolds was one of the instructors, and we were on a cliff. I don't remember how we got there.
- Shirley Beccue (24:28): But I was in my wheelchair, and I was fine until he picked me up, and when he picked me up, of course I was higher, and I could look down and see how far it was down there. We probably went down about four stories, but he sat me next to him on the edge of the cliff, and I'm sure I was holding on tight to his shirt or something. He was in a separate rope, and I had my own rope. And

so, we went down together, and it was a very gradual thing. It wasn't like a parachute jump off a thing.

Shirley Beccue (25:01): But Dave had been a little nervous, he said, because we never had a paraplegic go down before. But it was fine. The Tyrolean, I don't remember how I got up, but we were up probably about two stories as we went tree to tree. I think somewhere, I have a picture of that, of me on that line. I was the belay on a litter carry out on the top, where they were bringing a litter out.

Shirley Beccue (25:29): So, it was fun, and it was, as I said, the last day, so everybody was in a good mood, and just it was a fun day. I think one of the most fun days that we had as a group together. But that was the one and only time I repelled in the canyon. So, I'd probably do it again, but I'd want several strong men on either side of me. Yeah.

Shirley Beccue (26:02): It was good.

Shirley Beccue (26:03): But Albright, the whole experience was one that I was really happy to have had, and that the park was able to let me go for that length of time to enjoy that. And to learn from it, because there were aspects of some of the divisions that I wasn't aware of. So, it was very helpful in that way as well.

Lu Ann Jones (26:27): Yeah. Well, one of the reasons that I ask who--it's interesting that you mentioned Mr. Reynolds, because one of the other people that we have interviewed, one of the people that Nancy Russell directed us towards, he asked Eileen... Help me pronounce her last name.

Perri Meldon (26:48): Szychowski.

Lu Ann Jones (26:50): Szychowski. Eileen Szychowski. She was a horsewoman who had come to the canyon, assuming that she would be able to ride a mule down to the bottom. Was denied that, but in the process, got the attention of the park, and concessioners.

Lu Ann Jones (27:09): Anyway, J.T. Reynolds heard about this, and invited her to come to Albright and speak, and then the next summer she went back as an interpretive ranger just for a season at the canyon. So, again, I think one of the things that is interesting is to try to map, who are the people who are opening the doors, and sensitive to needs and opportunities? And it sounds like Mr. Reynolds was one of those people.

Shirley Beccue (27:45): Yeah. I think J.T. might have been at the Glades at one time. I'm not sure, because when I mentioned his name, several people had

worked with him. For some reason, I think that there might have been an Everglades connection too. Yeah. Deb was very aware of him.

Lu Ann Jones (28:05): I think he's kind of a legend around the Park Service.

Shirley Beccue (28:08): Is he?

Lu Ann Jones (28:09): I think so. Yeah. Thank you so much. That's it, Perri.

Perri Meldon (28:12): Yep. Now, you mentioned that you did these ranger skills in 1985. Were you still at Everglades at the time?

Shirley Beccue (28:23): Yes, I was. Yep. Yep.

Perri Meldon (28:27): What made you decide that it was time for a change at some point?

Shirley Beccue (28:33): Well, part of it was, I think, some of the people that I was close to had left. There was also, we had a new chief come in, and he was not a team builder, and that was not only a shock to me, but to some of the others as well. It kind of changed the mood of the division. Not necessarily all the individual people and district rangers, but so, it just felt like it wasn't as a congenial group, as it had been.

Shirley Beccue (29:16): People got together on individual issues, and to work through things, but there was, I don't know, this feeling overall that the mood had changed. And so, I decided to start looking around for another position.

Perri Meldon (29:36): And you reached out to Deb Wade, then?

Shirley Beccue (29:38): I'm sorry?

Perri Meldon (29:39): You reached out to Deb Wade, then?

Shirley Beccue (29:42): No, I hadn't, but she had come down. Well, her parents lived outside of the park; there was a trailer park where they wintered. She was down, and she came to visit the park, and she talked to me. She said, "I've got a position coming open in Acadia." She said, "I'd like you to consider applying for it, if you're interested."

Shirley Beccue (30:11): And so, that's how that happened, and went through the whole process of the registers and so forth. But I felt ready for a new adventure. It was hard leaving my family, which only lived two hours away. They lived up near Fort Lauderdale, so I knew I'd be a

distance away from them. But I thought, well, they'll have a new place to come and visit. And they have. They've visited more than I thought they would. They're all warm weather people, so getting them up here in even the fall was a big deal.

Shirley Beccue (30:55): The other thing that appealed to me about Acadia was that the park is so closely entwined with the communities. There's three big communities on the island. I mean, big by our island standards. I like that aspect of being able to connect, and have, quote, another life outside of the Park Service. So, that was very much of an appealing aspect of potentially moving to Maine. So, yep.

Shirley Beccue (31:26): I said, I've been here 31 years, and longer than I've lived in any other part of the country. So, I guess I like it still. My family don't ask me anymore when I'm moving. So, yeah.

Perri Meldon (31:46): That is a long time also for someone who came from Florida, even if you weren't originally from Florida. What was the job position that was presented to you?

Shirley Beccue (32:01): At Acadia?

Perri Meldon (32:02): Yeah.

Shirley Beccue (32:03): Well, I don't know if it was officially called the assistant chief of interpretation, but that's what it became. But when I first came to Acadia, I was still doing some programs in the park. Bird watching, bird walks, a campfire program, and some shorter walks as well, plus occasionally working at the visitor center.

Shirley Beccue (32:31): But then, as we kind of grew in our division, I became, instead of supervising the seasonal staff that were giving programs, it was kind of split into a group of rangers that oversaw the visitor center, and then another group of rangers that did the interpretive programs. So, at that time, I was working with those that were giving the programs, and out auditing and so forth.

Shirley Beccue (33:02): But then as our permanent staff grew, I became the supervisor of supervisors, who supervised what I used to supervise. So, I had a smaller group of people that I was supervising, but other aspects of my job came into play, in terms of working on wayside exhibits, and special programs.

Shirley Beccue (33:24): I was the first webmaster, so to speak, for the website, when that unknown thing of World Wide Web came into our life. So, I was doing that initially, until we hired people that had graphic skills,

and how that all evolved in terms of, those were very specialized positions after a while.

- Shirley Beccue (33:50): But so, that's how all that came about. I was less and less involved directly with the visitors, and more with kind of the behind-the-scenes aspect of supervising people that were doing the park newspaper, the park website. I was in charge of the park library at one time. So, it kind of evolved in that way.
- Shirley Beccue (34:20): Each new aspect of my job became a new challenge, which was fun. But I did miss sometimes being out with the public. I really had enjoyed that. I still occasionally would audit a program, even unofficially. I'd just go out, and if the ranger asked me for feedback, I'd share that with them. But it wasn't as big a part of my job as it had been in Everglades, or when I first started at Acadia.
- Perri Meldon (34:55): It sounds like a tremendous amount of work, and in some ways, it reminds me of when you were describing your time leading the nursery school. All of the different hats you were wearing, when you're describing webmaster, library, newspaper, occasional audits. This was around 1990, that you arrived?
- Shirley Beccue (35:19): When I came to Acadia?
- Perri Meldon (35:20): Mm-hmm.
- Shirley Beccue (35:22): I came to Acadia in '89. Yeah. And I retired in 2006. So, I was there 17 years at Acadia.
- Perri Meldon (35:39): Had it been an intentional career path that you would go from working with visitors, to taking more of this behind-the-scenes approach?
- Shirley Beccue (35:49): I don't think I looked at it as, this is what I want my next step to be. I think it just evolved as the need grew for someone to fill a spot.
- Shirley Beccue (35:59): I mean, like I said, with the website, that wasn't something that the park had planned on that we're going to start this. It just kind of happened, and so, somebody needed to step up, and I think it fell to interpretation, because it seemed like outreach, which was a part of what we did for visitors, in terms of things like the newspaper, and other non-personal services that we were doing.
- Shirley Beccue (36:30): It happened to be the day that we had a meeting about it, I was the free person to go to the meeting. So, in some ways, it came by

default. But I think it would've landed in interpretation anyway, at some point.

- Shirley Beccue (36:45): I do recall myself and one of the protection rangers sat in kind of a training session with a local person who was a web person. He came out after work one day, and spent about an hour and a half with myself and Boyd, one of the protection rangers. And he went through all the things you needed to do on the website. You do this, and if you click on this and you do that, and then you have this.
- Shirley Beccue (37:15): And so, when he left, Boyd and I looked at each other, and he said to me, he said, "Did you understand anything that he said?" I said, "No." He said, "Good. Because I didn't either."
- Shirley Beccue (37:27): So, we both were kind of taken aback by this. It was like learning a new language, which it was. We often met together, and kind of worked through some of the initial things. I do remember being in tears a couple times initially about, how are we going to figure this out?
- Shirley Beccue (37:48): But it all fell into place, and actually, once I retired, I started volunteering doing websites for nonprofits. So, I became more proficient at it, and I was glad I had the initial training that I did at Acadia, because I could understand some of the code, which now you don't even need to know that. But I was able to figure out why things weren't working, because of my initial training at Acadia. So, that was a benefit beyond on the Park Service.
- Shirley Beccue (38:24): And I still do a couple websites, but I've been slowly giving them up, so that I could move on to some other things of that I have interest in.
- Perri Meldon (38:35): I'm so impressed. You likely know far more than me, who's grown up in a generation of using computers. I can't code.
- Perri Meldon (38:51): So, if you began around 1989, did you find that there was a change in the park? And of course, you were at a different park now, but differences because of the Americans with Disabilities Act?
- Shirley Beccue (39:08): That's a good question. Yeah, I think there was more of a sensitivity when plans were being put together. If they were remodeling something that--the visitor center at Acadia, in order to reach it through the main parking lot, you have to climb 52 steps. So, obviously that's not workable for someone who has a need, or a disability in terms of mobility.

- Shirley Beccue (39:41): So, there was a conscious effort to find another way to access the building, which they did, and they put in an elevator, and also another little parking lot, and easier access for someone that couldn't do the 52 steps up to the visitor center. So, I think that was there. I think the staff in general were conscious of taking accessibility, especially in terms of structures, into consideration, whenever they were approaching a remodeling job, so to speak. So, I think that awareness was there.
- Shirley Beccue (40:26): One of the things we initiated at some point, and all the dates of course are kind of like a fog anymore. We initiated a sign language interpreter to be available for ranger-led programs with advanced planning and request. I looked on their website just the other day, and they still have that, which I was so glad to see that it was kept.
- Shirley Beccue (40:57): I don't know how often it's been used, but I know when I was at the park, and it must have been toward the end of my time there, but several times a year, there would be a request for that. And so, we would schedule that, and I'm not sure what funds Deb used to pay for that. There was no cost to the visitor to use that service. But I was so glad to see that they're still doing that.
- Shirley Beccue (41:29): I guess now some of the parks have these little audio devices. I guess it's kind of like a--I'm not sure if it's a microphone that the ranger wears, and then the visitor has a device for hearing impaired, that they can hear more clearly what the ranger is speaking about on the program. But that's also available, and I know at Everglades, they have that as well. So, that's nice to see that some of the parks have gone beyond the obvious in terms of structural needs that better serve the disabled population, and also a variety of disabilities that can be served in different ways to be more inclusive in a program or visiting a park.
- Perri Meldon (42:21): Yeah. Yeah. Those programmatic challenges remain fraught and evolving and unique to each park. But Acadia's, I imagine, presents its own unique challenges, because it's got this on island and off island component. Did you feel that you were able to participate fully in programs on and off island there?
- Shirley Beccue (42:44): I mean, Acadia being a mountainous park, there's some aspects that would not be available to someone that has a mobility issue. But we have--can't remember my numbers right now--but 48 miles of carriage road, which are not paved, but hard surface that go through the woods, and many scenic views, even overlooking the ocean, that are readily accessible for a wheelchair, and someone walking. I mean, some of them are--the grade is steep, but there are

a lot of options for visiting and seeing the park with a physical disability.

Shirley Beccue (43:41): When I first came, there was a young man here, an SCA who was in a wheelchair. He put together a very comprehensive access guide, which over the years was updated as facilities changed and improved and so forth. But that was, I think, a really great first step in kind of addressing and identifying the possibilities for someone.

Shirley Beccue (44:07): It opened the park's eyes in terms of, well, we really could make this part of the park a little more accessible if we did such and such. So, I think that was a really wonderful kind of eye opener, in terms of being more inclusive, in terms of looking at things. He was here--I think he might have been here the season before I came as well, but I just knew him from that one season when I first came.

Perri Meldon (44:42): Did you find, like with Everglades, and working with Deb Wade, were there many other colleagues with disabilities, or an intentional effort to hire employees with disabilities?

Shirley Beccue (44:59): I don't recall. I don't recall any of the staff having issues that I was readily aware of. I mean, there might have been someone that had a hearing disability in another division that--I don't know how it might have impacted their job. But I mean, I was the only one that was obviously disabled, but there may have been some people that had other issues that I wasn't aware of. But I don't recall that there was. Yeah.

Shirley Beccue (45:43): But that's not to say that they might have had a family member or a friend who had a disability. So, they themselves might not have had a disability, but they may have been somewhat aware, or fully aware of how a disability might affect a person's traveling through life, kind of situation.

Perri Meldon (46:04): Yeah, sure. Sure. Well, I'll turn it back over to Lu Ann, and see if you've got any questions lined up.

Lu Ann Jones (46:12): Well, I have kind of two different kinds of questions. The first one I'll ask is, do you think when visitors who had disabilities came to Acadia, for example it might have been on one of your interpretive programs, and saw you in a wheelchair, do you have any sense of what difference that made, in terms of comfort for them, or connection with the park?

- Shirley Beccue (46:41): I didn't feel that--. If people had issues, in terms of feeling like, I'm not sure that this ranger's capable of giving the program that I'm hoping is going to be given, I wasn't aware of that if it was. I mean if they had issues with that.
- Lu Ann Jones (47:06): Well, I was actually thinking maybe that they identified with you. That they saw that as a positive. I wasn't thinking that they might have seen it--but they saw it as a positive.
- Shirley Beccue (47:17): Positive. Yeah. I think overall, on the ranger programs that either I was giving, or I attended, the people were just happy to be in a group of like-minded people, so to speak. So, I guess I never felt really out of place, although, I mean, I was differently abled, I guess, from others.
- Shirley Beccue (47:47): Yeah. I mean, I think there was always kind of support for the overall objective of what the program was. Especially with bird watching people. They just kind of cling together. I mean, they just love being the first one to spot a bird somewhere or being able to identify a sound that they hear. So, there's a real camaraderie, oftentimes, on those kinds of--.
- Shirley Beccue (48:15): That particular program is much more involving of people than some other--like, if you go on a hike, and you're pointing out various aspects of the landscape--because they're actively involved in making that program happen, really. So, yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones (48:35): Well, so, the other question I had was that you turned more into doing more supervision, and supervision is an art and a talent in and of itself. So, how would you describe yourself as a supervisor, and what are kind of the challenges and the opportunities that being a supervisor offers somebody?
- Shirley Beccue (49:02): I enjoyed it, actually, quite a bit, and I think I approached it in terms of being positive in my comments. Being sensitive to how someone might react to something, especially if there were some issues on their program, and offering ways, or discussing ways, getting from them, the person I was talking to, ideas on how something might be approached in a different way. I felt I got positive feedback from the staff. They never felt threatened.
- Shirley Beccue (49:51): And I guess I admired so many of the people that I was supervising, even sometimes when we were discussing difficult things. One of the fellows that I was supervising, he was a district ranger. I remember, we had a disagreement about something, and we both ended up crying at the end of our discussion. We both

talked about it, and we really had so much respect for one another. We always were best friends, and even after he retired, he would come back to the park, and we would go out to lunch together. We would go for a walk together.

- Shirley Beccue (50:38): So, I felt very comfortable being a supervisor, and enjoyed it. As I said, I had a lot of respect for the people that I worked with, and I wanted to hear their ideas about issues. So yeah, I don't regret being a supervisor at all. I'm a very quiet, kind of non-aggressive kind of person. So, I think they never felt threatened by me. I like to think that I was helpful in my comments to them.
- Lu Ann Jones (51:25): Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate that.
- Perri Meldon (51:31): Digging a little more into that, looking back, can you recall a particular challenge or obstacle that you faced during your time at Acadia?
- Shirley Beccue (51:43): In terms, like a physical obstacle, or just--
- Perri Meldon (51:47): Not necessarily. It could be, but particularly in your role as supervisor. You described to us so many responsibilities earlier on, so were you faced a particular challenge in your capacity as supervisor?
- Shirley Beccue (52:05): Particular challenge. I think there was one seasonal that, she was very negative in a lot of things that she said in general. Not necessarily things about me, but her attitude. She just seemed like she had a real chip on her shoulder about a lot of things. Not just things that I encountered, but other people as well.
- Shirley Beccue (52:51): And so, it was a little difficult, sometimes, to discuss those kinds of things with her, because she would immediately jump on kind of a negative aspect of something. It was very, very defensive. So, it was a little awkward, and a little difficult to kind of reach through that with her.
- Shirley Beccue (53:18): I didn't rehire her the next year, because I felt that her attitude was not good for the morale of the rest of the staff. And so, I felt bad that not only me, but others couldn't kind of reach through whatever was there that was preventing her from kind of being more of the group. So, that was a little awkward, and I felt bad for her that she almost made it impossible to pull her into the group.
- Shirley Beccue (54:03): I don't know, I'm probably not explaining that correctly. But that was the only person that I questioned, what could I have done

differently to maybe make her time here more of a positive experience, or to kind of break down some of the negativity that she seemed to feel? We talked about a movie. There was a movie, a really great movie, I don't know if it's still there, that the Smithsonian put out, and I think it was called something like Part of Your Visitors Are Disabled. It was like a half hour movie, something along that line, and they went through different disabilities of going through the museum, and how the interpreter approached that.

Shirley Beccue (54:50): We would play a portion of that, and then kind of discuss the different scenarios. And this girl would say, "Well, that was just a movie. They were all actors." So, I said, "Well, it is something that was set up to illustrate." But she wouldn't have any part of that. That wasn't a real situation, was her attitude.

Shirley Beccue (55:15): So, there was always something negative that she said about things that was a little bit wearing at times. But that was, I think, the only person I encountered that I felt I really kind of couldn't break through, and kind of pull her into the fold, so to speak.

Perri Meldon (55:38): Sounds like you were really an attentive supervisor. Paid attention to the needs of those working at the park, and a listener at that as well. While you may be talking today more, I can sense that from you, just in your relations with colleagues.

Perri Meldon (55:59): And so, I also ask the inverse question. Looking back, are there particular moments you're really proud of? Things that you carry with you from your career.

Shirley Beccue (56:13): I think in a lot of ways, in small ways and big ways, working with the Park Service really has stayed with me. I remember in Everglades, the permanent staff went out to Fort Jefferson, which is about, I don't know, 70 miles from Key West. And it was a, well, planning session, and we were there for a couple of days.

Shirley Beccue (56:43): I remember in the restrooms and in the kitchen, there was sign that said, "When you brush your teeth or take a shower, please do not let the water run." Because all the fresh water is collected in cisterns at the fort, and so, water is very precious out there. Well, to this day, I never let the water run when I'm brushing my teeth, or when I'm taking a shower. So, those are very small things, but there were things that stayed with me.

Shirley Beccue (57:13): I always felt that if I left the park today, whatever day that might've been, when I was thinking this, that I would carry with

me lifelong lessons, and certainly an appreciation for the natural world. I mean, I don't use any pesticides in my garden, and I'm very conscious about recycling.

Shirley Beccue (57:38): So, I think the life experiences that I had, and the people, which is a huge part of why I love the park service, have stayed with me. Whatever career I might have gone on to had I left the Park Service, there were things that I would've taken with me from the Park Service.

Shirley Beccue (58:02): I never grew up thinking I'd ever be a park ranger. I didn't even know what a park ranger might do. But now as I look back, it's like, well, I can't imagine ever having done anything other than be a park ranger. I'm sure you all feel that way about your jobs. You love the jobs you do because of the people, because of the type of jobs that you have. So, I mean, it truly is a family that you're glad that you've been a part of. That's how I've always felt.

Perri Meldon (58:38): Now, you retired in 2006, you said?

Shirley Beccue (58:43): I'm sorry?

Perri Meldon (58:43): You retired in 2006.

Shirley Beccue (58:46): Correct. Yes.

Perri Meldon (58:47): Had you considered returning to Florida, as so many people do? Or did you decide, no, Acadia is home?

Shirley Beccue (58:55): Well, I guess after I retired, I got involved more with volunteering in various organizations on the island and doing the web pages and so forth. The friends that I made here in Acadia were very important to me to continue a relationship with.

Shirley Beccue (59:18): My family do all live in the South. We didn't grow up in the South, but they all--I mean, now, I think we live in about six or seven different places, with nieces and nephews and so forth. And if I did move, it would be where my sister is. She's down in Hiawassee, Georgia, which is right on the North Carolina, Georgia border.

Shirley Beccue (59:46): But I don't know. It's just hard to think about leaving this area. I'm in touch with my sister and my other siblings a lot, so it's not like I don't ever hear from them.

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- Shirley Beccue (00:00): At some point, I probably will move closer to my sister, just because my house and my garden and everything is getting a lot to take care of. I think just as I age, that the reality of moving closer to family will finally motivate me to move. The thought of just packing up is overwhelming at times, but I'm sure that day is around the bend, so to speak.
- Perri Meldon (00:33): I understand. I understand. Also, you've had an afterlife with your time in Acadia by, like you said, volunteering. It continues, the work. Well, for one last round, I'm going to pass it back to Lu Ann, if you have any questions.
- Lu Ann Jones (00:53): Well, I was wondering what organizations you volunteer with there. What your interest after retirement?
- Shirley Beccue (01:04): Yep, I got more involved in my church, was the deacon of this, every committee, was very involved with that. I also volunteered for about, I guess, six or seven years at Northeast Harbor Library, and I was working down in the archives. They had boxes and boxes of historical information that needed to be cataloged and so forth, and that was a lot of fun. I did that and then sometimes I worked up on the desk, checking out books and that type of thing.
- Shirley Beccue (01:43): Then I started doing the webpages. I did one for the homeless shelter in Ellsworth, the butterfly garden in Southwest Harbor, which I still do that one, the Island Trust Foundation, and there's a couple of others. Oh, Beatrix Farrand Society. So, I was involved in those, which took a lot of time, but I enjoyed it because I felt I was always learning a little bit more about how to do webpages. But about a year and a half ago, I thought, "I'm on the computer a whole lot, and I'd like not to be on the computer as much." So, I started to give those up.
- Shirley Beccue (02:27): I was involved in those things. I was involved in the YWCA and recently still have helped a little bit with their webpage, not the whole thing, but different parts of it, so I was involved with that. And then just off and on different single events that would happen in the community, I would participate in those, as well, and tried to get out in the park a little bit more than I had been to continue with bird watching, although I don't think I'm as good a birder as I was when I was in the park because I had to know a little bit more because I was meeting with people. So those were some of the major things that I was involved with. But I don't know.

- Shirley Beccue (03:16): I think retirement is almost like another job. You have to prepare for it and then you have to show up for it. So, there was that work ethic that if you're going to volunteer, you need to go all in for it or not do it. I've been trying to carve out more time just to do some painting, and I'm almost there but need to drop a couple other things to be able to fully engage myself in painting, which I really loved in college. My paintings will never show up in any gallery, but there's a real sense of, I don't know, accomplishment to finish a painting and to let it overtake you in a way, as I was talking about pottery, how you can almost feel it in your hands. I have taken a couple of online courses from Mary Gilkerson, who's out of South Carolina. She's a retired art teacher at one of the colleges in Columbia, and I love her style and I love her work ethics, and so I'm hoping to take another couple courses with her again on painting.
- Lu Ann Jones (04:38): Are there particular subjects that you like to paint?
- Shirley Beccue (04:43): I like landscapes and there's a few landscapes here at Acadia that one could paint. When I was in college, I loved to paint old barns and old farms there, and there's still a real attraction to those, as well. So, I have a number of photos I've taken that are possible paintings in the future. We'll see where that takes me.
- Lu Ann Jones (05:09): That's exciting. Thank you.
- Perri Meldon (05:14): Oh, Shirley, are there any parting thoughts or stories you wanted to share that we didn't know to ask about today?
- Shirley Beccue (05:25): Hmm, no, I don't think so. I think your jobs must be fascinating. I'm envious of you, but I think keeping a history of the parks is really important, whether it be oral history or documentation in some sort. I don't know. I like the fact that today, the parks are so much more accessible in terms of online and in-person aspects of knowing and understanding our parks. Our environmental education program at Acadia has grown substantially during the pandemic. The gal who's the supervisor of environmental ed right now, her and her team have put together something like, I don't know, 200 programs, they've reached over 4,000 or 5,000 children all over the country with their online programs, and it just keeps growing.
- Shirley Beccue (06:47): I just think that's so wonderful. That's probably not unusual for a lot of parks to be reaching out in that way. But I think it's really important because these young children will not only learn about it, the parks online, but it may inspire them to not only go to parks,

but maybe to become the next Future Rangers or the next environmental ed teachers. And I think that serves the Park Service extremely well, to have that wonderful outreach. So, I think the Park Service just has a wonderful future ahead of it. They have a wonderful past and a wonderful future going forward.

- Perri Meldon (07:36): I'll share this a little bit, I guess, off the record, but it's okay, Lu Ann, that this goes through the recording, too. Just thinking in terms of the accessibility and expansion of accessibility, and hearing your story, and thank you again for sharing it. I love what you said earlier about how one has to show up for retirement. I can't help but think about my mom who has had a tough time during the pandemic having just retired. She was formerly a nurse. My cousin, one year ago, March of last year, had a skiing accident. She was a senior in college, and she became a quadriplegic, now has no sensation below her neck. And a lot of what my mom has done the past year is go and spend time with my cousin through rehabilitation, and now she moves back into her parents' home.
- Perri Meldon (08:31): My cousin really wanted to visit Yellowstone when she graduated from college. And being able to listen to your story, and of course, I'm bringing a personal in here right now. I can't help but think about my cousin, about my mom, and that you've had this career. You're able to look back on it and think about it and think about how accessibility continues to grow, whether it's virtually during the pandemic and onward. So, thank you. I've really appreciated hearing from you, learning from you.
- Shirley Beccue (09:05): Well, thank you. Thank you. I hope she does well. That's a difficult situation, and my heart goes out to her and challenges, but how lucky she is to have someone like your mom to be there for her.
- Perri Meldon (09:25): She's a good care worker. And yeah, she's back home now, this young woman. So yeah, she's got a career ahead of her, just looks a little different than how she imagined a little before a year ago.
- Shirley Beccue (09:38): Sure.
- Perri Meldon (09:41): So, thank you, Shirley, again. This has been wonderful. I really have learned from you, and it's always a pleasure to get to do these oral histories, so thank you.
- Shirley Beccue (09:51): You're welcome. Thank you both.
- Lu Ann Jones (09:53): Absolutely. Yeah, it's so interesting. We're really lucky. I think Park Service careers are particular kind of careers, too, and how

you really exemplify how Park Service people can wear so many different hats over the course of a career, and again, how you grabbed hold of being the webmaster. On the one hand, yeah, you were there by default, but on the other hand, to take that and run with it is really very interesting. And seeing all the different things that you were involved with there at Acadia is always very interesting, to think about how people make careers with the National Park Service. So, thank you so much for being such a great narrator. And yeah, working with people like you for these oral history interviews, it's a real honor and real pleasure.

Automated voice (10:53): [ZOOM RECORDING STOPPED]

Perri Meldon (10:58): Thank you. Well, I hope that you get through this winter okay and that you get to enjoy some springtime flowers up in Maine soon enough. And if I make my way up to Acadia, I'm going to be asking around for you.

Shirley Beccue (11:13): You take care. Thank you very much.

Lu Ann Jones (11:16): Great, thank you.

Perri Meldon (11:16): Thank you, take care. Bye-bye.

Lu Ann Jones (11:20): Bye-bye.

Shirley Beccue (11:20): Bye.

[END OF FILE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]