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

Ray Bloomer
September 17, October 17, and October 19, 2018

Interview conducted by Perri Meldon
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
508 compliant version by Lauren Pash

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[START OF TRACK 1]

00:00

Perri Meldon: Today is September 17, 2018. My name is Perri Meldon and I'm interviewing Ray Bloomer, who has served various positions and continues to work with the National Park Service accessibility program. We are conducting this oral history today by phone and we will be discussing Ray's contributions to the National Park Service accessibility program and employment with the National Center on Accessibility. This is the first of probably several recordings. This oral history recording is part of my master's thesis in the history department at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and will be stored at the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center. So, welcome, Ray.

Ray Bloomer: Thank you, Perri.

Perri Meldon: So, we'll start off with basics first. When and where were you born?

Ray Bloomer: I was born in Philadelphia in 1953, May fourth.

Perri Meldon: All right. And where did you receive your education? And what did you study?

Ray Bloomer: I went to La Salle University in Philadelphia. My major was both history and psychology. It was through my history professor that I met the historian at Independence National Historic Park where I got my interest and connection to apply to Independence National Park and the National Park Service in 1976.

Perri Meldon: Could you tell us a little bit about those first few years with the National Park Service? You were there for a big year in 1976.

01:56

Ray Bloomer: That was a pretty big year. I applied for the position in 1975 and was hired and started February first, 1976. It was the Bicentennial year with many, many events that occurred that year. We had, obviously, the big Fourth of July celebration with President Ford coming. Then two days later, we had the Queen of England come to Independence Park, along with many other guests from foreign countries and also throughout the United States.

Perri Meldon: What is it that you were doing during that time at Independence?

Ray Bloomer: I was working as an interpreter, park ranger. I worked at the Liberty Bell Pavilion. Independence Hall, Congress Hall, Old City Hall, and the Jacob Graff House. I did actually get to--the day that the queen and Prince Philip arrived, everybody that was working in those areas had different assignments. And I, along with

another ranger, had the assignment of opening the door for the Queen and Prince Philip.

Perri Meldon: From that time in 1976, how did you then become involved in those early on accessibility initiatives in the National Park Service?

Ray Bloomer: Well, that was actually really interesting, Perri. I had only, as a person who is blind, I was the first blind person that was actually ever hired into a ranger position. I had only been blind for six years and had not had very much other interaction with other people with disabilities. Yet when I worked at the Liberty Bell Pavilion, visitors were allowed to touch the bell. And when people who were wheelchair users came in with someone, our rangers, in an attempt to be accommodating, would always indicate that they could take the ropes down so that a person who was a wheelchair user could get up under the bell enough so that they could touch it and get around the velvet ropes that surrounded the bell. They would always speak to the person that was accompanying the individual who was the wheelchair user, and saying you know, would he or she like to come up and touch the bell, rather than speak with them directly. That's exactly the way people would address me, if I happened to have been with a sighted person. So, whenever my wife and I would go to a restaurant or if we were going out to buy a product, people would always speak directly to her.

Ray Bloomer: So, at that point, that's when I realized this was something that was common in terms of how people address and interacted with people with disabilities, rather than just people who were blind. So, I started to realize, it's not an appropriate way. I didn't like it when people did it with me. So, I started doing a little bit of research and found out that that was a pretty common thing.

Ray Bloomer: So, at that point, I had developed a lot of information about people with disabilities, all different types of disabilities, and presented that to management of Independence Park. We began to do some in-service trainings on how to address individuals with disabilities. We also looked at the facilities that we had at Independence Park, what was accessible and what was not. We developed a quick handout that we used in all of our facilities, so that our other rangers would know what areas of Independence Park were accessible to individuals with disabilities. So that was the beginning of my work in accessibility and disabilities.

Perri Meldon: And you're talking specifically about Independence. So, this was before the National Park Service, service-wide, began tackling these initiatives.

06:47

Ray Bloomer: Yes. That is correct. What was interesting was, the historian at Independence Park transferred late in 1976 from Independence Park, and he became chief of visitor services in Boston National Historic Park, which at that time was a newly developed park. I think it was only in its second or third year in the National Park

Service at that time. So, he knew that I was doing this work at Independence Park, since he was there at the time. Within a few months of him arriving in Boston, he asked me would I be interested in doing some work in Boston Park similar to what I did at Independence, but to be much, much more involved, since that's a park that's newly developed, and he would like to make it as accessible as possible. Eventually, there was a position that was eventually developed, and it was offered to me, and I did accept it. At that time, it was called a special populations coordinator. Which today it would be considered an accessibility coordinator.

Perri Meldon: Were both of these programs, both when you were still at Independence and later at Boston, was this prior to the creation of the Special Populations Branch? Or by then was there a service-wide policy?

Ray Bloomer: It was prior by about two years.

Perri Meldon: What do you believe compelled the National Park Service, both as a nationwide service and locally at Boston and Independence, what compelled them to begin these accessibility programs?

Ray Bloomer: Well, at Independence and at Boston, it happened to have been, to a large degree, some of what was occurring for the first few years within the National Park Service relative to disabilities, it really was more or less a grassroots effort. In Boston it was the chief of visitor services who did see what I was doing at Independence Park and felt that that was something that should be done at a newly developed park, rather than do things that are not accessible and then try to change them later. At Independence Park, I think it was probably because it being the Bicentennial year, Independence Park was trying to reach out to as many visitors as possible. When I started talking about better ways to train our staff and learn more about people with disabilities, the park was very interested in doing that. Also, because, as I mentioned before, I was the first blind person ever hired into a ranger position, Independence Park, which was pretty typical of the Park Service at that time, wanted to get as much positive publicity out just to keep Independence as a park in the media as much as possible at that time. So, they did put a press release out stating that they had hired a person who was blind into a ranger position. So, there were some newspaper articles. I had been interviewed by several both local and national TV outlets. And I was even invited to be on the "To Tell the Truth" gameshow, representing a park ranger. Accessibility and people with disabilities were getting a lot of positive publicity as a result of that. And I think it just sort of snowballed a little bit from there at Independence Park and the attention that it got.

Ray Bloomer: It was also something that at Boston Park, they wanted to be sure, and from what I understand, there was also the fact that I was going up to Boston Park, it generated some interest in the region, also. Because I not only worked in Boston

Park, but I did an awful lot of region-wide work, also, at the North Atlantic Regional Office.

11:40

Perri Meldon: How did that feel for you, to serve as this representative for people with disabilities? Is this something that, kind of a role that only developed once you joined the Park Service?

Ray Bloomer: Well, I did not go into the Park Service with this in mind at all. My intent was that I would be a park ranger interpreter. It was serendipity, in a way. I mean, the fact that I just happened to have seen and recognized the need to interact differently with people with disabilities was just something that I pursued. The National Park Service has always been an agency that does continued training of its personnel so that they can better interact with all populations, whether it's children or adults of all different types or different populations of all sorts. They were always looking to train people. So, when I was at Independence and I proposed this type of training, they agreed yeah, this was definitely a need. And since I had done the homework to begin pursuing this, they were definitely willing to do it. As it gained momentum, as other people recognized that this was something that we needed to do more of in the Park Service, that's how it grew. But it wasn't something that I went into the Park Service with a targeted agenda, so to speak.

Perri Meldon: And did you face any resistance or challenges when you were applying for the job, as someone who was blind?

13:49

Ray Bloomer: Yes. I actually didn't know that I did at the time. The reason I say that is, I found this out about 15 years, or 20 years later, from a colleague, that the chief of visitor services at Independence National Park, when she had interviewed me, she felt that in terms of my knowledge and all the other elements that they were looking for in the type of people that they wanted to hire as an interpreter and as a ranger, that I was able to fulfill those, and she felt that I was qualified. But she just did not believe that a blind person could fulfill all the duties. That seemed to be the only barrier that she felt. She just could not imagine that a blind person could actually do that job. So, at the end of the interview, she thanked me and said she would let me know what the outcome would be in terms of whether I'd have a job or not.

Ray Bloomer: So, I left. And this is the way this was related to me later was that she looked down at her desk and realized that I had left my--I wore a hat at the time--that I left my hat on the end of her desk. She just assumed that she could quickly run downstairs and give it to me before I exited the building. When she got down to the bottom of the steps, she asked the receptionist, "Is there a man who is blind here?" They said, well, no, he left. She felt that was awfully quick. Stepped out

the door, assuming she could see what direction I went in, and she didn't see me at all. So, she picked what direction, she would try to chase me down. And fortunately, it was the right direction. And in about three blocks she finally caught up with me and said, "Oh, here, you forgot your hat." I apologized for having left it behind and said thank you. And the way the story was related was that by the time she got back to her office she realized that if I could get away from her that quickly, that I got the job. (laughter)

Perri Meldon: That's great.

Ray Bloomer: I guess it pays to be quick on your feet.

Perri Meldon: Likewise, did you face any challenges or resistance from sighted visitors when you were an interpretive ranger?

Ray Bloomer: Actually, not really. I was surprised that during that timeframe, I was 23 years old and did not find that people shied away from speaking to someone who was blind. Now I have, as I said, I'm blind but I have two percent sight, which gives me a little better than shadow vision. So, I was always able to tell when someone was in front of me speaking. I was able to address people. So, I think the way I addressed our visitors, I think it automatically put people at a comfortable feeling between myself as a ranger in uniform and the visitor. I think everybody just seemed to be pretty comfortable. So, I really didn't see that as a challenge.

Ray Bloomer: Now I did have to learn about all the interpretive issues. The history, the objects that were in the different rooms. I had to spend a whole lot more time memorizing what objects were where and what they were so that when someone said, "Well, what's on that table" I pretty much had an idea what they were probably talking about. And I said, "Oh, over here?" If they said, "No, behind you," okay, then I knew what it was they were looking for in terms of an item of curiosity or whatever it was. And I was able to address those questions. So, it did take a little bit longer to go through the learning process. But once I had that down, I really don't think that there were any major challenges between myself and visitors in terms of how we interacted.

Perri Meldon: Later on, I'd like to ask you more about your personal work with the National Park Service. But I'd also like to hear more about formation of the Park Service Accessibility Program, or Special Populations and Programs. Could you describe how that developed?

Ray Bloomer: Yes. Initially it was developed through an initiative by Ira Hutchinson, who was the deputy director of the National Park Service. Ira Hutchinson also had a master's degree in therapeutic recreation. So, he did come into the National Park Service with a strong background in the area of disabilities and a very strong interest in it. So, he wanted to see the National Park Service take a stronger view in terms of developing the program, doing things in a national way and also in a

more integrated way as the National Park Service did business, including people with disabilities. So, he initiative the Special Populations Division in the National Park Service. And that came about throughout the year of 1979 and the division came to fruition at the very end of that year.

Perri Meldon: Do you believe, looking back on this, that creation of the division was influenced by the activism of disability rights, or the passage of federal disability laws? Or did this seem to happen separately?

20:27

Ray Bloomer: I would say that because of what was occurring at the time, that being was we're past, we did have the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. It was not amended at that time to include the federal government. At that time, it only included anyone receiving federal financial funds, but not federally conducted. But I think because people with disabilities were starting to speak out more themselves, so it was a little bit more in the forefront of the thinking of federal agencies. So, I think that was a part of it. I think the fact that Ira Hutchinson had, as part of his own background, a strong knowledge and desire to see accessibility being addressed more within the National Park Service. And I also think that the fact that Bill Whalen was our director at the time. He was a very young director, and he really had a bigger influence on addressing not just people with disabilities, but he really wanted to see a bigger emphasis on urban populations being addressed within the National Park Service. Many of the populations of people that were your nontraditional visitors, he put a bigger emphasis there. So, I think that at the time there was probably many, many influences that happened to have come together. I guess it was just good timing at the time. But I wouldn't say that there was any one single influence that, you know, for example, it wasn't just the legislation. I think probably Ira Hutchinson was the greater influence within the National Park Service at that time.

Perri Meldon: Who was assigned as your, or were you immediately involved in the Special Populations and Programs because you were doing work based in Boston?

22:54

Ray Bloomer: Could you repeat the question again?

Perri Meldon: Were you immediately involved with this Special Populations and Programs because of your work in Boston?

Ray Bloomer: Oh, yes. Yes. I began, when I went to Boston in 1977, it was August of 1977, at that time, there was really no one in the National Park Service specifically addressing disability and accessibility issues. So, when I got go Boston, I began to do it not only at the national, I mean, at the park level, but I also was doing it at the regional level. The Park Service has a tendency to—as I mentioned, it

becomes kind of a little bit of a grassroots issue. I at one point went to a training program at Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. It was a two-week basic interpretive skills course. While I was there, I did have some discussion with the interpretive specialist that was running that training course, along with the superintendent of Mather. We did talk about ways of getting some of the disability and accessibility issues infused into some of the other training courses that they had. So, it was in the fall of 1977 I was asked to come down as a guest instructor at Mather Training Center for one of the other interpretive courses that they had.

Ray Bloomer: So, there's the beginning, in a sense, of my involvement at the national level. Because of that, and again, the fact that no one else was working in this area at the time, I began to develop a bit of a reputation for this type of work. I did get a couple of requests from well, for example, there was a course, not a course, rather a conference in Tennessee, I believe, in 1978. This was pretty much not at the academic level, but it was inviting a variety of state and federal organizations to participate in this conference focusing on people with disabilities. The National Park Service was invited. The director of the Park Service, Director Bill Whalen, called me and asked me if I would go to that conference to represent him. Which I was honored to do so, especially considering at the time I was a lowly GS-5 being asked by the director to go to a national conference. So, for me, that was a pretty big deal.

Perri Meldon: He found you?

Ray Bloomer: So, it was a lot of things like that. Then I got involved in some of the development of some of the national level courses before the Special Populations Division was developed. So, there were some efforts to include disability at different levels. But it was, again, very much grassroots-oriented.

Perri Meldon: Could you tell me about some of these trainings or workshops that happened before the creation of the division?

26:47

Ray Bloomer: Yes. Again, this would be something that was at the initiation of Ira Hutchinson. But there was a training course that was developed, and I believe it was in 1979, possibly 1978, I would have to check on the dates of that. But it was a title, I believe was called Full Spectrum Visitor Participation. It was held at the Albright Training Center. Contracted through, I believe, the University of Washington, to have a training course that would be targeted for higher level management. So, it had a couple of regional directors there, associate regional directors. Larger Park and medium-sized park superintendents. There were a handful of division chiefs, such as chiefs of interpretation. But they were of some of the very large parks, such as Mount Rainier, I believe Golden Gate, a couple of parks like that. So that was held with the idea that the Park Service would begin to focus on looking at a

variety of what people were considering special populations at the time, one of which was people with disabilities. Of course, at that time it was called the handicapped. I was asked to come in to address the topic of people with disabilities.

Ray Bloomer: So that was one course. A similar version of that, but one that was primarily just focused on disabilities was contracted the following year for an outside contracting group called Hawkins and Associates. They were a group of therapeutic recreation specialists, and they did a training again for, service-wide, Park Service people. That was done the following year. I think it was also in 1979. I was also invited to come down to be an instructor at that course. Now because the Park Service had not had a lot of interaction with people that were involved with the disability and accessibility field, nor did that group, because the Park Service did not have a large presence in the field, when they came in to do the instructing, their focus was on parks. It was more park and recreation rather than the National Park Service. So, an awful lot of the training that they were providing was accessibility that you could relate more to a municipal park, where they would put a focus on making playgrounds accessible and recreational activities accessible, but not necessarily focusing on the types of things that the National Park Service did.

Ray Bloomer: So, the superintendent of Mather Training Center, Dave Karraker, and John Tyler, who was the interpretive specialist there, they asked me what I thought of this training, since I was a National Park Service employee that was there both as a participant and also as an instructor. I explained to them from my perspective that I really felt that if we did that training course ourselves within the Park Service, that we could target it more towards the needs of National Park Service employees, focusing on the types of things we in the National Park Service do, rather than the type of activities that a park and recreation division or department of a municipality, or possibly even a state park might do.

Ray Bloomer: So, I was asked if I would be willing to coordinate a very similar course the following year, which we did. That course did focus on the National Park Service. We looked at access to historic parks, access to natural parks, rather than playgrounds and municipal parks.

Ray Bloomer: Then it was the year after that that the Division of Special Populations was developed. And they took over the training arm. Or at least the training centers looked to that division to do the training. And fortunately for me, I was able to stay involved with the Special Populations Division throughout the next many years, being involved with training.

Perri Meldon: Where did this training happen? You had mentioned Albright and then Tennessee, and then this one that followed just before creation of Special Populations?

32:26

Ray Bloomer: At the time, there were two primary training centers at the National Park Service that weren't necessarily specialized work like preservation or something like that. The two general training centers were the Albright Training Center, which is a National Park Service training center at Grand Canyon National Park. And the other one is at the Mather Training Center, which happens to be located on the grounds of Harpers Ferry National Historic Park in West Virginia. The Tennessee, that was simply a conference.

Perri Meldon: Okay. Now when the division was created, who was assigned there? Who became your colleagues in this field?

Ray Bloomer: Well, Dave Park was hired as the first chief, the only chief, of the Division of Special Programs and Populations. Now the reason why I say the only chief was that that began as a division. We currently have a chief, but it's at a branch level right now. But when Dave took over the management of that division, he came in as a division chief. And Dave was my colleague. Tom Coleman, who also worked for Dave as an accessibility specialist. Wendy Ross also worked in that division. They were also a colleague of mine. Fortunately, and I do say fortunately, had the opportunity to work on a regular basis with Dave and the other members of his division, even though at the time I was located either in Boston Park, or relatively soon after that, into the North Atlantic Region. I went into the North Atlantic Region in 1981. Initially on detail during the International Year of the Disabled Person, to coordinate the regional efforts there. And then at the end of that detail I was offered--an actual job within the North Atlantic Regional Office was developed, and I went into that position.

Perri Meldon: Were there any others working in Special Populations that were not in DC? Besides yourself?

Ray Bloomer: I'm sorry, that were not what?

Perri Meldon: Were there any others working in Special Populations located elsewhere besides DC, like yourself?

Ray Bloomer: There were a few people. For example, there was a gentleman that worked in the Denver Service Center. He was a planner, and his name was Steve Stone. Steve happened to have been a person who was a wheelchair user. He was doing some occasional work in the area of accessibility. Sort of the beginning, in some ways, of doing self-evaluations of parks. I did some work with Steve on a few of those. But that was not a major part of Steve's job. It was a collateral duty. It was more of Steve's interest in this. And he only did that work for a couple of years.

Perri Meldon: So, just to let you know, Ray, it's 9:45. How much longer would you like to chat?

36:32

Ray Bloomer: About another 10, 15 minutes.

Perri Meldon: Okay. So, you had mentioned 1981 as International Year of the Disabled Person or Persons. Could you tell me about that broadly? And then your involvement with it?

Ray Bloomer: Sure. The United Nations did determine, declare, 1981 as the International Year of the Disabled Person. The National Park Service had recommended that throughout the service that the parks, regions and so on focus on events or some activities towards the inclusion of people with disabilities during that international year. I received a call from our regional director, who was Richard Stanton. He asked if I would be willing to come over and speak to him about that, since at that time I had already been doing a lot of work within the North Atlantic Region. In particular, a lot of training. I had been on a few different planning teams for some of the planning that was done at specific parks in the North Atlantic Region. So, he was aware of the activities that I had been involved with up to that point.

Ray Bloomer: And when I went over to speak with him, he asked if I would be willing to consider a detail where, for 120 days, we could put the focus on activities involving people with disabilities. And whatever thoughts that I had, he asked me if I had any thoughts the things that we could do during that timeframe.

Ray Bloomer: I actually said to him that I would be willing to accept the position, but I would like to have the types of activities that we did in the region be activities that would be of a more permanent nature, rather than, I actually used the term, "flash in the pan." I didn't want something that we would do only for the International Year of the Disabled Person, and at the end of that time, it would go away. I really wanted it to let that year be a year that might initiate impact type activities.

Ray Bloomer: He said that he really liked that idea. So, they're the types of things that we looked at. I think the major achievement was we were the first region to develop accessibility coordinators as a collateral duty for each of the parks, and that that would be something that would continue from that time forward. It actually has to this day. The National Park Service, service-wide, after Dave Park saw what was occurring in the North Atlantic Region as far as the accessibility coordinators. I did a couple of trainings, regional trainings, and invited Dave up as a guest speaker at those. Within a few years, we began to get other regions to do it.

Ray Bloomer: I don't really remember what year it happened where the entire National Park Service was required to have accessibility coordinators in all of its parks throughout the whole system, but it was initiated in Boston during that international year.

Ray Bloomer: It was at the end of that detail that the North Atlantic Region developed the, and again it was they were identifying initially as a special population's coordinator,

but I was able to get the special population title dropped to call it a disability program manager.

40:58

Perri Meldon: What things were happening on the ground that eventually became permanent, as you said?

Ray Bloomer: Well, at that time, we were doing annual training was one of them. The second thing was that parks were looking at accessibility within their park. We were getting more parks. And it wasn't something where every single park was required to, but at that time, you started to see more parks develop handouts and in-house publications that would let visitors know what was accessible in their parks. As a result of the training, people were evaluating what types of activities needed to be done in a park to improve accessibility. And at that time, we did not have regulations such as a self-evaluation program that came out of the '73 Rehabilitation Act. Everything was somewhat voluntary, but we were able to get some of those things done, and they were encouraged at the regional level.

Ray Bloomer: We also, as I mentioned earlier, as parks were going through interpretive perspectives, processes, as parks were doing development concept planning, general management planning, when they were conducted within the North Atlantic Region, accessibility was added to that team, whether it was something that I was able to be involved with or whether it was something where the accessibility coordinator within that park was involved with. But prior to that, that was not something that was addressed at all in any of these planning type meetings or activities. So, I would say they were the major ones. Just because accessibility was relatively new, I think the greatest achievement was the continuation of training on an annual basis.

Perri Meldon: You're saying that the North Atlantic Region really served as a model for other regions throughout the country.

Ray Bloomer: I believe it did. Absolutely.

Perri Meldon: So, I think that I'm going to stop here before we move into new questions. But I was just wondering, is there anything else you'd like to share before we wrap up today.

43:44

Ray Bloomer: Yes. I wanted to just do one very quick follow-up to the previous question when you asked if there were other colleagues that were involved in this at the time in the early stages prior to the, well prior to and in the beginning of the Special Populations Division and program. There was also a woman who had a disability, she had a physical disability, single-leg amputee. Her name was Vicki White. She

worked in Golden Gate National Recreation Area in, I believe it was the late '70s or very early '80s, as their special populations coordinator. Again, it was a part-time position or a, excuse me, collateral duty. Because I know she had other duties besides accessibility and disability.

Perri Meldon: But she was working before creation of the service-wide accessibility coordinating committee?

Ray Bloomer: Yes, I believe she was, yeah, before the SWAC was developed, that's true. I think it was probably around the same time that the Special Programs and Populations Division was developed. Which her work was primarily within Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Perri Meldon: Okay. Are there any last thoughts you'd like to share? Or, we have more recordings ahead of us, too.

Ray Bloomer: I think that would probably be good for today, I believe.

Perri Meldon: Okay. All right. Then I'm just going to wrap up now. Don't hang up yet. We'll chat in a couple of minutes. Just want to do a formal closure. That again, today is September 17, 2018. My name is Perri Meldon. I've been speaking with Ray Bloomer about the National Park Service Accessibility Program. This is the first of several recordings.

45:56

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

00:00

Perri Meldon: Today is October 17, 2018. My name is Perri Meldon, and this is my second interview with Ray Bloomer. Ray has served various positions and continues to work with the National Park Service Accessibility Program. We are conducting this oral history today by phone, and we will be discussing Ray's contributions to the National Park Service Accessibility Program and employment with the National Center on Accessibility. This oral history recording is part of my master's thesis in the history department at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and will be stored at the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center.

Perri Meldon: So, Ray, last time we spoke, we left off on the UN International Year of Disabled Persons. Before moving along on our timeline, something that you had wanted to address, and I wanted to mention here, were the influence of accessibility trainings, both on the regional and the national level. I know that during IYDP,

you had really pushed for more permanent changes. And one of those were accessibility trainings happening. Could you talk more about them?

Ray Bloomer: Well, we were doing training in the North Atlantic Region with our accessibility coordinators. Part of the initiative in the North Atlantic Region as part of IYDP, or the International Year of the Disabled Person, was that each park would establish an accessibility coordinator. Then we developed region-wide training to make sure that those accessibility coordinators had the basic training that they needed to at least begin initiating some accessibility activities within each of their respective parks.

Ray Bloomer: We also, or I also, was involved with the training that we did at the national level at that time. And that was being done at the Mather Training Center.

02:30

Perri Meldon: Do you recall some of the people who participated in these trainings? Not necessarily the ones who presented, but the ones who attended?

Ray Bloomer: The attendees, you're talking about at the national level or the regional level?

Perri Meldon: Let's go with both, if that's—

Ray Bloomer: Okay. They were, some of them were the same types of individuals. The majority of them were people in the maintenance field, with some individuals at the interpretive level. There were even a few, a couple, that were superintendents that attended those trainings. But the majority at that time, and I'm going to say this was both at the regional level and at the national level, the majority were in the maintenance field. One of the reasons why that occurred, and it's still, to a large degree, is still evident throughout the National Park Service today, the greatest understanding of accessibility when people use that term, people relate it to the physical environment, rather than both physical and programmatic. So, we're still trying to educate people to a large degree that accessibility goes beyond the physical. It's not just the restrooms and ramps and the physical buildings and the physical environment, but that it is also programmatic, meaning the publications, audio visuals, exhibits and the programs that are operated within the facilities.

Perri Meldon: And we'll talk about that more, either today or in a future recording, because that's really important to discuss the programmatic. But just to maintain chronology in all of this, for the majority of the 1980s, you were at the North Atlantic Regional Office. And then in 1983, the accessibility program released Special Directive 83-3. Were you involved in that process?

04:53

Ray Bloomer: Yes, I was. The primary author of that was Dave Clark as the division chief at that time. But I was involved in editing and consultation at that time. Dave did include me in that process.

Perri Meldon: What were some of your other responsibilities, going back to the '80s, while working at the North Atlantic Regional Office as an accessibility coordinator?

Ray Bloomer: It was unique in the sense that I did have the responsibility to develop a training program for the North Atlantic Region. I also was involved with several different planning teams, and the planning teams dealt with--at that time, the Interpretive Division used to do what was called an interpretive prospectus. They also, I was involved with construction planning and concept development planning, along with GMPs, general management plans, I was involved with those teams. Either physically going to parks that were doing those types of, various levels of planning, or at least reviewing some of the documents that came to the regional office. So that was one area of responsibility.

Ray Bloomer: Another would be to assist in fact finding for any complaints that we had, whether they were Access Board complaints or 504 complaints. I also was involved with exhibit development whenever that was passed around the regional office in order to oversee and provide additional comment, and any type of special project that we had, such as the Statue of Liberty renovation and restoration project. Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, I was very, very involved in that project. Which is sort of a story unto itself because of the immensity of the project and the fact that that literally turned out to be for several years, many years, a model of accessibility for the Park Service.

Perri Meldon: Could you elaborate on that?

07:50

Ray Bloomer: Yes.

Perri Meldon: You're welcome to tell as much or as little as you'd like. But I know it's an involved story.

Ray Bloomer: Well, it initially started off where Lee Iacocca, who was the CEO of Chrysler Corporation, was asked to head up the Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation and head up their fundraising. When that became very, very public, some people with disabilities in both New York and New Jersey had written letters. If I recall, I think they were at a meeting in New York where the topic of the Statue of Liberty came up. People were saying, well, we should write letters to find out if in all this fundraising accessibility was going to be addressed.

Ray Bloomer: So those letters went to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and also to the President of the United States, which at the time was Ronald Reagan. They

went from Washington up to our region to write letters of response, and that happened to have come to my desk. At that time, I had recommended to our regional director, and this was done in consultation with Dave Park, because he was also aware of these letters that had come in, we both agreed that it would be a good idea to get these people involved in the process.

Ray Bloomer: So, we spoke with our regional director, and he had recommended that I speak with the superintendent of the Statue of Liberty. We ended up inviting these people to become what, if I recall directly, they developed a committee called the Superintendent's Consulting Committee on Accessibility for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island project.

Ray Bloomer: So, this group of people met, I believe it was about every three months. I believe they met quarterly. We initially met and went through both the statue and Ellis in its current conditions back in 1983, I believe is when probably the first meeting occurred. Then from that time forward, they were involved at various levels of planning. So, when construction drawings were developed quarterly, we would meet with that group, give them ideas as far as what was being considered. They would also give some input as far as some of the accessibility issues that may not have been considered, or things that should be considered. It was a very successful interaction between the disability community and the National Park Service. It was quite successful. There were times when we being the accessibility specialists within the National Park Service would let the committee know, here's some accessibility ideas that we have that may be receiving some resistance from exhibit designers or fabricators. The committee would get behind it and they would help to push some of those ideas through, making sure that the superintendent and regional director was aware that these things really needed to be considered in order to make things successful. And they eventually were. I think it was a great relationship, and it was a really good example of getting that consumer involvement by people with disabilities. In many, many of our trainings for years to come, we use that as an example of working with the community of people with disabilities with projects that occur throughout the Park Service and similar to the Statue of Liberty.

12:16

Perri Meldon: That's a really amazing story. And that was in the 1980s.

Ray Bloomer: Yes. That went from about 19, I believe it started in '83. Could have been late '82. And it continued through the development of the completion of Ellis Island, which was in 1992. The Statue of Liberty reopened in 1986, the hundredth anniversary. The hundredth anniversary of Ellis Island was in '92, and that continued to progress from 1986 until '92, when it opened.

Perri Meldon: Wow. Is it during this time as well that you worked with the home of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Vanderbilt? Or was that at a separate time?

Ray Bloomer: It was also during that same time frame. That actually occurred in 19, I believe it was either ’80 or the early part of ’81.

Perri Meldon: Could you speak a little bit about that as well?

Ray Bloomer: Yes. The preparation was in, it was actually in preparation for the one hundredth anniversary of FDR’s birthday. The park was planning on having a large event to celebrate that. The superintendent of Roosevelt-Vanderbilt at that time wanted to make sure that accessibility was being addressed. So, I was asked if I would attend the initial planning meeting that they had. I had asked Dave Park, who was the branch chief, or division chief of the accessibility office in Washington, if he would also want to join me for that meeting. The superintendent also called me and said one of the people that was going to be present there was going to be FDR Junior. He knew that I had been very interested in FDR as a president with a disability, the only president with a physical disability. He asked me if I’d like to, if he could arrange it, if I would like to meet with FDR after the lunch, sit back and spend a little extra time. Of course, I obviously said yes, I would love to do something like that. And he said, “Great, because I already made the arrangement. I knew you would.”

Ray Bloomer: So, I also let Dave Park know. So, Dave and I both planned on spending that additional time with FDR. After the lunch, which we thought would be a relatively short meeting after lunch, he ended up spending, I’m guessing, two to two and a half hours with Dave. He told us a variety of different stories about his dad as a president and leading up to his campaigns as a person with a disability. Wonderful opportunity.

15:40

Perri Meldon: And did you offer recommendations as well during that trip, regarding accessibility?

Ray Bloomer: Yes. We did provide some recommendations about making things more accessible. Unfortunately, some of the recommendations that we made were a little bit more leading towards the event itself. Such as making sure that some temporary measures were made to get people in and through the house itself, along with providing sign language interpretation and other information available to people with disabilities that were going to be attending the event. At that time, there wasn’t enough time to be able to get through the process of developing any physical access to the house. That was all to come about later.

Perri Meldon: And you were involved with that later?

Ray Bloomer: Yes, I was. Well, I had provided some early recommendations, I’m trying to think, I don’t recall the year. Probably a little bit before this event that I’m talking

about, the hundredth anniversary. I provided some recommendations on some things to make the house accessible. However, the major part of that process took place through a value analysis which was done in the late '90s. And I'm going to guess and say it was about '96 or '97, I believe. That took place at the Roosevelt House. There were a variety of people involved with that, people that had preservation background. There were a few people from the community that were involved. There were some members of the Roosevelt family that were involved in that value analysis and a variety of recommendations that had come out of that. I have not been involved directly since that timeframe to know what actually did occur.

Perri Meldon: So, you did, you worked on Ellis Island, and you also worked at the home of FDR and Vanderbilt in the '80s. But in 1987, you moved to Sagamore Hill. How did you end up there? And what were your responsibilities?

18:21

Ray Bloomer: Okay. At that time, and this was in late 1986, the North Atlantic associate regional director, Marie Rust, felt that they needed some additional funding within the North Atlantic Region Operations Division. They were looking at positions that they felt they could cut back on, and she made the determination that accessibility was one of those. It also happened to have been at a time when Sagamore Hill National Historic Site had a vacancy in their chief ranger/chief of interpretation position. That park was soon to get a renovation of its museum. Through conversation between Marie Rust and that superintendent, the superintendent felt that because of my background in interpretation and also in accessibility, an area that she also supported, she felt that that would be a good place for me, and it would be advantageous to the park.

Ray Bloomer: So, I was moved to Sagamore Hill as both chief of interpretation, chief ranger, and, at the same time, maintained for the five and a half years that I was at Sagamore Hill, the regional accessibility program management position as part of a split position.

Perri Meldon: So, you became collateral duty, in some ways.

Ray Bloomer: Correct.

Perri Meldon: How did you feel about that change?

Ray Bloomer: I felt that it was--I mean, I enjoyed becoming the chief of interpretation at Sagamore Hill because of my personal interest in presidential history. And yet at the same time, I was a bit disappointed because I do feel that it did diminish the emphasis in the North Atlantic Region on accessibility. And obviously when you're no longer doing something fulltime, it's not going to get the same attention. Nor could I do that with split duties.

Perri Meldon: Sure. Although you eventually did come back to it fulltime through a different venue. From what I understand, and if you could clarify this, too, in the 1980s, the National Park Service formed a partnership with Bradford Woods at Indiana University, and this eventually became the National Center on Accessibility. Could you speak on that?

21:41

Ray Bloomer: I have to stop you for a second. I'm losing the clarity. I'm having a little hard time understanding you.

Perri Meldon: Okay. No problem. So, in the 1980s, throughout this, the National Park Service established a partnership with Bradford Woods. And that eventually would become the National Center on Accessibility, which you are still involved with today. Could you speak about that process? When it began, and up until '92?

Ray Bloomer: Yes, I can. Throughout the 1980s, after the Office on Accessibility was established in Washington, nationally there were national level accessibility training courses. There were a couple of them initially that went on multiple, more than twice a year. There was one that focused on interpretation and another one that focused on facilities.

Ray Bloomer: Then after a couple of years had gone by, the Park Service did not have the same level of funding for training nationally. So, there were a variety of courses that were cut back a little bit. So instead of doing the courses every year, we were told that we may be able to do them, but they could not support it fully. The parks would have to pay to get their own people to the course, so long as we were able to develop the course. So, I was very involved with the Office on Accessibility at that time. We would develop the course curriculum. It would be advertised nationally through the training program, whether it was at Mather training or at the Albright Training Center. Then it would be up to the parks who were benefiting [attempt?] to send whoever they wanted to go to the training courses. That went on, and they would support the travel to get the trainers to the course. So, the national training program paid to get the instructors to the course, but not the trainees.

Ray Bloomer: Then by the middle '80s, we were told that the entire course would have to be funded by some other source. That they were not going to be able to fund it at the national level. Dave Park, through his prior connections with Gary Robb, they were both involved in the National Therapeutic Recreation Society, prior to Dave coming to the National Park Service, Dave contacted Gary Robb, who was the executive director of Bradford Woods. They developed a training opportunity where the National Park Service, we would still conduct the trainings, and we would do them at Bradford Woods. But instead of limiting it to just the National Park Service, they would open it up to other federal and state agencies, and we

would charge a tuition. And the tuition, paid for by non-Park Service people, would help to offset the cost for the National Park Service employees that would come to it. And I don't recall what the specific percentage of that difference was, but it was substantial enough that it enabled many Parks Service people to be able to get trained. I would say throughout almost all of the trainings, at least, if not more than, 50 percent of all the trainees were National Park Service employees. And that went on from about, I guess I would say it was probably about '85 or '86 up until the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Ray Bloomer: At that time, after the ADA had been passed, there was a congressman in Indiana by the name of Congressman John Meyers. He had contacted Indiana University and said he was considering retiring from Congress, and before he left, he wanted to see if there was some type of legislation or bill or something that he could do that would benefit people with disabilities, and did we have any ideas? The idea of developing the National Center on Accessibility was one that crossed his desk that he felt was significant enough and important enough to pass. So, he passed a line item in Congress that went through the National Park Service. Therefore, the development of the cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and Indiana University, and that's what brought about the National Center on Accessibility in 1992. NCA was established in February of 1992, from that cooperative agreement. Later in that same year, in the fall of 1992, is when I was asked if I would be willing to come out, initially it was on a three-year detail, to come out to NCA as director of technical assistance. At that time, my job position was transferred to the Washington office. But I physically came out to NCA on that detail. At the end of the three years, it was determined that NCA wanted to continue that relationship. So, I was permanently duty stationed out here from that time until today.

28:09

Perri Meldon: Who sent you on that detail?

Ray Bloomer: Dave Park did.

Perri Meldon: Okay. One last question. And we can continue with this next time as well. But as I've been reading about the National Center on Accessibility, I've also seen the name Project Access come up. What was Project Access?

Ray Bloomer: Project Access, when I had discussed earlier just the training agreement between Indiana University and the National Park Service before the National Center on Accessibility came into play, just the training component was identified as Project Access. So that was where only training was occurring at Bradford Woods between the National Park Service and Indiana University at Bradford Woods.

Perri Meldon: Okay.

Ray Bloomer: That was referred to as Project Access. So that when NCA was developed, Project Access was eliminated and it unto itself became the training component of the National Center on Accessibility. Then later on, I eventually absorbed the responsibility for training, and I became director of education and technical assistance.

Perri Meldon: So, training is really only one component of the National Center on Accessibility.

Ray Bloomer: Correct. When the National Center on Accessibility was developed, there were three areas of responsibility or areas of emphasis that it had. One was training or education. Another was research, and another was the provision of technical assistance, to the field.

Perri Meldon: Okay. Well, thank you. Before we wrap up today—and I'm sorry it's so brief, but we'll come back to this soon—are there any things that you wanted to touch upon that you didn't get to earlier in our chat?

Ray Bloomer: Well, one area, and again it's probably something that we should talk about a little bit more in depth, and that would be the relationship of Section 504 and its effect on the National Park Service as we went through the 1980s. Because the National Park Service finally got regulations under 504 as amended in 1978. We got regulations that we had to comply with, excuse me, in 1997. I mean, I'm sorry, 1987. That made a big difference in how we approached accessibility after that time. So that's probably something that would take possibly into our next recording session, a little bit more in depth as to how and why did we do certain things prior to that, and how did we do things after that.

Perri Meldon: Absolutely.

Ray Bloomer: The other area that I would probably want to identify a little bit would be some of the relationship with NCA with regard to both research and the federal regulatory negotiating committee, which involved the National Park Service, the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, and the National Center on Accessibility, which eventually led to some of the various standards. But that also included some of the research that NCA did, including pool research. Which about 80 percent of the regulations that you see in the architectural standards today on pools came from NCA's research.

Perri Meldon: Wow. Okay. We can certainly talk about that. But for the sake of time and your next meeting, we will wrap up now. So, I'm just going to give the concluding remark that again, today is October 17, 2018. I've been chatting with Ray Bloomer, accessibility specialist with the National Park Service. My name is Perri Meldon, and this is our second recording.

32:56

[END OF TRACK 2]

[END OF TRACK 3]

00:00

Perri Meldon: Today is October 19, 2018. My name is Perri Meldon, and this is my third recording with Ray Bloomer. We are conducting this oral history today by phone, and we will be discussing Ray's contributions to the National Park Service Accessibility Program, and employment with the National Center on Accessibility. This oral history recording is part of my master's thesis in the history department at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and will be stored at the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center.

Perri Meldon: So, Ray, the last time we spoke, we left off with the federal regulations that the Department of the Interior passed in 1987. Could you speak about this process, and why it took so long for the DOI to create these regulations? They were based on the Rehabilitation Act, correct?

Ray Bloomer: That is correct. What happened originally, when the act was first passed, the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, in particular Section 504, when that was passed in 1973, it took a while before regulations were written as a result of the act. As a matter of fact, it actually took the federal government being taken to court before regulations were promulgated as a result of that.

Ray Bloomer: When those regulations were passed, or when the act was passed, it was only written with the words "federally assisted programs." And it did not include the federal government itself. Organizations and people with disability challenged the federal government to do something about that. Jimmy Carter was president at the time. He signed an executive order in 1978 which amended Section 504, so it then not only included organizations that received federal financial assistance, but it also included all entities of the federal government itself.

Ray Bloomer: As a result of that, each of the different federal agencies had to write regulations to show how they are going to comply with the Rehabilitation Act as amended. In particular, for Section 504. So, what had to happen first was that the Department of Justice had the responsibility to write the lead regulations. And then all of the other departments, using those lead regulations as their prototype or guide, then wrote theirs. It took until 1987 before the Department of Interior had regulations that became effective and enforceable.

03:26

Perri Meldon: Who was involved in that process to create these regulations?

Ray Bloomer: Well, for the Department of Justice, the person that wrote the lead regulations was John Wodatch. Then once it went to the departmental level, I think, I'm not sure about this, but I believe George Covington had the responsibility. The reason I'm a little bit fuzzy on that is I'm not sure if George was involved with the writing of the regulations for the federally assisted program, federally conducted, or whether he did both.

Perri Meldon: This is going back a bit, but why is Section 504 so significant compared to the other sections of the Rehabilitation Act?

Ray Bloomer: Okay. Each section of the Rehabilitation Act had a specific area of responsibility or a specific area that it was to achieve. So, for example, Section 501 dealt with employment of people with disabilities. Section 502 established the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board. And it also gave that board the responsibility for the development of minimum accessibility guidelines for the development of future architectural standards. Section 503 dealt with anyone, federal contractors, anyone who had a contract with the federal government and how it was to relate to the hiring of people with disabilities within their organization. So, in other words, if someone, a company of a particular size, and there was different sizes of a company. So, if you had more than 15 employees, then you had X responsibility to make sure that your company hired people with disabilities. If your company was bigger, it had a different level of responsibility.

Ray Bloomer: Section 504 was the one that we were focusing on. The reason why that one is particularly important is because it essentially was saying, and I'm slightly paraphrasing, no otherwise qualified individual in the United States shall solely because of their disability be denied the benefits of or be discriminated against in any program or activity conducted by the federal government. When we talk about programs or activities, that is very, very broad. It's very difficult to specifically nail down an actual finite definition. But essentially it comes down to whatever opportunity is afforded to people without disabilities, people with disabilities have to have the equal opportunity to benefit and participate in a way that people without disabilities are getting.

Ray Bloomer: When we ask what are programs, programs can be audiovisuals, they could be exhibits. They could be things that are conducted, such as walks, talks, tours, public programs, presentations. Anything along those lines could be programs. But programs could also be, and again, when we talk about the opportunity to benefit, the opportunity to benefit may be, say, for example, Half Dome or El Capitan at Yosemite. That is the resource. But because the National Park Service preserves that resource, they protect that resource, they also interpret that resource to the public through exhibits, through walks, talks and tours. In some instances, depending on what the nature of a particular park may be, it may be actually going up to that resource. That then becomes an element of the programmatic responsibility under Section 504 that an agency has.

08:22

Perri Meldon: This is something that you've mentioned in the past few interviews as well as our chats, that you sense that, or you've seen on the ground level, in the recent past there's more emphasis on programmatic access, rather than just architectural. Why do you think that is?

Ray Bloomer: Well, part of it is the fact that more people are, well, "we" being those of us that have had the responsibility to try educate and emphasize the Park Service's responsibility to make its facilities, programs, activities, services more accessible to people with disabilities. For many, many years, it was very, very easy for people to understand architectural standards. You go to the book and if something, a ramp was not supposed to exceed a certain slope, it was easy to identify. Doorways had to be X wide. All the elements that are in the architectural standards are very easy to identify.

Ray Bloomer: It was a little bit different to understand program access. Because of two things. Number one, program access has a greater effect on people with sensory, intellectual and cognitive disabilities in ways that are not as easy to understand as it is for individuals with physical disabilities. Because with physical disabilities, is can you get up to and through and operate whatever the physical components are of the program, whatever it might be, to a large degree. The Architectural Barriers Act met the needs in most instances of people with mobility disabilities or physical disabilities.

Ray Bloomer: That did not occur when it came to providing program access. For example, even under Section 504, where it said you had to have effective communication. Effective communication for the audiovisual programs that we had in the beginning, back in the '80s, when you had very, very few audiovisual programs in parks that were captioned, people were coming up with, well, I will provide a written script for somebody who might be deaf or someone who has hearing loss. We'd have to explain, you can't give a script to someone, go into a darkened theater, and expect that they could read it. Then people came up with well, we could put like the police do, we could put a low-level light on a clipboard. Yet, we still had to say to people, that is not an effective way to communicate, because a person looking at a script would not be able to know when and where the script matches the film, the audio the people are hearing on the film.

Ray Bloomer: So, it took a while to get people to realize that you had to have captions. Which is one of the reasons Section 508 did not come about until 1999, why that had to be added to the Rehabilitation Act. Because people weren't quite getting the fact that some of these elements had to be specifically spelled out and required. You couldn't just say you had to have effective communication. We had to identify *how* you had to have effective communication.

Ray Bloomer: We also did, and I'm saying "we," the National Center on Accessibility, back in 1999, conducted a perception study. That perception study did just a little bit under 10 percent of the national parks at that time. I think we had 29 parks represented. We interviewed the park superintendents, facility managers, I believe it was chiefs of interpretation and the accessibility coordinators of 29 parks. The questions that were asked of the superintendents in particular were, do you believe that your parks were physically accessibly, programmatically accessible? Then we had some questions that were asked that helped to verify or validate the answers to their questions.

Ray Bloomer: Well, most superintendents felt that their parks were very physically accessible. Many of them thought that they were programmatically accessible. Yet when we asked those same superintendents, or we asked the questions of their employees—their facility managers, chiefs of interpretation and accessibility coordinators—did you have things like captioned film, assistive listening systems, alternative formats, tactile experiences—most of them said no, they didn't have that. Yet the superintendents thought that their parks were programmatically accessible. So, they had an inaccurate perception of what program access was. So therefore, we were able to have a pretty clear indication that most park managers really didn't know what program access really was.

Ray Bloomer: Now we knew just by the level of programmatic accessibility throughout the parks how inadequate program access was, and, to a large degree, still is in many instances. We've come a long way. We're constantly improving and the education level that our employees have, in particular those that are involved in exhibit design, the contracting, the fabrication and so on, has improved a great deal. But we still have a long, long way to go.

14:55

Perri Meldon: What was then the follow up to that perception study?

Ray Bloomer: Besides giving it to the Washington office on accessibility, and it was then circulated to the regional accessibility coordinators, I really don't know that there was any follow up beyond that. That's not to say that it didn't occur. I'm just saying that I'm not aware of it.

Perri Meldon: Okay. I'd actually like to go back to the 1987 federal regulations. At that time, you were at Sagamore Hill, correct?

Ray Bloomer: That's correct.

Perri Meldon: How did you see the impact, or how did you experience the impact of the federal regulations on the ground level? Either at Sagamore Hill or throughout the North Atlantic Regional Office?

Ray Bloomer: Well, I would say the impact was, without having any type of specific studies to verify this, this is strictly observation, I would say that the impact was relatively minimal. The reason I say that is that even though we did not have 504 regulations for federally conducted programs, we used the regulations from federally assisted programs as a guideline. I know that as the regional accessibility program manager in the North Atlantic Region, both when I was located in the region and then when I went to Sagamore Hill, we continued to say, "use that as best practice for best available information." Because even though we did not, "we" being the Park Service, even though we did not have federally conducted regulations, we knew, and continued to tell all of the personnel, that Congress still by intent doesn't, when Congress passed the law, the intent was the federal government would have to comply--and in the absence of regulations didn't leave you off the hook altogether. So, we used the federally assisted programs as a guideline, knowing that the others would be eventually coming, so that when it did hit, I would say it didn't have a great deal of impact immediately.

Ray Bloomer: One thing that had to occur was the conducting of a self-evaluation process within a year, meaning that all the parks throughout the system had to conduct a self-evaluation of their programs, services and activities, and come up with a plan on what they were going to do to make their programs that were not accessible, accessible. There was very, very little guidance on how to go about doing that. They were really ineffective. But there was nothing--

18:28

Perri Meldon: The self-evaluations were ineffective?

Ray Bloomer: Yeah. Yeah. They really were. Some parks did a very good job with them, or attempt at it, and some parks hardly did anything. There was very little guidance. Even from the departmental level, there wasn't much emphasis that said you had to do it. I mean, the regulations came out. Within the Park Service, we attempted to do what we could. But again, we had no authority to oversee it. And with a really, really limited personnel at the Washington level, and I was the only fulltime regional coordinator. Even to go through in my region at that time-- I think I had 34 parks—at that time, it would have been daunting to go through the self-evaluation of each park without physically going to the park to try to determine how effective they were. And most of them throughout the entire park system, according to what I was told from Dave Park, most of them were very, very ineffective. People really didn't know when they were, first of all, people didn't even know what they should have been evaluating to know whether it was effective or not. Many people, because what the true definition of what a program, service or activity was, was pretty difficult for people to understand. A lot of what they had in parks weren't even evaluated.

Perri Meldon: Have you found that in the time since this first round of self-evaluations has passed, has awareness changed significantly? Are there better tools for self-evaluations?

20:28

Ray Bloomer: Yes and no. There are better, (coughs) excuse me. There are some better tools. Awareness has increased tenfold. We've done a lot of training over the years. As newer employees come in, they're more knowledgeable of accessibility and more aware of people with disabilities. So, in that sense, it has increased greatly. Also, I think the Park Service and most parks realize that you probably do need to have some degree of education. Now it doesn't have to be formal education, but people need to be well trained in order to effectively do a self-evaluation or an accessibility assessment of parks, especially when you're including the whole programmatic component of it. So, there are other organizations. The National Center on Accessibility has conducted in whole or in part probably by now more than 100 assessments or self-evaluations of parks. The Denver Service Center has hired some people and has trained some of their people to do some of the assessments. I don't know what numbers they have done or how many they've done. Other parks have even gone outside to some other organizations. Independent living centers, organizations like that. And hired them to come in and do a self-evaluation or an assessment of their facility.

Perri Meldon: That's very interesting.

Ray Bloomer: Especially for some really big parks. It's going to take a lot to achieve that.

Perri Meldon: So, speaking about self-evaluations, you had mentioned that there have been improvements. What are some other ways you've seen changes? Or what else would you like to say about them?

Ray Bloomer: There have been improvements in terms of conducting the self-evaluation. Unfortunately, once that self-evaluation has been completed, there is no official authority or method to ensure that once the barriers have been identified that there is a fund source or some type of authority that indicates that a timeline for barrier elimination will be identified and put into action. That is, it's a little bit hit or miss. And it really does, to a large degree, depend on the action to be taken at park level. So, it really depends on the commitment of each park superintendent and the managers within each park.

Perri Meldon: I don't know if you're allowed to speak about this, but could you possibly give examples where parks have followed through on recommendations and evaluations, as well as examples where they have not?

23:52

Ray Bloomer: Well, there have been, I actually don't, to be honest with you, I don't know too many parks where I have been involved with monitoring the progress. I have been involved with participating on some of the teams that have done the self-evaluations. I know that there are some parks that have called the National Center on Accessibility and have said we're in the process of eliminating barriers, what are some of the things that we can do? For example, we just finished one at Salem Maritime National Historic Park this past May. They have already begun taking the work orders and the programmatic items that were identified, and they're already trying to knock them off as quickly as they can. Not only eliminating the ones that they have the power to do either by administrative changes or minimal amounts of park operation money. I know that they've also written some plans to seek funding for barrier elimination of anything that's major. So that's just one example of a park that has done that.

Ray Bloomer: I will also say, Golden Gate National Recreation Area in California, they were one park that had received a lawsuit. It was the first major lawsuit the Park Service received since back in 1976. It really required Golden Gate to make a lot of physical changes that would bring them further into compliance with Section 504. But I also have to say, in all fairness, I was already aware that prior to their lawsuit, Golden Gate was already head and shoulders above many other parks in making their park accessible, and they had already begun the process of doing self-evaluations of different areas of Golden Gate National Recreation Area prior to actually getting that official lawsuit that they got.

Perri Meldon: I have a few questions following all that you just said. Firstly, where does Salem and Golden Gate and other parks, where do they get their funding from? Is it coming from the National Park Service, or other sources?

Ray Bloomer: It does come from both. There are different ways that parks are funded. Every park has its primary park operations budget that it gets every single year. Then there are other methods of getting funding, such as congressional line-item funds. And that's usually for larger projects. Then there's additional funds. So, for example, there's various fund sources. Repair rehab would be one fund source. There's a lot of different types of special emphasis funding that occurs. But cyclical maintenance funds. When there's a pot of money that is made available. And then different parks, which submit requests against those different fund sources. And based on the priority and the description that each park makes will depend on whether and how much they get funds. Many parks also will get funds through the fee program that exists throughout many of the national parks. That's another way that funding is made available. Then you have organizations such as foundations and other friends' groups and things like organizations such as that, that will also provide funding for national parks. National parks can accept donations. And some parks, depending on the nature of their park, get greater sources of donations than others.

Perri Meldon: Interesting. Now going back to another thing that you had said, you had mentioned a lawsuit in 1976. What was this lawsuit?

29:09

Ray Bloomer: In 1976, the National Park Service had the national, uh—

Perri Meldon: Bicentennial?

Ray Bloomer: I'm sorry. I've just lost my train of thought. It was in Washington. It was the train station in Washington. Washington, DC. And that station was being renovated. The intent was--it never did succeed. But because of the Bicentennial that was coming up at that time, it was an attempt to make the train station like a national visitors' center. When it was being renovated, they did not make it accessible, and they did not comply with the standards of that time. Which would have been the 1971 ANSI standards. There was a complaint against the National Park Service, because they're the ones that had responsibility for the national station, I can't recall what it was called at the time, for it to be made accessible. So, some organization, and I'm not sure who, brought the National Park Service to court as a result of that. I don't know what the outcome was, because the national visitor center was disbanded after a certain amount of time anyway, because it just did not seem to be very effective.

Perri Meldon: Hmm. While on the topic of trials and court hearings, I was going to ask you about this later, but we can talk now about it because you mentioned it. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area court hearing. Could you expand upon that?

31:13

Ray Bloomer: Yes. That was a complaint that was brought against the National Park Service by an organization called, DRA was the acronym, and it was Disability Rights Advocates. They took the National Park Service to court in the Ninth District, in federal court, because they felt that the Park Service was violating Section 504. There was a settlement agreement that had been developed as a result of that. Part of that settlement agreement was that that a specific amount of money would be spent by the National Park Service each year, and I'm not sure what the total number of years was, to bring that settlement agreement to a close. But for each year during the time of the settlement agreement, there was a specific plan on what had to be achieved and how much money would be spent to achieve making aspects of Golden Gate National Recreation Area accessible. It dealt with areas of the park such as Muir Woods, Alcatraz. Golden Gate, I believe, has five different beach areas, so it dealt with the beach areas. It looked at all of the, or many of the programmatic components and physical components of Golden Gate that became part of the settlement agreement as part of the resolution.

Perri Meldon: As well as historic and outdoor and recreation as well.

Ray Bloomer: Oh, yeah. Yes. It included areas, the trails, camping areas, historic areas such as Alcatraz, Fort Point. Fort Mason. Other aspects of Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Perri Meldon: And this trial lasted for several years until a resolution was reached, correct?

33:26

Ray Bloomer: That is correct. I don't recall the exact number of years. But if I'm not mistaken, I believe the trial, I think that the filing of the court case, I think, was in 2007, I believe.

Perri Meldon: Were you or other members of the National Center on Accessibility involved, or still involved?

Ray Bloomer: The National Center on Accessibility was involved up to, and I was also involved, up to a point. Both in terms of looking at certain areas, we were doing some of the self-evaluation and assessment of the park as it was leading up to the filing of the complaint and for a little while afterwards. And then the Department of Justice had advised the park not to do any more self-evaluating that wasn't determined by the court. So, at that point, the National Center on Accessibility was more or less told to immediately cease doing any further self-evaluating. Part of the process of getting depositions, I know there were a few people within the Park Service that had to give a deposition, including the executive director of the National Center on Accessibility as a result of the court case.

Perri Meldon: We'll come back to those congressional hearings, too, later on. The ones in 2006 and 2008. But I'd also like to backtrack and go, we jumped a bit from 1987 to the mid-2000s. But before we do that, is there anything else about Golden Gate National Recreation Area that you wanted to speak about?

Ray Bloomer: Well, just the fact that it was, I don't want to say it was unfair, it was just somewhat unfortunate that it happened to have been one of the parks that was very progressive in its approach to accessibility and what it had already achieved in making the facilities accessible prior to the lawsuit. They were the only park in the system that had a fulltime accessibility program manager, prior to the lawsuit.

Perri Meldon: That makes it so interesting, then, that that national recreation area, of all places, came under fire.

36:27

Ray Bloomer: Primarily it was because of the location of Disability Rights Advocates. They were located in Berkeley, California, and that's right in the metro area of Golden

Gate National Recreation Area. Prior to that lawsuit, the Disability Rights Advocates successfully sued the state park system of California. So, they already had a bit of a precedence. They felt that with the success rate that they have, they felt that they could bring about a lawsuit against the National Park Service and also be successful at that, which they obviously were.

Perri Meldon: Along those lines, then, you've been in the Park Service through decades of disability rights activism. How do you feel that disability rights activists have influenced your work, or the work of the accessibility program in the Park Service?

Ray Bloomer: Oh, that's a difficult question to answer. We have had our own activists within the National Park Service. Besides myself, obviously, I know you've already had discussion with Dave Park. Within the field of recreation and parks and tourism, the National Park Service has been recognized as a leader unto itself as it relates to accessibility and activism in parks and recreation. So, from that point of view, we sort of led the field, to a large degree, even though it was leading glacially. There were organizations outside the Park Service that would contact us and say that they would like to work with us. Unfortunately, what slows the process down is funding. Making things accessible when you have to go back and make wholesale changes, especially when you're looking at changing things from rehabilitating entire exhibits or physical buildings or trails or campgrounds. But when it's done in a progressive, integrated way, and I'm talking integrated both in terms of the things that parks do on a regular basis, but also integrating the funding sources. It can happen quicker and more efficiently, and probably a little less painful. But it took a long time before it got to the point where doing that in an integrated fashion actually started to occur.

Perri Meldon: Hmm. Well, to go back in time, going back to Sagamore Hill and at a time when disability rights activists were active. You were there at the time of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. You've spoken about the laws that do directly impact the National Park Service. But still, the Americans with Disabilities Act was huge in many regards. How did it impact attitudes or relationships to disability in the National Park Service?

40:17

Ray Bloomer: Even though the ADA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, does not directly affect the National Park Service because it deals with state and local government, that's Title II and Title III deals with entities that are privately owned but commercially operated or open to the public. The ADA still really began to shine a great light on accessibility at all levels, whether it was state, local, or whether it was federal. Because the average person didn't know the difference between ADA and 504. The average person with a disability knew, wow, there's new regulations, there's a new law, and now I'm going to have more access than I ever had in the past. So, the expectation that the public had on accessibility all over,

whether that accessibility was in state, local government, commercial or federal, was much higher. And because that expectation was higher, even within the federal government, there were people that didn't realize that they already had a pretty heavy responsibility under Section 504, and they were looking at it because of what they thought the ADA meant to them, only to find out they were supposed to have been doing the same things long before the ADA was passed.

Ray Bloomer: So, the emphasis and the awareness, not only by disability organizations, but by people with disabilities themselves, increased immensely after the ADA had been passed. And it still has that effect on us today. The one thing that it did, it required the US Access Board, to pass many new regulations that didn't exist. Under Section 504, we didn't have fishing, or under the ADA, at the time, we did not have standards for pools, for fishing and boating docks and areas, for beaches, for trails, for campgrounds and picnic areas and scenic overlooks. All those existed as a result of the passage of the ADA. So that when those things went into effect, it not only affected state and local government and commercial, but it also, because it brought about new areas for accessibility and for standards, it also affected the federal government. So, it had a very big impact on the federal government.

Ray Bloomer: I was fortunate to be part of the federal regulatory negotiating committee for outdoor developed areas where they were using that legal process to develop the foundation or the basis for accessibility standards for both campgrounds, beaches, trails, and scenic overlooks.

Perri Meldon: How were you involved in that process?

43:57

Ray Bloomer: There were 27 people representing a variety of entities, and it represented people from both sides. Stakeholders such as KOA campgrounds, so you have the public entities involved. You had people from the National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management. We had people from agriculture, from the US Forest Service, all involved. We had people from the private sector who were trail designers. And we had organizations that represented a variety of different organizations representing people with disabilities. So, you had all these different stakeholders involved. It was a series of meetings conducted by the US Access Board. And they hired professional federal facilitators to conduct these meetings. So, there were meetings that were held every two months for two years to get all of the input in a variety of these different areas of specialty that I just identified to determine how to make trails, beaches, campgrounds, picnic areas and scenic overlooks accessible. What would we recommend for standards?

Ray Bloomer: At the end of that two-year period of time, a report was given to the US Access Board with all of the findings that took place over this two-year period of time. The US Access Board used that report so that they could then develop as what was required under Section 502, the development of minimum standards for those

areas. Then it was up to GSA, Government Services Administration, who oversees, they're the ones that administer the regulations or the standards for the federal entities, for the federal government. Not all of them, but for the ones that fall under GSA, which happens to be both the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior. They then took the minimum guidelines that the US Access Board developed, and they had the authority to develop them into standards, which they did. And they became part of Chapter 10 of [ABAS?].

Perri Meldon: Do you recall roughly when this two-year period was, when you were involved?

Ray Bloomer: Nineteen-ninety-nine and 2000.

Perri Meldon: Okay. Well, that brings me to my next question. Despite this increased awareness and attention on access, you've alluded to, as well as Dave and Kay, that the accessibility program, which was a division, was downgraded to a branch and then a program. And that's something I'm having trouble pinning down, that timeline. And what is inferred by that downgrading?

47:28

Ray Bloomer: Well, within the hierarchy of the Park Service, there are various associate directors. At that time, the associate director of operations oversaw all of the divisions that fell in under operations. So, at that time, the division of the Office of Accessibility was then under the associate director of operations. Dave Park answered directly to that associate director. When this division then became a branch, they then answered to a division chief who again was one step away from the associate director. When this was downgraded from a branch to a program, they then were, the manager, who happened to have been David at the time, he answered to the branch chief, who answered to a division chief, who answered to the associate director. So, no matter what organizational or reorganizational structure the accessibility program lies within, the further down that it's downgraded, obviously the less funding that's available and also the further down the chain of authority you are, the less emphasis that program has.

Perri Meldon: Do you recall when it was first downgraded from a division to a branch?

Ray Bloomer: It was in the mid '90s. I don't recall the exact year. But it was in the mid '90s.

Perri Meldon: And when Kay arrived in the late 2000s, Kay Ellis, it would have then been a program?

Ray Bloomer: Yes. It was downgraded, when Dave Park was the division chief, he was hired into the position as a division chief. It went to a branch, and it went to a program under Dave. When Dave retired at the end of 2008 and Kay went into the position in March of 2009, it had already been a program. So, Kay came in as a program manager.

Perri Meldon: Did it remain a program up until the time of Jeremy Buzzell's arrival in 2014?

50:30

Ray Bloomer: That's correct.

Perri Meldon: And during his time, it has since moved a couple of times.

Ray Bloomer: Jeremy was hired in 2014 as a branch chief.

Perri Meldon: So, by then it was a branch again.

Ray Bloomer: It was a branch. And then January of this year, Jeremy was given additional responsibilities as a branch chief to be responsible over the housing program and the accessibility program. And the accessibility program was once more downgraded to a branch.

Perri Meldon: Okay. It's hard to follow. But this helps. It gets a little hazy in the late 2000s, up until the present. Without all the memos that were written in the '70s, '80s and '90s, when things switch over to email, it gets a little dicier to follow.

Ray Bloomer: It does. I can understand that. But it was, I mean, I don't recall specific dates as to when it went from a branch to a program. And I'm going to say that part probably took place in the very late '90s, possibly the very early 2000s. But I know that it was definitely a program by at least 2003.

Perri Meldon: This brings us to the 2000s. And in both 2006 and 2008, there were two congressional hearings that the National Park Service was invited to. I believe that Dave Park was at the first one. What were these congressional hearings? Why did the National Park Service get invited?

Ray Bloomer: Well, I'm not sure if they were exactly invited, or whether they were told by Congress to attend. But they were specifically done because one specific congressman was interested in the level of attention that the National Park Service either was or was not giving to accessibility. I can't recall that congressman's last name right now. He was from New Mexico. His son, or I'm sorry, his brother, rather, was an individual with a physical disability, and that's one of the reasons why he had a personal interest in it. But he was the one that conducted these hearings, and not only identified Park Service officials that he wanted to hear from, but he also had representatives from the disability community to hear their reactions to their experiences within visiting national parks.

54:04

Perri Meldon: I believe it might have been Steven Pearce?

Ray Bloomer: Yes, that's correct. Steven Pearce, whose brother was Philip Pearce.

Perri Meldon: As far as you understand it, the precedent for these hearings was his personal interest. There was no other?

Ray Bloomer: As far as I know, it was his own personal interest that did create this. I don't believe that it was as a result of any type of congressional inquiries by the public at large.

Perri Meldon: And what followed? So, 2008 was largely a hearing based off of the 2006 hearing. But what followed then after 2008?

Ray Bloomer: Well, it was interesting. Because at one point, and this gets back to the issue of the perception that management has. One of the, I believe it was the deputy director of the Park Service, when they were returning from those hearings, had asked Dave Park, "How could we be so far away from being accessible?" And he said, "Every time I go to a park, I see ramps and grab bars."

Ray Bloomer: That's when Dave said to this deputy director, "You're only seeing the physical component. But many of the areas that we are so far from being in compliance with is on the programmatic aspect of it." Dave used as an example the lack of accessible films that were not captioned. As a result of that, that particular deputy director really helped to bring about an emphasis on audiovisuals. It was a couple of million dollars that were spent to get many of the audiovisual programs in national parks captioned and get audio description for them and also get assistive listening for them. But it took that conversation on the way back from one of those congressional hearings to get across the idea that accessibility was more than ramps and grab bars. That's a large perception that many managers at that time had, and probably some still do.

Perri Meldon: Again, do you recall, you had mentioned around two million dollars going into supporting captioning of these films. Do you recall where that funding came from, or if there was any line item that passed through to support that measure?

57:17

Ray Bloomer: I do not recall that. No, I don't.

Perri Meldon: Okay. I can ask Michelle, too. When did Michele Hartley join the National Park Service?

Ray Bloomer: Michele has been with the Park Service, I think for about 18 years, I'm guessing. I don't recall exactly when she came into the Park Service. She did not come in as an accessibility specialist. She came in as an audiovisual producer, I believe.

Perri Meldon: Based at Harpers Ferry.

Ray Bloomer: Yes, that's correct.

Perri Meldon: Okay. Well, between 2008 and 2018, and again, this question comes from the haziness of emails, what are the greatest changes that you've seen, that you can reflect on in the past decade?

Ray Bloomer: During that timeframe, probably the biggest change that I have seen has been the fact that there has been a lot of funding put into getting accessibility assessments, self-evaluations, within the national park units. Again, we probably have a little bit more than a hundred of them that have been assessed, either in whole or in part, both physical and/or programmatic. And that's a big step. Because you've got to figure out where you are in order to figure out where you're going. You have to understand what barriers exist so that you can put in, either eliminate those barriers or put in for the funding necessary for major costs of eliminating some of the bigger barriers. So, I look at that as probably the biggest change that I have seen during that timeframe.

Perri Meldon: And for you at this point in your career, you're looking at, is it over 40 years now?

Ray Bloomer: Forty-two. And I'll be 43 in about four months.

Perri Meldon: (laughs) So at almost 43 years in the National Park Service, what are your tasks these days? What keeps you busy at work?

59:50

Ray Bloomer: Well, first of all, I still do a lot of training. I do a lot of technical assistance in terms of answering questions. I've been involved in, I'm still involved in a lot of projects that involve exhibit development, wayside exhibit development. I just finished up, or am in the process of finishing up, one of the biggest accessibility projects that the National Park Service had undertaken. Which is both the physical landscape area, but even bigger than that was the complete renovation of the museum at Gateway Arch National Park in Saint Louis, Missouri. It is really cutting edge in terms of it being accessible as a museum. It is, to me, I think a great achievement by the National Park Service. But it's also a great achievement by, and it really did show how various levels of government throughout that, including the private sector, was able to come together to make that a very successful operation. So, I was involved with that.

Ray Bloomer: I've been involved with the White House visitor center. Exhibits. And a variety of others. I've also been involved in some development of policy changes, such as the service animal policy, interim policy, which has just been signed this week, as a matter of fact.

Perri Meldon: Oh, wow.

Ray Bloomer: I did write the frequently asked questions that has been posted. And I will be conducting three webinars so that we can begin the education process that has to parallel the interim service animal policy.

Perri Meldon: Wow, that's very exciting. The service animal policy.

1:02:09

Ray Bloomer: It is. And essentially the reason why that was done is we wanted to be sure that when people with disabilities that use service animals visit our national parks, not only will their civil rights be made available to them, but even more than that is what they experience as far as the civil rights are concerned relative to the use of service animals when they are in the public sector, and also in state and local government, that what we're doing in the National Park Service is consistent with that. And that's what our endeavor was in upgrading our policy was to make sure that that consistency existed.

Perri Meldon: Actually, that does remind me, we haven't mentioned this yet, but Director's Order 42, which became effective in 2000. There hasn't been a follow-up director's order, correct?

Ray Bloomer: That is correct. We have made a few attempts at revising that. Now at one time, director's orders all had sunset dates. But I believe when they made the sunset a policy, I don't think at that time management realized how overwhelming it would be to keep revising the various director's orders. So, they were no longer allowed to sunset. The director's order stays into effect until a new director, until they are revised, and the revision is signed off on and made public. So, we have made some progress in developing draft revision. And that is being currently worked on as we speak.

Perri Meldon: But many aspects or factors that are described in the director's order are still at work. Not fully achieved yet.

Ray Bloomer: Yes. That's correct.

Perri Meldon: So, Ray, looking back on your career and where we are now, what do you consider the greatest ongoing, or perhaps new challenges that the accessibility program has faced and continues to face?

1:04:42

Ray Bloomer: That's a very good question, and a very, very difficult one to answer. The fact that, when I say, "new challenges," or I answer the question of new challenges, I

think it's just to continue to make sure that we are educating our employees at all levels. Because those that are at the very top have to have the knowledge necessary to know what needs to be funded throughout our system. We have exhibits that exist that haven't been touched in multiple decades. They need to be funded, but they also need to be funded in a way that there is oversight to ensure, number one, that the proper level of funding to make them accessible when they rehabilitate and renovate them, and that the proper changes take place to make them accessible. And I think that that is a very, very big challenge, is getting that level of education at all levels up to where it needs to be. To me, that is a huge challenge within the National Park Service.

Perri Meldon: Hmm. Mm hmm. By the same token, then, what do you consider your – so, personally—your greatest accomplishments with the National Park Service in your almost 43 years?

1:06:29

Ray Bloomer: The fact that I haven't given up. (laughter) I don't say that being totally facetious. I think that I've had many people over the years ask me how have I been able to continue at this level, and to maintain the level of passion that I hope that I still have, but others believe that I have. I think one of the reasons why I've been able to do what I've done and continue is because I have seen change take place over the years. It may be, I know that it's incremental. And it may be, as I mentioned earlier, a bit on the glacial side. It might be slow in coming. But it still progresses. I know that we've got a long way to go, and it's going to take many, many people, and the involvement of many people, to achieve it. But I feel that I've played my part. I feel that I have influenced many people over the years. I hope to still be able to continue to do that, so that they will do their part.

Ray Bloomer: I can still remember days when I would be traveling in a city with somebody who's a wheelchair user. And with me being blind, I would have a hand on their wheelchair. We were going down the street between the first lane of traffic and parked cars, because we couldn't get a wheelchair up on the sidewalk. We would do that for blocks on end, until we got to the address where we needed to be, and I would assist that person up on the sidewalk. Today you go in cities and it's very rare that you find curb corners without curb ramp. So, we've come a long way. Still have a long way to go.

Perri Meldon: Well, thank you. Yeah. Ray, is there anything else that you'd like to add that we haven't touched on, or that you'd like to go back to?

1:09:06

Ray Bloomer: Well, I think in terms of looking at where the National Park Service needs to be right now. The breakdown of the National Park Service in terms of its employees. Right now, we have at the national level, we still only have two people that are

part of the National Accessibility Program that are full time. We have a branch chief that has divided responsibilities between accessibility and housing. We have one person at Harpers Ferry and one person at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. We have 417 national park units. And that's not enough people to be successful at what we're doing. So even though accessibility is, in many ways, everybody's responsibility, when it's broken down into small levels like what I just identified, we're never going to get the level of commitment. Which also means, the commitment is not just we're going to do some things, but we're going to fund the things that we say we're going to do. Until we get there, accessibility is always going to be almost a stepchild of the National Park Service.

Perri Meldon: Hmm. Yeah. Well, thank you. Thank you for your time. I know we'll have more to talk about. We will talk about FDR Junior at another point. Again, if there's anything that comes up now and the next time we chat about FDR Junior, then we can always add that in later.

Ray Bloomer: Okay.

Perri Meldon: But again, thank you. I'm just going to wrap up quickly, and then we'll go back to wrapping up our phone call.

Ray Bloomer: Thank you, Perri. It was enjoyable working with you.

Perri Meldon: Thank you. So again, my name is Perri Meldon. I've been recording with Ray Bloomer, accessibility specialist with the National Park Service and the National Center on Accessibility. Today is October 19, 2018, and this is our third recording.

71:52

[END OF TRACK 3]

[END OF INTERVIEW]