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



Colleen Spika  
December 21, 1978

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

Dorothy Huyck: The date is December 21, 1978. I am Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Colleen Spika, who was a park ranger in the National Capital Region.

Colleen Spika: I think what [inaudible] during the time [inaudible] that we can [inaudible], and I've always been interested in the outdoors, and I like people, and I'm concerned about the environment, and wildlife, and [inaudible] for this country. And I looked specifically at agencies that could possibly use my resources and my abilities. And I look to them [inaudible] what was going on, because I was in the government for about nine years. I really [inaudible] and I was afraid [inaudible] moving towards an agency like that. And therefore, I guess I sought out to talk with the quote, unquote "rangers" that time I found a real fun male husbandry who was at Rock Creek Park, and I talked with him about my interests, and he was very opposed over a period of months. And finally, I was over there for a program, and he gave me a job announcement which happened to be for a new area out in Virginia. And I looked into that and I wasn't real sure what was going to happen because it didn't seem like it was quite as open as I had hoped, and I was – there was an opening for sure, but the facility itself was not ready for people to actually inhabit. Then there was another position he told me about with the museum lab as a secretary, and that's not exactly what I had in mind. However, the subject of the type of work that I was then doing [inaudible] I thought that I might look into that. However, and as I said, that's not exactly what I wanted to go back to and even after going, interviewing for the job, I produced a documentary for the Army at that time, and I then decided I would like a position out of Great Falls that had come open. And I would really make an attempt to get my forms in order and go through them and which I did. And that was probably in early October of 1967. And, then Superintendent Floyd Taylor, who's since retired, and I went to see him, and I told him that I was specifically interested in working for the National Park Service in the field area. And I had heard about Great Falls Park, Virginia and could they use my skills once the job opened or when would it be opened? And he told me that yes, they were going to open the facility. Whether the visitor center at that time or not they were going to use an area – I imagine later as I found out and had the job, I realized now that it was the maintenance area that he was talking about. We would use temporary office space there. So, I was employed officially on November the 6th, 1967 as an information receptionist for the new Great Falls Visitor Center in, Great Falls Park, Virginia.

Dorothy Huyck: Information receptionist?

Colleen Spika: That's right.

Dorothy Huyck: What grade was that?

Colleen Spika: GS-4.

Dorothy Huyck: [affirmative].

Colleen Spika: So, from there I began to set up the Park files and it was kind of an interesting and exciting time because there was a brand-new facility. The Park Service staffed it with a Chief Park Ranger, who was Jim Riggs [phonetic]. There was a naturalist, who was Alex Long [phonetic] and historian, Joanna Long [phonetic], and myself. And we were four staffed with the exception of one maintenance man. So, we began to open up this 800-acre facility for the public in that little humble beginning of a garage. It was a great time because we really were not confined with a building and such and all the responsibilities we came to understand. But it was a natural time of exploring the park together, learning together. Learning about the people that I was working with, and really sort of hearing about their experiences was very exciting because Jim had been “the Chief Ranger” in Yosemite at Hitachi”, Hitachi I believe it is in a backwoods situation. Alex had just come into the Park Service after having worked with National – well not the National, but the Army Map Service, and Joanna was sort of fresh out of college and full of good ideas. And it was a very enthusiastic time for our group. And I didn't really see, honestly, myself in this position, information receptionist, for long because I felt I could do that work, but there was a lot of other things I had on my mind. And I looked at it as a position that had a lot of possibilities for me, and that's the reason I accepted it. I do not know really all the things – it's so hard looking back – that must have been running through my mind about what the future held. But I knew that I wanted to team up those goals that I mentioned earlier about working with people, getting more involved with the public, really learning what the Park Service management was all about, and how we go about bringing parks to people because I think that's really what the park service is. It's people enjoying the resources that we have set aside and dedicated our lives to protect and preserve and yet use wisely. And so, that became my life and as it evolved during the years ahead, I did not realize on that day that I would spend almost nine years, well, nine years it was there at Great Falls. And during that time my position changed, and I was upgraded. When I left the Park in January, excuse me, in February of '77, I was a GS-7 and was selected into the Park Ranger Intake Program at the National Capital Region out of about 103 candidates I might add. And I was terribly excited and terribly pleased when I got a call in January 1977 from my boss that I had been selected.

Dorothy Huyck: Were you the only person selected out of 103 candidates?

Colleen Spika: No, there as another girl that worked at the Park with me, Claire Young and there as another female, Veronica Dalsey [phonetic], but it's my understanding with Veronica that she was in an Upward Mobility Program. And then there was a black male in National Capital Park East. So, I believe we were the four candidates. But it was terribly exciting, as you can imagine to work out there and have as your goal to be a professional person. I had always considered myself such, but to be recognized by my agency as such was a big thrill for me. And that meant my career could take on a lot of different avenues. And that's what I've been exploring during this almost two years of internship in the Park Ranger Intake Program, where I've been studying resource management, concessions, special permits, environmental education. Oh, my. There's so many things. Just general management. Working with visitor safety, interpretation, maintenance, program planning and [inaudible], congressional. The whole gamut of how you deal and work with the public that is using our facilities. And I always try to keep in my mind, that I am not the keeper of the Park, but I am part of the people. My particular job has to do with taking care of the facility that's my responsibility as a Park Ranger. But you, the public, own this Park and I feel like you have every right to enjoy. My job is to make sure that you have a pleasant, enjoyable and not necessarily educational, but that you might take something from the Park maybe you haven't discovered before. And to help you discover it to your interpretation, so in the years that I've been at Great Falls much of the time that I considered special and memorable was times that I spent with the public and little discoveries along the trail, or a new way of looking at the river. We wanted to keep the water that was used and why I that's important not only to us as consumers, but the wildlife and their right to live as well as yours and ours. And, working with children is most rewarding, and to receive a letter from them on how good the visit was and to know that as they grow and bond to us the fact that they'll be able to [inaudible] on nature and to conserve the country, and to be useful in it's preservation and to use whatever resources that we have to [inaudible].

Dorothy Huyck: Are you still in the Intake Training Program?

Colleen Spika: Yes, as matter of fact I am. I'm not sure from when I talked with other colleagues that there's a central cutoff date, but it is in a sense when one reaches the majority of the criteria laid down in that plan, and we do have a very, pardon me, definite [inaudible] date that we should fulfill. In other words, we should have a very good background on the policies of our agency, and the administration, and the supervision, and resource management, and all of the other elements that go in to National Park

System. But in those criteria and our facilities that we can work through, or work with, or people we can work with, divisions, people at the region, people at the field level. And that puts the program to expose us to as many opportunities as possible to learn, to absorb, to help out, to see how these workings of legislation that congress approves then goes on to viable programs where maybe a park is dedicated and then it begins to be staffed. And then we come in and take over that and run it as a National Park area. And in order to do that, one must have a good background. The major course that we take in this Park Ranger course is a basic one called Introduction to Park Operations. And that it is a real fine course. It's your major background, history of the park service. The policies and legislation that [inaudible] and [inaudible]. So, it's important to know legally where we stand, and why we are. Because if we don't understand that, then we begin to make up goals and objectives when they're already in the legislation [inaudible].

Dorothy Huyck: When will the time come when they're completed [inaudible]?

Colleen Spika: No, not really. Although I have, we have what's known as forms 180 and on the 180s you prepare them in order of your preferences. And I have done so, and I have been thinking about the career for the future, and thinking that I have some very definite skills, I feel, in supervision and management. And also, working with visitor services maybe as a specialty and that's been a consideration. It is also one that I've noted on the form. Resource management is another one I'm interested in, although I realize that I feel a lack of knowing all about the subject that I'd like to in order to capably take on a position like that, and I'm trying to expose myself to more so that I might understand it better.

Dorothy Huyck: Have you anyway to discuss all [inaudible]?

Colleen Spika: I don't know that the forms allow you to do that. I, myself, would prefer the North Atlantic, or the southeast region. I have some preferences in [inaudible] for those choices. I think the western region is exciting, and there's a lot of things going on out there. But my own interest and I think my own background, the areas that I see here, at this point in my life might be better for my skills, and so that's why I would choose those two areas.

Dorothy Huyck: And also [inaudible]?

Colleen Spika: Yes, I worked for the U.S. Department of the Army. I worked for the State Department, H-E-W.

Dorothy Huyck: [affirmative]. And going back a little further in history—

Colleen Spika: [affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: Can I ask where and when you were born?

Collen Spika: Yes, February 11th, 1933, and I was born in Washington, D.C.

Dorothy Huyck: [Inaudible] after all This time?

Collen Spika: No, I have an older brother.

Dorothy Huyck: Okay.

Collen Spika: Three years older. He lives in California.

Dorothy Huyck: And is he always gone?

Collen Spika: Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: Where did you grow up?

Collen Spika: In Washington, and I spent summers in Ohio with my parents. My father, particularly, and really enjoyed that time because it was spent on the farm, and he allowed me to pursue my interest of loving to roam around the woods and just being outside. I really enjoyed that.

Dorothy Huyck: Was either of your parents at home [inaudible]?

Collen Spika: No.

Dorothy Huyck: What was your father's occupation?

Collen Spika: He was a craftsman, a tradesman at plaster by trade.

Dorothy Huyck: And your mother? [Inaudible]? You attended high school in Washington?

Collen Spika: Yes, eastern.

Dorothy Huyck: Okay, and have you attended [inaudible]?

Collen Spika: Yes, but I am an undergraduate and I've taken courses at NOVA, William and Mary.

Dorothy Huyck: Did you go to William and Mary [inaudible] on a full-time basis?

Collen Spika: No, it was a summer special course in the natural resources.

Dorothy Huyck: In the courses you've taken at NOVA, have they been resource oriented as well?

Collen Spika: Not always, no. I have done one in professional writing from a non-professional, and then I have taken, when I first started my job at the Park Service, I thought I'd go ahead and hone up on shorthand skills. Although, as I said, I really wasn't interested, but I felt that it would be helpful. So, I studied that for a year. And I think after that mainly the training I had at

the Park Service really [inaudible]. So that's really where I spent a major part of it.

Dorothy Huyck: When you were in high school was there someone who was particularly an encouragement in following your [inaudible], like a parent or teacher? I know you've got one.

Collen Spika: No, I cannot think of. I wish there had been, but no.

Dorothy Huyck: So, you didn't find the merit courses that interesting?

Collen Spika: Some science, not a lot of math. Math had never proved to be very good for me. But I did take college preparatory and studied Spanish. And family illness prevented my attending college after high school.

Dorothy Huyck: Oh.

Collen Spika: I did not do that.

Dorothy Huyck: Did you get good grades in [inaudible]?

Collen Spika: Yes, I was mostly an A /B student with some Cs. I'd like to have had more science, but our school just didn't offer a lot.

Dorothy Huyck: Did you go to public school?

Collen Spika: Yes, [affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: As you were growing up if you don't – did you play with boys?

Collen Spika: Yes, because the neighborhood was mainly boys.

Dorothy Huyck: [inaudible]?

Collen Spika: A little bit, yes, I think so.

Dorothy Huyck: And as you became a teenager were you expected to become something more of a lady?

Collen Spika: No, I can only relate a humorous event that I remember very vividly. The first day I ever wore lipstick and got off the school bus the boys in my neighborhood, I saw them waiting at the end of the first block and I'll never forget how they laughed and kidded me. Now, it wasn't meant to be mean or anything. But it just, to me it seemed that I become a woman that day. They recognized hey, she's different. She's changed. And so, they responded very well. I think it was a very good relationship.

Dorothy Huyck: Was this a choice you made, or were you encouraged by your family to be more lady like?

- Collen Spika: No, I believe it was a choice I made. I just felt like being more interested in me, and I enjoyed wearing nice things. And I think I always had an eye for beauty, and I was aware that I was growing up. And maybe this was the first day I remember that this is the way that I was going to express it. So, that was kind of a fun thing.
- Dorothy Huyck: In the growing up process, were there any extra-curricular activities related to school or elsewhere that has since been helpful in your work at Park Service?
- Collen Spika: Well, I've always had an interest in music and believe it or not, in this area particularly we do get into performing arts, and even in the Park we had touches of need for people that are capable in music and understanding that, and I was always singing and playing and instrument which was the piano. And I love to sing, and I enjoy artwork, interior design. And I think that's helped me too. Because even putting on Exhibits of art I seem to have an eye for that, and I have always enjoyed—
- Dorothy Huyck: Great Falls, Great Falls has a regular art exhibit?
- Collen Spika: Well, yes, not only art, but different exhibits on archeology and historical events. But even when you're putting those things up you have to have an eye for what looks nice, and that's been very helpful to me. And I've enjoyed being with friends and older people, as well as, younger and that's helped me a lot because I've learned a lot. And my parents have business on the weekends. A flower business, an open mart flower business. In fact, that business was carried on before I was even born. Before my brother and I were born. It was during the depression years that they opened this up to supplement their income during very difficult days. And my brother and I were sort of born into this, and we helped our family. And so, my social life during the growing up days is really family oriented because it was a family work business, and we helped our parents. But when you have a business like that, you're meeting people all the time, and I found out that people would be really great, and I enjoyed them. And I think that was something I thought back on that we were – they were buying flowers at, it was a happy experience and I got to talk to people, and that really helped develop me, I believe, because I had the chance to talk to a lot of different kinds of people.
- Dorothy Huyck: Had you been to the National Parks at all? In general—
- Collen Spika: As a child?
- Dorothy Huyck: —or anything as a child or before you went to work for the government?
- Collen Spika: Only to Shenandoah, right.



- Dorothy Huyck: Had you been on camping trips, or fishing trips, and the like?
- Collen Spika: No.
- Dorothy Huyck: I'd like to ask about persons who have been your supervisors—
- Collen Spika: [affirmative].
- Dorothy Huyck: —while you've been with the Park Service. We really don't need to name people. I'm less interested in their names than—
- Collen Spika: [affirmative].
- Dorothy Huyck: —what you experienced. Have you found the supervisors to be encouraging, or discouraging, or maybe you've encountered some of both?
- Collen Spika: Yes, well, I think particularly as a woman I did not receive much encouragement regarding my aspiration to become a Park Ranger. Quite frankly, someone that I recall saying, “You'll never make it.” It's sort of a closed fraternity in a sense. Not really, but the encouragement certainly was not there. If anything, it was a negative thing. And, I would say, not a supervisor, but a specific course that I took was most encouraging. I'd like to mention that because I think it would be helpful for woman in the future.
- Dorothy Huyck: I'm going to ask you about courses in a minute.
- Collen Spika: Okay.
- Dorothy Huyck: So why don't we just for the moment—
- Collen Spika: Right.
- Dorothy Huyck: —concentrate on the supervisors.
- Collen Spika: I really do not feel I had a lot of encouragement. Some minor encouragement, but I think that the future was more or less mapped out by me, and I knew if I wanted it, I had to fight for it and work for it and I had to really get in there and take it as a personal challenge. This is what I wanted, and I knew it would not come easy.
- Dorothy Huyck: Do you feel you received discouragement?
- Collen Spika: In some areas, yes. Is the question confined to that for males only, or just from woman, or both?
- Dorothy Huyck: Anyone.
- Collen Spika: Okay. I'd say some, but there were a lot of encouraging people that knew how much I loved my work, and wanted to succeed, and they did encourage.

Dorothy Huyck: How did they show encouragement?

Colleen Spika: Okay. One, I believe they did encourage me to try out ideas that I had to take on more than perhaps was more than perhaps was in the job description. If I had an idea, okay, let's see it. Let's see what you can do with it. And then a development process of doing the program and then letting them more or less see it and come out and enjoy it. And so, I had feedback that way. And then also working with others, colleagues and my coworkers. I felt that there was encouragement there because they came to me and asked me questions, or they would say, "When you're here things are exciting," or, "You inspire us," or things like that that made me feel really great about my ideas. I knew they were good. I knew many of them had to be refined, but in working with the group I felt that there were ideas I shared with them, and I saw good things happen. And that encouraged my own.

Dorothy Huyck: Did you get that kind of reaction from your supervisors and your colleagues?

Colleen Spika: Yeah, some supervisors, yes.

Dorothy Huyck: [affirmative]. Do you identify any way in which discouragement was shown?

Colleen Spika: Well, sometimes a lip service like, "It's a great job," but it's as if it's being said but what commitment is there with the go ahead? And it's like you're, you're acknowledged because it almost is the polite thing to do. But beyond that, I recognize professionally or giving an opinion, sometimes that's not always experienced. And I found that as I'm learning skills now of how to put across my ideas they are being accepted. Perhaps it was my own lack of ability to know how to present my ideas that faulted some of that. I'm not sure. As I look back now, I realize that I've observed other successful women, particularly noticing how they are presenting ideas, and plans, and decisions. And I want to be a decisive person, and I feel that I am. But in the past and in my younger days maybe I just didn't. I was studying the person to see how they'd accept ideas, so I was trying to do it that way and whereas now I'm trying to present them as I feel them and know them to be and stand by them. And I feel that there's a change that's come there.

Dorothy Huyck: There are some people who think of the National Park Service as a rather male oriented organization, do you?

Colleen Spika: Oh, yes. Yes, I do. But I believe it is changing. And I feel—

Dorothy Huyck: What evidence do you have, if any?

- Collen Spika: Well, it's very encouraging just today that I received a list by a friend of the women in the higher grades who are moving into upper management. I'd like to see more. I think we ought to at least have one or two regional directors, or several associate regional directors in our region and also service wide. I believe that most of the women that are being recognized are almost superwomen. They almost have to be. And it's interesting that they're called witches many times, whereas men are just ambitious, and very job oriented. Now, I do not feel that's true.
- Dorothy Huyck: A woman who is ambitious, to use the term applied to men, maybe referred to as a witch?
- Collen Spika: [affirmative].
- Dorothy Huyck: Is that piece of language actually used?
- Collen Spika: Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: And within the Park Service?
- Collen Spika: [affirmative].
- Dorothy Huyck: Because—
- Collen Spika: Well, maybe. I can't say for all the Park Service. But it's, I've heard it referred to around our region and sometimes they're not ready to deal with that and maybe they can't really, some women are so persistent and with good ideas and maybe they're threatening. And so, there's a problem maybe in accepting all of that. But again, I think we're in a male bastion, and I think that we're storming the doors. And I think there's a lot of great gals out there. I'm inspired by the successes of my female coworkers and colleagues. And I have sought some of their opinions, and talked over some of my plans and dreams with them on a private basis and, “Hey, what do you think? Do you think this is good? Do you, do you see me in this role?” Or, perhaps for support and, and critiquing back together. But it's been an honest exchange and I've welcomed it. Before I think this is also something new, women have been in such competition that now we're beginning to work together, and there's real strength in that. So, I do see women moving up and I do see, particularly, one woman from our region went on to a very responsible job in the interior, I believe in this building. And she's very well thought of, and I think that she's been an inspiration to a lot of the other women to strive for the excellence of service.
- Dorothy Huyck: So, this excellence, which may have been misunderstood as ambitious of a, ambition of a—
- Collen Spika: [Affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: —an unpleasantry is beginning to be recognized as excellence?

Collen Spika: Oh, yes. Yes, I believe so. And I believe as younger managers come along and they're more use to seeing us work side by side, and even some of the old ones, they take a fresh look at what's going on because the world is changing. And we're working, and helping, and not hindering. It still may be tough for them to accept us in some ways as a co-equal employment wise, but I believe that we really will see changes. I'm realistic to know that they'll be certain changes in my life career. But the girls behind me, I keep thinking it will be a whole lot – I should say the women. The women behind me, there will be even more changes, drastic changes in leadership places for them that maybe are not present now or in the immediate future, but I believe there will be. And I think that we're raising up a whole group of young people that are very serious about their life work, and I believe that their intelligence will be heard, and they will be recognized. And I for one will be very happy to see that happen.

Dorothy Huyck: You referred to some of the coursework that you have taken under the Park Service Program.

Collen Spika: [affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: Do you want to tell us more about that?

Collen Spika: Can I get it out of here would you – a good bit of training in a number of courses. In fact, the last 180 that I prepared, I began to look at the work from a suggestion from a female colleague to group it together into main categories as I was heading for particular jobs. And I felt that my next potential supervisor would like to know what I have had, and in what realm that they really work with. So, mainly they were grouped into management courses, communication courses, interpretation, and career development. Now, in the management courses, as I say, I feel the best course to begin with, and they do for all intake rangers is the Introduction to Park Operations. My particular term was nine weeks in Grand Canyon, which was just marvelous. And I just feel without it I don't think I could ever be the person that I am today. And although there were a lot of personal challenges like mountain climbing, and mule riding down the Canyon that I had never been experienced to before, maybe that's why it was extra exciting for me and the friendships that are still mine today I treasure very highly. And it really set the tone for the Park Service career and what it's all about. And, of course, to be the supervisor I had the Introduction to Supervision and Supervision and Group Performance, and Personnel Management for Supervisors. And, of course, last year was very good it was called, The Human Side of Management. And that proved to be very helpful to many of us that took that at the region. And the Federal

Budget Process was another one that gave me an overview of the budget process for the whole federal government, which really opened up some new doors as to why OMB cuts us many times, which is very unpleasant when you're at the field level or the region level. And really, no matter what level you happen to be, but it just seems like we misunderstand a lot of times why we're cut. And when we take a total look at the budget -- and I think the whole thing of being downtown in Washington. It really is a hot box, but it's been a valuable experience because if you don't understand the politics of everything, and of course none of us ever understand the politics of everything, but I mean it's been such a broadening view point to look at things, not just through a tunnel, but to look at your problem and then the problems surrounding it and maybe sometimes why you don't get funds or why someone else does. It's been a really good management course to have had, and I'm really grateful for that. And then, of course writing, how can we getting through life without being able to write? And, Effective Writing is the one I felt was really good Effective Writing for Managers. And, I didn't -- in communications I had a course at Harper's Ferry. And I also took on my course at -- through Alexandria School System on psychology, which was and has proved valuable. And I've had visitor safety training. Communication and Creative Arts, which dealt with the arts in all sorts of forms through poetry, and drama, and music, art, literature of all kinds and that was very good because more and more the Parks are being opened up to musical concerts, art expressions through exhibits. Even in actual areas that may be just were trails at one time. Even more recently a friend of ours had just returned from New York and they said on the nature trail instead of having typical guide signs or posts there were poems by Robert Frost. They were very refreshing. And so, these things I always try to keep an eye on new approaches to use the arts to bring about an enjoyable experience in a park setting. And I think it's wise to be sensitive. And visual aids, of course, had to do with the presentation of graphic matter and slides, movies, films. And I've learned a lot about that, and visitors do not come to natural areas to sit down and watch an hour movie. So, try to keep it short. Try to keep it brief, but informative and then let the people go and that's what it's all about. As I say, I've had a continuing interest really in all age groups. But I loved working with children too. And so, I was involved in children's interpretation workshop. And also, a program that I studied and paid for through the Smithsonian on museum programs for the handicapped. And, the Demonstration and Interpretations is another course offered at Harpers Ferry, which we observed and learn how to use living history. Some areas it's really great and others we can find many more reasons why it's not appropriate and it really would not be viable to use it. And then NASA last year offered, or two years ago I guess it was, the Goddard Space Flight

Center offered to a number of us sky interpretation, and I felt that was very interesting. In many of the areas, of course, we're able to use that. Now I'd like to talk about a course I really think is great. It's called Creative Career Development for Woman and it's offered, or I believe it's a different name now, but it's offered through the Alexander [unintelligible] and Associates in the area. And for the first time, it was during that course I really believe things began to come together about the aspirations I have of being a Park Ranger. I knew what they were. I could tell you, and my friends, and my husband, or whatever. But I, I really was never able to get my thoughts down and then match them up with realistic goals and timetables. And it was through this course that I really did kind of pull this all together, and I would highly recommend that for other woman and men because now I believe that course is including both. And then there was a seminar for woman working for a career, which was sort of a follow up, but not nearly as good, I feel, as the one that [unintelligible] had, because he allowed us to take a look at the things we're really good at, and then the skills that we already have, where we want to go, and not look at the things we haven't done well and just put those aside and concentrate on the things we do well. And there are people and there are organizations that can market our skills. And so, I felt that I would put a time table where I wanted to be, and I really strove after that to try to rewrite things and to put my thoughts more cohesively together, and to take my career and put it in a more readable, understandable, realistic tone so that I would be taken seriously. Not just that I was enjoying my work out there, but, okay, I want to be recognized for what I have to offer, and this is what I want to do to get my goals realized.

Dorothy Huyck: Are you finding that to some degree you're following that timetable?

Colleen Spika: [affirmative], yes. It was interesting not long after that, perhaps a year or so when the park ranger – I decided that I would try three times, that was the timetable. I would try three times to become a park ranger and after that I began a plan of leaving the National Park Service and going on to another agency, which I had in mind two, but particularly one that I would look into a program I heard about there. So, I tried. The first time I was interviewed, was not selected. A male was selected. The second time I was interviewed, another female was selected. And the third time I made it. So that sort of cinched that plan that it did, it did work and even if I had not gained professional status in the Park Service, I feel like my life still would have been successful because I made a plan and I decided I was going to stick by it. And I was going to realize my goals.

Dorothy Huyck: Your plan included the possibility of leaving the department?

Colleen Spika: Yes, it did.

Dorothy Huyck: I've observed that other women have said the same thing. That they seem to observe men and their long-term commitment and fascination by this particular organization—

Colleen Spika: [affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: —felt that sometimes women are not going to be that thoroughly dedicated. They will look at their overall possibilities and possibly move out of the Park Service.

Colleen Spika: Exactly. Certainly, the things I've talked about as we've opened the interview, my love for the service was there and not just for the figure head, the letter head, but for what it stood for. That's what I was really dedicated to. And even if I left the Park Service, those ideas would stay with me the rest of my life. However, I felt a personal dedication to myself. I felt that I had something to offer and that if this agency was not going to recognize me, I would find someone that would. And then I would throw in my energies to that and find personal fulfillment which was important to me. As long as I'm working, I cannot see just existing along, and going along, and just being happy with status quo, when I felt I was capable of more. And I do demand a lot of myself. I feel that I'm reaching forward all the time trying to learn growth, increase and I wanted an agency that would also recognize that. And if Park Service would not, certainly I cannot say there would be no hard feelings, there would be, of course, and rightly so. But I didn't feel that it would be worth it at my age, to frustrate myself with possibilities that they may not and if they didn't, then I was prepared to leave.

Dorothy Huyck: In the light of that, can I ask what your current grade is?

Colleen Spika: Yes, a 9.

Dorothy Huyck: Will that in any way change when you complete the Intake Course?

Colleen Spika: Well, as a matter of fact, it's gone up since I've been in the Intake Course. I've already been raised to a 9 level. The Park Ranger Intake Course, normally as you come in it's a 5, 5, 7, 9. But in the true sense of the word, in my situation, I had been an incumbent 7. And so, they accepted me at that grade level, which I was happy about, and elevated me to the 9 level. And I understand that's not uncommon, but it's more common to come in at 5 and then go to the 7, and then to the 9. So, in my case I have received a raise within the last year.

Dorothy Huyck: I'd like to ask you; do you think you've been able to use your specific talents and abilities and training in working for the Park Service?

Colleen Spika: Yes, I do.

- Dorothy Huyck: Has anybody ever been a mentor for you within Park Service?
- Collen Spika: Yes, I think so.
- Dorothy Huyck: Was this a man or a woman?
- Collen Spika: Both.
- Dorothy Huyck: Two persons?
- Collen Spika: Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: Do you think that being a woman has in any way affected your opportunities for added responsibilities and promotions?
- Collen Spika: Yes, in the Park it definitely did. I felt like it didn't, it really in some ways it was in my benefit to be a female. That's what I recognized. And now, I don't feel that way. I feel that I'll be select. Indeed, I've been asked to do certain things because of who I am and not because I happen to be a male, female and I'm very glad about that. It's not a problem of is he a good ranger? It's is she capable, or is that person capable of doing this job? That's what I'm after. And I feel some of the things that I've been involved in in the region I've been successful just because I follow through on the task given. And I think if anything if I were a male and it was a job that they needed to get done I think they think about the person now more than just it happens in my particular situation now that my boss is a male and he has been very supportive. And I enjoy working for him and he is a female promoter. So, I appreciate that. Probably for the first time in my career someone who really has taken an interest and been willing to listen to ideas. And has encouraged me and helped me in anything in my management plan or of my individual development plan. Park Ranger trainees have what's known as an IDP, which is an Individual Development Plan. And as I've talked it over and developed it, he's been very encouraging. And I have not – I generally can't think of a time when he wasn't real supportive. So, that was a good and has been a great experience. And I look for that in the next position too.
- Dorothy Huyck: Do you think there are any jobs within the National Park Service that a woman really should not have?
- Collen Spika: Oh, wow. Let's see. Okay, I think there – I don't mean to evade the question. But I think that the job and the qualifications are what we're looking at. If there's a job that perhaps I don't think I could take on, it might be very rigorous, like coming down a 500-foot face, but there is another woman and she is qualified, why not? So, I would say as long as she's qualified. I feel that most jobs, to my knowledge, could be done by either, depending on the physical capabilities as well as the mental.



Dorothy Huyck: Am I correct in assuming from what you say that there really are no jobs that some woman cannot handle?

Collen Spika: That's right, I think so.

Dorothy Huyck: Have you given or received assistance from other women in identifying positions that could be filled by a woman?

Collen Spika: Yes. [affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: Have you given that assistance, or received it, or both?

Collen Spika: I've been given the assistance and given it.

Dorothy Huyck: Do you see anything such as an all-girl network growing within the Park Service?

Collen Spika: [affirmative]. Yes, I do.

Dorothy Huyck: Here in the National Capital Region only, is that correct?

Collen Spika: Well, no, now I have a female friend in another region and she's certainly keeping us aware of growing opportunities. Particularly, she knows of my interest, so she's been letting me know.

Dorothy Huyck: You mentioned that you and several other women have been very forthright and open with each other and accepting your various abilities?

Collen Spika: [affirmative].

Dorothy Huyck: Will this lead to the evolution of woman keeping in touch with each other as the all boy network functions, do you think?

Collen Spika: Oh, I hope so. I think it's so helpful. If it's taken away, in my mind, this thing of, oh I've heard about a great job, but I don't want to tell anybody but just myself. I want to look into it. But if I know that I have a friend and they're really capable and they're ready to move on or they've expressed it to me and I hear about something, I'll pick up the phone or I'll call them. And I've had the pleasant thing of having that returned to me and I do really appreciate it. And there's a warmth now between the professional woman that are, are going up in the Park Service and I think they do help each other and perhaps the intuitiveness of women has helped a great deal because we're maybe sensitive to certain things that a male was not. A work environment or some really – a nice position but we know, someone knows, okay, when you go there there's the personality here that you're going to have to deal with and they're very strong. They'll be extremely challenging your ideas. So, get together before you go there and realize you're going to have to fight for your idea and be ready to stand up for it. As long – let them make the choices, but if you know something that

might be helpful or might be very helpful in their final decision of either taking the job or turning it down, I believe you owe it to your friend just to share it.

Dorothy Huyck: Does your friend always have to be a female or is it kind of shared information also exchanged between men and women?

Collen Spika: Well, yes. I have several male friends that are really nice doing that. Not as many. It seems like the women that are coming up are more helpful to each other mainly because we've learned through the school of hard knock what's happened. But I have been reading about this all girl touch that the girls help each other. But I have a male friend who regularly calls me and lets me know, or sends me advertisements of jobs in situations where I may not have had an opportunity to get a hold of it. It just says, maybe you'd like to look into it or something and I really appreciate that.

Dorothy Huyck: And you would do the same for him?

Collen Spika: Yes, and I have.

Dorothy Huyck: [affirmative]. Where do you see the Park Service five years from now in terms of opportunities for woman?

Collen Spika: Five years, oh boy. Well, I believe there will be more and more female rangers. I know that realistically we don't seem to have a huge opening of positions down the road, but with the new omnibus bill, certainly there have been new Park Service lands that have just been accessed and now it will go through this process of staffing. And I believe some of the promising and upcoming women will be asked for responsibilities there. So, I see women moving into superintendence's. The Chiefs of Visitor Services. In regional positions. Hopefully, I would like to see at least one or two female Associate Regional Directors in our region and certainly more than one at the top in the Washington Office. And I'd like to see it be the cream of the crop, because I think they're going to lead the way and I know it's going to be a real pressurizing thing. But I'd like to see more women move into top management and work with males in, in the management of Park Service, but more on an equal basis.

Dorothy Huyck: I'd like to shift to a different area entirely. Are you currently married?

Collen Spika: Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: When were you married?

Collen Spika: In 1953.

Dorothy Huyck: Is your husband employed by the Park Service?

Collen Spika: No.

Dorothy Huyck: And what is his occupation?

Colleen Spika: Civil engineer.

Dorothy Huyck: Where does – do you have any children?

Colleen Spika: No.

Dorothy Huyck: Where does this factor of being married enter in as far as possible future mobility is concerned?

Colleen Spika: Okay. It enters in that as I stated on my forms, I would not like to go to a remote area. Wherever we go, and that's another reason I picked sort of the east coast, that my husband would have an equal opportunity for a position. Not necessarily with the Park Service, but in a population base where he could gain employment. And we've talked about it and even before I applied for this we talked about it quite a few years ago. So, he realized had I been selected that mobility might be one of the things or it may not. I don't know. It just depends on what opens up here in Washington or opens up somewhere else. But he's willing, and I'm very fortunate that he is and not just to leave the area but to look for new opportunities for himself.

Dorothy Huyck: His skills are transferable?

Colleen Spika: Yes, yes. He has many skills—

Dorothy Huyck: [affirmative].

Colleen Spika: —that he has been involved in a number of private pursuits that he could probably put to a gainful employment.

Dorothy Huyck: In the past, one of the major factors previously women for lack of employment was the mobility. But you do not see that as a problem at all?

Colleen Spika: No, I don't.

Dorothy Huyck: That is obviously something you worked through with your husband?

Colleen Spika: Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: And so, when the time comes you may possibly move from this area?

Colleen Spika: That's right. And, I think that too, that in the interview – I also feel that it's unfair to be asked about your marriage. I believe that that is a question that has nothing to do with your professional interview, and that you would not be interviewing if you had no serious intention of considering the job that has been offered to you. And therefore, your marital status is a private concern. And I feel that that is still going on though, and I believe that

now supervisors are still asking those types of questions as a potential employee.

Dorothy Huyck: Are they asking both men and women?

Collen Spika: To my knowledge it was just challenged recently by another female, even about the question of how many children do you have? And he became quite flustered, this is the interviewer, because I don't think he had intended, but since she made a point of it he said, well he will ask all the men. So, that answer that he gave, gave me the indication that he was just asking that of the females. And, again, we're applying for a job, not for marital counseling. And that's our private business.

Dorothy Huyck: [a].

Collen Spika: And I think that's a good way.

Dorothy Huyck: Do you and your husband have financial responsibility for anyone besides yourselves?

Collen Spika: We have my mother and father, and my husband's mother, and they are a concern to us because they're getting older, and but we're not immediately financially responsible for them only that we can help administer their affairs if they got to the point where they couldn't. Right now, we are having some considerations because my husband's mother is in a nursing home temporarily and these are all considerations for the future.

Dorothy Huyck: If a young woman just out of school came to you and asked you about joining the National Park Service would you recommend the idea too?

Collen Spika: Well, yes and no. Yes, I'd be excited for her because I'd understand why she was interested. Because it is a very, in a sense it's a very glamorous life. It's just, by glamour I don't mean like glitter and sequins and all that, but I mean it's exciting and people just gravitate to it because it's a wonderful, refreshing way to earn a living, being outdoors as well as in. Working with people. Of course, doing paperwork but living in some very lovely areas. Not only working there but living there. And so, the glamour of the Park Service, I guess, has always been the call of the wild. And it's one that people just, I don't care where I go, they find out I'm a Park Service Ranger they just – there are just all kinds of questions. But I would be cautious with her. I would accept the enthusiasm, encourage her because we never know the potential of one young person. And therefore, I would not be totally discouraging, but I'd say, now if you are really serious, you've got a fight ahead of yourself because the registers for one thing are often closed for a long time. And your possibilities are very slim indeed to get in. But if you're serious and again, we pursue the career, I'd set down a timetable. Give myself five years to try and get in. If that didn't

work, I'd pursue something else. But always be in – keeping in mind another occupation, or something else that you like to do. Because realistically I would encourage a young woman because I know that there are a lot of bright young people getting out of college today and we never know what sorts of wisdom they have and what wonderful solutions to environmental problems they could contain. But I think for their professional growth that they should be aware of the difficulties of the service in hiring and securing a permanent job, and also even harder it seems the rare essence of becoming a female ranger. So, I would be hopeful and encouraging, but I would also be realistic about what's going on now and what I see.

Dorothy Huyck: You and I talked about quite a range of topics here. Is there something that we may have overlooked that we should have talked about that you would like to comment on?

Collen Spika: Well, in terms of counseling, I would hope in the future that other women would get professional counseling very soon and not wait or have to wait as long as I did. And not seemingly have someone who really cared or recognized that I wasn't just a gal sitting out there with fingers pressing on a machine. That I had real aspirations, and I really loved my work and I was serious, and I didn't do a good job just to have it go unnoticed and not be recognized for what I had to offer. And therefore, professional counseling I would say is one of the primary things I would like to see more happen soon after a woman comes in the park service. And I think that all of the, particularly I'm referring now to women who would inspire to be a Park Ranger. I feel that they need to be told, and counseled with, and dealt with very seriously. Because I feel that there's a lot of unrest in the Park technician series from which I came, because there's a lot of promises either spoken or unspoken given to people about their career, and where they're going and I feel many instances there's no serious commitment to that at all. And therefore, you spin your wheels, and you get all worked up, and hopeful, and there's no way your dreams could be realized, all of the dreams. Certainly, some have, because I'm a recipient of a great dream. But I only wish I had this opportunity even ten years ago when I was younger.

Dorothy Huyck: Are you thinking of something similar to the created Career Development for Woman course that you took?

Collen Spika: Well, yes, that's certainly good. But I'm saying when these young people come into the Park, into the region, into the Washington office, level with them. Let them know what lies ahead. Let them know what's going to be required.

Dorothy Huyck: Who should be warning them?

Colleen Spika: I feel that if it's in a Park situation I feel that supervisors should. If it's in the region, I think whoever that female person is working for, or there should be maybe at the regional level, a female counselor for the professional positions in the Park Service. Someone who could be available and let it be known that she or he is available to give this counseling. And not just a one-shot deal, but maybe you work for six months or a year and then your interests are shifting and you're not sure. Maybe this is through the training office too. They certainly offer the training, but what I'm saying is more professional guidance to assess your needs. See where you've been. See what you've acquired and then take what you believe are your career aspirations and get them really on the road to realization. Because I feel there are only so many years you can work and realize your dreams and if you wait, or if you get misguided, or if you are told the wrong information a lot of people leave frustrated and disappointed. And we've lost some really great people and I feel that that's a shame because it's our loss. But I also know in talking to some of these females that they have been promised, or they've been told, or they've been assured, and it's never been written down, oh this is a great opportunity do this. But, there's nothing at the end of that rainbow. There was just a very short-term goal. So, I feel they should be really professionally worked with more seriously, and have some way of feeding back after six months to a year go back and say what you've accomplished and how are you seeing it? Where you are on the job. How are things coming along? And are you getting recognition, or do you see situations opening up for you? And then, of course, taking a realistic look. I think from the Washington office that perhaps to the regions we could have a better summary of what positions are open. Realistically, how many were filled by woman last year? How many be men? Then take a look at the grades. What was opened up to men? What was opened up to women? What types of jobs in the professional series did they, if they were Park Rangers, what kind of positions did they occupy? Because that's encouraging to me, and to a young person to know, hey they got a resource manager that's 11 at [unintelligible] Park and they hired a woman. That's terrific. And they were really encouraged. And then, maybe, you could find out more about the woman that was hired too. That's another thing. When females are hired, because we are new and moving into the professional level, maybe within that region it could be more sharing or in the Washington office. Something like we're doing now. Where – what is your career background and how did you get started and what are some of the things that sort of guided you or encouraged you into this field or whatever it is? Because I think a lot of people sort of just

fall into things, or others go after something they know what it is but it's encouraging to them to know that I, hey that is what I started as –

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]