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Debbie Koegler
October 25, 2015

Interview conducted by Thea Garrett
Transcribed by Thea Garrett
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PO Box 50
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DEBBIE KOEGLER

By Thea Garrett

October 25, 2015

The Ranger Rendezvous

Black Mountain, North Carolina

Transcribed by Thea Garrett

The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript.

[START OF TAPE 1]

Thea Garrett: This is Thea Garrett on October 25th, 2015, at Black Mountain and we are at the 38th annual [Association of National Park Rangers] Ranger Rendezvous. Can you state your name?

Debbie Koegler: Hi, I'm Debbie Koegler.

Thea Garrett: And this is Thea Garrett and we are talking about Debbie's long association with Yosemite National Park.

Debbie Koegler: Well, I grew up in a military family and basically lived in two different areas that were military-attached: the Monterey Peninsula and then the Presidio of San Francisco in Marin County, which was north of San Francisco. That's where I ended up finishing my growing up years and then going on to Humboldt State, where I met Fred. My association started probably – my earliest memory was about seven years old when my parents took us to Yosemite camping every summer, but only to Yosemite Valley. Then later on I can remember driving up the Tioga Road into the high granite country and that's where Fred basically did his camping as a child. We didn't meet until college.

Thea Garrett: Did you connect pretty early on over Yosemite or was that a connection you discovered that you had later?

Debbie Koegler: When Fred and I met in college we were actually headed home for our Thanksgiving holiday in a Greyhound bus, an all-night bus that we could get home in time for Thanksgiving. We met on that bus. We talked briefly and he told me something about being a Park Ranger in Yosemite and he had just started at that point.

Debbie Koegler: I'd always hiked on Mt. Tamalpais, which is near Muir Woods. I probably did that every single weekend, at least one full day up to the top of the mountain and back. But I loved the high granite country, I loved hiking, I loved walking. Then we had this bond because he also loved the high granite country. Being very young, pretty much you're attaching your interest to somebody that has some of the same values but also some of the same interests which was mountaineering, being in the backcountry, hiking, backpacking, skiing. So those were some of our common interests.

Thea Garrett: As a child how long would you stay and visit in Yosemite each summer?

Debbie Koegler: We stayed usually two weeks, and I just remember playing on the boulders and in the rivers, and walking through Yosemite Valley, seeing the bears, the wild animals, going out into the river and hiking some of the little local trails around the valley itself. We were young so we didn't do a lot as far as going many, many miles and that didn't come till later, till I was a teenager.

Thea Garrett: After you met Fred, did you return to Yosemite Valley?

Debbie Koegler: Never returned to Yosemite Valley itself to camp, except for two summers out of his career we were assigned in Yosemite Valley for two summers. And we were living in what they called Camp Six along the river at that point – there is no longer a Camp Six, it's now a big parking lot. Yeah, I did return there, to the valley to camp. But basically, it was always in the high country.

Debbie Koegler: Before Fred and I were married, we arranged for me – it was a different era and my parents said I could visit him one summer if I wanted to, but just for a few weeks if I took my younger sister along with me. Of course, I was driving at that point and maybe twenty-one? [Debbie laughs] and took my younger sister who was eleven years younger along with me and stayed for two weeks. There was a minister up there in Tuolumne Meadows, who conducted the religious services on Sunday, and he had an extra tent and that's the tent that I stayed in while I visited Fred. At that point, I mean, it was gorgeous to be able to be in these domes and high granite peaks and the river and all the backcountry and I really just loved it. Our parents had talked in the interim with each other, his parents and my parents had said that we couldn't get together or get married until we at least had a career, at least worked for one year, by ourselves and could support ourselves and that's what we did.

Debbie Koegler: I went back to San Francisco and worked for a company called McCormick and Schilling, which is a spice company today, and he went back to Los Angeles and finished his student teaching and started to teach. Then it was that next year that we decided that – he'd already worked two summers – so we had decided that, he called me one night and I was still working in San Francisco and he said, "Do you wanna marry a park ranger and cook on a woodstove?" I was a food technologist working for McCormick and Schilling in a state-of-the-art kitchen – test kitchen and I just said, "Sure." [laughter] Twenty-three years old and I was like, "Sure!" [laughter] So that's kind of how we got together, and we've been married for forty-eight years.

Thea Garrett: That's amazing. Going from this test kitchen, state-of-the-art and transition to a wood stove, what was that transition like?

Debbie Koegler: Well, it was easy. I mean it was a challenge, it was fun. You're young and so anything that comes your way is sort of like, "Okay, let's see where this goes and this is fun." I actually, at that point, I was at the point where McCormick and Schilling was transitioning to Baltimore, Maryland, and so I knew I either had to move to Baltimore, I had about another year to think that over, or stay in California. It wasn't that I married Fred because I wanted to stay in California. It was like, "well, I really don't want to go

to Baltimore. I'd like to stay with the company, but I don't want to go to Maryland." So that's kind of how all those decisions were made.

Debbie Koegler: As far as the cooking and all, I had started to write a cookbook because of high elevation cooking. I'd look things up, there were books out there. I mean there were people that lived in Denver, Colorado; they had all sorts of cooking on how to cook high elevation.

Debbie Koegler: When I met the families – and it was all families at that point up in Tuolumne Meadows and people had children – and we didn't have electricity to cook on, it was just a wood stove. Well, some of these wives and people were already cooking. It wasn't just wives it was some of the rangers, too, they weren't married and so they had to cook, too. But we didn't have a place where we could get bread too often and we – then we didn't have freezer capacity. We had just an icebox where we had to go over and get a block of ice in order to keep our food cold. So, we couldn't buy too much so we had to bring staples, so flour, and all of your basics: baking soda, baking powder, all that, sugar. So, you baked bread and then that would last for your week hopefully and you'd bake other things. Cook on high heat on top of the wood stove was wonderful, because a high heat really gives flavor to your food when you are cooking. But fresh vegetables were also hard to get so if we went to the central Valley we could pick up fresh vegetables, but that was – we didn't make too many of those trips unless we went to San Francisco to visit relatives. So, most of the food was canned – canned vegetables, canned fruit, and a lot of staples, a lot of supplies for baking.

Thea Garrett: That's fascinating.

Debbie Koegler: It was fun [laughter] but it was very hot to cook on a wood stove and I don't remember – I think at this point in my life I am glad I am not cooking on wood stove because it was a lot of work and, of course, we had to chop the wood in order to – I chopped the kindling, Fred chopped the big pieces of wood for the stove. He got up in the morning and usually started the stove and then we'd keep it going in the morning and let it go cold until the evening, until we were ready for dinner and then of course you'd have to have the heat for the evening time and then until we went to bed. We had two boys – one was born in Yosemite Valley – and they learned to chop wood later on, so that they would chop the wood and keep these woodpiles going. And pretty much that was the tradition of all the families up there. We had twelve or thirteen kids; some of those kids would go out and chop wood for other people for their wood stoves.

Thea Garrett: Was there a lot of camaraderie between the different families?

Debbie Koegler: Always. That's all you had. The original compound – what we called a compound – there was twelve tents, and we had interpreters and protective

rangers and we all lived together. Most of us had children. There were some single rangers that were up there, and some that came without their families and their families would visit from the low country once in a while.

Debbie Koegler: Yes, and actually that was a lifesaver when it came to having children. There were lots of children to play with from the time they were born until the time they left to work. Most of the children up there started to work at fourteen because the company, the lodge and some of the other areas, the store and the grill, would hire these kids at fourteen so that they could go out to work and that was really a good time in their life to start working. Our two boys have worked from the time they were fourteen and then at eighteen they could get hired by fee collection to work in the campgrounds or fires to work at the helitack, the helibase, or do something a little more – I'm trying to think of the word I want to use for that – a little more challenging. They weren't just making beds [laughter] at the lodge, or helping with the dishes working in the kitchen.

Thea Garrett: When you married Fred, when he asked, "Do you want to be the wife of a Ranger?" did you envision what your life would look like during the summers for the next next forty-eight years.

Debbie Koegler: You know, I didn't. I really never thought – I didn't think ahead that much at that age you're just thinking fun, and I'd already visited for several weeks so that was a good trial to go up and see. He was living in a tent with a roommate, his first roommate, for several summers, and he had this tent, and he had this wood stove, and he had this icebox that you had to go get ice for. He had these bunk beds that he and his roommate had. It was all army surplus, and you kept your food in these wooden boxes. You had bears coming in and out of the tent or trying to break into the tent. You had – it was freezing cold in the mornings, sometimes down to the twenties or even single digits. I knew, kind of, all that ahead of time, that that's how they lived. It was a very simple way of living. And then, I got to know some of the other rangers and their families. So, I knew sort of where I was headed but I didn't look at it as work or a different life.

Debbie Koegler: I became a little concerned, I think – our first year we were married, and I wasn't doing a whole lot of work at that point. It wasn't until the second summer that I took on a job and realized that I couldn't just sit around all day, but I did go out, I always went some place every day. I went hiking some place; I always went to some location. I've done just about every trail within a twenty-mile radius of Tuolumne Meadows. And most of the wives who didn't have children at that point did that. That's what we did: we went out hiking.

Thea Garrett: Did you go out together or by yourself?

Debbie Koegler: Both, yeah, both. As some of them had kids we'd wander along with them. But most of the wives at that point did not work. But then, I didn't have any children for about four years, so I decided that I would go to work the second year and they decided that they would open up a bookstore-visitor center. They had a visitor center already where you wrote fire permits, and they decided the Yosemite Association would open this bookstore. (The Yosemite Association later became the Yosemite Conservancy.) I was hired up there to do that work: write fire permits, give out information – it was like a visitor use assistant, and you'd sell books. So that's what I did for a few years until we had our first child.

Debbie Koegler: But as far as the work? I was young and it was an adventure. I kind of knew what I was getting into, but it was only for those three months and then we'd move back – well, actually, we stayed for the first four years; we stayed and closed the road. So, we were asked to stay and then there was another couple up there who were one of our immediate bosses and a wife, they didn't have children and I remember that we would knit in the afternoon and then we'd figure out what we were baking that day and share it. So, I had the camaraderie with her later in the season after everyone had left, because there were only several of us left to close that road. So, we closed the road and also opened the road for four different seasons.

Debbie Koegler: My concern, I think, the first year is when we went to the valley and Fred worked in the valley at Arch Rock and he had a midnight mob shift. At that point in my life, I did not enjoy being alone at night and I felt uncomfortable; there were many people coming and going at the location where we were living – lots of park visitors. It was at an entrance station and people were coming and going all night long. Also, I was feeling very isolated from other park people – almost too remote: no newspaper, no radio, no TV, nothing like that.

Debbie Koegler: And so, I think at that point he wanted to go – he was thinking he would go permanent Park Service. Meanwhile, he had his teaching credential, and our parents were pushing more for him to use that. We had some good advice from people who said, "Teach in the winter and you'll have the best of both worlds, and then in the summer do the park ranger job." At that point, most of the interpreters and protective seasonals were all teachers or college professors. After spending four years in Yosemite, we decided to have the best of both worlds, and then I could get back to more of a metropolitan area in the winter. Even though I like the remoteness, there is part of me that still wants to be near a cosmopolitan area where I can have access to daily news and concerts and people, more people and organizations, and back to the profession I had trained for. I decided at that point I would also go back into teaching. I would get my teaching credential and teach.

Thea Garrett: You were teaching at that point in time?

Debbie Koegler: Not until about – our second child was five, so the first one was ten – yeah, not until our first child was ten, and then I decided to go back to teaching. I needed to pick up my actual credential to teach and decided I would do that, after having several children, "Oh, I think I can do this, I think I can handle kids." [Laughter] So I did teaching, also, and I taught for seventeen years.

Thea Garrett: Yeah, and you were really early, kind of the prototype to what became the VUA [visitor use assistant] later on.

Debbie Koegler: Well, at that point, in Tuolumne Meadows I was the first and there were several other women that we pulled in, also wives, at the visitor center. Then later on, it was a couple of younger girls of some of the families that came in to help and then it just took off everywhere. But there were, as I found out later on, I thought I was the only visitor use assistant in Yosemite, but as I found out later on there were a lot of women starting to come into the Park Service at that time.

Thea Garrett: That must have been a really interesting transition to witness.

Debbie Koegler: Well—

Thea Garrett: Or not—

Debbie Koegler: Well, I think the interesting transition to witness was from the – I come from an era of defined roles, but I also came from a mother who worked full time and she was a civil servant and worked for the army. I knew that there was that opportunity to work and that it was okay to do that, being married and having children. My choice was not to work until my children were a certain age in school; that was my choice. But the definition of roles was that, okay, mom will stay home and is going to take care of the kids and the family. But there just became a time where I felt, like, whoa you could – I can do this. We lived on a one salary for a long time, and it wasn't easy and then – I lost my train of thought, sorry—

Thea Garrett: No, you were talking about transitions and defined roles—

Debbie Koegler: Oh, as far as women coming into the Park Service. So, definition of roles and we'll go back to that, but a lot of the rangers at that point – because of the definition of roles in that generation – they really resented a lot of the women. And the women that were starting to come in were interpreters, and they weren't necessarily law enforcement, and then they gradually just came in to our whole community up there. There were some rangers that actually – and of course they are even an older generation than we are – decided that they just couldn't work with women, it was just against how they felt, and so there were people that left as a result of that, that was just

not what they considered a ranger [laughter]. So yes, you do, you have to change with the time, and realizing that they [women] could do the job and so, yeah, I didn't think about it too much; I just knew that if they'd gone through all the training and all, they could do it.

Thea Garrett: At that point in time was there also a change in the kind of visitation that you were seeing to the park?

Debbie Koegler: Oh, yes. The original visitation when I went up there was people that came back year after year, after year. Fred, my husband, came from a family that went year after year, after year; had the same campsite, stayed at the same place, stayed at the same time other people stayed. And some people stayed all summer, it was legal to do that. And they just came up, pulled in and that's where they stayed for the entire summer. They became a community within themselves and the campground.

Debbie Koegler: So, when I arrived, that's where I went. I would go out mushroom hunting with some of the locals – they were the "locals" in the campground. But they were very – they were a lot of people from different countries that had been raised going out into the woods and getting mushrooms and that sort of thing and fish at different locations and compare their fish catch and where they caught them. So, I would go out and then we'd come home and cook those things up, we would be invited for cocktails. Vice versa, they'd come over to our place – or dinner, that was pretty common to mix the local camping community with the ranger community.

Debbie Koegler: In fact, Fred, camped there since he was five and so he was very much part of that local community and he played with some of the ranger kids over in ranger camp which was just across the river. You can cross the river if you want, or you can go the long way, but you can cross the river and go over and be playing with the ranger kids. And that's originally how he met the district ranger and started talking about being a ranger someday.

Thea Garrett: That's interesting. Was there anything that surprised you about the Park Service?

Debbie Koegler: It was just a long-term situation, where rangers stayed forever in Yosemite – and some of these longtime rangers had pioneer backgrounds and their families and grandfathers and great-grandfathers, lakes and mountains had been named after them – they stayed a long time. But then things changed, and the teachers started leaving, the season got longer so that the teachers just couldn't come for their two-and a half months. The schools also changed in California, where they wanted you at school longer and the days got longer. How do I want to say that? [Debbie laughs] Well, anyway, school years got longer, Park Service days got longer, the season got longer, and they wanted you for four, five, six months – the 1039

hours. So, a lot of them couldn't fulfill that anymore. Then the housing changed; they decided that they needed more law enforcement rangers, there was more money to hire them, and these were people who could stay longer. Well, who could stay longer that had another job? It was usually young, single rangers were out of school, or they were in school part-time, and they'd get to stay for those longer hours – a longer season.

Debbie Koegler: So that gradually took over, and so we don't have the longtime people who come back anymore. It's people that come for two, three years and then a lot of their emphasis was to leave and get a permanent job. The protective staff is a group of young rangers that stay for two or three seasons, and they want a permanent job someplace, so they want to move on, they don't want to just stay in Tuolumne and come back year after year. They need a permanent job, so it's just sort of a stepping stone to get some place else. So that transition of not having the connection, the family – your family, has basically gone and their emphasis is different than ours. We've learned to be pretty independent and work with new people every three or four years.

Thea Garrett: How do you think that change has impacted the park and people's relationship to it with the shorter—?

Debbie Koegler: Some rangers come in and you can tell right away if they are interested in the area and not just the car – the patrol car, and writing tickets, and law enforcement – I'm just talking protection right now.

Thea Garrett: Absolutely.

Debbie Koegler: Interpreters, that's a whole 'nother thing. But some of the protective rangers do not know where the lakes or trails are, or distances between places on the trails. They do not get out and hike on their days off. They go other places to show, do their laundry; they don't have time to get out into the backcountry.

Debbie Koegler: When we first began, we took at least one day of the two or three days off – we went into a different place in the backcountry to see what it was like, usually hiking four or five miles, maybe six miles, one way and then come back out in a day or overnight. The wilderness protection rangers, they are out there. They have to go to many different areas in the district to patrol as it is part of their job criteria – either hiking or on horseback. So, protection is different now; it is more patrol car work and writing tickets.

Thea Garrett: So, one other question, you had a mule—

Debbie Koegler: Oh, well, early on before we had children, Fred was given the opportunity to go into the backcountry. There was a ranger patrol cabin. It was about fourteen miles in, it was called Merced Lake. At that time the wives rode the horses. That's just what you did. In the afternoon or the evening, you

went out and rode a horse if you wanted to. When your spouse came home you could do that. Or even, if you had friends visiting and there were enough horses in the corral, you could just take out the horses and go out onto the meadow and ride. (Today, it's a no-no to ride on the meadow because of environmental damage.)

Debbie Koegler: They assigned me a mule. Her name was Jane, and she was a Korean War mule. All the mules at that point had been purchased from the cavalry after the Korean War. They were getting on in age at that point. I was assigned a mule and she was a riding mule. Sometimes these mules get pretty confident around horses, and they don't take the orders from the horses, and they want to be out front. They think of themselves as a horse as they have been used like a horse. And I remember that Jane always wanted to be out front of a horse, and the horse let her. We were lucky enough that the horse would let her do that. So, we packed another mule and then we took Jane and Fred's horse into the backcountry for part of the summer.

Debbie Koegler: At Merced Lake there was no electricity. You had to heat the water on the stove. It was all wood heated on the wood stove and then there were pipes from the wood stove that went into the heater that would heat the water for the shower and for washing clothes. But yeah, I learned how to pack a mule, ride a mule (a little different than riding a horse).

Debbie Koegler: Before we had to leave the backcountry, we were supposed to stay a few more days, and were getting ready to come out. It was getting late in the season and there was a storm that was brewing. Our boss called us on the radio and said, "You've got to get out. We're getting a bigger storm than we thought" – and of course, this was in an era where they couldn't read the weather. (We didn't have mega Doppler.) But they said, "You've go to get out."

Debbie Koegler: So, we hurried and got everything packed and headed out over some high mountain passes where it was snowing. We got out and I can remember coming out in this snowstorm and just having the horses trudging through the snow, and I was thinking, oh, my god, will we ever make it? I mean, we had fourteen miles to go through a snowstorm and I thought, I just hope these animals just know the way home because everything was covered with snow. Fred went out ahead and had his horse which was pulling a mule loaded with all of our supplies. I was so cold, and the only thing that was warm was my bottom because it was on the mule, good old Jane [laughter]. And so, I put my hands down on the mule because she was warm, and I remember that specifically on that trip. So, I stayed warm because I was on Jane.

Thea Garrett: Jane?

Debbie Koegler: Jane.

Thea Garrett: Jane.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Thea Garrett: How long did you – did Jane stay with you?

Debbie Koegler: I can't remember how many more years she stayed. They have a turnover. Part of it's because of their finances and if they've got money to purchase more animals then they'll maybe survey some – they call it survey. In those days I don't think they ended up in a good place but – they used to call it the glue factory in those days, or dog meat factory, way back when – but now I think they're a little bit more humane and when they survey them, especially if it's a riding mule or a horse, they'll try to get it into some sort of a kid's camp where they are more docile as they are older and they'll just follow along and be easy to ride.

Thea Garrett: That's nice. So, is there anything sort of after you had children that you wanted to talk about? Anything about how your role in the Park Service changed?

Debbie Koegler: Yeah, I think we just alluded that people were leaving—

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Debbie Koegler: —and then the families started leaving. Probably the biggest reason that our family core community left was that they [Yosemite] had more funds and they were going to hire more law enforcement rangers, so they needed housing. The law enforcement rangers took priority – and they even take more priority now because when they're hired, they don't want them to have roommates. They want them to be able to have a single cabin on their own, or that ranger just won't come. I mean, that's kind of how it is now because of time shifts. So they needed more cabin space and because the families were taking up a single cabin, we were told, it was alluded to the families and wives early on that we needed to either think about going to work ourselves, that both people – if two people were working you could share that cabin – it was a tent cabin – with another person, it could either be a roommate or it could be your spouse if that was the case, or a friend. But they were going to change the housing scenario, so seasonal families were going to go. At that point we lost several long-term families and they had, like, some of them had three, four kids and they were all stuffed into these one-tent cabins – they loved it because you're really living outside, but they decided that having all family members working would not work for them.

Debbie Koegler: My children were at the point, my boys were at the point where they'd already gone to work and they didn't need me around that much, so I

decided to do some volunteer work for the City of San Francisco. The City of San Francisco, the watershed program came into being in – I'm so bad on the dates of those years, I think Fred has the exact dates – but the City of San Francisco at Hetch Hetchy [Valley] – that's where the water supply comes from – under California mandates for water clarity, they needed build a filter system. This filter system was supposed to cost multi-multi-millions of dollars and they didn't want to do that, so they felt that if they could keep the clarity of the water good and keep it pure enough to avoid that filter system they sent money to Yosemite to pay for more patrol rangers. So, they had this watershed program that they devised, so they have people walking the watershed, they'd have horse patrol rangers, that's how it was done to keep the – I mean, constantly on every trail, there was somebody on every trail all the time, that was how it was supposed to work in order to keep the water clean and pure.

Debbie Koegler: So, I decided that I would be a volunteer; they called them Volunteer Water Walkers. I was out there every day anyway, so I volunteered. When I was out there by myself, I saw all sorts of things happening. People would leave their diapers, I mean, it was not a good scenario. So, they said, "Okay, well we'll put you on as a volunteer." So, I volunteered to walk the watershed, but what I did is I wanted to walk the front country. Most of the rangers that were watershed walkers, or the ones that were being paid, did not want to walk the four-mile corridor in Tuolumne Meadows. They needed to be out into the backcountry, patrolling longer trails and further away lakes. I decided that, "No", I said, "there are so many people in the front country; I want to be in the front country." Because I really do enjoy talking to people and being a teacher; I like the education factor of telling people why we need to keep the water clean.

Debbie Koegler: I loved talking to people and telling them what they could do, where they could go, and I loved taking the time to do that. As a volunteer you could do that. I think sometimes we can stop, and we can, we don't have to worry about our time, we don't have to worry about our goal getting to a certain place at a certain time. So, I did that for four years. The program was definitely going to stay as long as the City of San Francisco paid the money to pay the rangers to do this. They needed to have recorded history so they needed someone to input the statistics, so I did that, too. Oh, my gosh, it was so basic, but I learned enough to help them with their input of all their stats. And that's when the stats started for the city. A report at the end of the year is given back to the City of San Francisco showing how many people working, how many miles, how many hours they put in, how much trash you picked up, how many contacts you made, citations and warnings given, and so on, which justified the next year's budget. This was a report given to the City of San Francisco to this day. So, I really enjoyed that work, but at that point I knew they were going to be hiring more rangers, so if I didn't "work" for NPS we were going to lose our housing.

Debbie Koegler: I could have probably stayed in the housing volunteering, and I thought, but I'll just see if I can go to work. So, I applied as a fee collector, and they hired me in the campground. So, I worked in the campgrounds for a good number of years, and I was just sort of tired of the campgrounds, so decided that I would work at the entrance station. I was always thinking, oh maybe it's greener on the other side [laughter]. In the campgrounds you'd get complaints from people, you're sitting right in front of people getting complaints. At that point, after you've done it for a long period of time you get tired of it. I would rather be out talking to people and having it pleasant than to have people coming at me and complaining about the campsite: they didn't like this, they didn't like that. So, I decided to go to the entrance station, still working in the summer, still working—

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Debbie Koegler: —as a teacher and did that. Then the pace just got to be too quick for me and really fast, and lifting boxes and forty-pound weights of boxes, of maps and things like this. I decided I was just getting to that point in my life where I didn't want to do that or couldn't do that. Meanwhile, Fred – there's always these wonderful and lucky transitions – he was really lucky and he was offered the horse patrol general park ranger position, so he went from law enforcement to the general park ranger horse patrol, full-time to take care of the horses. So, at that point they said that we could be grandfathered in to bringing our own housing, which would be a trailer, a travel trailer, up to Tuolumne. We would lose our housing, our tent. I thought, well, maybe I'm ready for that transition. So I worked for several more years after that and decided that I didn't have to work anymore because we no longer needed housing, so I went part-time and so I would fill in from time to time, if they needed me for search and rescues as a dispatcher or logistics and work for fee collection at different locations – the visitor center, Mono Lake Visitor Center, and that's what I did.

Thea Garrett: So, you were also doing dispatch?

Debbie Koegler: I did, for them. I don't think I was really great at it. [laughter] I wasn't formally trained. But in the early years because there were so few of us up there, you had to do a lot things as a wife before you even worked for the Park Service. I mean we had to go on accidents; we had to mop blood up from people that were dying in car accidents. We had to learn how to run the fire truck, in case the men weren't there to respond. We had to build fires into a big fire stove so that we could heat hot water every day for the people that were doing their laundry – we rotated doing our laundry. Every day a certain family would do it. There were a lot of things that we needed to do to keep camp life going, a lot of physical work.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Debbie Koegler: So, a lot of the wives in that era, they had to do their own chopping of their wood. They had to help their husbands if there wasn't anybody else in camp they had to go out with them on a car accident or a rescue and help. Yeah, I learned some of those things. Yes, you had to learn to use the radio, if there wasn't anybody else around and there was an emergency and somebody came into camp who needed help and the guys were out you had to learn how to use the radio. So, it was a lot of stuff that was just sort of commonplace for the earlier era, you didn't think about it.

Thea Garrett: That's wild. Do you have examples of times where you – a time where you had to fill in kind of unexpectedly.

Debbie Koegler: In the office we had to fill in, if there was no one there to answer the phones or sit in the office and they all had to run out someplace, yes. Yeah, they'd say, "Oh would you sit down here in the office for a while when people come in and fill in." I never had to take over anything, but I did have to help with the mail, answering phone calls, and park visitor questions. I was asked to fill in here and there.

Thea Garrett: Yeah. A lot of work?

Debbie Koegler: No, not a lot of work.

Thea Garrett: That's fascinating. The kinds of things that you described doing would be unheard of.

Debbie Koegler: Well, I think a lot of the women and I reflect back on a lot of it, even the permanent women and I know there are some here at this Rendezvous that are back from the same era I'm from and they had to do the same things. They had to do a lot of things and a lot of them had park assignments that were way out in Alaska and a lot of different places way out in the middle of nowhere. And they were called upon to do a lot as fulltime ranger-wives. So, I don't feel like I had to do that much in comparison to some of these other women who were married to long-time permanent rangers that they had to do forty, thirty years ago.

Thea Garrett: That's incredible. Is there anything that we haven't covered yet that you would like to touch on?

Debbie Koegler: [sigh] Probably I will think about it later [laughs] and remember it later, "Oh, I should have said that." No, I was lucky and it was fun. Now it's work, the physical ramifications are more work. I do, if there is no one around, feed the horses. I have to feed the horses. Or I have to go up to the main office and ask if there is someone that's willing to come feed the horses because those bales of hay are heavy. We asked for a new type of wheelbarrow, a way to dispatch all this hay, basically because sometimes I have to feed the stock, so it was easier to get this new big wheelbarrow that you could roll around. So that made it much easier this last year.

Debbie Koegler: Fred was assigned to do horse patrol and part of that was to do all the mopping out of the corrals and the feeding, and to take care of these horses. If there isn't anyone to help when he has to do a rescue or go on a carryout and he needs to get the stock out and curry them and clean them up, I will help get out the mules usually, and help him with these heavy saddles and apparatus that you need to put on the mules. It's a different sort of thing; they need to have special rigging on their saddles when they have to carry a patient.

Thea Garrett: Is that to carry the litter or something?

Debbie Koegler: Not to carry a litter, but a patient.

Thea Garrett: Okay.

Debbie Koegler: And they have to have special rigging that goes around the back of them that's going to stabilize the front and the back and stabilize the saddle. And that's a lot of stuff to do, a lot of stuff for one person to do; he could do it by himself but it takes a lot more time, but it's easier for two people. So, I will help him with the carry outs and getting the mules ready so he can get on with rescue. Because you are under a timeframe, you got to get out there and get these people that are hurt, so you're working very quickly. So yeah, I have had to do that, but usually when there's no one else to support or help at that point. I love it.

Thea Garrett: That's interesting. It's remarkable the amount of time that you've spent in Yosemite and probably the depth of your knowledge of it really surpasses a lot of—

Debbie Koegler: You know, I've gotten to a point now where the pendulum swings.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Debbie Koegler: And so "new" ideas come in and, oh, I remember that idea, [laughter] that didn't work. But you don't say much, you just do your job, you just do what you have to do. And he enjoys it, he's lucky, he enjoys his work tremendously and as long as he can physically do it, we'll just keep returning and we feel lucky that we can still do it.

Thea Garrett: That's wonderful. Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I don't want to take any more of your time.

Debbie Koegler: Oh, you're welcome.

Thea Garrett: It was really lovely talking to you.

[END OF TAPE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]