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



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

Elizabeth Coiner: 00:00 Remember it was just that part of life. I can remember, of course I didn't know about the Park Service, but I can remember in fourth grade that we talked about Yellowstone and Yosemite parks and wonders of nature in those parks in the fourth grade.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:21 Where you were living when you were in the fourth grade?

Elizabeth Coiner: 00:25 Durham, North Carolina.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:26 Were you born there?

Elizabeth Coiner: 00:27 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:29 Where were you born?

Elizabeth Coiner: 00:30 I was born in what was known as Graham, Virginia, that's in Tazewell County. It's right on the border, like Bluefield. It's Bluefield now, it's just a section of Bluefield, West Virginia on the Virginia side.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:46 Did you grow up there?

Elizabeth Coiner: 00:47 No, we went to North Carolina when I was about three years old.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:54 And where—

Elizabeth Coiner: 00:55 We lived for several years in Raleigh, and then we moved to Durham and settled there.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:03 How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:05 I had one brother older than myself.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:10 And you had younger brothers and sisters?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:11 No. Just the two of us.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:14 How many years older was your brother than you are?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:17 About two and a half years.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:21 Were either of your parents graduates of college?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:24 My father was.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:26 And what was his occupation?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:28 Physician.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:30 And did your mother have a profession of any kind?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:34 Well, she taught school before she married. Married on this day.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:41 Is that so? December 18th.

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:44 1901.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:48 Did this mean she had gone to a normal school?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:51 Not at that time, no. I think she just had regular schooling there in Virginia.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:57 Where did you go to high school, in Durham?

Elizabeth Coiner: 01:59 Durham, yes. Durham High School.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:01 And after high school?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:03 I went to Duke University.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:05 And did you graduate from Duke?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:06 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 02:06 What year was that?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:08 1927.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:09 And in what did you major at Duke?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:11 History.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:14 Did you do any graduate work?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:15 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:16 At Duke also?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:17 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:18 And did you get a graduate degree?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:19 No, I didn't. I went out to China, and I stayed. It was during the Depression, and I stayed longer than I should've stayed to have come back and finished up that degree.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:36 Can I ask what you were doing in China?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:38 Teaching.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:39 Where?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:40 Nanking, mainly. I also taught in [inaudible 00:02:44] one summer.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:46 Were you teaching at an extension of an American college, or [crosstalk 00:02:50]?

Elizabeth Coiner: 02:50 No, it was an American school. You know the parents of course want their children to fit in an American community, and that's the way they do it because if they go to a Chinese school they don't fit in very well when they come back home.

Dorothy Huyck: 03:10 These were then the dependent children of American parents?

Elizabeth Coiner: 03:12 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Most of them. They had a regulation. Each class had to have at least 50% American children in it to preserve the American character of it.

Dorothy Huyck: 03:29 What subjects were you teaching?

Elizabeth Coiner: 03:30 I taught in the primary grades. It was a primary and elementary school.

Dorothy Huyck: 03:34 And what years were you in China?

Elizabeth Coiner: 03:38 1931 to 1935.

Dorothy Huyck: 03:42 And when you returned to the United States, then what?

- Elizabeth Coiner: 03:46 Well that was the difficulty, because I had problems of certification then, teacher certification, because they had changed the rules you know. It meant going back to school for about two more years although I had far more credits than I needed even to graduate, but not those specific education courses, and I just could never get the kind of a job I wanted. I would know when I was going to get a job, when I took a job, it was going to last one year because all I could get was teaching typewriting, which I didn't want to do. But in the Depression, you just had to take what you could get, so I decided I'd enter the government service.
- Dorothy Huyck: 04:54 And when did you come into the government?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 04:55 1941.
- Dorothy Huyck: 05:00 Let me go back and ask you a few questions about your family. When you were in high school and later on at Duke, was there someone who particularly encouraged you in the educational process? One of your parents, a teacher, a professor?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 05:15 I guess I just never thought anything but what I would go. My father was quite a student, and they neither one were narrow-minded people. They were broad-minded people and it just never occurred to me that I wouldn't have a college education. I would like to have gone to a school where you could board, but that wasn't in the cards. We didn't have that kind of money. We were lucky that the school was right there in the town, home, at that time because by that time, my father was a practical invalid himself.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:10 That plus the Depression would've—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 06:12 Well that was before the Depression, that was in the 1920s. We had a Depression in the 1920s in my home.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:25 In high school, did you take math and science courses?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 06:29 Well yes, they were required. I had math for let's see, three years of math I guess, two years of algebra and a year of geometry. I wasn't particularly good in math. And then in science I had chemistry.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:55 When you were growing up, as a youngster, did you play with boys?

Elizabeth Coiner: 07:01 Not much, no. Not much.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:03 Were you by any chance considered a tomboy?

Elizabeth Coiner: 07:06 No. I wouldn't say I was considered a domestic either. I liked to read a lot, and while I was a outdoor person too. Used to do a lot of hiking, swimming, things like that. But I never cared too much for competitive sports.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:29 You entered the government in 1941, but you did not come into the Park Service?

Elizabeth Coiner: 07:35 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:37 What agency did you work for before the Park Service?

Elizabeth Coiner: 07:40 I worked for the agency Office for Emergency Management. That was one of those defense agencies.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:51 And after that, did you work for other agencies?

Elizabeth Coiner: 07:54 I transferred to the Public Housing Administration.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:03 And was there some other agency before you joined the Park Service?

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:06 That's all.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:06 And in what year did you enter the Park Service?

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:10 1957.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:12 And at what grade?

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:15 Five.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:16 And what were you doing at that point?

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:19 Working in pictures. I was a pictorial research clerk.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:25 For which office at the Park Service?

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:27 Well, it was under what was known as "Information" at that time. It was a branch of it, it wasn't a branch at that time.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:40 Do you remember Isabelle Story?

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:42 It was after she left. She came there once or twice and I met her, but I can't say I knew her.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:53 And you must've gone on up in grade then from pictorial research clerk.

Elizabeth Coiner: 08:59 Yes, but it was hard sledding.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:00 It was.

Elizabeth Coiner: 09:01 Hard sledding, yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:02 Why?

Elizabeth Coiner: 09:03 Well, my relations weren't too good, and I think they just make their mind up, weren't going to do anything for me. Just like that.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:18 You were eventually moved up—

Elizabeth Coiner: 09:21 Yeah, but – It's strange how you get raises. I don't think it's always from what you accomplish. The first raise I got to a six came from a desk check. It wasn't from the office, it was from personnel.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:50 When was that? Do you know?

Elizabeth Coiner: 09:59 Oh, dear. It had to be the early '60s. I can't be sure what date, but it was in the early 60s.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:05 Did you continue as a pictorial research clerk then?

Elizabeth Coiner: 10:09 For a while. That isn't what I wanted to do, you know. I wanted to get an opportunity to write, is what I thought I would be doing, some writing, when I came there to work. And, well, there wasn't any writing. It was a joke. That's why my trouble started in the first place, you see.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:32 You had been led to believe that you would be doing some writing?

- Elizabeth Coiner: 10:35 Yeah, and I knew that I wasn't going to spend my life writing, but I thought I'd have opportunities. That's the way it was presented.
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:43 [Crosstalk, 00:10:43] —the opportunity?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 10:43 That's right. Writing was typing, and they told me, "Oh, you won't have to type. Oh, we know typing." But that's what it was, a lot of filing. Those pictures are very heavy. I had never had any kind of heavy, do any heavy work like that in my life, and it was just more than I could take so that's how my troubles started. I was in my 50s when I went there to work, and suddenly to have to lift all those pictures, and the place wasn't organized. Just completely disorganized and pictures all over the building. Now they're all just there. Hardly any in that office, and it just really was – knocked me out. I just had an awful time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:40 Were these photographs that you were using?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 11:42 Mm-hmm (affirmative). They were on the big frame things and the files were just chuck full. It just bothered me so and my muscles tightened up so.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:58 Are these the materials that are now in the photo lab up in the penthouse?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 12:01 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:01 But there was no penthouse and there was no photo lab?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 12:01 Oh, there wasn't – The room – Well you know how deep the rooms are over there in Interior, and they're very narrow. There was a long table and there were three of us in there using that table. One man was a reporter for the Park Service, Frank Fragale, and Ralph Anderson is the man I was working for, and myself, and then the files and it's very crowded.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:40 Are these now the items that are in the photo lab up in the penthouse?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 12:44 Well some of them are.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:45 So this was a forerunner of that collection?

Elizabeth Coiner: 12:48 Oh yes, but there was no organization to it, you know.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:51 So after this desk audit, then you were promoted to a GS-6?

Elizabeth Coiner: 12:59 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 13:00 And what transpired thereafter?

Elizabeth Coiner: 13:05 I really had – I thought what I was going through was bad, but it got – After Mr. Anderson retired – Mr. Anderson would infuriate me because he could never see that I was overloaded with work. I never got a word of sympathy, he'd start talking about someone else who had a lot of work. He'd talk about how much work Mr. Evison had, and that would just infuriate me. Not that I didn't think Mr. Evison had a lot of work but he couldn't see all the work I had to do and needed some help there. And he couldn't see that, and when Jack Boucher came there to work, he came there through the, I believe, White House patronage. So, Mr. Anderson just fell all over himself paying attention to him and doing for him, but he couldn't see that I was doing anything. And one thing that I had suggested about improving in the office to make it more accessible and more easy too, I suggested and he just threw it aside, just nothing. But when Jack Boucher came and made the same suggestion, he got an award for it.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:33 Exactly the same suggestion that you—

Elizabeth Coiner: 14:33 Yeah.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:35 What was the nature of that suggestion?

Elizabeth Coiner: 14:38 It was a master file, where you had the picture on there with information but on a card, not something like this to have to load.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:49 Not a big thing.

Elizabeth Coiner: 14:50 Yes. And it was a good system and was accepted when Jack made the suggestion. But when I made it, it was just nothing.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:01 And the two suggestions were really identical.

- Elizabeth Coiner: 15:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative), and I made that suggestion before Jack Boucher came, but you were just ignored about everything and that just infuriated me. And then he would imply that I wasn't willing enough to do the work, and well, that was one time, of course, I didn't do it, but it was like a flame that shot up through me, just like a flame, and I felt like committing murder. I never had that experience before or afterwards, but I know what that is like, implying that I wasn't willing to do the work. I had so much there to do that I had to do it the best way I could do instead of having suggestions that weren't very practical.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:59 You must've eventually moved out of that spot, because you were a writer at your job.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 16:07 Well I got out of there but in order to do it I had to get some help from the other side to move out. The man who succeeded Mr. Anderson was Dutch, and he lived in the Far East too. He like to – he didn't want anybody else to be from the Far East, I think that was part of the trouble. But also, he wanted to scrap those little cards that I had set up and put them back on big heavy books, which is what they have now. But the job was a hard job, but that made it so much easier to have them on those cards.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 16:58 And I had a lot of information on those cards, and he wanted to set these things up with books and with hardly any information on them. That's what they have today, and it's true. You can, with those picture photos, you can see the picture much better, the original. But it just about killed me. About six years' work, just scrapped like that. It wouldn't have been so bad, but I felt beyond my physical capacity to handle, so he really rode me hard. He said he was going to get rid of me, and I would walk out in the halls sometimes so I wouldn't say anything back to him.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 17:48 So I finally was transferred into Information, and each one seems to tell a line. I seemed to have that problem. Wasn't long in there before – we had a new Chief of Information, Charles Boatner from Texas, and he'd been administrative assistant to Lyndon Johnson before that and – and so he was very friendly towards me. But I could see these people walking into his office and wasn't long before what I could do was just file and I had all this fight to keep from firing, and I'm telescoping now. They said that I could do research. Well, it was mostly elementary kind of research

in the world, and they would not give me credit for doing any writing. And I was just kind of isolated.

- Dorothy Huyck: 19:03 Did you then start doing some writing?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 19:06 Very little. Carlos Whiting was very sympathetic to my cause, and he liked my style of writing, but you see he was in difficulties there himself at this time, the same kind of walking in and poisoning a person's mind went on. So, I did get some, but I never really was accepted. I wrote a press release it never was used. One was used by Interior Department, but never by the Park Service. They let me do a little writing, but very seldom would ever use it.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 19:52 And as time went by and other people took over, it seemed like I had even less opportunity for the way of writing letters and so forth. But they would give me something that they didn't want to fool with, a lot of looking up stuff.
- Dorothy Huyck: 20:13 Did this lead up to the first time you retired?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 20:16 Yes, this was all before I retired the first time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 20:21 And you retired the first time in what year?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 20:23 '73.
- Dorothy Huyck: 20:26 By which time you really hadn't been allowed to do a very great deal of writing.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 20:30 No, and you know I was terrified for fear that I'd have a desk check and they'd say my grade was higher than the type of work I was doing. Just terrified all the time that that was going to happen to me.
- Dorothy Huyck: 20:51 When did you actually return to the Park Service, then, after your first retirement?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 20:57 That's '73 so it'd be '75 and I only had a few months.
- Dorothy Huyck: 21:04 And during that time what were you doing?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 21:06 Oh, working on the handicapped book that they hadn't touched since I left, and when I came back, the first step after it came in from the main office, just put it together and get the information on it, not the final copy. And then I

looked up – Did something about the Presidents of the United States and their association with the areas that were in the Park Service, not at the time they were parks but adding to the history of the parks. That took quite a bit of time.

- Dorothy Huyck: 21:55 Had you planned to stay only a few months when you—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 21:58 Well it was mandatory. When I retired the second time, I retired the 30th of November of '75.
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:08 Was your initial retirement a voluntary retirement?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 22:12 I went over there to England, and I got a telegram telling me that I could retire. If I retired by two or three days – I forgot what date that was. Anyway, it was the end of the month, and I just had two or three days in order to make up my mind, I was over there in England. I didn't know what else to do, I just couldn't think, so I retired. I didn't know what else to do.
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:48 Was it ever explained why you were given two or three days' notice by way of a cable?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 22:55 You could get the increase in salary, that sort—
- Dorothy Huyck: 22:57 So it was a service-wide—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 23:01 It wasn't me particularly.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:03 I see, that's what I wanted [crosstalk 00:23:04].
- Elizabeth Coiner: 23:06 But they waited until I was over there in England to tell me about that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:11 And you replied by cable if you were [crosstalk 00:23:13]?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 23:14 No, I came back. I came back home. I called Nikki Wilson, I didn't know who else to call, to ask what the situation was and she said she'd gotten the same kind of treatment. I was subjected to quite a bit of harassment before that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:34 In what form?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 23:38 Well, I had a bookcase. I was having some trouble with my hand at that time, my fingernails kept breaking off and I

couldn't get ahold, couldn't hold things very well. So, I had this bookcase and the little handle on the top shelf of the window was off. It was hard for me to get that open. I kept that open all the time, and they would slip in there and pull that down. I'd look up and it was down, and they could, you know, reflection, see. I found that what they were doing was watching me from that. There was a little partition there in the room, and they'd be back here and could look there and see me, and that was a form of harassment.

Elizabeth Coiner: 24:39

And then another thing, they decided that they were going to put their supply cabinet in there with me, and I had one for myself and I didn't mind that. But what they did was they put the cabinet right beside my desk, and that little old Duncan would come in there and stand there with his hands on his hips just staring at me. It really made me sick. So, there's another case where he was running and nobody knew what he said, I didn't have anything, I wasn't doing anything. But no telling what he was saying about me.

Elizabeth Coiner: 25:26

By that time, the feminist movement had started, and they had some new girls in there mostly from the Middle West and they saw what kind of work I was doing and they were horrified. Well, this upset them, because they thought that I was trying to run them down. Well, I listened to them but all I ever said was, "Well it's always been this way, and I guess it always will be." They need people to do secretarial work, not so much writing. They wanted more responsibility, and I said, "Well that's the way it's always been since I've been here." But with this Duncan running back and forth and staring at you, looking at you, and then creeping back. You never did know what he was saying. It seemed like relations got worse, I know he had a lot to do with it. And then standing over you, you just couldn't think. I couldn't think, rather. Might not have bothered somebody else, but it surely did bother me.

Dorothy Huyck: 26:33

Do you think that being a woman has made a difference in the career you had with the National Park Service?

Elizabeth Coiner: 26:42

Yes, definitely. Definitely.

Dorothy Huyck: 26:44

In what way?

- Elizabeth Coiner: 26:47 Well I don't think that I would've been expected, when I came there, to do just the filing and typing in the first place, I don't think it would've been like that at all.
- Dorothy Huyck: 27:04 If you had not been a woman?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 27:05 Yes. And of course, I tried to better myself. I went down and applied history because I have a good history background and they'd always say, "Well you know, the office here is policy-making, and we really don't have any openings for women in the field because we need firefighters and that takes a man." That was the kind of runaround I got there, that they needed firefighters on the job in the field, the historians.
- Dorothy Huyck: 27:51 Were other women told that also?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 27:53 I've heard some of us say the same thing. Yeah, I don't think they singled me out on that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 27:59 Did you observe other women having some of the same experiences that you had?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 28:08 I don't know what you'd say, that I had some people who were in secretarial positions there and they said it was worse in Veterans. Veterans Administration had a bad reputation, and they said it was worse in Veterans. They wouldn't work there at Veterans.
- Dorothy Huyck: 28:28 You said that you were interested in bettering your situation?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 28:32 Yeah.
- Dorothy Huyck: 28:33 Not always being a file clerk.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 28:35 Yeah, I'd never been a file clerk in my life.
- Dorothy Huyck: 28:39 Did you see other women also trying to better their situation? Do other—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 28:48 Some of them. Some of them, see, were secretaries and didn't ever want to be anything but a secretary.
- Dorothy Huyck: 28:51 What about the person – Did you observe any other women who were interested in moving out of the secretarial role?

- Elizabeth Coiner: 29:00 I think they in the editing there, they had an editing clerk and it was just typing. I understand that was a common policy there in the Interior Department, and they told me up there in the office they liked the title of it to be Editorial Clerk, but see it didn't lead anywhere. They said that there were many people in that situation, nothing unusual about that in Interior.
- Dorothy Huyck: 29:46 Did you know other women who asked about jobs in the field and were told that those were for persons who could be firefighters?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 29:53 I can't give you any names, but yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 29:55 I don't really care about names—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 29:55 Yes, I did. I wasn't the only one.
- Dorothy Huyck: 29:55 And was that—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 29:55 I just can't remember the names of the people.
- Dorothy Huyck: 29:55 No, I really just as soon not have names on the tape. But was that a fairly [inaudible 00:30:10] organization?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 30:13 I think so. Very much so. Oh, you know I sometimes would have to go around to get information to prepare the work I had to do, and while you were waiting your turn to go in and talk to the person some man would come along and he thought nothing of just walking in ahead of you. That was a common practice. You were just not anything. I don't know whether you follow on this, but I had never in all my born days ever been called by my first name on a job. It's always been Miss or Mr. or Mrs. So-and-So, and this was for everybody. But after Mr. Anderson left and this new group came in, there wasn't anything like that, but they wanted to be Mr. So-and-So, believe me.
- Dorothy Huyck: 31:25 You could not call them by their first names?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 31:27 Mm-mm (negative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 31:31 [crosstalk 00:31:31].
- Elizabeth Coiner: 31:31 This was really galling, because it's all right to call a person by their first name but it should be on a basis of equality.

You're just a girl, and I'd never been called a girl before. I can remember when I was a freshman in college, we had a temporary dean of women, and she impressed that on us. "You are not girls, you are women." This was 1923, '24.

- Dorothy Huyck: 32:05 Was that one little aspect of the feminist movement that was evident during the '20s?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 32:11 Yes. Well, I don't remember anybody else saying that. Well as far as the "Miss," that, in college, I can remember when I was a sophomore, we had a professor of psychology from Iowa and he called us by our first names, every one of us. And I don't think we bothered about it so much because we liked the man, but one fellow there resented it strongly. He didn't want to be called "Sam," and that professor wasn't allowed to return?
- Dorothy Huyck: 32:49 But the point about being a woman and not a girl, that was amplified by just your one dean, is that correct?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 32:55 That's what I remember, but I remembered it very strongly at the time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 32:59 Did she give you any reasoning for that distinction between being a girl and being a woman?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 33:05 Well, being a girl you were too frivolous. Life is serious and you have a responsibility in life. You're mature, you're not a child. That's the way she impressed that on us.
- Dorothy Huyck: 33:22 You had worked for other agencies prior to working for the Park Service. Had those been more satisfactory to you?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 33:29 Well, I would say yes. But the problem in Public Housing was that they didn't have any money. It was during that period after the war. I worked there during the war, and we thought that it would be a prospering agency after the war, but instead this Cold War started and the tax on public housing as socialism took the form of no money. And you were constantly afraid you were going to be bumped or reduced in grade, and you couldn't make any headway there.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 34:14 But I never had any relations like that. I was always treated with respect, and they knew that anything I did was reliable and dependable. And to walk into a place where they

assumed that you weren't going to do it, you couldn't be depended upon, this was too much for me.

- Dorothy Huyck: 34:40 Is it possible that you walked into that place, which was the Park Service, you simply ran into one or two or three individuals who had that attitude, or do you see the attitude as more widespread?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 34:54 Well, I think it's pretty general, but I don't think it was everybody. No, I wouldn't say that. I think the man I worked for had problems himself, but he was far more gentlemanly I say than some of his successors that I ran into.
- Dorothy Huyck: 35:18 Possibly if you could have worked in some other area of the Park Service, you might've encountered a different group of personalities?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 35:25 Well, if I'd gone in maybe on a higher grade level. But I think the women in the higher grade level had difficulties, too. Some of them.
- Dorothy Huyck: 35:33 Did you see evidence of that? Again, I'm not interested so much in names, but did you see experience of that among women in higher grade levels?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 35:47 Well, I remember a woman who was in History, she had a good history background, and she had a much better grade than I did, but she was just indexing cards and never got farther than indexing cards.
- Dorothy Huyck: 36:10 So there was a wider spread—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 36:12 And they kind of—
- Dorothy Huyck: 36:13 —the under-utilization of women [crosstalk 00:36:14].
- Elizabeth Coiner: 36:14 Yeah, they kind of looked down on her. A woman, you know. You couldn't expect any more than that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 36:24 Were you given any opportunities to attend training courses?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 36:27 Just when I first went there, I think they had one little bitty secretarial training and then took us through the library.

- Dorothy Huyck: 36:41 But you didn't go to a training center or anything like that?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 36:42 Never did anything like that for me, no.
- Dorothy Huyck: 36:46 Did you take the secretarial training course?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 36:46 That was just one lecture, I think. It was kind of a orientation when I first went there.
- Dorothy Huyck: 36:56 So there were no additional training offered to you?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 37:04 Mmm. I took some work at Agriculture editing during that time, but they never paid attention to that. Never utilized it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 37:18 That's a good word, utilized. It appears that women's abilities often were under-utilized.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 37:24 Absolutely. And now this wouldn't be just women, but I know they had – Personnel makes you fill out a form like they were looking to utilize what abilities you had, fill in this form, and that was just a waste of time because the secretary in there told me that it would be put on [inaudible 00:37:52], just to give you something to do. But that wasn't just women. But you just were ignored.
- Dorothy Huyck: 37:51 There was not anyone who ever acted as a mentor for you through the Park Service?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 37:54 No one other than Carlos Whiting, but he had difficulties himself there. He really liked to have done more for me, had he had the opportunity and he would say, "Now just be patient, we're just trying to get this organized." So, before I could get it organized--It seemed like if someone did do something for me, well pretty soon these people got real busy and closed down on you so that you were right back where you were before. You might be making a little more money, but you were right back where you were before.
- Dorothy Huyck: 39:03 Are there any jobs in the National Park Service that women really should not tackle?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 39:11 I think those files, those picture files. That's what I think they can do, as far as mentality it's just all the same. Very often I think they're going to do it better.
- Dorothy Huyck: 39:29 Do you think the Park Service is [inaudible 00:39:29]?

- Elizabeth Coiner: 39:32 Well, from reading the Courier it seems a lot of women have responsible positions, rising quick. I think so, which I think is a good thing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 39:45 Do you feel optimistic about women's opportunities [inaudible 00:39:50]?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 39:52 Well, as of now I think so. I don't know what setbacks they're going to have, because that seems to be the history of the woman's movement, that you make a little progress and then they close down on you, like after World War II and they kept telling women that opportunity was in the home, and that. See now they had had a woman head of Personnel, and they had had a woman head of Information Service that's an historian, you know. And then they did have, I came there, an assistant chief of Information, Miss Pace. She died. She wasn't there very long, she wasn't replaced. A woman didn't replace her.
- Dorothy Huyck: 40:50 After World War II, you were telling me that [inaudible 00:40:55] was the opportunities were in the home?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 40:56 Well I don't mean just the Park Service, I'm talking about—
- Dorothy Huyck: 40:57 No of course not. I'm [crosstalk 00:40:57]. How did you get the message that women's opportunities were in the home?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 41:06 Well, you could read it in magazines, and you could see it happening where they closing out on women, the jobs. The men came back from the war and wanted jobs, and there weren't many women veterans. They were about the only ones who got a preference, there weren't many of them. Oh, what was the name of that book? I can't remember that book. It was written by a man and woman, and the theme of it was the woman's place is in the home. You know that book?
- Dorothy Huyck: 41:49 I'm not familiar [crosstalk 00:41:50].
- Elizabeth Coiner: 41:50 Man and woman who wrote it. It's funny, I just can't remember the name of it. It had quite a bit of influence in the 1940s and a definite reaction.
- Dorothy Huyck: 42:12 So you feel that that kind of press attitude and writing has a real influence—?

- Elizabeth Coiner: 42:16 Oh, I definitely did, definitely did. Then you almost had to start all over from scratch. Some people are not even aware that there had been any efforts for women to improve themselves before that [inaudible 00:42:28] is done.
- Dorothy Huyck: 42:28 Were you aware of the feminist movement back in the '20s, when women were making some progress?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 42:29 Well, some. I lived in a place where there weren't too many opportunities then, mainly in teaching. But, yes there was. You see, in World War I, see I was a child. I remember World War I. Lot of women went to work then. Not like World War II, but they did. And then they tried to push them back, forget all about that. But cutting the hair short, was all part of that. I remember when that happened, just like wildfire. Happened overnight. It started in Europe with, I think, radical women early in the century cut their hair like Russian women. But then during World War I in Europe, women went into the factories and so on, if they had long hair, it was dangerous. And so, they cut their hair, and it came to this country just about the end of the war, and it just swept over the country like wildfire. That was a great subject for the ministers, how sinful that was, and it was all part of keeping women down.
- Dorothy Huyck: 44:02 Was cutting their hair an expression of not wanting to be kept down?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 44:10 It was a liberation. It was a liberation, all right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 44:14 So by cutting their hair, women were expressing themselves as not wanting to be kept back into the kitchen?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 44:21 Yes, and it seemed so strange in the '60s when girls let their hair grow long as expression of their liberation, as if hair cut short wasn't. It was just the reverse, they just didn't know anything about it then. And I heard Alistair Cooke speaking, I think on America, and he said that that started in America. He's mistaken. It started in Europe, I remember very well when it happened and I remember the editorials in the papers about cutting the hair. And the short skirts, all of it was a liberation.
- Dorothy Huyck: 45:08 May I ask if you were married at any time?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 45:12 No, I never was married.

- Dorothy Huyck: 45:13 If a young woman came to you today and told you she was considering entering the National Park Service, would you encourage her to do so in today's world?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 45:28 Oh, yes, but I'd put some provisos about what she had to watch out for.
- Dorothy Huyck: 45:34 What should she watch out for?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 45:37 Well, I think it's a very authoritarian place. The uniform, they think they're just God, and I think they should be made aware of that. But I've got some grandnieces I think it would be nice for them to work in the Park Service. But I think they all could be made aware of those things.
- Dorothy Huyck: 46:03 Would there be some positive side of the Park Service you'd speak to your grandnieces about [inaudible 00:46:13]?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 46:12 Yes, I think the program and the areas, and all is just great. It's where you can use yourself, use your knowledge and the imagination and just so many interesting aspects of the Park Service you won't get anywhere else if you had the opportunity.
- Dorothy Huyck: 46:39 And you would not have to be a firefighter to do it?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 46:44 That's right. But you look into that, I think you'll find that that's what they did say about they needed these parks – Well, you see they didn't have many city parks, that's a new thing. That they needed all the hands they could get to fight the fires, and that took men.
- Dorothy Huyck: 47:13 There were, of course, parks here in the National Capital Region during that time.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 47:15 Mm-hmm (affirmative). But there weren't so many women in that area either, were there?
- Dorothy Huyck: 47:36 We've talked about quite a collection of subjects. Is there something that we have not mentioned, that we've not talked about at all, that you'd like to comment on with regard to your experience in the National Park Service?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 48:01 Well I don't know. I did think I had something to offer. After all, I was an honors student in history at Duke

University and I did very well in the graduate work also that I had in history. And I'd had an experience abroad. I don't know how much that experience in China mitigated against me. It was always kind of a secret thing, like you were just walking around in the dark and you didn't know just exactly what it was they had against you in addition. During this time, of course, China was a bete noir, and having that experience, nobody wanted to hear anything good about China. And I never took the reactionary viewpoint of China, having been there and seen what those people had suffered and what was best for them. So, I don't know how much, whether that had an influence or not. I suspect it played some part.

- Dorothy Huyck: 49:23 Do you feel that somewhere in your experience with the Park Service, apart from the earlier agencies, the fact that you had spent some time in China may have been a negative thing?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 49:33 I think maybe it was. Especially when you're in trouble, they have that. They can always say something like that. Now I never did know exactly how to fight. You didn't know what you could do, exactly.
- Dorothy Huyck: 49:52 Were there occasions when you confronted your supervisors with the difficulties of the situation and talked about these difficulties straightforwardly?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 50:00 Well, I tried to with Anderson, but you see he'd always start talking about Mr. Evison, how much work Mr. Evison had.
- Dorothy Huyck: 50:06 Was it really [crosstalk 00:50:09]—
- Elizabeth Coiner: 50:08 Or maybe Mr. Wirth had. You know? He would not see what my problem was.
- Dorothy Huyck: 50:23 He was probably comparing lemons and oranges, wasn't he?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 50:23 Right.
- Dorothy Huyck: 50:24 I don't mean to make you into a lemon or an orange [crosstalk 00:50:24].
- Elizabeth Coiner: 50:24 Somebody told me, one of the head secretaries there in Information, "He's a nice slave driver." He was very

gentlemanly, a very polite person. But he just couldn't see all the work you had.

- Dorothy Huyck: 50:38 Once he had left, did you later stage an attempt to be open and forthright with one of your supervisors about all the difficulties you'd been having?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 50:50 Jack Boucher was there on trial at one time, but it was a girl in the office there who was really trying to push ahead. Just a high school graduate, and a very ruthless kind of a woman, I think she's the most ruthless woman I ever knew. They must've had some kind of relationship because he told me there's a time when a person must step down, let her, this little secretary, move ahead. Well they have really done things for her, but in my opinion she's just not the Park Service type at all. But she—
- Dorothy Huyck: 51:35 In the long run, this person did move ahead?
- Elizabeth Coiner: 51:37 Sex. Sexy person.
- Dorothy Huyck: 51:41 [crosstalk 00:51:41].
- Elizabeth Coiner: 51:41 They've done all kinds of things for her. I'm not giving her name.
- Dorothy Huyck: 51:44 No.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 51:45 I said someday she may be director of the Park Service. I think they put her through college, or are putting her through college at same time. But even men who flirt with her closely say the same thing about her. Some characteristics are human characteristics. But he harassed me quite a bit, and I would walk out of the office – Today, I hadn't done anything, but that was the combination there. She said she was going to get rid of me and all of that worked together.
- Elizabeth Coiner: 52:32 Then John Hubolt [phonetic] came, and he was a sick man. He's the one who was Dutch and spent a lot of time in Dutch East Indies. There was more harassment. That's when I had to do something, get some outside help. I never had done that before in my life, but I had to just – Push came to shove, I had to do something to get out of there. That was 1963, it was the year with the big march in

Washington, the colored people. That was it, '63 I believe it was.

Dorothy Huyck: 53:17

To whom did you turn for outside help?

Elizabeth Coiner: 53:23

Then Vice-President Johnson.

Dorothy Huyck: 53:28

And through the White House you did find things improved afterwards?

Elizabeth Coiner: 53:31

For a very little while, but it was a strange thing. You see, my brother lived in Texas, and he worked with a brother-in-law of Johnson in Federal Aviation. He didn't want to do that, but it was just such a desperate situation. People told me, "You've really just got to get some help." So, the contact was Charles Boatner, who was Johnson's administrative assistant. So, don't think the very week that I transferred, he didn't come there to be chief of Information? And it was fine, and he told Carlos Whiting, he said "I think I did the right thing. I think she's a wonderful person." And then he saw these people walking in and that's the way it was, the story. Always. A new person came and just information, just blacked you out, always.

Elizabeth Coiner: 54:35

Nikki Wilson did help me, I must say. She helped me with Ed Wing. He said, "Okay, I made a mistake." But he said, "I don't feel like changing it." He always suspected me for some reason. He gave me some opportunities. He said once, I think I'd been in government service 30 years, something like that. It was on a landmark day, and he said he hoped I could be there another 30 years. But then, this little old Duncan, when these girls came, he saw that as an opportunity. He wanted to push himself ahead. Don't think with all these cuts that they've had recently, he didn't get a two-grade promotion, or a grade promotion, of all the people. That little snoopa-doopa. Never saw anything like him for that. Individual differences.

Elizabeth Coiner: 55:55

I don't know, probably if I thought long enough other things would certainly come to mind. But I just can't think of anything right now. As I say, I just don't know what the influence the effect that I taught school in China had, but I don't think it was – It certainly was not the initial thing. If it was, it was just something else they could add to it to make it look worse. But if I'd been a man, I don't think I would've

gone through all those problems. Might've had some, but it wouldn't have been like that.

Dorothy Huyck: 56:41 And it's your impression that other women were having somewhat similar problems?

Elizabeth Coiner: 56:45 They weren't making any progress, unless they married somebody, something like that. They had to make a provision. I can think of one person, she was a nice person. She was a secretary, a college graduate, been sitting there for years. And then when she married one of the Park Service men, they had to give her a different title. She would've sat there as a secretary the rest of her life, I'm sure, but for that. She was a nice person, capable person. I mean, I'm not belittling what they did, but they just wouldn't have done it otherwise. It was her connection with some male that did it for her.

Dorothy Huyck: 57:41 You do think times are changing somewhat?

Elizabeth Coiner: 57:41 Yes, I certainly do. I hope it continues. I hope it continues, course I'm not on the inside. But they certainly have more opportunities for promotion than there ever were before. They would've started out as typists, probably. Secretaries.

Dorothy Huyck: 58:08 Anything else we should add?

Elizabeth Coiner: 58:10 Well I can't think of anything right now.

Dorothy Huyck: 58:10 Thank you.

Elizabeth Coiner: 58:11 Well, you're certainly welcome.

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]