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



Linda Russo
July 3, 1978

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

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:04 The date is July 3, 1978. I am Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Linda Russo, R-U-S-S-O, who is a writer-editor at the Denver Service Center. Can I ask you just how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service?
- Linda Russo: 00:24 Well, I transferred to Park Service in 1962. I worked in the Navy Department for 10 months before that, and then I got the opportunity to come to Park Service, so I grabbed it because I'd heard a lot about it, all good. And I started out as a secretary-stenographer, GS-4 and I worked my way up to a seven, took a long time and I worked in Washington for about 10 years.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:58 Did you? In what office?
- Linda Russo: 01:00 All kinds of offices and been through various reorganizations. So, I worked for a lot of different people, and I got a lot of experience and knowledge. And then we got the opportunity to move out here in '71. And I worked for the same man that I worked for back East. Actually, I worked for him about eight years, same man. And then when we reorganized in '75, in order to maintain my grade, I was put in a category of legislative coordinator, which I coordinated with the Washington Office and with the field offices, regions, and so forth, about gathering data for legislative support and for congressional hearings.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:48 What grade was that?
- Linda Russo: 01:51 That was still a seven. And then along came the opportunity for three of us to move down to graphic arts and editing, which we did. And that was—
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:08 Who were the other two persons if I may ask?
- Linda Russo: 02:10 Well, one was Sandy Schuster and another was Karen Whitney. Karen now works over here, and Sandy is still over in editing and we're both sevens there, but it is an upward mobility position. And we worked as trainees, but we both had maintained the jobs or responsibilities that we had before, see, and I recently just had my PD rewritten.

- Dorothy Huyck: 02:38 I'm sorry, what is a PD?
- Linda Russo: 02:39 Position description.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:40 Thank you.
- Linda Russo: 02:41 To make me just a writer-editor. And then now they have another girl which came over to the new division, new areas of urban studies, to take over those other functions of legislative support data. So, I'm strictly now a writer-editor and going to start college this fall—
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:01 That's exciting.
- Linda Russo: 03:03 – after about 15 years – to gain some experience in writing and journalism, any kind of courses, that I can't never remember, to benefit me in my job there. So that's basically it. I worked as a secretary for 15 years, and it's challenging and it's a lot of fun and everything, but it's just a dead end. Not many fields that a woman can get into. So, I was very thankful when the opportunity came along, particularly with the branch that I'm in now editing so I like it very much, and I feel it is very worthwhile and very stimulating and it will give me an opportunity to move ahead.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:51 How is this upward mobility position defined?
- Linda Russo: 03:55 Well, normally you would come in as a GS-5, like a trainee called editorial assistant, but since we were already, these girls and I, we were already sevens, we just had to like work a year and that actually, we just kind of lateralled down there. They waved like the – I don't know what they call them – wave the requirements or something. So, you usually, it takes two years of specialized before you can come a nine and a seven, you do some rewriting, maybe of documents, we edit all Park Service documents and also your responsibility is to make sure it's grammatically correct in the proper style and format. And then when you get into the nine level, which is journeyman level, that requires more, you actually work much closer with the author of the document, and you do more rewriting, and it gets a little more difficult.
- And then 11, you actually become a member of the team. And a lot of times you go out on field trips with them, and they might give you the ideas, but you do most of the

writing of the report. So there again, it gets tougher and tougher as you go on. The limit is 12 which there again you're a member of the team. So, it's a good field and one of few that women can get into without a college degree, but it gives you the incentive to want to go to college, to gain more experience. It's like I said, I probably never would've gone back. Well, I mean, you think about it, going back well, and I have a small son, so it's not been easy, but now since he's getting older, I figure, well it's time to think about me so I can go to school now. And I have a reason to go, since I'm looking forward to being an upper-level writer.

- Dorothy Huyck: 06:01 Within this upper mobility program, then you're still, you are currently a seven, where are you going to be going to college?
- Linda Russo: 06:08 Metropolitan State.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:10 In Denver?
- Linda Russo: 06:11 Mm-hmm.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:14 Where did you go to high school?
- Linda Russo: 06:16 Was in Illinois.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:17 Were you born in Illinois?
- Linda Russo: 06:19 Well, I was born in a town that would be right next door in Indiana, because the town I lived in didn't have a hospital at the time, so it was like 11 miles away. But actually, I grew up in Illinois, I was there for 18 years.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:35 When were you born?
- Linda Russo: 06:36 1943.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:37 But you grew up in Illinois? In what location in Illinois?
- Linda Russo: 06:41 Well, it's a small town named Mount Carmel and it's in like a southeastern area.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:51 Were you an only child?
- Linda Russo: 06:52 No, I have a brother.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:54 Is he older or younger?

Linda Russo: 06:55 Yes. He's older. He's two and a half years older.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:00 So you grew up for the first 18 years in Mount Carmel, through high school?

Linda Russo: 07:05 Right.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:08 Had your father attended college by chance?

Linda Russo: 07:10 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:11 Or your mother?

Linda Russo: 07:11 No one in my family had.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:12 And what were their occupations?

Linda Russo: 07:15 Well, my father was a carpenter and my mother was my housewife for many, many years until she did go back to work. And she's still working there. She works at the hospital.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:31 When you were in high school, did you take science and math courses at all?

Linda Russo: 07:37 Only really what was required because I guess all the time that I was growing up, I'd always – my dream was I always wanted to be a secretary and moved to the big city. Of course, I was really thinking about New York, and I ended up in Washington. So, I really took all the secretarial courses that I possibly could.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:00 Was there someone in your family or among your teachers who was a particularly encouraging person during the high school years?

Linda Russo: 08:07 Probably my secretarial practice teacher. He always – he encouraged us very, very much. It seems very important that we do a really good job, if you want to get ahead, do a good job, so we did.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:26 Were you by any chance considered a tomboy while you were growing up?

Linda Russo: 08:30 No, mm-mm. I can't say that ever was.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:35 Were you into any particular extracurricular activities in growing up that are helpful now that you have been employed by the Park Service these many years?

Linda Russo: 08:45 No. I wouldn't say that.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:47 And you had traveled to parks or wandered around national parks particularly?

Linda Russo: 08:52 Not, you mean, when I was young?

Dorothy Huyck: 08:53 As you were growing up.

Linda Russo: 08:55 No, we went to mostly there was state park or something. I think the only Park Service area we went to was in Springfield. I went to Lincoln Boyhood. The ones that were right nearby, but I hadn't been to a national park until I went to Washington.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:15 Then what factors went into your interest in working for the Park Service when the opportunity arose?

Linda Russo: 09:21 Well, mainly because when I went to DC, I had about three other roommates. We all got together and I don't know how it was that when I went, one of them was selected to work for Park Service, whereas the rest of us were selected to work for the Navy department and she just kept telling us how, what a great outfit it was, and it just sounded so good that eventually one by one, we started going over there and I was glad we did at least that I did. So that's basically how I found out about it, went over to the building and talked to people and that more or less made up my mind that this is where I want to work. And so, I have been for 17 years.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:11 Have you received encouragement or discouragement from your supervisors during those 17 years?

Linda Russo: 10:19 Always encouragement.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:21 Like what?

Linda Russo: 10:22 Always, I can say that I, like I said, I worked for this one man for eight years, and though he never – You get to a certain point where they can't give you promotions, he

always made it known in one way or another that I was appreciated, my work was appreciated and always encouraged me to go out and get what you want even if it meant not working for him anymore to better myself, he always just said do whatever you want to do, and so that's what I've tried to do.

- Dorothy Huyck: 10:56 And you came with him here to Denver?
- Linda Russo: 10:58 Mm-hmm. We didn't know for sure when we moved out here that the people that we worked for back East were necessarily the people we going to work for out here, but he said, if at all possible, I would like you to continue working for me, and it worked out that way.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:13 He's probably not your supervisor currently?
- Linda Russo: 11:15 No.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:17 But again, you found your current supervisor an encouraging person?
- Linda Russo: 11:21 He's very, very helpful, very, very encouraging.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:26 Since you've gotten into the writing-editing business, have you been encouraged to take any courses?
- Linda Russo: 11:30 Oh yes. He, Mr. Morrissey, that's my supervisor now, has told us by all means anything that's going to help you take them.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:41 I'm thinking of the courses within the Park Service training courses.
- Linda Russo: 11:45 Right. Well, when I first moved downstairs there in editing, we were said, "Find out what a course you want." So, I took an English course, it was a college level, was a correspondence course through civil service for about six months and which of course they paid for. And they will pay for any classes that I take at Metro that are job related and he's always, he's been very, very encouraging saying, "By all means." Because he knows in the long run it's going to benefit me and them.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:22 Yes of course. Then your courses at Metro will be paid for by the Park Service?

- Linda Russo: 12:27 Right. As many of them as possible that will be job related now, there may be some that won't be, no I don't know.
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:32 What are you planning to start out with?
- Linda Russo: 12:35 Well, I would like to take a basic writing course and then probably another English course, and then may be some history courses because that's – history is an alternative too, that whenever you feel like you've gone as far as you can down there and if you get a history degree, well then you could become a historian and go to a park. I mean that's the long way off, but—
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:59 Are you planning to go all the way through to a degree?
- Linda Russo: 13:00 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 13:00 That's going to be a long, long-
- Linda Russo: 13:03 It's going to take me a long time, but I hoping to take the CLEP test. Have you heard that it's college level examination program. And that most colleges around the country do recognize it and do accept, and they will give you credit. There's five tests on it and the math, I'm not sure about if I'm going to take that one yet or not, but there's the four tests, I'm pretty sure. And they give you credit up to – Well, they can give you up to two years credit so that will help. So that certain courses I may not have to take so that can eliminate time and money as far, if I could start out as a sophomore, I mean, that would be great then it, but I realize it's going to take a long time because I plan to go at night, I can't go through the daytime because I have to work. So, I do realize it and I guess it's better, late than never. But—
- Dorothy Huyck: 14:04 Do you think that thus far up to date, the Park Service has made good use of your specific talents and training?
- Linda Russo: 14:12 Yes I do. I've always felt that the work that I'm doing is beneficial, and it's being used, but because you can see the results like where we work now. Whereas as a secretary because it's always a routine thing of typing a letter and it goes, and you never see it again, goes outside to an individual. But where I work now, when you finish a document and it goes to the printer and it comes back and here it is and you can look at it and say, I helped make this possible, and it makes you feel good.

- Dorothy Huyck: 14:53 What kind of documents are you working on?
- Linda Russo: 14:57 Well, we work on planning documents, environmental impact statements, assessments of alternatives, just all kinds, interpretive plans, history.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:11 Do you write these or edit the writing of someone else?
- Linda Russo: 15:12 Well, at the stage I am, we usually just edit them. We do some rewriting and most of the authors that we deal with, they always go along with what you say. You have some that are very stubborn in that this is what they want to say, no matter how bad it is, they just will not change it. But most of them are really good to work with. And they'll always go along with your suggestions it improves the wording. So, they're very good.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:42 Where do you acquire your particular facility with words so that you bring that to the editing process?
- Linda Russo: 15:49 Well, mostly in school and on the English courses that I took in high school. Plus, all the time that I was a secretary, you're gaining this knowledge. And I had a very – luckily most of the supervisors I had were always very generous in saying, "Do whatever you want with it, make it sound better." And that was nice too, and all along in my Park Service career, I've taken lots of courses, lots of courses that had to do with English grammar. So, when I—
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:24 In the Park Service itself?
- Linda Russo: 16:25 Right. So that when I came downstairs, I already had a pretty good knowledge of grammar, and all things that go with it. So yes, it was something that I got up here, but you get a little rusty sometimes so that's why I feel well, I'm going to go back to school, to college, to better myself.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:52 Do you think that being a woman has made any difference at all in your career with Park Service? Has it affected your opportunities at all?
- Linda Russo: 17:00 Not me personally, no, because I realize, and there are certain areas that if I chose to get into a degree would be required and that would take lots of time whereas the job and what I'm in now, I can work and go to school at the

same time. And possibly some of the work that I do here will count as credit in college.

- Dorothy Huyck: 17:30 As you look ahead into the future, what do you feel about the future opportunities, say five or 10 years from now as far as women are concerned?
- Linda Russo: 17:37 Oh, I think it's looking better and better all the time. I really do. For me, I'm certainly hopeful that it will mean that I will try to go the limit in the office that I'm in. I may not make it and I may have to get into something else or I may want to.
- Dorothy Huyck: 17:59 There are some people who think of the Park Service is a real rather male-oriented organization.
- Linda Russo: 18:04 Well, basically it is, as far as professionals are concerned, yes I would say that. And that may be in a lot of agencies, I don't know. But I think it's growing, and women are getting better opportunities, but we still do have a way to go but, we're moving.
- Dorothy Huyck: 18:24 Can you define that way that is left to go, what's going—
- Linda Russo: 18:30 Well, and for there are lots of secretaries around in the Park Service, probably as in a lot of agencies, and they probably would be content just like me until you're practically forced. It's just like sometimes you just need a little bit of a shove in the right direction because I was always happy being a secretary and I always enjoyed the work and found it very challenging, but you get to the point where you realize it's a dead end, I can't go anywhere else. And so luckily, I guess the opportunity came along with the right time and I just needed a little bit of a push, but that's what women are going to have to do is get out or go to school. And a lot of them are doing that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 19:14 What was the source of the push in your particular case?
- Linda Russo: 19:17 Well, basically because we got reorganized and I really had, I could stay a secretary and do what I did before, but it would've meant losing a grade. You retain your salary for two years or whatever, but I guess that was all I needed. No, my salary or my GS position means too much to me to give it up, so I might as well keep it, plus try to go further.

- Dorothy Huyck: 19:49 Was there a problem identifying the direction that you could go in order to keep your grade and proceed from there?
- Linda Russo: 19:55 No, no, that wasn't a problem because there weren't too many options at the time open for there was three of us that were actually in that position. We had to get into another field or stay what we were and lose the grade. So, each of us were given the opportunity to go into different, like me in legislation and another girl in public information and another one in public involvement. And so that wasn't--but that really didn't, I don't know, it didn't seem to do anything for us, it wasn't challenging or rewarding, or we just didn't feel like we were accomplishing anything.
- And then, so we went and talked to the associate manager, and he told us that we had this opportunity to go down to graphic arts and editing into upper mobility positions. And we didn't argue with him we said, "Well, it sounds great." At least I was a little kind of scared at first about it because going to a brand new field, which you really, I mean, you've done some of it in doing your correspondence and all but thought about, "Hey I'm going to be editing documents that are going out to the public" and in the end, the final product is your responsibility to be error free and to look good and to sound good. So, it was scary, but yet kind of looked forward to it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 21:30 More challenging?
- Linda Russo: 21:31 Right. Exactly. I was.
- Dorothy Huyck: 21:36 Are there certain requisites as far as upward mobility positions are concerned, in other words, how is it that you qualify for an upward mobility sort of situation?
- Linda Russo: 21:47 I don't really know. It's like I said you have to be, they like waived the qualifications because we were already sevens, but yet we had to work that extra year to make like it kind of balanced itself out. And then we had to work, well we have to work like two years to get this specialized before we can go on to the nine level. Now, since it's a two-grade jump 7, 9, 11, but as far as the prerequisites are, I'm not exactly sure. It's just, we just happen to be in the right place at the right time whereas now when they come in – new employees and we have two men, eight women, two men.

And always in the other office, it's always, it's the other way around.

So, the two guys get tease a lot about that but – and we have two co-op students there. And then we have two new other people that came in, but they're like, the co-ops are like twos and threes or something. And then the others are like GS fives. So, they'll go from a five to a seven. So actually, I was lucky that I didn't have to come in on the ground floor. But new people coming in now would have to come in as a five, I guess, unless they had maybe a degree and had had some writing your experience. So, it's all, I guess, in just being at the right place at the right time.

- Dorothy Huyck: 23:23 May I ask if you're married?
- Linda Russo: 23:26 Not now, I'm divorced.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:28 Did you work for the Park Service during the time you were married?
- Linda Russo: 23:32 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:35 Have you children?
- Linda Russo: 23:36 I have one boy who is now 10.
- Dorothy Huyck: 23:41 Have you found it – Let's ask it this way. How have you managed being a parent and your Park Service career at the same time?
- Linda Russo: 23:52 Oh, with much difficulty. No, it's just something that I've had to do because I've been by myself and I realize it and I'm sure that my son has missed out on a lot because he doesn't have both parents, and because he has a mother that works and has to work and I don't think it makes him any less of a human being or any less intelligent than any other kid. And he's very understanding and that I do get an opportunity to work a lot of overtime. So, there are times that I don't see him very much and he is very good about it.

And he's very – I've tried to pass on to him a lot of my, I don't know, the things that I want to do and try to make him strong and you try to make up to be both parents, and it isn't easy, but I tried to make him strong because I used to – I didn't have a lot of confidence I was insecure, which I feel

that I've come out of that. And I've tried to make him feel like he's have a lot of self-confidence and be very sure of yourself and he does very well in school, and I'm very proud of him because like I said, he's had to – and I guess I expect a lot too, but he's done very well.

Dorothy Huyck: 25:21

If an opportunity for a position elsewhere than in Denver arose, as far as you're concerned, would you consider yourself mobile and therefore open to thinking of another position in another location?

Linda Russo: 25:31

Yes. I never used to, and maybe that was a lot of the insecurity, thinking, well I moved out here, but a lot of my friends moved out here and I really didn't feel alone. And because if I had to do it myself, I don't know that I would've, but now I feel yes, if the right opportunity came along, I would. And I feel my son is in age now where it wouldn't be as disruptive. They can adapt very well. Kids adapt probably very well than grownups.

Dorothy Huyck: 26:06

If a young person just thinking about starting a professional career in the Park Service asked your advice, would you encourage a young woman to enter a professional category in the Park Service employment?

Linda Russo: 26:17

I certainly would. I think it's a very good agency to work for. Maybe I'm a little prejudice and I've worked for them for 17 years, so obviously I think a lot of it, and I've never really had a desire to go anywhere else, to another bureau or anything. In fact, I left Park Service at one point when I was married in my – One of the basic reasons I quit was I wanted to get my retirement out. See this was, I didn't work for like for five years and I wanted to get my retirement out, and I got a job in private industry. The way the retirement I got out, well, we were going to use to pay off all our expenses, so my husband could go to school full time and I would continue working. Well, I went to and got a job with an A&E firm in Washington.

Dorothy Huyck: 27:13

An AE firm?

Linda Russo: 27:14

Well architect engineering firm. And I worked there for two months, and I didn't like it at all. So, I went back to Park Service, not the same man, I wasn't working for him, but I worked in the same division that I left. Very lucky that way. And I thought, no. So, I did, I stepped out a little

bit and I don't know, sometimes I think, well, maybe I didn't really give it a chance, but I guess maybe I'm a little bit spoiled, I don't know. So, I went back to Park Service, and I haven't regretted it. In fact, I've never regretted it at all, working for Park Service. And I can't think of another agency that I really would like to work for. I think it has many good opportunities as any other place because there's some place that I don't know about.

- Dorothy Huyck: 28:11 I've been asking you a lot of questions. Is there some comment that I haven't spoken of or asked anything about that you'd like to make that pertains to the Park Service and your experience of being a woman employed by the Park Service? Something come to your mind that we may not have talked about.
- Linda Russo: 28:29 No, I don't think so. I think about cover as far as my career and what I'd like to do and what I have done, if I really, I can't think of anything else.
- Dorothy Huyck: 28:42 Well, thank you, Linda.

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]