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Bruce McKeeman
October 25, 2014

Interview conducted by Brenna Lissoway
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
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ANPR Oral History Project

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[START OF TRACK 1]

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. This is Brenna Lissoway interviewing Bruce McKeeman. Today is October the 25th, that's right, 2014. We're at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado, sort of nearing the end of Ranger Rendezvous. So, Bruce, I was hoping we could start the interview by just having you state your name and where you were born and your date of birth, please.

Bruce McKeeman: My name is Bruce Douglas McKeeman. I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on May 12, 1948.

Brenna Lissoway: Great. So, what I was hoping we could do is start the interview with just a little bit of your background information. So, can you start by telling me a little bit about your family?

Bruce McKeeman: Sure. Our family were three boys, of which I'm the oldest, and my dad was a minister of the Unitarian Universalist Association. We moved about every six years with his ministry, so I grew up probably pretty prepared for the park service, moving on a regular basis. But I lived in Massachusetts until I was about 10 years old, and then we moved to northeastern Ohio. Akron, Ohio, with my dad's job.

Bruce McKeeman: I went to high school in Ohio. Revere High School in Bath Township. And to Marietta College in southeastern Ohio. Marietta had a cooperative five-year program with the University of Michigan, so after three years at Marietta, I transferred to University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and spent two years there. After my first year at Michigan, I got my degree from Marietta, a B.A. in biology. After my second year at Michigan, I got a BS in forestry.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Just backing up a little bit, what sorts of things did your family do for fun growing up?

Bruce McKeeman: We did a lot of camping. A lot of outdoor stuff. I didn't find out until very late in my life that my dad was actually a college tennis champion.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, is that right?

Bruce McKeeman: So, we did a lot, played a lot of games. You know, a lot of football and baseball.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you were into sports?

Bruce McKeeman: I was into sports. Very much so. Played little league. They hadn't developed youth soccer at that point. I was always out doing stuff. It's a busy day, go out and play. There wasn't any sit and watch TV kind of stuff. So, we were always doing stuff outside.

Bruce McKeeman: What really got me interested in the National Park Service was 1960, my dad took six weeks off, which was an unusual amount of time. We were still in Massachusetts. We spent two weeks driving out to California, two weeks in California, and two weeks driving back to Massachusetts.

Camping in all the national parks along the way. That was the point, at 12 years old, that I decided I wanted to be a park ranger.

Brenna Lissoway: What was it about the park ranger that was so attractive?

Bruce McKeeman: Just being in the parks, being in the outdoors, being able to go hike and see the various resources. It was just that enticement of being an outdoor situation and recreation and the national grandeur of what we saw. And it was not just the national parks; it was the historic sites as well.

Brenna Lissoway: Did you stop at some historic sites, too, when you were traveling?

Bruce McKeeman: Oh, yes. Yep. We would stop at any National Park Service site, regardless of its focus, that we could find. Typical day was we would get up and pack up the car and all that and then whatever we were doing, we would usually drive until about three, maybe four o'clock in the afternoon. And then have time to set up camp and go swimming or go hiking and go see something before we had to settle in for the night.

Bruce McKeeman: But one of the stops was in Yosemite, and it was at the time of the fire fall was still going on. So, prior to Director Hartzog deciding that the fire fall was not an appropriate activity in a national park, I did get to see that out at Curry Village Meadow.

Brenna Lissoway: And what was that like?

Bruce McKeeman: It was really an interesting thing. Having worked in Hawaii Volcanoes, we have the flow of the lava. You can see this red glow stretching like a river. It was very much like that coming down off of Glacier Point. Because they'd build a big bonfire at the top, and then as it got dark, they would push it over the side of Glacier Point. So, you had this whole red ember glow coming down the face of Glacier Point.

Brenna Lissoway: Any other parks or sites that stick out to you on that trip?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I mean, there were incidences which were interesting. We were camped at Lake Mead, and we had a, I think it was a 10 by 10, or I guess it was a 12 by 12 canvas umbrella tent. Well, it was so hot in Lake Mead at that time of the year, this was a summer trip, that we got up at four o'clock in the morning and packed everything up and drove across the desert to L.A., just because you couldn't get any sleep whatsoever. It was intensely uncomfortable.

Bruce McKeeman: And then we were camped up near Golden Gate Bridge on Muir Beach. The winds were so heavy coming in off the coast that we had to take our dining tarp and put it up as a windscreen before we could get the tent to stay up and get it staked down. It was just blowing the tent over.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. And neither of those extreme outdoor experiences dissuaded you from—(laughs)

Bruce McKeeman: No. Not at all. Not at all.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. So, did you have other interests growing up?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I was in Boy Scouts. All those typical kind of kid things. Marching band in high school. I was the equipment manager for the high school basketball team. So again, a sports-related deal. And when I went to Marietta College, I was the head equipment student manager for the football team and the tennis team.

Brenna Lissoway: So how did you decide to go to Marietta College?

Bruce McKeeman: It was small and liberal arts. I didn't want to be a large, you know, a number in a big institution somewhere. And it was far enough away from home that you could feel like you were on your own. But it was close enough that if I needed to be home, or wanted to get home for holidays or something, it was available. It had a very good reputation as a liberal arts college. And it had that five-year program with Michigan to get me into forestry.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you had your mind on the forestry program when you entered Marietta.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. I had my mind on how do I become a park ranger after that vacation trip. So, from the time I was 12 years old in junior high school, I wanted to go into forestry on some level. And whether it was Park Service or Forest Service, I didn't know at that time. But because Marietta had the cooperative program. Actually, they had it with two schools. They had it with Duke and the University of Michigan. My advisor was more preferential to Michigan, so that's where I ended up going.

Brenna Lissoway: I see. Okay. So how did you get your first Park Service job?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I will readily admit that I was extremely lucky. And the stars had to have aligned. I started working for the Park Service the summer I graduated from high school. The Isaac Walton League, in Akron, and my dad had contacts with the Isaac Walton people, apparently were recruiting students to work in the blister rust program. White pine blister rust program was prevalent in the large western national parks. And so, I ended up with a position in Yellowstone working on blister rust. So, I did that for three summers, '66, '67 and '68.

Brenna Lissoway: While you were going to college?

Bruce McKeeman: While I was going to college. And '69 I would have gone back and done another summer, but University of Michigan at that time for the forestry students had a summer camp program that we were required to go through. So, I had to take '69 off to finish school.

Brenna Lissoway: I see. Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: Then the next step in that whole progress is a recruiter came from Philadelphia (to the University of Michigan looking for natural resource students). And this was part of the Urban Park Ranger Intake Program. Where for some vast region, reason, they couldn't get rangers to go to urban areas. Go figure. And so, the Park Service had approval from OPM

to go do direct hiring recruitment. So, we had a recruiter come from Philadelphia, University of Michigan. And he had been to Penn State and a bunch of the other land management colleges. My supervisor (advisor) knew that I was interested in the Park Service and I had worked in Yellowstone. So, he set me up with an appointment with this recruiter. Went through the interview, and he looked at my grades and stuff. So, he said that he could, he had a position available at Independence [National Historical Park], in Philadelphia.

Bruce McKeeman: So, this is where I tell the tale on myself. Being a young college student, sitting there and not reasoning out that this was, in essence, an offer of a permanent job in the National Park System because it was a recruitment for the urban intake program. I was sitting there going, Yellowstone (Seasonal job). Philadelphia. Yellowstone. And so, he obviously picked up on my hesitation of jumping at a job in Independence.

Bruce McKeeman: So, he sat there for a couple of seconds. He said, "Well," he said, "I could probably get you a job in the Smokies."

Bruce McKeeman: I said, "Fine. I'd be happy to go to the Smokies." So, I figured that I had once again opened my mouth and inserted my foot. Blown whatever opportunity might have been available.

Bruce McKeeman: So, finished up the semester and went back home. I was packing up the car to get ready to drive out to Yellowstone. And the Smokies called me, said they had my name on a cert, and when could I report for duty?

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. So, you had to forego Yellowstone and went to—

Bruce McKeeman: I had to forego Yellowstone to go to the Great Smoky Mountains.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Yeah. Can I quickly ask you, what were your summers at Yellowstone like, working on the blister rust crew?

Bruce McKeeman: I thought they were fantastic. I mean, to be in Yellowstone. It was a lot of hard work. I know the first few weeks, going from Ohio to elevation in Yellowstone. And we were constantly out hiking and walking and working in the park. So, it was a training period. I obviously was not in full physical shape at that point. So, there was a lot of huffing and puffing and sweating to keep up with the crew, but I managed to do that. I didn't get sent home the first couple of weeks. They thought I could make it. We would, for the blister rust program, they had folks who went out and identified areas in the park. We were stationed at Canyon Village. There was also a crew at Lake and a crew at West Thumb. Where there were a lot of ribes bushes. The gooseberry, the ribes bushes, the intermediate host of the white pine blister rust. So, the concept from resource management was if we can eliminate the ribes bushes, we can eliminate the intermediate host and we can control or stop the spread of the white pine blister rust. Which then, what white pine blister rust does, it gets in the white pine tree. You get an orange rusty sack that eventually girdles the tree and kills it. And pine nuts are a primary food source for the grizzly

bear and the black bear and other animals. So, this was an effort to help protect a vital food source for the grizzly bear in Yellowstone. So, if we can interrupt this.

Bruce McKeeman: So, they had big string lines set up. And we had a nylon rope that was 66 feet long. We would drag that behind us. And we had what we called a hoedag which was a little forked hoe (hoe at one end and a pronged end at the other). Whenever we saw a ribes bush or a gooseberry bush, we would dig it up. We had a little chemical that we would squirt on the roots that would kill the roots so they wouldn't re-grow. And pulled the bush up so it would dry out and die.

Bruce McKeeman: So, you'd just go back and forth all day long in this work area. You'd get done with the one section and you would sign the tag that you had done this, and the date and your name, and start the next section. When the end of the day came, you had a predetermined meeting spot of where you had to be, and we would hike back out to the road to get on the trucks to go back to camp.

Bruce McKeeman: Then they had quality control folks that would come by and check your work area. If they found too many missed bushes, they would mark it as not complete. Then you'd have to go back in and redo that section again.

Bruce McKeeman: We were also used by the Park Service for firefighting as a basic fire land crew. So, if there were small fires and stuff, although we did end up on a couple of big fires.

Brenna Lissoway: You did respond to some fires?

Bruce McKeeman: Yes. And also, to search and rescue. So, if they needed extra bodies to go out on a search pattern, they'd call up the BRC crews and we'd go out and help the rangers do that.

Brenna Lissoway: What kind of training did they give you for those activities?

Bruce McKeeman: For fire we had basic Fire 110, you know. Here are the tools, you know. You have to have a hard hat. How to use your fire shelter. All the basic things that you get for a red card basic firefighter. So, we had a couple of times where, for example, they had a couple of lightning strikes. They just said, well, I'll just have the BRC guy get it. So, we'd go in, find the smoke, put the fire out. Sit there and monitor it for X number of hours, cold trail it, and come back.

Brenna Lissoway: And you said you got on a couple of big ones?

Bruce McKeeman: Got on one big fire. It was up in the north (Buffalo Plateau). I don't remember exactly where it was at this point. But one of those little incidences. We had all our packs, all our stuff, and we were hiking in. We came to this one meadow. There was this sow grizzly bear on the other side of the meadow. They have relatively poor eyesight, but their hearing and their smell is extremely well-tuned. She decided she had to come over and investigate what this noise and group of people were on the other side

of her meadow. So, we spent an hour and a half or so up in the trees waiting for her to smell around and decide that there wasn't anything of interest to her, for her to go away.

Brenna Lissoway: You mean you climbed trees?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. We climbed trees to get away from the grizzly, so there wasn't any opportunity for interaction. Then after she had her curiosity satisfied, we finished hiking into the fire. In 1968, there were a lot of wildfires in the West. One particularly large one was the Flathead Fire in Glacier National Park. We were sending all the Blister Rust crews up there, but they wanted one crew to stay in Yellowstone in case a fire started. My crew became the designated crew and we had to stay in Yellowstone. I had an experienced fire crew, but we did not have a single fire in Yellowstone that summer. We were really bummed out about missing the fires.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. Did you have a lot of wildlife encounters those summers?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. Pretty much. You know, you're out in the backwoods and you're on your own. I mean, you've got a crew, but you're staged apart because of work areas. There would be a lot of times you'd go out in the morning, and if you knew you were going back the same area, you'd just leave some of your gear out there, so you didn't have to haul it back and forth. And you'd get out there and find that your marker was all messed up because some moose had come through and got tangled up in the rope and you had to reset everything and all that.

Bruce McKeeman: Other than that, on your days off, you have the weekends off to go play visitor. Seeing what some of the, seeing all the different wildlife and some of the foolish things that some visitors tend to do.

Bruce McKeeman: A lot of bears back in the '60s in Yellowstone. I was in Yellowstone this summer (2014), and I didn't see a single bear. Single black bear.

Brenna Lissoway: Single black bear. Or a grizzly bear?

Bruce McKeeman: Didn't see a grizzly bear. I know they had been working diligently to get the black bears not to be food bears on the road and cause bear jams. They had been very successful. When we were there in the '60s, you could go to Dunraven Pass and you could count on having a bear jam up by Dunraven Pass. There was always a sow and cubs out there stopping traffic.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. That's quite a change.

Bruce McKeeman: Yes. Better for the bears. A little disappointing sometimes for the visitor. But safer.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Mm hmm. Okay, so you got your first, this was a permanent job that you took to go to Great Smokies.

Bruce McKeeman: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: With the intake program.

Bruce McKeeman: Correct.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. So, tell me about working at Great Smokies. What did they have you doing?

Bruce McKeeman: I was working on the North Carolina side, and was basically a campground ranger. I was working at Deep Creek campground during the week. Then on weekends, there was another campground that was at the very end of Blue Ridge Parkway, because the Blue Ridge Parkway ends in Cherokee and dumps into the Smokies. So, the Heintooga Overlook campground was up just before the parkway ended. So, I would go up on weekends as a relief ranger. So that ranger would work five days, had two days off. So, on the weekends, I would go up the Heintooga and be the campground ranger up there. Then three other days I was at Deep Creek.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. And so, what other requirements did you have as part of the intake program?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, you get hired for the summer. Then you go on furlough and you have one year to complete your degree. Because these were all folks coming in between their junior and senior years at college. So even though it was between my fourth and fifth year, because I was on the five-year program, but we were hired at the end of our junior year to work for the summer, and then on furlough to finish school. So, you had one year to finish school.

Bruce McKeeman: I was very close to getting my degree at the end of those four years. I needed one more semester. So, I actually finished in December. So, I wrote a letter to the Smokies saying I'm graduating, I'm finished work, I'm ready to come back to the Smokies. And they sent me a letter saying congratulations, report for duty at Albright Training Center at Grand Canyon. (laughter)

Brenna Lissoway: So, the understanding was then that the park that picked you up for this intake program would then hire you. You would then have a permanent position with that park.

Bruce McKeeman: I'm not sure—

Brenna Lissoway: Or it would just be you were in the Park Service at that—

Bruce McKeeman: I was in the park service. I suspect that what it was, like what happened with me in the Smokies, that when you knew you were completing your degree, you could contact the park that you had been in. They would either bring you back for that next summer because most people getting out of school in the spring, there would be another summer employment, and then whatever other assignments as part of the program. Since I finished a semester early, they sent me to Albright to go through Introduction to Park Operations. So that's what I ended up doing. So, I was duty stationed at Albright Training Center, where I fortuitously managed to meet my future wife.

Brenna Lissoway: Ah. What was she doing there?

Bruce McKeeman: She was an employee of the Park Service.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: She had another one of these unusual entry processes. Hopewell Furnace, or Hopewell Village in eastern Pennsylvania was having a hard time filling a historian job. And who knows why. But they had gotten permission from OPM to go to the civil service register to try to hire somebody. My wife's name showed up in that, so they offered her a job, which she accepted. She had no background. She came from a rural farm community in eastern South Dakota. So, I mean, her summer experiences and connections with national parks were nonexistent, in reality. Her dad was a farmer. And that's what they did.

Bruce McKeeman: So, she received an offer for this basically junior historian interpretive job at Hopewell Village. So, she went to that. And because she didn't have any background in the Park Service and knowledge, they told her about this Introduction to Park Operations class, which is the whole focus of it. But her superintendent wouldn't let her go during the fall or the spring because they had so many school groups and interpretive demands at the park. He said, "If you want to go to this, you have to go to the winter class." She had applied for it and was told that she wasn't selected and was on the waiting list. Had got home for Christmas and all of a sudden gets this phone call saying, "You've been selected. You have to be in Arizona the beginning of January." So, it was a whirlwind change between being home on annual leave and having to get back to Pennsylvania to pack to get back to Arizona for the class.

Brenna Lissoway: Right. Right.

Bruce McKeeman: But it was a 10-week class at Albright.

Brenna Lissoway: And what was that like? What sorts of topics did they cover? What were you learning?

Bruce McKeeman: It was the entire gamut of, starting with the history of the Park Service. This is what the Park Service is. This is what we represent. This is our history, our philosophy, our aims, and our goals. I mean, you get the entire backdrop of why the Park Service is, what its intentions are, what its management philosophies are. We also did some ranger skill type of training. This was before they separated Ranger Skills out of Introduction to Park Ops. It was all rolled into one. So, we'd have a couple of days of traffic accident investigation. We'd have a couple of days of going out to the rim of the Grand Canyon and doing rappelling and rope work. We'd have a couple of days of search and rescue. So, they were trying to touch some of the basic skills that you would need going into it. We worked on interpretation. We wrote reports. And we had to get up in front of the class and do an interpretive talk, do an interpretive demonstration. So, it was a full-rounded skills thing.

Bruce McKeeman: They also brought in someone like Scoyen, they brought Eivind (Evan) Scoyen to give a talk. And they would bring in—

Brenna Lissoway: Who was he?

Bruce McKeeman: He was a former (Associate) director of the Park Service (1956 – 1962), and early National park Superintendent. Lon Garrison was the director at the training center when I was there. Deny Galvin, Bill Wendt, Dwight Hamilton were the three instructors. Then we also did an overnight trip down to Phantom Ranch. So, we went down the Kaibab, camped out at Phantom Ranch for the night and then hiked back out the Bright Angel. So, we were out in the resource. We had P.E. every day.

Brenna Lissoway: P.E.?

Bruce McKeeman: Physical ed. You know. Go, try to catch up to Bill Wendt who was, Bill was a tall, lanky guy with long legs. And obviously, you know, he's used to being at that elevation. You know, it's 7500 feet, the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. And it's always, "Get in your jogging stuff. We're going." So, he would take us out through the woods. And you'd have this whole line of folks from the class trying to follow Bill, stay with him. Which was good. We needed to be in shape. It was something that rangers have to do. And also, it was a good chance to get out of the classroom, instead of having so much butt time.

Brenna Lissoway: Right. Right. What was the composition of your class like?

Bruce McKeeman: We had, well, the Park Service at that time, this is January 1970, had the introduction, and they were trying to catch up. So, they would have what they call backlog. Folks that have been in the Park Service three, four, five years, but hadn't been to the class or hadn't had the introduction to park operations, philosophy, and stuff. So, they would bring backlog rangers in, instead of new rangers like I was.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: So, we had, I think there were six new rangers and we had seven women in the class. And then the rest were males and backlog.

Brenna Lissoway: From all different disciplines—

Bruce McKeeman: From all over the service.

Brenna Lissoway: All over the service.

Bruce McKeeman: Mainly interpretation and protection rangers. I don't recall having any maintenance folks in our class. There may have been a couple of admin. But primarily rangers. Both interp and resource managers. We also had a couple of Rangers from the area Indian Tribes – one from the Navajo reservation and one from Isleta Pueblo.

Brenna Lissoway: And what do you think was the impact of that training on your career, if any?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I think it was very good. Obviously, having the opportunity to interface with Deny Galvin, who was a future deputy director. Bill Wendt went on to be chief ranger in Yosemite. Dwight Hamilton went on to a distinguished career as well. And having their experience, as well as bringing in instructors who had long associations in the Park Service and being able to hear their stories and their backgrounds and their interest. This is what the book says, and here are how some of the variations of what the book says happen. Then being able to interface and having a group of people that you're in class with and associating with 24/7 provides a lot of good friendships and support groups that you can utilize throughout your career.

Brenna Lissoway: Hmm. Interesting. Okay, so you went through the Intro to Park Operations. And you were then going to – what came next?

Bruce McKeeman: Because I was part of the urban intake ranger program, then I was reassigned to Washington, DC. The agreement was that you would spend up to a year in an urban assignment as a part of the urban program before you could be considered to go on to any other field assignments. So, whether that was in DC, this was at the same time that Golden Gate in San Francisco, Gateway in New York City, were coming online. The Arch in Saint Louis, Cuyahoga Valley, Indiana Dunes. So, the opportunities to go to an urban area, not just Washington, DC, was a possibility. We had no say in where we ended up.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you couldn't make requests.

Bruce McKeeman: Couldn't make, you know, it was, "Congratulations. Your desk is now located here." So, I went back to DC. They had two houses up on Connecticut Avenue, which were Park Service houses in Washington, DC. In Northwest Washington, which is a rather exclusive part of the city. So, there was a large house and a small house. And depending on the mix of men and women, depending on who occupied which house. So, we had housing which, as a GS5, where the total annual salary of about $7,000, that was a very nice option to have that.

Brenna Lissoway: And these were all the intake rangers?

Bruce McKeeman: These were all the intake rangers. Right. So, there were three or four people from the class prior to mine. And then two or three people from my class. See, the backlogs, backlogs would all go back to their parks. So, the intakes, the new ones, as part of the urban intake ranger program, were assigned primarily to Washington. There were some other assignments, but primarily Washington. And we worked out of National Capital Region office on 1100 Ohio Drive. Working for Lucia Bragan was her name. Somewhere in there she got married because I think Bragan was her married name. But anyway, Lucia was our coordinator for the intake ranger program in DC.

Bruce McKeeman: The first assignment that I had, and four or five of the others, we were all assigned to go through the US Park Police Academy. So, this was before FLETC [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center] and before Consolidated. After the riots in Yosemite in 1971, then the Park Service realized that they needed to do something as far as training park rangers in how to do law enforcement and be law enforcement officers. And so, they had set up an agreement where park rangers were intermingled with US Park Police cadets. So, there were a number of us who went through, at that time it was just the park police. Each of the different agencies had their own little law enforcement academy. It was strictly park police and the park rangers and run and managed by the park police. It was their academy. And that was, see, that went three months, basically. March through June.

Brenna Lissoway: And again, you were assigned to this.

Bruce McKeeman: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: This was not anything that you had requested.

Bruce McKeeman: No.

Brenna Lissoway: How did you feel about that?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, part of that is probably, well, part of it certainly is my personal philosophy and background. Part of it was that in the late '60s, when I was in college, we had the Vietnam War and draft and that business. Going into a fully militaristic law enforcement group was challenging. It wasn't that we were actively opposing the training or being in the park police. However, when you have a group of rangers, there was a reluctance to go through the full military compliance. When we started, they said, anytime you enter a room and one of the instructors is there, you had to salute. If you wanted to go into their office, you had to knock on the door and wait to be announced and salute. At the beginning of each day, we would assemble down at Ohio Drive at the National Capital Headquarters and do close-order drill marching around the parking lot.

Bruce McKeeman: Part of this is, that's the structure of a law enforcement agency. You are a private and you report to a sergeant who reports to a lieutenant who reports to a captain who reports to a major or reports to the chief, etcetera. And so, close-order drills for riot control. Knowing that when you're given an order you will obey the order without question. Because that's what the leader has decided is in the best interest and safety of the troop. And so, going through what is, in essence, basic training, which is what the park police recruits go through. If we were going to be trained in law enforcement, this was something we needed to accept as well. We drew the line at standing up and saluting and bowing in awe of our leaders. It doesn't mean we didn't respect them. Doesn't mean we wouldn't obey them. But our feeling was, you know, we're not military people. We're

park rangers. You know, and we had a little lighter philosophy than hardcore law enforcement.

Bruce McKeeman: And I know, we'll probably get to this later on, there has been a continuum of discussion of is it better to recruit resource type folks and train them in law enforcement as one of their many tools or is it better to hire a law enforcement-background trained employee and try to sensitize them to being a resource person. My philosophy is the first is better. That, and I have worked in some very heavy law enforcement areas, and I have done law enforcement for much of my career. Having that toolkit and having that ability and knowledge and background is important for the safety of both the public and the employees and the resources. But it's not necessarily a primary job. It may be a primary duty. We may be doing that.

Bruce McKeeman: For example, in Yosemite, we talked a lot about we'd spend 95 percent of our time with 5 percent of the visitors, because those are the ones who are creating trouble. Sometimes that gives you a relatively jaded view of what a park visitor is. So, we would often try to rotate into and work with resource management or do something other than just straight law enforcement. Fortunately, in Yosemite we did wildland fire, we did structural fire. We were the EMS crews. We were the search and rescue crews. You know if it needed to be done, as Horace Albright once said, send a ranger. And in Yosemite, with the exclusive jurisdiction, it was ours to do. Our responsibility and our willingness to do that.

Bruce McKeeman: But going back to the Park Police Academy, this was, I think, a little bit of an issue between the park police and the Park Service. Because the park police are saying, this is our academy. This is what we expect of our recruits, and we really don't want or don't need a small cabal of non-park police people setting a poor example or encouraging the cadets while if I have to do this, why don't they? You know, it's kind of, we're all in this boat together. Let's all pull on the oars and let's not have these little side groups that are disrupting the mental aspect and focus of what the training was supposed to be.

Bruce McKeeman: But we came to agree that no, we didn't have to stand up and salute. They were willing to let that slide. But my park police academy was the last pure park police academy.

Brenna Lissoway: What do you mean?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, the next academy class was a consolidated class. In order to save some money, what they started doing was combining all these small little law enforcement academies. So, the GSA, the Capital Police, etcetera, within DC. They all had their own little thing.

Brenna Lissoway: So, it was a multi-agency consolidation.

Bruce McKeeman: Right. So, they consolidated basic police training into one academy. So, all the other agencies, with the exception of the FBI, who still had

Quantico, were required to send their law enforcement people to the consolidated law enforcement school, or academy. And that was held at 1310 L Street in Washington, DC. And it was there for a number of years until they created FLETC in Georgia. But my class was the last one that was just Park Service and park police.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Okay. Any particular skills or classes or instructors or anything like that that stick out about your time at the park police academy?

Bruce McKeeman: I mean they obviously brought in subject matter experts. I mean, we talked about fingerprint analysis, we talked about typewriter analysis. We had ATF [Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms] come in and talk about bombs. You can stick this, and you can stick this and seal up an envelope and throw it in a mailbox. And after a few minutes you'll have a chemical reaction and a firebomb. You know, so it was all that basic stuff of patrol. We would go outside of DC and do high-speed pursuit driver training and car stops. We'd go to the pistol range and learn how to shoot pistols and shotguns. So, there was the technical stuff as well as the classroom stuff. We had to write papers. We had to select topics and do like a final paper for the class kind of business. They were all graded. We had university professors come in and teach some of the classes. So, it was an extremely well-done academy. I mean, I take my hats off to them. So, you know, you have to, these are skill sets that will potentially save your life in an emergency situation.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the instructors was a guy by the name of Bob Langston. He had been a motor man and had come into the training department. And Bob ultimately went on to become chief of the park police. He was out of Maryland. We went through first aid training and we went through CPR and all that business. Later on, in my career I was reassigned to George Washington Memorial Parkway. So, I had an opportunity then to reconnect with Bob. Great guy.

Brenna Lissoway: So, then you graduated from the academy.

Bruce McKeeman: Mm hmm.

Brenna Lissoway: And what was your next assignment? Or how did you get to your next position?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I was still in Washington. And the next thing that I ended up doing was working out of the urban intake ranger office on Ohio Drive. And I ended up being assigned to a couple of schools in northeast Washington doing a summer environmental education program. So, I was an interpreter, basically. And you know, some camp called and said gee, we need a ranger to come out and do a program on X. And they said, "Bruce, on Tuesday you need to be over here at this summer camp, and you've got an hour and a half to work with campers on X." I also ended up going out to Wolf Trap Farm Park and giving interpretive tours at Wolf Trap during the summer.

Bruce McKeeman: So basically, it was, they had this cadre of urban-trained rangers to do different various things. And we weren't assigned, I mean I wasn't, anyway, assigned to the monuments and memorials in the National Mall. And we weren't sitting out there in uniform at the Lincoln Memorial or any of that business. But as this also was a time where they had Summer in the Parks, which was an urban program for schoolkids and children to interface with parks and park resources. So even though they had a set group of folks hired to work for Summer in the Parks, we would fill in or assist. There was one time that they were taking a group of inner-city kids from Washington, DC up to Fort McHenry in Baltimore, and they needed a couple of extra folks to chaperone and help herd the kids around. So, I said yeah, fine, I can go do that. So, it was being put into various interpretive experiences as they were needed in the greater Washington, DC area.

Brenna Lissoway: That's interesting that they put all of that training and emphasis on the law enforcement for you all, only to put you into these interpretive situations.

Bruce McKeeman: Right. Well, I think part of it, though, it's kind of like going through Introduction to Park Operations and the Park Police were responsible for all the law enforcement in the DC area, so we were not going to be utilized in that manner.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: Here is an exposure to a skill set or something which may ultimately become your career.

Brenna Lissoway: So, this was still really training.

Bruce McKeeman: This is really training. Correct. I think part of it was an evaluation of how did we respond? Were we good interpreters? Were we good with the public and the kids? How would we do in law enforcement school? That kind of business. You know, so it's that evaluation that's ongoing. And we got the new recruits. You know, we're going to put them in various situations and see how they respond and react. And what is their skill set as these new college kids coming into the workforce?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. To me, having a variety of options to be able to go and look at and experience and train yourself on, also is valuable. I have long believed in the aspect of the general ranger. You know, doesn't necessarily mean that you're excellent at everything. But being able to perform and do a wide variety of tasks is important. Even though I spent a large percentage of my time in visitor protection and law enforcement, only doing law enforcement, in my view, is too narrowly defined and focused. That goes back to the earlier comment about do we hire resource people and train them in law enforcement? Or do we hire cops and hope that they can be sensitive to the resource. And that's nothing against policemen. It's just, there's a different mindset and different focus. And you know, we've had criminal investigators in the park. We've gone through the 1811, we went

through Professional Issues Park Ranger program, and I was involved in all that stuff. And I still fervently believe that a multitasked ranger provides more and varied abilities to deal with the resources in public than it is to say well I only do law enforcement. It doesn't mean that there may not be certain places where that strict focus is beneficial. But in general, in the service with the broad range of areas that we have, and responsibilities and duties that we have, a multitasked focused ranger gives us a broader opportunity to do what we need to do when we need to do it.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. That's interesting. Yeah. So, at the end of this summer that you had in DC, what happened next in your career?

Bruce McKeeman: The next is I received a notice that I had been assigned to Tonto National Monument in Arizona.

Brenna Lissoway: Again, no request, just—

Bruce McKeeman: No. No. And this is, this is another aspect of the way the Park Service was at the time. We had what they called the BEE, which was the Bureau of Employee Evaluations. This was, and what happened was, if a job was open, the park would send in a request to fill the position. And they would say, here's the skill set, using modern terminology. But here are the KSAs, if you will. The knowledge, skills, and abilities of what I need for this position. It's this grade. It's an 025 park ranger GS5, you know, at Park X.

Bruce McKeeman: In the Bureau of Employee Evaluations, they had file cabinets. Long, big, huge file cabinets. And each employee would fill out a form saying okay, here's my current grade and position. Here's my current location. Here are my attributes, and here's what I want to do for my next career move. I'm a GS5, I want to be a GS7. In interpretation, I want to stay in interpretation. I'm a general ranger, I want to be a district ranger.

Brenna Lissoway: And this was for all Park Service employees?

Bruce McKeeman: Yes. Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Not just for the new people.

Bruce McKeeman: No. No. This was, every employee filled out this form, and would send it into Washington. That form had areas on the outside where you could take a hole punch and you could punch a hole. And that hole would correspond to grade level, classification, promotion, interest, etcetera. And they would be in these large file cabinets. When the request came in, they would literally take a long rod and run it through those holes and pick up. If your card was punched with the attribute that they were looking for, it would come up out of the file cabinet. Then they would get set in another file cabinet and they would go to the next attribute. And this was the way they sorted all of our interest cards.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. How often would you fill out an interest card?

Bruce McKeeman: Once a year. Like during our evaluation period. And ultimately then the magic of a hidden door in Washington, they would come up with a list.

The register. That register would go to the hiring employee. Unbeknownst to anyone. You never knew when you would get a call with a job offer. So, I mean, literally out of the blue. And so, that's the way you were offered a job, was you would get a phone call. One of my superintendents said, "Oh, by the way, in a couple of hours, you're probably going to get a phone call."

Brenna Lissoway: Because someone had called—

Bruce McKeeman: Because someone had called the superintendent to say, "I'm going to offer Bruce a position at this park." But he didn't tell me the park. He didn't tell me the job. He just said, "You're going to get a phone call." And so, the phone would ring. "It's for you."

Bruce McKeeman: Well, "This is so and so and I'm in such and such a park and I have such and such a position. And I want to know if you're willing to take it." In those days, you could turn down one, maybe two, before somehow that long rod just missed your form. These were, I mean, our perceptions. I'm sure that the folks at BEE would say, oh, no, no, no, everyone had a fair shake every time. And that's fine. But from the field level, it's if you turn down one or two, there were a number of people who said, "You know, I haven't gotten a call in two years. I wonder what happened."

Brenna Lissoway: So that was the only way to be promoted.

Bruce McKeeman: That was the only way to change jobs.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. When did that change?

Bruce McKeeman: Let's see. That would have changed probably in the '80s (mid 70's actually), I would think.

Brenna Lissoway: That late.

Bruce McKeeman: Yes. And let's see, get my years straight here. Late '70s. Late '70s. Because when I was still in Yosemite, I got a phone call offering me a job as a Tamiami district ranger in Everglades. Which for various reasons I turned down. But yeah. So that was, I was in the valley. So, '75, '76, '77. Somewhere in—

Brenna Lissoway: And that was the last out of the blue call that you got?

Bruce McKeeman: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Because then it became incumbent on the individual then to apply for jobs.

Bruce McKeeman: Then, yes. Because then we started getting the weekly list posting openings.

Brenna Lissoway: I see.

Bruce McKeeman: And you could then choose to apply for that opening. If you felt one, it was where you wanted to go, two, it was something you were qualified for. And that's where we started getting into the 171 and the KSAs and

this is all still pre-computer. So, it's lots of typing and correction tape and all that business. But yeah, so in there, they changed from BEE and went to the weekly posting of vacancies.

Brenna Lissoway: How did that change how you thought about your career?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I felt that it gave me a little more control. It didn't make it any less competitive. But at least I'm not worried about having a six month-old baby and being asked to move to Alligator Alley to live in a 16-foot trailer with a fence around it to keep the alligators out. Which is what the Tamiami ranger job was.

Brenna Lissoway: That's why you turned it down?

Bruce McKeeman: That's why I turned it down. I had just had our first child. Living in Yosemite. I mean, housing is, you want to talk about housing, we'll talk about housing. But anyway, we had decent housing in Yosemite. Don't get me wrong. But to go from Yosemite Valley to the Northern Everglades with a young child. And to live in 18, 20-foot house trailer in the middle of an alligator area wasn't something that I was interested in doing. Partly because of my family, and partly because it just wasn't – I mean, yeah, I wanted to be a district ranger or an area ranger. But it just wasn't something that I felt met with where I was headed and wanted to do. But it was primarily a family call on that one.

Brenna Lissoway: I see. Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: So, with the new listings, you now have the option of saying well, that's a park I like, that's a position I like, it's an area of the country I like. So, you then have—

Brenna Lissoway: Working with people that you like, perhaps?

Bruce McKeeman: Potentially. I know this guy here; I know that guy there. I mean, that's another whole aspect. If we want to get into it, we can, as far as when you apply for a job you put down your three references. At least, that's the way it was for the 171. But the Park Service is a uniquely connected and small agency. And there were many times where people would call. Oh, well this guy worked in that park. Well I know, a buddy of mine works in that park. I'm going to call my buddy. "Well, what do you know about him? What can you tell me about Bruce? Is he a good guy?" Because typically, you're not going to put someone on your reference that's going to give you a bad reference.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: I mean, the three references should be, if you've done this correctly, people who support you and support your abilities and are willing to give you a good talk. So, what do we do in the Park Service? Okay. Those are references. I'll call the references because I have to. And, but I also know these other five people who have either been in that park during that time or are in this park at this time. And I'm going to talk to them because

they're either my mentors or in my social group or folks that I respect and trust to know they're going to give me the correct information on the abilities of the applicant. I mean, that's just the way life is in the Park Service. So that was the transition between BEE and the weekly posting. And fortunately, I didn't have to deal with USA Jobs. So.

Brenna Lissoway: (laughs) Okay. So, you were sent to Tonto.

Bruce McKeeman: I was sent to Tonto. Basically, what happened is the superintendent had sent in the request to fill a position. Because Washington DC had this group of intake rangers that they needed to put in place, some of these parks, instead of getting the register got a one name cert, you know, and I'm sure that a number of those superintendents would have called the region, said, "What is this?" You know, congratulations. Here's your employee.

Brenna Lissoway: So, it worked both ways, really.

Bruce McKeeman: Well, it worked, you know, they had a commitment to us as trainees at the end of our training period. And complying with, feeling that we've complied with the urban intake ranger requirements to assign us to a park. It's always interesting when you look back. There was a lady that had been in the previous intake class from mine. And her interest, she wanted to be an interpreter in the Southwest. And I, of course, had gone through the law enforcement academy, was a little more interested in getting into Ranger Activities and law enforcement, search and rescue, etc. And so, I got sent to Tonto as the first non-archeologist at a Southwest archeological site, as a general ranger. She was sent to Hawaii Volcanoes as a road patrol person. I mean, sometimes they do things just to see, their feeling was, these were what you needed for the next step in your career. I have no insight as to who or why or how the selections were made. So, I'm speaking out of school to make any aspersions that there was any diabolical part of this.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: But again, this is potentially another aspect. If she had had a good background and experience and ability in interpretation, okay, let's stretch her experience and put her into a road patrol ranger situation. And let's take Bruce who has these other abilities and has some interpretive experience and exposure, but maybe not a lot. And we'll make him a resource ranger at a small archeological site.

Brenna Lissoway: So really it sounds like the goal of park management at that point was really to continue to develop generalists.

Bruce McKeeman: I would say that's an appropriate comment.

Brenna Lissoway: Huh. That's interesting.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: So how was Tonto for you? What did you do? And what was it sort of daily activities for you?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, let me catch up on one little back thing.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Bruce McKeeman: Because at Albright I had met this woman. She was the interpretive historian ranger of Hopewell Furnace, and I was in DC. One of the other intake rangers lived very near to Hopewell Furnace, and he was going home every weekend. So, I caught a ride and continued to see the lady I had met at Albright, and ultimately, we got engaged. When I was assigned to Tonto, then we set our marriage date. So when I reported to Tonto, one of the things I had to deal with the superintendent was, oh, by the way, I need annual leave over this date because I have to fly back to Pennsylvania to get married. So that was another aspect of it. So, I went to Tonto as a single individual.

Bruce McKeeman: And it really is a marvelous site. Two very well-preserved cliff dwellings. The challenge for me is that all of the previous rangers had been trained archeologists. So, I was the first generalist to go to Tonto. Which, whether or not that was an issue with the superintendent, I don't know. But it was a great opportunity for me as a first permanent field site job to get into what does it mean to be a ranger. I was responsible for the visitor center. I supervised the seasonal interpreters. Set the tour schedules, did all that stuff. Wrote the safety plan. They had had a fire at the monument, probably 10 years earlier. And they had set out photo spots to document the re-vegetation of areas that had been in the fire. So, one of the resource duties was to take this large four by four camera, set it up over the marked spot, and take photographs of the revegetation. And do that. We did that every quarter. So, every three months we got to go over different parts of the monument. Tonto's a relatively small park, 640 acres, thirty miles outside of Globe, Arizona.

Brenna Lissoway: Did you live in the park?

Bruce McKeeman: Lived in the park.

Brenna Lissoway: That was your first experience living in a park, right?

Bruce McKeeman: Correct. Well, other than three summers in Yellowstone.

Brenna Lissoway: Right. But I mean, this was as a permanent ranger.

Bruce McKeeman: This is my permanent, right. They had, we had four Mission 66 houses in the park. The visitors center was a Mission 66 visitor center. The superintendent had one house. I had one house. The maintenance man and the admin clerk were married, so they had a house. And then there was another house available for seasonals. We eventually ended up getting another fulltime position. Which actually it was an interesting hybrid position. It was two days interp working for me and three days maintenance. But when you have a small park, when you have an FTE

staff of four, you have to make do with what you have. So, we had gotten permission to have a hybrid position shared between maintenance and interp. So that worked out well. The weekends were the busy times for interpretation. So then that gave the maintenance guy who was off on the weekends, it gave him a worker to work with him during the week. So, anyways.

Brenna Lissoway: So, did your wife come to join you, then, while you were still at Tonto?

Bruce McKeeman: Right. I got there in November. Went back to Pennsylvania. Got married. And our honeymoon, basically, was driving from Pennsylvania back to Arizona so I could go back to work.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: You have limited annual leave amounts at that point in your career. So, I had just enough time to get married and drive back to Arizona. So, then she joined me at that point. She resigned from Hopewell. If we had had maybe a little better knowledge and feeling of what it, since she was a permanent and having reinstatement rights, maybe we would not have done it for her to quit, resign. Maybe there was some other option. With Tonto, and because of nepotism and because of limited staff positions, there was not a position for her to work.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: And we didn't even, didn't even explore the idea that maybe the Forest Service that had offices nearby would have had something. I mean, that dual career thing wasn't even a concept that came into play. And so, she ended up getting a job in a camera store in town. That's where she went to work.

Bruce McKeeman: But for two newlyweds to be out in the desert in Arizona, it was wonderful. You know, open the windows at night and the cool desert air coming in, listening to coyotes howl down in the wash. It's a great site. And that job at Tonto is what ultimately led us to decide that when we would retire, that we would go to the Southwest to retire.

Brenna Lissoway: And that's where you are now?

Bruce McKeeman: That's where we are now.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. Interesting.

Bruce McKeeman: Prescott, Arizona.

Brenna Lissoway: (laughs) Okay. So, talk to me a little bit about your next move. Unless there's something else you want to talk about, being at Tonto.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. One of the things that I did, since I wasn't an archeologist, I was able to meet with my predecessor. She said well here's some textbooks. Here's some technical journals. Here's what we've done from an archeological standpoint in the park, to help bring you up to speed on your archeology.

Bruce McKeeman: Also, in Globe, there was a community college. So, I went into the community college and took Southwest anthropology classes and intro to archeology classes on my own in order to improve my background and my knowledge of the cultural focus that we have. So instead of just depending on, okay, here's our interpretive story and here's what we say and here's how we do it, I also took the opportunity of community college to take basic college background classes on the culture of the Southwest. Southwest archeology. Which to this day I have a great interest in Southwest archeology and visiting archeological sites and comparing the cultures and all that aspect of it. So, it was a great opportunity. I mean our law enforcement profile at Tonto was pretty low. I think we had 10 citations in the file cabinet somewhere.

Bruce McKeeman: But I also was responsible for a hunting patrol. Because we were surrounded by Tonto National Forest, where they allowed hunting. So, during hunting season, I would go on boundary patrol. No radio. No gun. No backup. No ballistic vest. And if I encountered somebody, what I was supposed to do was contact the county sheriff to come deal with the law enforcement situation, because Tonto had proprietary jurisdiction, as did the Tonto National Forest.

Bruce McKeeman: But what we were really looking at was if any hunters were getting close to the boundary, saying, "This is a national monument. You're outside the national forest. You're not allowed to hunt in here. You have to go someplace else."

Brenna Lissoway: What about archeological site protection?

Bruce McKeeman: The park had been surveyed, and the primary site were the two cliff dwellings. The trail up to the lower dwelling as closed when the visitors center was closed. And the upper ruin was back behind a ridge, so you really couldn't see it from the parking lot. So that was basic protection. But the only way to go to the upper ruin while I was there was on a guided tour. You had to be with a ranger to go to the upper ruin. Lower ruin was self-guided. We would patrol it. I mean, we would go up, have a ranger station at the ruin when we had staff to do so. Otherwise, you could see the ruin from the visitors center so you could kind of keep an eye on the visitors as they went up the trail.

Brenna Lissoway: Did you have any contact with any of the local Native American groups? Tribes?

Bruce McKeeman: No, did not. At that time, and looking at that Southwest archeology, these were the Salado Indians that came here about 900 and left here around 1300. That was the endemic story. But there wasn't any over outreach to the other pueblo tribes in the area. Now, superintendent may have done that. But as a field ranger, no.

Brenna Lissoway: Anything else that you want to talk about in terms of Tonto?

Bruce McKeeman: No. I think that's fine.

Brenna Lissoway: So then walk me through your next move.

Bruce McKeeman: Okay. Next move is the phone call. And it happened to be from Yosemite National Park. For the Crane Flat area ranger in the North District, Mather District, of Yosemite. This was in the fall. I'd have to look at my papers. I want to say it was September. So, I'm going to go from the Southwest to the Sierra Mountains. Which was exciting.

Brenna Lissoway: This was a welcome call for you?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. I had been there two years. I had, well, for a year and a half there was one superintendent, Zeb McKinney. Then he left and Glen Henderson came in as a superintendent. I think Zeb expected more of me as a ranger than I had the experience and knowledge to give. "Listen, I want you to do this report." I'd never done that report before. So, there wasn't a lot of guidance. "Go do this." "Okay." So, I went and did what I could. Turned it in. "Oh, this isn't good enough. Not what I wanted, not what I expected. Go redo it."

Bruce McKeeman: I think this to a certain extent is part of the drawback of a one-name register. Congratulations, this is who you're getting, whether you like them or not. So, there may have been – I don't know for sure, I mean, Zeb is a very nice guy – but I think there was a higher level expectation on his part of what my knowledge and training and background had been than what I was at, the level I was actually at.

Bruce McKeeman: For the first park assignment, usually it's more of a training assignment. And you're looking for that guidance and support. You know, take a crack at this and then come in and we'll talk about it and I'll give you some guidance. Or try this, do this, you need to modify this a little more because, and have that partnership of mentoring. That wasn't there. So, I did what I felt was the right thing to do and the right way to do it. Later on, I had other supervisors that were much more of a mentor and supporter than in this particular situation.

Brenna Lissoway: Could you talk about some of those people or some of those circumstances? Who the good mentors in your career were?

Bruce McKeeman: Sure. Certainly, the time I spent in Yosemite Valley. Between Jim Brady and Dick Martin, Tom Griffiths, Jimmy Martin. Then you have, I'm not sure I need to bring this up, but eventually it will come out somewhere, the whole aspect of the Yosemite Mafia. You know that whole element. I was there during that time. Wasn't necessarily considered one of that group. But when you look at the Jim Brady's and the Dan Shelly's and the Walt Dabney's and the Roger Rudolf's and the Mark Forbes, and it goes on and on and on and on. I don't mean to leave any of you guys out that I didn't mention. But this is what made the time in Yosemite special. We had a good group of folks that were there for you, and you knew that they had your back. Didn't matter time of day (getting emotional) or place or circumstances. So, it was a good group. We managed and created some

good friendships. We had a good professional situation. And it was just a unique time and place and group of people that just made it work.

Brenna Lissoway: What was it about the context that you were in, do you think?

Bruce McKeeman: I think the context was there wasn't anybody else going to be there. If we didn't do it for each other, there wasn't anybody. You know, like I said earlier, we were the fire department. Both wildland and structural. We had our own jail. So, we were the law enforcement people, exclusive federal jurisdiction. We had our own magistrate, our own jail. We had our own ambulance. We had our own medical clinic. We had to deal with all the technical search and rescue. We had a good group of technical climbers down at the climbing camp. That if we have someone stuck on the face of El Cap (El Capitan), we have a number of rangers that are highly qualified technical climbers. I am not one. But we also had the climbing camp that this was their life. So, if we had a really dicey technical rescue, we could bring those folks on as emergency hires to go do the technical part while we managed the rest of the rescue.

Bruce McKeeman: Fortunately, and I think this is still generally true, we're not rescuing the highly competent technical climbers. I mean, yeah, every now and then, a rock's going to fall. They're going to take a fall. They're going to break a leg; they're going to break a shoulder. Something's going to happen that they're going to need assistance. But that's a very small percentage of the people that are out there doing technical climbing.

Bruce McKeeman: We usually got involved more with the people who saw someone climbing and said, "Heck, I can do that!" and grabbed their neoprene clothesline and think it's technical climbing equipment. Then get partway up the rocks and realize they can't go up, they can't get down, they're stuck. Those are the folks that we would end up interfacing with on a far more frequent basis than the highly skilled technical climbers that are in Yosemite.

Brenna Lissoway: Uh huh. It sounds like you all were responsible for a greatly, very complex operation.

Bruce McKeeman: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: And that's part of sort of the, what created the camaraderie?

Bruce McKeeman: I think so. I mean, we have a limited staff, and we have limited resources, and we have a great deal of responsibilities. In order to cover all the bases and make it all work to some level of competency, you need to rely on each other. And so, it just is a mutual experience that you can't say well, if you weren't there, you can't understand, because that's not totally true. But it just got to the point where it didn't matter. If you needed something, it was going to come. Whether it was two o'clock in the morning, five o'clock at night.

Bruce McKeeman: There was one day I think we had four simultaneous rescues going on, two of which included body recoveries. So, I was off that day. So, I get a

phone call from dispatch saying, "We've got another rescue and we're out of people. We need some more help." "Okay." Off we go.

Bruce McKeeman: Well, that was the first time, and probably the only time, that when I walked into the rescue cache to get some equipment, there was almost none. It was bare. Butch Farabee was up on the Cathedral Rocks with the technical rescue. We had a body recovery up Tenaya Canyon, up past Half Dome. There was a lady with a broken leg at the base of Lower Yosemite Falls. And we had a report of a guy missing and presumed had gone off a waterfall down by Foresta. So, we were in four spread-out distinct parts of the valley in Yosemite. You've got technical climbing, you've got body rescue, you've got carry out and you've got a report of a potential, another fatality. I think I found four other people that were otherwise available, so we went down and dealt with that.

Bruce McKeeman: It was just getting dark when we discovered the body. We were able to recover the remains and getting carried out just after dark.

Brenna Lissoway: Was that your first fatality?

Bruce McKeeman: No. That one wasn't. I spent a year in the North District, out at Crane Flat. And road patrol, entrance station kind of stuff. And then was reassigned to the valley after a year. Let's see, I went down to the valley, let's see, I got there September, October. So, it was September the next year. So Memorial Day weekend after that, had a report of two climbers that had fallen up behind Yosemite Lodge. I go check it out. They had been doing some basic climbing. Probably five, six, maybe five, seven rating. Technical, but not highly technical, when you consider Yosemite. And they had climbed up to this little ledge and there was a tree limb growing out of a crack at the top of the ledge. They had roped off on that and were rappelling off of the tree limb, and it pull out of the rock. And so, two guys, the tree limb and all the ropes ended up in a heap at the bottom of the ledge. That was the first one.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. How do you deal with something like that? [pause] Okay. We're continuing.

Bruce McKeeman: Well, Yosemite averaged probably 30 fatalities a year. From all sources. Heart attacks, car accidents, climbing falls, etcetera. Back in those days, in the early '70s, we didn't talk about PTSD. We didn't have trauma intervention. Most of our dealing with those kinds of things were dealing with each other and probably a significant amount of Jack Daniels. Why more of us aren't alcoholics, I don't know. Some of us manage better than others. But there was a significant level of activities. Whether it was arrests or, we dealt with some pretty gruesome stuff. Many of us at that time became deputy sheriffs with Mariposa County, strictly for the coroner duties that it gave us. So that we could, on a fatality, for example, with those two gentlemen, you know, we could recover the bodies, do the investigation, take them to the temporary morgue that we had. Notify the funeral home. And they would come up and retrieve the individuals. In the

meantime, we're trying to identify them. We're dealing with families. Doing the reports, doing the investigation, doing all of the stuff that goes with that.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: But you know, it was, again, it's just. It's our responsibility and our duty. Some weren't nearly as bad as others. But you know, it's a cumulative effect.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Yeah. I'm sure that also brought you all together. Having to deal with all of that.

Bruce McKeeman: Right.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about what the environment was like? Because you were working in Yosemite, it was several years post-Yosemite riot.

Bruce McKeeman: Right. I got to the North District in the fall of '73.

Brenna Lissoway: '73. So, it had been about three years.

Bruce McKeeman: Two, yeah, '71.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. And what was the feeling at that point?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I think part of it was that we had a large group of folks who had just been trained in law enforcement. So, we supposedly at least had the background, initial skill set and ability to work with law enforcement. Simultaneous to that, Yosemite had tried to set up a number of interpretive programs to directly focus on youth. Part of the issue with the riot was we had all the young folks coming and not wanting to follow authority. And free use and will. Access to the parks. You know, many coming up out of San Francisco. Not to say they were, blame San Francisco at all.

Bruce McKeeman: But the park felt that, well, how can we reach this group? This isn't the traditional Mom and Pop and two kids in a station wagon, camping in a campground. And there was, at that time, the beginning or at least the well-started issues of drugs. And the whole drug culture of the '70s. So I think there was an effort to say, okay, well, gee, maybe if we have a program up here by Mirror Lake, a nighttime sky watch kind of a thing, that we can engage a different cultural group in appreciating and understanding and using the park. And not having them congregate over in the meadow.

Bruce McKeeman: And I wasn't there for the riot. I've seen lots of stories, talked to lots of people that were involved. We were ill prepared to do what we tried to do. So, part of that lesson was, let's get some training. Let's focus on working with and dealing with. We set up a couple of what they called alternative campgrounds. So that there would be a place for the backpackers to go stay. They didn't come in in a car in a family group. Let's provide them a place where a backpack, low-fee area. Come in on the bus, you've got

your backpack. Maybe you're doing a back country hike the next day. Your permit doesn't start. You need a place to stay. Well, in Yosemite, in the summertime, all of the auto campgrounds are full. So, there was no place for hikers and backpackers, bicyclists and stuff to really camp.

Bruce McKeeman: So, they created Yellow Pines, what it was called at that time. Then it became Muir Tree. And then I think now it doesn't even exist any longer. But Yellow Pine campground, about a half mile, three-quarters of a mile down-valley from Yosemite Lodge. There was a trail put in so they could hike down there. It was a walk-in campground. And then at some point it became a drive-in campground, which led to other law enforcement issues. We had drug deals going on down there and a lot of bad activities that we had to go in and deal with.

Bruce McKeeman: At one point, you didn't go in there alone.

Brenna Lissoway: As a ranger?

Bruce McKeeman: As a ranger. You went in there with at least one other person to watch your back. If not two. Because the amount of drugs that was going on down there and potential assaults and weapons and a number of other things. That's when Yellow Pine was a drive-in campground. And then all of this drug stuff was going on and illegal activity. So, you eliminated the parking lot and made it a walk-in campground. So, you had to park up by Yosemite Lodge and walk down across the meadows to get to what was then called Muir Tree. We were hoping maybe a different focus, a different name, would remove that, "Oh, yeah, man, go up to Yosemite and go to Yellow Pine, because that's where you can really get some good stuff." Whether it was marijuana or acid or whatever it was that was going on.

Brenna Lissoway: Did that have any effect?

Bruce McKeeman: It did. It had some. Then we also took three rangers, yeah, three rangers on night shift. They were both fee collectors as well as law enforcement rangers. So, their patrol was between Camp Four, which was a climbing camp right next to the gas station at the lodge, and Muir Tree, a walk-in campground. So basically, they were collecting fees for campers, and they were doing a much more high-profile patrol.

Bruce McKeeman: When access to vehicles containing large amounts of drugs was less available, then those activities and groups moved elsewhere.

Brenna Lissoway: Elsewhere in the park?

Bruce McKeeman: Elsewhere in the park. And we eventually got the upper hand. You don't ever totally eliminate some of that stuff. I mean, people bring drugs in with them. But dealing with dealers and people just living in their cars in the parking lot at the campground and selling stuff out of the back of the car, that we could control, and that we got rid of.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. What were some of the other big issues you were dealing with at Yosemite?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, we had a number of bear issues. I mean, resource management dealt with the bears. But the campground rangers and patrol rangers did a lot to help them. We had large culvert traps. So, if we had a bear in the campground that was ripping into coolers and tearing into tents, we would put a culvert trap in there and working in cooperation with the resource management staff.

Bruce McKeeman: And then since usually you don't set those until after dark and trying to keep people away so kids won't get into them and have that stuff, the ranger will go around and set the trap. And then we would check on it during our patrols, during the night. Then if we actually captured a bear, then we'd get the pickup truck and haul it out of the campground and take it up to the maintenance area and get resource management to – and we would work with them as far as working up, if we had time. And it wasn't something else going on, then we were approved, if you will, or allowed to stay and assist resource management folks with working up the bear. We'd dart it with tranquilizer drug and put it to sleep. And open the trap, and pull it out of the trap, and weigh it and measure it and tag it, and do whatever the resource people wanted done in order to identify that bear and its health condition and all of that. Sometimes we would be the ones that would drive the trap someplace else to release the bear.

Brenna Lissoway: Someplace else in the park?

Bruce McKeeman: Usually somewhere else in the park. I mean I had, when I was in the Northern District, we had a bear at Crane Flat campground captured and we worked it up. They wanted me to haul it down to Hetch Hetchy, which was probably 40 road miles or so, and a ways away. And so, I hauled it down there and let it out. I always say it beat me back to the campground. It wasn't quite that quick, but within a day or two, it was back at the campground. They have an acute sense of direction, an acute sense of smell. They know where the easy pickings are. We had a bear up at Crane Flat one time that your standard Coleman ice chest with a little flip lock, he knew how to work the flip lock. So, he would paw at it and open the cooler. And high-grade whatever was inside. If there was steak and hot dogs, he'd take the steak. If there was diet soda and sugared soda, he'd take the, he'd bite into each can until he found the sugared stuff. So, they're extremely intelligent animals. Marvelous animals.

Bruce McKeeman: So that was, that kind of stuff. Or if the bear wouldn't go in the trap, we were all trained in using the tranquilizer dart, and putting the drugs in and loading the dart and shooting the bear. So that was, again, one of those broad skills where we're not just doing campground patrol. We're not just doing road patrol. Those kinds of activities, law enforcement and patrol stuff occupied a significant portion of our time. But also, being allowed and able to work on resource issues. Really, number one, it gave you a

different focus. Kind of took you out of the pressure grinder of being in the middle of negative law enforcement activity – and doing something that was a resource-focused issue that was beneficial to the resources of the park and helped for the safety of visitors.

Bruce McKeeman: I always talked to my rangers about interpretive law enforcement. There are many people who don't like that term. But I always felt that our duty and responsibility, on any contact, was one to provide the visitor with an opportunity to enjoy the park and understand its resources in a legal, non-impacting way. Sometimes they were willing to follow the program, and there were other times where they, by their actions and attitude, required us to go in a different direction. But, you know, when you stopped somebody because they were doing something wrong, you're basically giving them an opportunity. Here's what you did wrong. Here's why it's wrong, in our view. Here's what you can do to not do it wrong. Here's why we feel this is the appropriate way for your activity in the park. For your safety, our safety, protection of the resource, whatever that might be. To me, that's an interpretive effort to inform the visitor of how to have a safe experience within the park. There are some people who don't like that interpretation or that aspect of defining it that way. But I always felt that encouraging law enforcement rangers to look at it that way would help give them a positive interaction in sometimes a very negative situation.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you felt that there was some resistance to that attitude?

Bruce McKeeman: No. I think there were some folks who didn't like having the word "interpretation" attached to an interpretive law enforcement contact.

Brenna Lissoway: I think, okay, I see what you're saying.

Bruce McKeeman: I mean, each division and aspect has responsibilities and focuses. When I was district ranger at Hawaii Volcanoes, we were doing log sheets for patrol rangers. I was requiring them to be at the various overlooks between 10 and 2 when most of the tour buses came through the park. I said, I want you out of your cars, at the overlooks, talking to the visitors, unless you get a radio call to go to a scene for an incident. I want you to log in roughly how many people you contacted during that time, and then I will report those as interpretive contacts.

Bruce McKeeman: Chief of interpretation took great issue with that because that wasn't interpretation. That was a visitor contact, but it wasn't interpretation. Okay. Fine. I mean, we can parse words any different way you want. It was an effort in the park of number one, not having my rangers in a green congregation at the dining hall at Kilauea military camp. Having them out in the field, on patrol, doing what they're supposed to be doing. And doing the other thing they're supposed to be doing, which is interacting with the visitor and providing them a positive experience of what they were seeing and what was going on in an extremely active geological zone.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. Right. Did you, while you were at Yosemite, or any other park after Tonto, participate in any formal interpretive activities? Did you have that opportunity?

Bruce McKeeman: I did. Well, each park I went to, I tried to know the story, and be able to provide at least the basic information. I always felt strongly about wearing the uniform. When I was superintendent at Herbert Hoover, at the end of my career, I was always in uniform unless I was going to some meeting where it wasn't appropriate. But I walked to work through the community. My office was in one of the historic houses. So, to go to another office or go over to headquarters or the visitors center, I was out in the park, in uniform. To me, it was important to be able to explain what Herbert Hoover was about, what the park was about, what they were seeing and being involved in. We had limited staff, so everyone in my view should be able to provide at least the basics of why that park's there and what the people can do to have a better experience while they're at the park. It didn't matter whether me as a superintendent or an interpreter or law enforcement ranger or maintenance person. If we were in uniform, the public expects us to be able to answer the basic questions, and we should be able to answer the basic questions. Doesn't mean to say that the maintenance man's going to know every single tree and flower that may exist. But they should know enough to say why that park's there, what the resources are that they're working in, and when the visitor has a basic question be able to answer it. Or, if they can't answer it, say, "If you go here, you can get that information." This is visitor service. That's why we exist. Protect the resource. Provide the visitors information.

Brenna Lissoway: Do you think that ability's changed during your career? Has the Park Service moved away from that in some way?

Bruce McKeeman: I think to a certain extent, this is where we're getting into that philosophical situation where myself and many of the rangers in my generation, the Park Service was an avocation, not a vocation. It was a lifestyle. It was a choice, and not just a job. And I think during all spectrums of the Park Service, there will have been people to where it was simply a paycheck. It was simply a job. But I think there was a large group that came up in the '70s, during the environmental era, beginning of Earth Day in the early '70s. The whole environmental concept was a lifestyle focus. So, working for the national park system, for me, was a lifestyle and a choice that I'd wanted to do since I was 12.

Bruce McKeeman: Now my sense, and it's just my sense, is that there's more of an attitude that it's a job. I'm going to come; I'm going to do my job. whether it's eight hours a day, five days a week, whatever it might be. But when my job's done, I'm going home. Leave me alone. And that's not true of everybody. It may not even be true of a large percentage of employees. But there's just a gut feeling that it's true more of the time now than it was when I was in the system.

Brenna Lissoway: Can you put your finger at an event or a something that may have caused that change? Or even when that change really started to happen? Or is it just so gradual that it's hard to say.

Bruce McKeeman: I think part of it was as we were transitioning from generalized rangers – broad background; you know, jack of all trades, master of none – to a more compartmentalized, focused specialization. Whether it was law enforcement, whether it was interpretation, whether it was resource management, concessions, whatever it might have been. We wanted to become more professional. How do you become more professional? You become more focused. As you become more focused, there's a tendency then to have less concern about responsibilities and issues outside of your focus. It's not just the stove piping of law enforcement. I mean, that was one result of it. But it's, I can't be a master of everything, so let me be a master of this piece. And if I master this piece, then I have less concern, less ability and less knowledge of things outside that. And less potential to directly impact it.

Bruce McKeeman: So I think that has led to some of this feeling that it's not, you know, we need to be able to do a little of everything and be able to do it appropriately, but I'm just going to do this. And once I'm done doing that, then I'm not responsible for any of this other stuff.

Bruce McKeeman: Part of it, I think, well, I don't think it all goes to housing. But part of it is the encouragement of not living in the park. The pressure that we receive from Congress to eliminate in-park housing. When you move outside the park, then your social aspect is non-park focused. That's not necessarily bad; it's just different. It's like when we were in Yosemite, all the rangers living in Yosemite Valley were together almost 24/7. You develop the friendships. You develop the camaraderie, and you know that that group is going to be there no matter what. If five of them are living inside the park and ten of them are living outside the park, those five are depending on each other and hope that there's someone home when they call the other person.

Bruce McKeeman: We went through this whole thing over on-call, and whether or not we should be paid for on call. Part of this is generational. Part of this is, you know if I'm off, I'm off. And I'm not going to give you my time. If you want me to be on call, you need to pay me. And again, I think that's a different viewpoint and focus between avocation and vocation.

Bruce McKeeman: We, I, let me put it this way, I didn't feel put upon to be on-call once every couple of weeks.

Brenna Lissoway: Without being paid?

Bruce McKeeman: Without being paid. Now if I got called out, I got paid. But to have a patrol car sitting in my driveway and agreeing that I'm not going to go drink, and I'm not going to go do something, and I will either be available by phone or radio, so the dispatcher knows where to get me, I didn't see

that as an imposition on my lifestyle or anything else. It's just that, hey, if something happens and those guys need me, I'm coming.

Bruce McKeeman: And likewise, when I'm out there if I need somebody, I know they're coming.

Brenna Lissoway: Was that attitude prevalent in other places, other than Yosemite, that you experienced?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I don't know. When I was at Voyageurs, I was chief ranger at Voyageurs. We only had a very small LE [law enforcement] staff, and so somebody in each district would be available. And it was generally without compensation unless they got called out. But those guys all felt, at least they didn't express any difference to me, that this is what we need to do. There's only a small amount of us. It's a huge park, and we've got lots of stuff going on. Boats and snowmobiles. There isn't anybody else to call. I'm it. And so, if I'm at home, fine. If I'm not going to be there, I arrange for someone else to be available. It may be somebody in the other district who's going to have to drive 40 miles to get there. But at least there's an identified individual to start out on the initial incident. And then we can scramble whoever else we need to do that.

Bruce McKeeman: But when you've got a staff of that size, and we have a job to do, protect the resource, serves the public, sometimes you have to do that. And at Voyageurs, we didn't pay for standby.

Bruce McKeeman: The huge issue, I think, in Yosemite, probably same thing in Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountain, the bigger parks, you guys have enough staff. If you want me to say okay, I'm on duty but I'm not working, then there ought to be some compensation for it. Because you're imposing upon the private life of the individual after they've done their duty. It's just a different philosophy.

Bruce McKeeman: You know, were we taken advantage of? Probably. Were we willing to do it because we felt that it was the right thing to do? Yes. You have a different group with a different focus and a different attitude. And it's not saying it's wrong. It's just different.

Brenna Lissoway: What effect did Ranger Careers have; do you think? If any. On this change.

Bruce McKeeman: I don't know that it had an effect on the change. I think that it was an extremely important and valid thing to do. I was on the implementation team for Ranger Careers in the Midwest Region when I was chief ranger at Voyageurs. And you know, the Park Service historically has been known as one of the federal agencies with the lowest pay rate and grade of any federal agency in the U.S. So, to be able to appropriately identify the skills and the background and the training that we bring to the job, and receive appropriate pay for that, was exactly the right thing to do. Did it cost the Park Service a bunch of money? Absolutely. Did we get a bunch

of money from Congress to implement it? Absolutely. Did some parks not do it right? Absolutely.

Brenna Lissoway: What wasn't right about how they, what do you mean?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, within the Midwest Region, as an example, we had a number of parks where they didn't take the opportunity to project what the positions would be if they became vacant. In other words, okay, we've got a GS-7 ranger. He's going to go to a 9. Maybe you have a GS-7 district ranger who is going to go to an 11. If you don't project that out with the increase of ranger careers and, at that time, also locality pay, then when this guy moves or retires, and all of a sudden this position changes, if you didn't anticipate that change and request the funding to support that change, then all of a sudden you're behind the eight ball in your budgeting.

Bruce McKeeman: So, there were three or four parks where I called up and I said, "Wait a minute. What about this?" "Well, we don't have to worry about that. That's not going to happen."

Bruce McKeeman: I said, "It's coming. This is a reality. Those are going to be GS-9 rangers. If you have a vacant position, and even if you recruit it today as a 7, it will be a 9. Automatically. So, if you don't request a 9 salary for that position you're filling today, you are going to not have sufficient funds to support the automatic grade increases that we're all going to get. And you have a chance now to fully fund your ranger staffs, including locality pay. If you don't take advantage of the opportunity, don't come grumbling about it later. Because it's here. We're trying to help you do the right thing to project this down the road. I can't make you do it. It's your park. It's your salaries. This is your division. This is your organization chart. Whether you agree with them being GS-9s or not is immaterial. This is going to happen. I'm trying to keep you from making a dramatic error in judgment." Some said, "Oh, okay. Fine."

Bruce McKeeman: Some said, "This is what I want." Okay.

Brenna Lissoway: So how did Ranger Careers change things in the Park Service?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, it brought, I mean, obviously the increased salary was something that was beneficial for all those who were affected. We saw some promotions that had been a long time waiting to happen. The interesting thing was trying to explain and make the field staff understand that their new grade level was based on education and knowledge of the resource and your ability to interpret that information to the visitors, and not on any other technical skill set that we have in our basket. It wasn't based on law enforcement. It wasn't based on search and rescue. It wasn't based on being an EMS. It wasn't based on having a red card for fire. It wasn't based on any other technical skill that we feel are critical as rangers. OPM had told us for years, being a law enforcement ranger is a GS-7 job. OPM wasn't going to change their mind. We sat there and said well, gee, look at Border Patrol. Their base level field ranger's an 11.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow.

Bruce McKeeman: Their supervisor's a 12. Their district is a 13. We're a 7, or a 5. Supervisor might be a 7 or a 9. District ranger might be an 11. So, there's that disparity. I was never in on, how can we make a, Walt Dabney did a lot of that work. In trying to reclassify the park ranger positions to make them professional. In working with OPM, and OPM consistently said, "That law enforcement ranger job is a seven." Now, the education and interpretive component, and ability to know your resource and protect and manage your resource, that is what got the park rangers their grade increases through base ranger 9. And trying to make the field staff understand and appreciate that the educational component was what got them grade increase. Sometimes it got through and sometimes it didn't. You know? I've got, I've punched all these cards. I have all these skills. Why aren't I a higher rate? Well, because OPM looks at those individually. What does a firefighter make here? What does an EMT make here?

Bruce McKeeman: For many years, and this is always interesting when you talk with city staffs or other associations, you know, highway patrol is a highway patrolman. He's not a firefighter and an EMT and a search and rescue. He's a law enforcement officer. Fire department generally are only fire departments. Some fire departments have EMTs. EMTs generally are not the firefighters. They may roll together, may even roll in the same vehicle. But you have two people to do two jobs. What's a park ranger do? A park ranger wears five or six hats, and many of them quite well. Highly professional, experienced individuals. Highly trained. And what are they making? On an annual basis, I mean, now it's probably up in the $30,000, $40,000, $50,000 a year. Each of those people, each of those job skills out in the city make that same amount. So, you're getting $150,000 employee or more for one person for 35 or 40 thousand. So, we're very professional, we're highly skilled. We understand that among ourselves. It's frustrating sometimes when you say well gee, if I was working here, I could make twice as much and do half as much work. And then when, of course, you say, well then fine. Go work there. Well, no, I want to work here. But I want to have that advantage.

Bruce McKeeman: That was the challenge of Ranger Careers, I think. I think it helped us recognize and acknowledge the skill levels of the park rangers. And there were a number of other, admin was, well how come the rangers are getting a promotion? We're not getting promotions. I mean, cultural, interpretation, resource management, natural resources and cultural resources, and kind of raised the boat for everybody as much as we can. But I think Ranger Careers was a very important program that we were able to get through with Jim Brady and Walt Dabney and Bill Sanders and a bunch of those folks. It was very beneficial. I think it helps us in attracting young, bright folks, with a little better competitive salary. A livable salary, if you will versus continuing to bump along at a very low level.

Bruce McKeeman: It was like the whole business between the park technician and park ranger program. The 026 and the 025, which came before Ranger Careers. You would have two people in the patrol car with the same equipment, with the same duties, the same responsibilities and the same expectations. One was an 026 park technician, whose grade increases came one step at a time, sitting right next to an 025 park ranger, whose grade increases came two levels at a time. Two extremely competent, capable people with an artificial disparity based on how they were hired. And that's not to say that the Park Service didn't purposely utilize in an opportunity to bring in some highly skilled people. We couldn't hire them as a park ranger, but we could hire them as a park tech. So, we brought them in as a park tech, knowing that eventually we would get them over to being a park ranger. So that just set us up for a disparity that didn't need to be there.

Bruce McKeeman: But it was there, because number one, it was the way OPM did it. And again, this goes back to OPM looking at those technical skills – law enforcement, search and rescue, fire, EMS – being a technician's work.

Brenna Lissoway: Versus a professional's work.

Bruce McKeeman: Versus professional work. Which is managing, overseeing, directing. Even though using those skill sets you have a higher level of responsibility focus. Well, in the field, that wasn't necessarily true. And so that created, so I mean, we resolved the 025, 026 disparity at one point. And then we moved on and resolved grade level issues and OPM requirements with the Ranger Careers.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you were at Yosemite for 10 years?

Bruce McKeeman: Eight.

Brenna Lissoway: Eight years. Okay. What was it like living in a big park, versus when you were living at Tonto?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, it was, I mean, at Tonto we were extremely isolated. I mean, you had the superintendent, and you had the maintenance person, who's an older person. I'm a young, newly married person. And it's just us. Part of it, someone would say well, gee, that's nice. You know, kind of like a two-year honeymoon. So, we were able to go do this, go do that, on our own time. But it was nice in the more social setting of Yosemite Valley. And giving particularly my wife an opportunity – and she went back to work in Yosemite. She worked seasonally as an interpreter for one summer. And she worked for Jack Dyer in the curatorial division up until we had kids.

Bruce McKeeman: And then when we were at Roosevelt/Vanderbilt, she volunteered for the curatorial division. I think the staff, I was deputy superintendent, so I think the staff probably thought I was putting her in there as a mole. But our kids were gone at that point, so that gave her an opportunity to go back and do some of the stuff that she enjoyed.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the gags of Yosemite and just the ongoing intensity of some of the stuff we were involved in, they would always say that for me, the Park Service was my first wife and Georjean was my second wife. You know, I was married to the job. And there were sometimes, I fully admit, where the job came long before the family did. Hard part.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. I've heard several people talk about the challenges of such demanding jobs and how it can take a toll on families.

Bruce McKeeman: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. And part of that, then, I think what helps some of that is being in that social setting in Yosemite, where you have people who understand the pressures and are able to, at least the wives – or the spouses. Let me put it that way. The significant others and the spouses, I'm not trying to be sexist – you know, have a support group. So while we're off fighting fire or leaving the baby shower in the middle of a fire call or getting called out at three o'clock in the morning and getting home and the kid's crying and the wife's crying because they're both feeding off of each other, those are both family pressures that you have to deal with. Again, I think it goes back to the advocacy that, you know, the avocation, our intense desire to do what's right as part of the job. I mean, we're married to the job. There were many family groups who didn't survive that. The divorce rate in the Park Service is probably extremely high.

Bruce McKeeman: But there were others of us who managed to get through it. And I think a big part of that was having other spousal supports to help those spouses deal with the fact that we were off working on our stuff. We had a set agreement between my wife and I, and I worked night shift for four years in Yosemite Valley, that if I wasn't going to get home—

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Bruce McKeeman: —within a reasonable period at the end of the shift, that I would have the dispatcher call her, particularly if I was involved with an incident. You know, call my wife, tell her I won't be home for three hours, I'm on an MVA, whatever. And there was one time, I think, it was probably about 2:30 in the morning. Something had just happened. I said, "Call my wife. Tell her that this just came up and it will be several hours before I get home." And he goes, "Do you know what time it is?" I said, "Yeah, I'm well aware of what time it is. Let my wife know that I'm not coming, because otherwise she's going to be up, she's going to be nervous, she's going to be afraid. But if you tell her I'm involved, then she knows that you know what I'm doing, there are other people there, and I'm not just – something happened somewhere." So that was our commitment to ease her mind.

Brenna Lissoway: Did that change when you had kids?

Bruce McKeeman: No.

Brenna Lissoway: No?

Bruce McKeeman: No. It was probably more important when we had kids that, you know, I'm not coming home at a set time. The night shift actually, in my view, worked out very well for a family group. Because you know, I didn't have to go to work until the middle of the afternoon. So, I was home during the day when the kids were up and around. I could walk them to the post office and get the mail. I could be there and be a part of their lives. Then I'd go to work, and I'd come home for dinner. We'd have a moderate early late dinner, eight o'clock or whatever. And after dinner, the kids would get put to bed. And then Georjean would get up earlier when the kids woke up in the morning, so I could get some sleep. But from a family cycle process, it worked very well versus my getting up early and going to work and her dealing with the kids all during the day when they're awake and active. And come home for lunch and go back to work and get home and have a couple of hours before they have to go to bed, before they go to bed. It was a much better bonding opportunity for me to be home during the daytime when the kids were awake and active.

Brenna Lissoway: Uh huh. Yeah. That's interesting. So, what do you feel like was one of your, in your mind, one of the most important things that you did at Yosemite? Whether an accomplishment, or just something that you were involved with, or something you learned, perhaps?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I certainly had a great opportunity to develop a lot of field skills. And I mean yeah, I've gone through the park police academy. But when you had an opportunity to learn to do some climbing, I always felt that that should be tempered with the fact that you don't climb higher than you're willing to fall, which for me wasn't very high. But I mean, I got to the point where I could do some five-seven, five-eight climbs, particularly if that was top-roped. I mean, I was involved in a lot of search and rescue, a lot of EMS. I became an instructor for first aid and CPR. So, giving community CPR classes and teaching first aid in those skill sets to the community in addition to the rangers was an opportunity. I was given an opportunity to do some different things. I was detailed to the concessions office for, I think it was four or five months. So, you don't usually have an opportunity to go do that kind of job change working in Yosemite. What else was there? So, it was that aspect.

Bruce McKeeman: I also had the opportunity to become an instructor for different things, which helped later on when I was asked to be an instructor at some of the seasonal law enforcement academies. I've continued to do that after I retired. I teach at the law enforcement academies as needed. So, it was something I picked up with the folks we talked about earlier. Great support in my career and trying to bring me up, you know. I went from field level road patrol to supervisor to shift supervisor when the district ranger and his secretary were having issues with the amount of responsibilities and duties the secretary had. They were looking for somebody to help them do the budget. Fortunately, in my view, I was on night shift. I happened to walk into the office.

Bruce McKeeman: And Dick [Martin] says, "We need somebody to work on the budget." I poked my head around the door. I said, "Don't look any further." He says, "You're kidding me. You don't want to do that."

Bruce McKeeman: I said, "Listen. If, in my view, if you want to get anywhere in the national park system, you need to know how to manage the budget. You need to know how to manage the money." And it's not generally an aspect of being a law enforcement visitor protection ranger that you come up with. So here was an opportunity, even as a shift supervisor, or assistant shift supervisor, to be able to do some administrative stuff and begin to train and acquire knowledge that would potentially help me as I became division chief and assistant superintendent and superintendent.

Brenna Lissoway: So, at that point you were thinking that your career goals were moving in a more directed way? Like you were looking for a superintendency? Or what—

Bruce McKeeman: No, at that point I was looking at going from assistant shift supervisor to a district ranger. At that point, I think my end goal probably was chief ranger. You know, when you're looking up at the vast sky, there's only so far you can see. But in my view, that was my next progression, was to go from shift supervisor to assistant shift supervisor stuff into that next supervisory level, which was a district ranger. And then to a chief ranger.

Bruce McKeeman: Now, after I got to that point, the superintendency interest came when I went to Johnstown Flood as a site manager. Which is, in essence, a superintendent, but you report to a superintendent.

Brenna Lissoway: And that was your next move from Yosemite, right?

Bruce McKeeman: No. From Yosemite, I went to Hawaii Volcanoes.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay, Hawaii Volcanoes.

Bruce McKeeman: And Hawaii Volcanoes, I was a front country district ranger.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay, so that was a promotion for you?

Bruce McKeeman: It was a promotion in responsibility. Not in grade.

Brenna Lissoway: Not in grade. (laughs)

Bruce McKeeman: And there were, Dan Sholly was the chief ranger. Dave Ames was the superintendent. And we had three district rangers. I was the front country district ranger. Bob Seibert was the back-country district ranger. And Francis Kuailani was the Kalapana district ranger. He was a native Hawaiian, and it was the district closest to the Hawaiian community. So, it worked well for us to have a native Hawaiian as our district ranger for that outreach and coordination and working scope. That was a decision the superintendent had made. But it was fine, and it worked well.

Bruce McKeeman: We didn't have a huge staff there, but the opportunities I had in Hawaii were just outstanding. When the eruption, which is still going on today, started in January of 1983, since it started in the back country, Bob Seibert

got to go in first. He spent the first 24 hours during the eruption of Pu'u O'o, then he came out after 24 hours and I went in for the next 24 hours. So, working with the volcanologists and the geologists at the eruption site, I mean, it's an experience that you'll get nowhere else. We were camped probably a half mile away. You could feel the heat coming off the eruption. Just watching the curtain of fire develop. All of a sudden you just see this crack open up and you see the steam coming up, and next thing, it's just a curtain of lava coming up out of the ground. It's an experience that you can't get anyplace else. And I've had that opportunity. It's just spectacular.

Bruce McKeeman: Now we did spend a lot of time dealing with marijuana growers. Before I got there, they were having issues in the back country with marijuana growers setting rat traps with shotgun shells and trip traps, and threatening visitors. So, the conversation was, do we limit back country availability to the public and turn it over to the growers, or do we try to eliminate the growing and reclaim the park for the public?

Bruce McKeeman: The decision was to go in and reclaim the park. So, the first year I was there, we spent many, many, many hours and days on stakeouts in the back country. Cold camp. (No fires). Watching marijuana plots. Waiting for people to come in to tend them. Take pictures. Gather evidence. We, I mean, entire staff ended up arresting 26 people for felony possession and intent to distribute in the park. Many hours in helicopters. Many hours out in – and this was, since I was the new person coming in at the time and wasn't known to anybody, they wanted to use me on some undercover stuff.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, sure.

Bruce McKeeman: The adverse aspect of that was don't tell anybody where you're going or what you're doing. Of course, I had to tell my wife, don't tell anybody where I'm going or what I'm doing. So, we're the new people in park housing in the park, and she's got three or four other neighbors saying, "Hey, why don't you guys come over for dinner?"

Bruce McKeeman: "Um, well, we'd love to, but we really can't do it this week." I mean, she was in a bad position of not being able to say, well, Bruce has some work activity that's not allowing him to be available. It was, don't tell anybody where he is or what he's doing or why he's doing it. She had to make up excuses. Probably some people were put off about, gee, why does this standoffish, snobby district ranger's wife not want to come socialize with us?

Bruce McKeeman: Later on, it turned out very well. We made some very good friends and continue to see and visit them over the years.

Brenna Lissoway: How long did that undercover work go on?

Bruce McKeeman: It was a couple of weeks.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, okay.

Bruce McKeeman: I mean, it was very short time. Right at the beginning. Before someone says oh, yeah, we've got a new ranger, let's go find out who this new ranger is. But it was that kind of a deal which really put a burden on her. And our two kids were just beginning, they were, let's see, '81, Jennifer was born in '76. So, she's five years old. Neil was born in '79, so he's two and a half. "Yeah. I can come. I'll be happy to meet with you and work with you and say hi, get to know you. But Bruce isn't available."

Brenna Lissoway: That's hard as new people.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. So, you always want to welcome the new rangers, the new employees and bring them a casserole. I mean, Park Service etiquette being as it is, let's get to know each other and welcome aboard and we're glad you're here. But that wasn't an easy transition for her.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. So, you were there for a couple of years?

Bruce McKeeman: Two years.

Brenna Lissoway: Two years. And why did you leave that post, and where did you go next?

Bruce McKeeman: Okay. My mother-in-law was having some medical issues.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: My wife, she was getting a little island fever, but not bad. But she was concerned with her mother's health. The only way to get off the island is with an airplane. If the airplane's not available, what are we going to do and how are we going to do it? I would have stayed a little longer. But for family purposes, my mother-in-law's health, primarily. There was a great opportunity came up at Johnstown Flood. It was a site manager's job. It would be the first permanent ranger at Johnstown. Allegheny Portage and Johnstown Flood are two parks in western Pennsylvania that are located about 25 miles apart. So, you have a single management team over both parks. Johnstown was basically a satellite park on the other side of the mountains from, near Johnstown, versus Allegheny Portage Railroad, which is near Altoona. Mountain in between. But the headquarters staff was at Allegheny Portage, and so Johnstown was run basically as a seasonal unit out of Allegheny Portage.

Bruce McKeeman: Randy Cooley, who I had worked with in Yosemite, was the superintendent. And I saw this vacancy announcement for a site manager's job. Which is sort of the next intermediate step. It's more responsibility. You're responsible for a whole park. It's like a mini superintendent.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: Except you're not supervised by a regional director. You're supervised by another superintendent. So, it's a unit manager, site manager, position. So that was available. They were, they wanted someone to come in to establish community relations and to begin to develop a new visitor's center and park programs. So, the opportunity for any employee to get in on basically the ground floor to design and develop what the park is going

to be is a unique opportunity. So, I was excited about that aspect of it. I knew Randy. We wanted to get back to the mainland because of family health issues.

Brenna Lissoway: That's quite a change, though, going from—

Bruce McKeeman: Oh, yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: I mean, protection almost exclusively to doing something that's so multifaceted.

Bruce McKeeman: That's another exciting aspect of it is you get to broaden out. Been there, done that. I mean, eight years in Yosemite. Two years of Hawaii Volcanoes. I still had my law enforcement credentials. There was still a law enforcement aspect to what was going on at Johnstown. I was on call for anything that happened at the park. But, you know, now you get a chance to look at the little bigger picture. You get to work with a community. At Johnstown, the park was, in essence, the dam that gave way to create the Johnstown flood in 1889. The clubhouse and the row of Victorian houses that were part of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club were outside the park. But this was an important resource and interpretive aspect of the whole Johnstown story. It was then creating those community links and working with community leaders and the homeowners to see that we want to protect, at least visually, the outside. The large clubhouse building was a hotel and restaurant, so you had an opportunity to get inside and see the whole setup and talk about the summer pleasuring ground for the industrialists out of Pittsburgh. Again, it throws you in a different view. You're not strictly looking at the, what I would call the hard skills of visitor protection. But here's an opportunity to stretch and grow and work towards management issues. To me, it was a unique opportunity that came at the right time.

Brenna Lissoway: You mentioned that one of the important things they were wanting you to do, your position to accomplish, is community relations. How, what was your strategy to establish good community relations?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, one of the ways of doing that was to get involved in the local Rotary Club. When I was in Yosemite, we had created a Rotary Club in Yosemite Valley. I think there were only, mainly two or three parks that have Rotary Clubs in them. Grand Canyon's one. Yosemite's the other.

Brenna Lissoway: I have to tell you, the Yosemite Rotary Club just closed shop this year.

Bruce McKeeman: Oh. I'm sorry to hear that.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah.

Bruce McKeeman: But we were challenged in coming up with classification categories. So, I mean, we split some pretty fine hairs in order, because it was mainly the rangers. All of a sudden it was well, okay, you can be EMS, and you can be SAR. And you can be this, and you can be that. And we tried to bring in resource management and superintendent and all that stuff. But we did

get that club started in Yosemite Valley. So having that association with Rotary and what Rotary stood for, then when I got to Johnstown – and my dad had been in Rotary, so I was aware of what Rotary stood for – Hawaii, the superintendent did the Rotary thing down in Hilo, which was fine. So, I was in Rotary in Yosemite. Not in Rotary in Hawaii. I was in Rotary in Johnstown. But that gave me access to all of those businesspeople in the business community in the greater Johnstown area. Being able to go to other Rotary Clubs in the area for either makeup or to provide a program, again broadened that horizon.

Bruce McKeeman: Saint Michael, which is a little community that Johnstown Dam is located in, is a very small, coal mining community. When we moved over there, Randy arranged a rental house for us because there was no park housing. So, this would have been my first venture into public housing, or private housing. Anyways, he arranged for us to move into a small rental in Saint Michael. What that allowed me to do was to establish connections and relationships with the people who lived in Saint Michael. There were very few houses available. And this is the proverbial company town. Yep. Yeah. The cookie cutter row of houses on seven different streets, and the coal miners that worked the mines in the area, were living in many of those houses.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the hooks that I used, and actually my neighbor is the one who used it more than anything, is, "Can you believe it? This guy moved to Saint Michael from Hawaii? Why would he leave Hawaii to come to western Pennsylvania?!" That was an immediate intro. You've got to meet this guy! He just moved here from Hawaii!" So, it was just one of those little quirks that came about. But it was a very effective tool to get to know people in the community. That community is a relatively closed, tight-knit community, because they're all miners. A lot of them are Polish background, or Slovakian background. So very extended family. You know, Dad worked in the mine, Grandpa worked in the mine, I work in a mine, my son's working in the mine, or the mill. I mean, that was their life.

Bruce McKeeman: In essence, we got adopted by the mining community, because this one guy who lived across the street became good friends and wanted to make a big deal out of us moving there from Hawaii. We got invited to Fourth of July family picnics. McKeeman's not very Polish or Slovakian. But this was, gee, new guy in town. He's here working at the park. Welcome.

Brenna Lissoway: What was their attitude toward the Park Service, or the park being there?

Bruce McKeeman: They were supportive of the park. It really wasn't a negative on the community. It was primarily open seasonally during the school year and the summer. They had a seasonal staff working at the park. It usually was closed in the winter. Open in the summer and on the weekends and in the spring and fall. But it really had a minimal effect or impact on the community. So, two things that I felt very good about. One was being able

to make the connection with the local schools and begin to get the schools to come to Johnstown. I mean, here's a critical piece of American history in their backyard. But we weren't open when the school was open. Many school systems, like usually fifth grade, have state history. You know, whether it's Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Massachusetts or whatever it might be. So here is a piece of Americana that happened in their backyard – granted, many years ago – that they weren't utilizing.

Bruce McKeeman: So, one of the things I wanted to do was to get the park into the school and the schools into the park. Now I had to go around the back door to do that, because going to the school and saying hey, "Let me come talk about Pennsylvania history," well, they know Pennsylvania history far better than I do. You know, you've got your fifth-grade teachers that have taught Pennsylvanian history forever. I'm sure there was a component of the Johnstown flood in there. However, for a uniformed park ranger to go to a schoolteacher and say, "How are you teaching geology? What's your knowledge and information base on volcanoes?" "Well, we got this, we got that."

Bruce McKeeman: I said, "I've got two years of personal experience. I've got thousands of slides. I would love to give you a break and come in and spend an hour doing volcano history for you." "Oh, God, that would be great! We'd love to have you."

Bruce McKeeman: So, I put together an interpretive program based on Hawaii, in uniform, show up at the school, talk to the kids, and say, "Oh, by the way, we've got a little park down the road here that's in your backyard that you all need to know about and come see and be involved in. Because this is yours. I can tell you about my history. But this is your history. And you need to know that."

Bruce McKeeman: It allowed for, again, okay, now I'm talking to teachers, I'm talking to administrators, I'm talking to kids. If you get the kids, what do you get? You get the parents. So that was another approach.

Brenna Lissoway: So, what were some of the challenges that you had then at Johnstown? Maybe, you know, being sort of new to the whole managerial aspect.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the advantages, to a certain extent, was that I was functioning more as assistant to the superintendent than I was as managing the park. Because the chief of interpretation at Allegheny Portage still set the staffing levels for the interpretive program at Johnstown, still supervised interpreters there. I had a maintenance person that was still supervised by the chief of maintenance out of Allegheny Portage. Now, because I was there on a more consistent basis, you know, I could then deal with those guys and say, hey, you know, instead of having the maintenance guy do this, it really would help us if he could do this. I know this is how you have the interpretive schedule set, but gee, if we could tweak it this way, we could get more school groups in, we could do a better job this. More people would understand and appreciate that the park's open.

Bruce McKeeman: The primary thing that we're working on, I went there in '83. The centennial for the flood was in '89. So, our focus was to get a new visitors center built. We had this little shoebox of a contact station that had almost no room whatsoever. We brought in a portable trailer and set it at the end of the parking lot for me to use as an office. Like I said, we were just gearing this thing up. On the other side of the dam, up on a hillside, is where the caretaker's house and farm was. We had a historic photograph that showed the house and at least a scale and essence of what the barn was. We didn't have any details on the barn, and the barn was long gone. The house was in deplorable condition. You could stand in the basement and look out the roof. It's a historic structure. We need to preserve this.

Bruce McKeeman: I had the opportunity to get sent to a number of cultural resource schools and work on historic preservation. I got to know Dick Sellers and a number of people in that community very well, and we've had friendship ever since. He was just amazed that we were going to save this historic structure, not take it down and build something new. He really liked that idea. Because we had this historic photograph, then we could scale the mass of the barn. We weren't going to rebuild it. We were putting something new. But we were maintaining the historic integrity of the farm site by building a visitors center that replicated the size and mass of the barn. You know? So, we were being true to the cultural landscape, and we were being true to not representing the visitors center as a replica barn.

Brenna Lissoway: Because you didn't know what it looked like.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah, we didn't know what it looked like. We had this grainy distance photograph. We found the foundation, so we knew the size and scale. So, we put back the cultural image of the landscape by massing a building of the same size and scale of what was there historically. Then we took the house, and we restored the house and that became our offices.

Brenna Lissoway: Was that a fairly new concept at that time for park managers?

Bruce McKeeman: I don't know if it was a new concept. It was certainly the right concept. You hear all these horror stories throughout the history of the park service about well that building's 49 years old and 11 months and 25 days, and where's my bulldozer? Which isn't necessarily wrong, but it's not true to what we should be doing as far as, if it's a salvageable building, we should be salvaging the historic structures so long as it contributes to the story and purpose of the park. That's what we were doing at Johnstown. It may not be the right thing every place, but it was the right thing to do there.

Bruce McKeeman: We spent a lot of time working with the Denver Service Center, and a lot of time working with Harpers Ferry Center. One of the things that the chief of interp and the superintendent and myself did was go around to as many parks within that area as we could and look at their orientation film. We ourselves had some pretty specific ideas of what an orientation film should do. After viewing X number of this, we all pretty much agreed that the film at Antietam did exactly what it should do. It not only told what

the Battle of Antietam was about, but it also told how the Battle of Antietam fit into the scope of the war. You know, there are some parks you go to where you get this nice, artsy, esoteric, isn't this a wonderful resource. And you walk out of them and you go, so what's this place about? And how does it fit into the greater context?

Bruce McKeeman: I mean, to a certain extent, you sometimes have an easier job doing that in the historical site or battle site, when you have a specific historical context of what's going on. That was the thing at Antietam was, here is why the Battle of Antietam was critical, and here's what the Battle of Antietam meant to the rest of the Civil War. So, we thought it was just outstanding. About the right length. It was a comprehensive interpretive component. We wanted, Tim Radford, who had done the Antietam film, to do the film at Johnstown. The folks at Harpers Ferry weren't quite as enthusiastic about our requesting Mr. Radford.

Brenna Lissoway: Why was that?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, we asked them. The first comment was, "He's always late and he's always over budget." He makes a great product. He's a great, great film person. But, as far as the management at Harpers Ferry was concerned, if you want Tim, you have to be prepared for it to be over budget and for it to be late. We said, the budget isn't an issue, and it can't be late, because we're dedicating the visitors center on the 100th anniversary of the Johnstown Flood. Memorial Day weekend, 1989. It will open and the film will be there. Finally, they agreed to give us Tim.

Brenna Lissoway: How did the film turn out?

Bruce McKeeman: It is the only PG-rated orientation film in the National Park Service. It is that powerful, and that good. Of course, in the Johnstown Flood, 2,209 people lost their lives in Johnstown. The dam gave way. And that's another inside joke. I mean, people thought the dam broke. No, it didn't break. It washed out. Minor technical issue. My going away plaque said, "The dam broke." Anyways, so, huge human-interest impact. So, we were going to deal with the stalled rainstorm, the improperly fixed structure of the dam, the lack of flood control in the dam. Dam washes away and a wall of water 60 feet high, valley wall to valley wall, moving down to Johnstown, goes through one of the steel mills, gets all sorts of wire and stuff wrapped into it, all the logs and stuff. Washes out all these houses and gets caught up against a bridge and catches on fire. Two thousand, two hundred and nine people die. Great impact. It's the first non-battle opportunity for Clara Barton to come and do emergency relief. Johnstown.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow. Interesting. So how did your opening go? Were you there for that?

Bruce McKeeman: I went back to it. I had left. After we had all the designs and knew what we were going to do and how it was going to be, and we had Tim on board working on the film, I transferred and went back up for the dedication. Now a lot of our interpretive material at Johnstown is based on David

McCullough's book, *The Johnstown Flood.* And David was at the dedication. Tim got the film there about three hours before the dedication. (laughs) Maybe a little sooner. Maybe the night before. But I mean, it was close. He's a great guy. Love Tim.

Bruce McKeeman: So anyway, have the dedication. The congressman's there, David McCullough's there, all the dignitaries are there. Regional director's there, da, da, da, da, da. So, after the dedication we go in and VIPs at the first showing of the film. So, we went in, sat down. David McCullough was sitting behind me. The film goes. Film ends. You know, usually when you see an orientation film or movie, as the credits roll, people start gathering stuff up and making noise. In this one, everyone sits. It is quiet. Wow.

Bruce McKeeman: David McCullough, sitting behind me, goes, "Damn. That's good."

Brenna Lissoway: That's a pretty good accolade.

Bruce McKeeman: Absolutely. Absolutely. Wonderful. Wonderful thing. So, that was Johnstown.

Brenna Lissoway: So why did you leave there?

Bruce McKeeman: Um, why did I leave there? Part of it was promotion. Part of it was I felt I had done about as much as I could. You know, kind of my job's done here. Part of it, this was working for Randy was where I got the bug to want to be a superintendent. And so, going to George Washington Memorial Parkway as the site manager at Great Falls, Virginia, I thought was another step up, another opportunity. A little different area. It's a 700-acre natural area right on the fall line of Potomac River, right at Great Falls. I thought it was the next move.

Brenna Lissoway: So how was that park for you?

Bruce McKeeman: It was a good park. There were certainly some levels of frustration with it. Part of the frustration was familywise; was we were living sort of on the edge. I mean, housing in the Washington, DC area is not inexpensive. But we ended up in a good position. We had good schools for the kids. My commute was certainly a lot different than it was at Johnstown.

Brenna Lissoway: Longer?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, at Johnstown, in fact part of the time I was at Johnstown, I rode my bike to work and back. I was only three miles from the park. No traffic. I'm living now, Great Falls is outside the Beltway. So, I'm living in Loudoun County outside of Fairfax County, and I have to drive down Route 7 and down the old Georgetown Pike in heavy commuter traffic to get there. So, on a good day, a weekday, it was probably 40, 45 minutes. On weekends, it was probably 30 minutes. So, gone more, gone longer. I had this little enclave. I'm reporting now to the chief ranger. At that time, at the GW Parkway, Bart Truedell was the chief ranger. He was responsible for the three satellite areas: Arlington House, Great Falls, Virginia, and Clara Barton-Glen Echo. They all reported to

the chief ranger. That's the way it was set up. Okay. Didn't really matter to me one way or the other.

Bruce McKeeman: So, I had probably more autonomy at Great Falls than I had at Johnstown. Partly because it was established, it was running, we had an operation versus doing the community, get this place going kind of stuff. So, again, it allowed you to focus more on the operational aspect of a park.

Bruce McKeeman: Working in the greater DC area is interesting and intriguing for many aspects.

Brenna Lissoway: Like what?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, the first one, I would say, is the whole issue over law enforcement. We're back into the National Capital Region. We're back to dealing with the United States Park Police. I still had my commission. I still had a fire card. I was still EMS-rated. So, all of that, it's not baggage, but all of those attributes and abilities and knowledge are still with me. So now I've got 700 acres. I was hired primarily because the superintendent was concerned about the number of drownings in the Potomac River. That was one of the issues out of Great Falls where we would get young kids, you know, the twenties, late teens, early twenties, coming in, drinking along the river. Jumping in and out of the river. And drowning. Great Falls is being utilized as a recreation area.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the challenges is we have the United States Olympic whitewater team training in the river and utilizing the falls, which are classified as six plus, risk of life, in front of the public. So, the way the park is set up, there's what they call the upper parking lot is actually above the fall line of the Potomac River. So, when you look out at the river from the upper parking lot, it's this smooth, tranquil, apparently slow-moving body of water. But just downstream and out of sight is this six plus risk of life water cataracts. It's that whole thing. Well, gee, that doesn't look too hard. I can do that. Or, you know, okay, I've got an inner tube. Oh, this is just a little river. Let me put in the water – swish – you're going to get swept downstream.

Bruce McKeeman: We had very few fatalities, actually, associated with the falls themselves. More so once you get downstream and you get people who have been drinking and inappropriate activities and behaviors going in and out of a cold-water river and drowning. Because they're drunk. But John Byrne, the superintendent, and he had been a deputy superintendent in Yosemite, and was impressed, I guess, is the word, over one of the rescues that I had been involved in.

Brenna Lissoway: At Yosemite.

Bruce McKeeman: At Yosemite. I mean, we did hundreds of rescues a year. He made a comment one day about well, you know, I was really impressed with this rescue that you were involved in.

Brenna Lissoway: Which one was it?

Bruce McKeeman: And I'm going, which one was it? And I had no clue. Finally, one day I said, "John, which rescue was it?"

Bruce McKeeman: He said, "Well, it was the one over there at Curry Village. There were two people got caught in a rock fall and were killed." The only thing I did on that rescue was manage the flow of resources. I was standing on the bridge at Curry Village before they went up the Mist Trail. We had a hazard zone because of rock fall. So, we had people up at the rescue site dealing with the bodies, and a narrow way to get in and out that was relatively safe. We had closed the trail so that we wouldn't get anyone else hurt and the people at the rescue site would radio down and say, "Well, I need this."

Bruce McKeeman: "Okay." And so, I'd find somebody. And the gear and said, "Well, go up there. And bring this back." I mean, that's all I did was traffic cop. But John was impressed, apparently. In working with the public and talking to them and managing the part of the rescue that I was responsible for. It got me a job. That's great. So.

Bruce McKeeman: But the average fatality rate at that time was seven drownings a year along that section of the Potomac. In the four years I was there, we had three. So, I was able to deal with that.

Brenna Lissoway: What did you do to—

Bruce McKeeman: Well, what I did, and this was part of the frustration and challenge, was that the park police were supposed to be dealing with law enforcement issues, of which drinking and going in and out of the river would be one. The two park policemen that were assigned to Great Falls were both horse patrolmen. Unfortunately, the uniform for the horse patrolmen of the United States Park Police were slick-soled leather boots, and those aren't very good or safe to walk on when you're in a rocky slope. So, the amount of time that they spent on foot along the riverbank where the issues were was very small, because they were on their horse, riding the trails.

Bruce McKeeman: So, what I did was took the three law enforcement rangers that I had at the site and turned them into a safety patrol. Through the magic work of the golden tongue, turned them loose along the river. Although we were not allowed to utilize our law enforcement authorizations – because that was the park police responsibility – we were able to convince individuals that their activity was inappropriate and probably the best option would be for them to find a different place to pursue their interests. We couldn't wear our guns. We wore uniforms. So, people who don't understand that just because you're a uniformed individual with a badge, they don't know that you don't have any authority. They just know that they've got some ranger in their face saying, hey, you can't be drinking here, you can't be jumping in and out of the river, and we think it's time for you to maybe go find some other place to be. We were successful a great percentage of the time.

Bruce McKeeman: The other challenge there was that the river wasn't in the park. The Maryland/Virginia boundary was the mean high-water mark on the

Virginia shore. So, once you touched the water, you were in the state of Maryland and outside the park. But we had a good relationship with the Maryland Waterways Police. The C&O Canal was on the other side of the river, so you got the C&O Canal on one side, you've got Great Falls on the Virginia side. The park police worked, to a certain extent. I mean, if we had an issue, we could talk to them and they would generally go take care of it.

Bruce McKeeman: In some of my frustrations, I managed to, I was down at the regional office, the headquarters, and the park police headquarters is right adjacent to the Park Service headquarters on Ohio Drive, National Capital Region. I was down there one day for a meeting on something, and walked out the door, and coming down the hall is chief of the U.S. Park Police, Bob Langston.

Bruce McKeeman: "Hi, Bruce! How you doing?" "Doing well, Bob. How are you?" "How are things going?"

Bruce McKeeman: "Well, gee, Bob, you know, I've got a few issues with law enforcement in the park. Horse patrol guys are doing okay, but I need some foot patrol. The issues we have don't coordinate well with the horsemen you have." (coughs) Excuse me. "But, you know, we're doing the best we can."

Bruce McKeeman: Didn't think any more of it. Went back to my office. Next morning, I get a phone call from a lieutenant saying, "I understand there's some concern about the horse patrol unit at Great Falls." I said, "Well—" "We'd like to come out and meet with you." "Fine. Come on down." So, an hour later, I have a lieutenant and a captain sitting in my office. "Let's talk about this." Okay. Not much came of it, but—

Brenna Lissoway: You got some response.

Bruce McKeeman: At least Bobby was true to his word that he would look into it, and I had a couple of people come out. I did occasionally get a little more different type of patrol units in the park, other than just the horsemen. Nothing against the horsemen. Nothing against park police. I appreciate them greatly. It's just the need that we had at the park, from a park management standpoint, differed from the resources of a horse patrol.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah.

Bruce McKeeman: Their uniform outfit really wasn't compatible with being down on a slick rock where my issues were. So, it was a matter of – and we did have horse issues that they certainly helped with. We had several miles of riding trail in the park. But the main law enforcement issue and the main patrol concern, and the main life safety situation was one that really wasn't compatible with being dealt with by the horse patrol.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. That makes sense.

Bruce McKeeman: Anyways.

Brenna Lissoway: I'm going to stop right there just for a minute. [pause] Okay. We're just continuing here, Bruce. So, maybe talk to me about the next position you had, your next move.

Bruce McKeeman: Okay. From Great Falls, then we went to Voyageurs National Park in northern Minnesota where I was chief ranger. As I say, we were there eight years and 16 winters. (Brenna Lissoway laughs) International Falls, Minnesota, has a reputation for a reason. Like all the parks, it's a magnificent park. It also, at the time I was there, was a pretty embattled one?

Brenna Lissoway: How so?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, it was created in 1976. It's a newer park, which means it's being carved out of private and corporate lands, not public lands. Boise Cascade donated a fair amount of property within the park. They helped create the park. There was a lot of debate and discussion over people wanting to continue to utilize it from the intensely recreational standpoint. As the background goes, when the governor of Minnesota testified on Capitol Hill about the establishment of the park, he said we want to continue to motorboat and snowmobile and fish and hunt and do all those kinds of recreational activities. The committee reportedly said, "Well, Governor, if you want to do that, then we'll be happy to create a national recreation area for you."

Bruce McKeeman: Governor says, "I want a national park in my state." Congress said, "So be it."

Bruce McKeeman: Which then curtailed a lot of those intensive motorized activities. To a certain extent. However, it is one of the few national parks, and probably the only national park, that in the enabling legislation authorizes – and the critical word here is "appropriate" – the appropriate use of snowmobiles, motorboats and other motorized recreational vehicles. ATVs are prohibited. But snowmobiling is an authorized activity in the national park.

Bruce McKeeman: So, we had what I call the local grumbles. We had a local anti-park minority. But they were the vocal ones. So all of the articles in the paper, all the complaints, all the, "We can't do this, we can't do that, we don't like this, we don't like that," were really from the local vocal minority.

Brenna Lissoway: Was this the first park that you had encountered real local opposition?

Bruce McKeeman: Yes. But on the other hand, there was a significant number of people who supported the park. But because of local politics, they were not very vocal.

Bruce McKeeman: We also were dealing with a lot of inholdings and use and occupancy issues. I believe it was the Army Corps of Engineers had, the Park Service utilized the Army Corps of Engineers acquisition team. Depending on who you talk to depends on how sensitive they may or may not have been to acquiring land. Their focus is, go get the land.

Bruce McKeeman: When you talk to some of the local people, they feel that they weren't treated very well. Of course, people are going to complain about well, I only got so much for my property, but the guy two years later got that much more for his property. So, I got cheated. I mean, all of those kinds of things that come up when you displace people.

Bruce McKeeman: A number of people selected 25-year use and occupancies. So, you start with 1976. You add 25 years. So, when I got there in 1990, many of those use and occupancies were just beginning to come due. They didn't all select 25 years. Some selected shorter time. The issue with the use and occupancy, the 25-year as an example, is it's a fixed, set lease. You can sell it. You can inherit it. You can trade it. But you can't extend it. So, when the 25 years are up, no matter who is utilizing it, they are to vacate. What usually happens in the land acquisition process is you come up with fair market value. If you elect the lease, then the number of years of that lease's value is deducted from the fair market value. So, if it's a $100,000 piece of property with a summer cabin on it and you elect the 25-year use and occupancy, maybe you'll get $80,000. And you're required to maintain it. You can't expand it. You can't increase the footprint. But you're required to maintain what's there. You live on it tax-free because it's now federal property.

Bruce McKeeman: Another option some people elected was life estate. Some people were savvy enough that they sold their property to their youngest child for a dollar in considerations. So maybe they have a 12-year-old that owns the property that the Park Service acquired. Then the idea, obviously, is that the parents and the kids will live on it until that youngest child dies. Which sometimes works. And sometimes, unfortunately, if the young child dies young, that's the end of the lease. You can't pass it on. You can't sell it. You can't inherit it. It belongs to the named title owner. And so, we had some of those come up.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you were in the position of enforcing the—

Bruce McKeeman: Right. I was the chief ranger. One of my responsibilities was dealing with use and occupancies and special park uses. I had the typical stuff a chief ranger deals with. I had law enforcement. I had search and rescue. I had EMS. I had patrol rangers. I had an airplane pilot with a commission. We dealt with motor boating stuff in the summer and dealt with snowmobile stuff in the winter. When I first got there, I also supervised resource management, both natural and cultural resources. So, it was visitor protection and resource management.

Brenna Lissoway: That's unusual.

Bruce McKeeman: It depends on the park. We had a chief of maintenance. We had a chief of interpretation. We had an administrative officer. Superintendent. We had a couple of research biologists. And I had everything else. So, if it wasn't in maintenance and it wasn't in interpretation, it was in my bailiwick.

Brenna Lissoway: So how did you, what was your approach to dealing with some of these really sensitive issues?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, some people would probably say I wasn't the right person to do that.

Brenna Lissoway: Why's that?

Bruce McKeeman: Oh, the old crusty law enforcement hard-charging insensitive kind of guy. No. I'm just kidding. Those are the kinds of deals where you look to make supporters where you can. You know? Going to church in the community. Now I'm back in the Rotary Club again, so I've got those contacts in the Rotary Club. It was a great privilege and opportunity in that the former chief ranger decided that he didn't really want to be a chief ranger and deal with all the administrative paperwork, office stuff. That he really wanted to be a field person. I don't know how voluntary it was, but he became a district ranger so that he could keep doing all the field stuff, and I came here as a chief ranger.

Bruce McKeeman: And so, having Joe Cayou there, who was there from the inception of the park, provided a great resource and support. He knew the community. He knew the players. He knew the history. And so, he was very willing and able to help me not step on landmines. I was very appreciative of having Joe there as a resource.

Bruce McKeeman: Because it was a newer park, it was still in that arc of going from a developing park to an operating park. So, you have a lot of initial input as far as staff and funds go, which is great to get it up and running. But you get to that critical mass, that critical corner where you go from beginning operations to full-fledged operations, and there's a needed boost in funding and positions to get it to where you're at base-level operating from managing an initial operation. And there's a difference in those components.

Bruce McKeeman: That was another one of our challenges was to get to that point of trying to get more FTE, which generally aren't an issue in the park service. I mean, there's always FTE somewhere. It's just getting them allocated where they need to be sometimes is a challenge. But it's the base funding. And being able to support that. So, I've got district rangers classified as district rangers, graded as district rangers, who are also the primary field ranger. You had asked earlier about Ranger Careers. Well when we did Ranger Careers while I was at Voyageurs, I projected those positions at the grade level they should have been, at full operation, which was a step above where they actually were. Voyageurs should have been in the future set up pretty well because we had anticipated that growth and that increase, and the grade level increases, and the locality pay increases in order to get the funding that was coming out of Washington.

Bruce McKeeman: So, some parks didn't do that. I managed to see that, and particularly since I was on the implementation team, I understood what we were dealing with. So, I think that was a benefit to the park.

Bruce McKeeman: But we've got limited staff. So, you've got two rangers working in the North District. You've got two rangers working in the South District. One part-time ranger working in the far south. When you're looking at 218,054 acres of park with 84,000 acres of water, that's not a lot of people. And it's big water. I mean, talk about the name of the park is Voyageurs, based on the French-Canadian fur traders. And therein lies the visions of big canoes and the paddles and all that. But those lakes are big water lakes, and you can get big waves, and get into trouble real quick if you don't know what you're doing.

Bruce McKeeman: Sea kayaks work pretty well there. We were seeing an increase in kayaking and canoeing. So, if you can get across the bay and get up next to the peninsula, you've got some protection and that works well. You know, in the wintertime it's all frozen. There's a big, big push to get the snowmobile trails open in the wintertime. There are many people who are willing to push the envelope of ice thickness to get out there. We were pretty successful in seeing – until we get this thickness, we're not grooming our trails and we're not opening them. They like to have them open by Thanksgiving because they depend on the tourism in the towns. Sometimes it just doesn't work. Not safely.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. Right.

Bruce McKeeman: The other interesting thing they did in the park was they plowed an ice road. So, there was a 10-mile, I believe it was, from the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, they plowed an ice road out across, road out across the ice. So, you would drive your car down the boat ramp and out onto the ice. And take a scenic drive.

Brenna Lissoway: In your regular vehicle.

Bruce McKeeman: In your regular vehicle. On top of water that's 60 to a hundred and who knows how feet deep.

Brenna Lissoway: That's unique.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. It's a little breathtaking the first time you do that, because you roll down your windows, you undo your seatbelts, and you drive down a boat ramp onto ice. The thing that most people don't realize about ice is it's actually elastic. So, if you go fast enough, you can actually push up a little wave in front of you. So, when you're coming back into shore, you want to make sure you're going slow enough so you don't pop the ice. When that elastic bubble would hit the shore, you could snap it. Then we get ice ridges. But it's an interesting experience the first time that you drive down the boat ramp and go out on the ice and drive 10 miles out across the lakes to see the area.

Bruce McKeeman: To get to the cross-country ski area, we had to drive across the bay. Park the car on the ice and go cross-country skiing.

Brenna Lissoway: Huh. Wow. That's amazing. (laughs)

Bruce McKeeman: Yes. And we had wolves. We had moose and bear and deer. Bald eagles.

Brenna Lissoway: So very wild place.

Bruce McKeeman: It's a spectacular place. The resources at Voyageurs are really phenomenal. It is a great place and will continue to be a great place. What we're seeing now is that as we get through generations, we're seeing more support for the park. So, it's not, it's not the raw, fresh, "You took my land." You know. It's not the raw, fresh, "You took my dad's land. We used to go out there as kids. Now we can't do that."

Bruce McKeeman: So, once you get a generation or two beyond the initial acquisition, people all of a sudden start saying, "Gee, you know, we're kind of glad you guys are here. Because otherwise it would be private cabin and private cabin and private cabin all along the lakeshore." Now they can go out and there are campgrounds. There are picnic spots. There are places they can pull their boats up on the lakeshore and enjoy the area. Big fishing area. Walleye. Musky. Etcetera. So, it's an amazing place. The local support is getting better as you get a little further away from the raw, "I lost my land, and the government took it from me."

Brenna Lissoway: So, was it less embattled when you left?

Bruce McKeeman: When I left, yeah. I was there eight years. At one point, we had a congressional field hearing at the park to determine whether or not the park would continue to exist.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, wow.

Bruce McKeeman: The local vocal had gotten enough political deal. The congressmen arranged to have a field hearing in International Falls. And you know, Senator Wellstone was there, Congressman Oberstar was there. The head of the natural resource committee for the House Congressman Jim Hansen was there. A number of local politicians, governor. And when they pulled into town, there was a spontaneous pro-park rally. The hearing was held in the auditorium at the high school, at the basketball auditorium. It was pretty equal between pro-park and anti-park people. But up until then, all you heard was the local vocal anti-park folks. So, it was really heartwarming to see that we did have support. They were willing, in a crunch, to come out and risk the ire of their neighbors and say, "No, this is a good thing. We want this."

Bruce McKeeman: The chairman of the House committee stood up and said, "Well, I know we're here to determine the status of the park, and I'm here to tell you, the park is not going away. It doesn't mean we don't have issues we need to address, and issues we need to talk about and deal with. But this park will continue to exist."

Bruce McKeeman: But we'd put in a lot of time and effort. Barbara West was the superintendent. She had been in the Department of the Interior, had been on the Hill, personal associations with the secretary and the under-secretary [of the Interior]. So, I mean, she had a lot of the political

knowledge and wherewithal on what we should do and how we should approach dealing with the hearing. I think was the right person at the right time.

Bruce McKeeman: We had wolf biologists studying wolves. We had individuals studying bald eagles. We had issues with the reproductive success of eagles in the park. So, we had areas that we closed off. We got into some controversy over the wolf management, and we closed several bays in the wintertime to keep snowmobiles out from chasing deer and stuff like that so the wolves could have opportunities. Many people didn't like any restrictions at any level.

Bruce McKeeman: But one day I sat down, and I figured that the average snowmobile trail in Minnesota is about 16 feet wide. So, I figured okay, for a mile, it's 16 feet wide, you have X amount of acreage. And I knew the mileage of all the authorized snowmobile trails in the state of Minnesota. So, I figured out what their acreage was. Then I sat down and looked at the park. On the lakes, other than these few, the 12 bays that were closed, there was no restriction. You could snowmobile anywhere you wanted to. We did mark trails on the ice. We did groom an area, so it was smoother and nicer to snowmobile in the groomed area. But it didn't preclude you from going someplace else on the lake and the ice surface. Now the land portages, we restricted them. They had to be on a portage. Marked. Groomed.

Bruce McKeeman: So anyway, I figured out the total acreage of the area that was open to snowmobiling in the park and compared that to the mileage, or the acreage I had calculated on designated snowmobiles in the state of Minnesota. We had more area open to snowmobiling in the park than the entire rest of the state of Minnesota.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow.

Bruce McKeeman: The locals weren't happy to hear that, either. They were complaining about how we were limiting their activities, limiting their ability to snowmobiling. We weren't allowing them to go anywhere and everywhere. And like I said, the enabling legislation said, "appropriate use," not "unfettered use."

Bruce McKeeman: I just did that to see where we stood in relation to the state of Minnesota, which you have to snowmobile on a designated trail. We had more land acreage available. Not necessarily better trails or more trails. But just flat comparison of acreage, we had more resources open to snowmobiling than the state of Minnesota did. So that kind of eased some of that argument a little bit.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. I can see how that would be helpful. Hmm. So, I'm curious, then, I'd like to move forward then and kind of talk about your next couple of assignments.

Bruce McKeeman: Okay.

Brenna Lissoway: So, what attracted you to your next position? And what was it?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, my next position was deputy superintendent at Roosevelt-Vanderbilt Historic Sites. So chief ranger, next assignment likely is superintendent or deputy superintendent or regional office.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you're saying that's sort of the perceived natural progression?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah. I mean, if you look at the hierarchy in the park, you go from field ranger to district ranger to chief ranger. So, you're division chief. Next thing after division chief is management. Whether superintendent or deputy superintendent, depends on the size of the park.

Bruce McKeeman: Like I said, when I was at Johnstown, I got, in my mind, I really wanted to become a superintendent. So for me, after eight years as chief ranger, the next logical progression in my mind was to be a superintendent, although I suppose if the opportunity had come to go to a region as a regional chief ranger, it would have been something I would have considered.

Brenna Lissoway: Mm hmm. Because you had a couple of details in the regional office, didn't you?

Bruce McKeeman: Right. I had in National Capital Region; I went into the regional office acting as a staff park ranger position. In Omaha, Midwest Region, I spent a couple of months in regional office as the staff park ranger. So, I had that experience. I also had details to Alaska for the oil spill. I did land investigation claims in Alaska, also. They had some, well, under ANILCA, [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act] in Alaska local natives were able to claim up to 160 acres of land, and BLM was doing the adjudication of those claims. But all of a sudden there were a couple of claims in the middle of a concessions area in one of the parks. Well, it's hard to claim that that was continual, personal private use of property when it's in the middle of a concessions operation. So, there was some concern about the legitimacy of some of these claims.

Bruce McKeeman: I was a member of a team that was asked to go up there and review all of these claims for certain legal justifications and purposes. So, I spent eight weeks in Alaska in the winter, working on reviewing and determining the legality and appropriateness of each of those land claims. I worked on Gates of the Arctic and Yukon-Charley and Bering Land Bridge, primarily. Love Fairbanks.

Brenna Lissoway: So, you went to the deputy superintendency?

Bruce McKeeman: Yes, and went to the deputy—

Brenna Lissoway: Vanderbilt, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt

Bruce McKeeman: Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites. So, there are three parks in Hyde Park, New York. There's the Home of FDR. There's the Vanderbilt Mansion. And there is Val-Kill, which was Eleanor Roosevelt's cottage. Each of them about two miles apart. All in the community of Hyde Park. We had a single management structure managing all three of those parks. So, three separate designated parks, but one management team.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. And what were some of your projects there?

Bruce McKeeman: For the first superintendent, his primary interest was the outside political, rub elbows, go see all the stars. That section of the Mid-Hudson Valley, you know, James Earl Jones, there's a number of movie stars, number of people with large political connections live in that whole area. And so, Paul (Skip) Cole, who had been the chief of interpretation at Allegheny Portage when I was at Johnstown, was the superintendent. And he was looking for a deputy superintendent to come in and basically be the operational manager.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: So, he wanted to do the external political stuff, and he wanted me to do the internal manage the parks. Well, we had 60 FTEs, a couple of million-dollar budget. Large operation. You know, so we have three separate parks. You've got maintenance requirements at three different areas. You've got interpretive requirements at all the areas. You've got resource issues at all the areas. You've got law enforcement issues at all the areas. So, it was a step up in expansion of responsibilities and duties. And it was, I enjoyed it. It's a really fascinating area from an interpretive standpoint. But truthfully, you look at the Home of FDR being that mid-Hudson high-tier person. Well-ranked, politically connected, financially well off.

Bruce McKeeman: You go up the road to the Vanderbilt Mansion, and this was supposedly called Uncle Georgie's small cottage, 50-room mansion on the Hudson River Valley. Son of Commander Vanderbilt. Lots of money. So you have the ornateness of the Gilded Age. You know, the hand-carved wooden ceiling, walnut ceilings. The gold gilding, the massive furniture. Very high, ornate living.

Bruce McKeeman: You go to Val-Kill, which was Eleanor's place, it's like you went to your Aunt Mathilda's cottage. Knotty pine paneling on the walls. Mismatched furniture like you were in a dorm room. You have five and dime glasses on the table next to the silver candelabra. She was a lady throughout, but she had a very, very hard childhood. Married her, I think Franklin was her fifth cousin. Her father was Teddy Roosevelt's brother. Extremely intelligent lady. And yet lived a very eclectic life.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the challenges for her was really that Springwood (FDR's Home) was really her mother-in-law's house, Sarah's house, and so she never felt that it was her house. So, she had Franklin build Val-Kill, which was in an area where they used to picnic and was a very nice area and she enjoyed it over there. So that's where she stayed.

Bruce McKeeman: To show how unpretentious she was, some schoolchild made a nametag desk plate and misspelled her name. And she said, "That's fine. That's the way she spelled it. Just leave it there." (Brenna Lissoway laughs)

Bruce McKeeman: But went on to do some magnificent things in her own right. I think that and given the history of the country at the time, that if FDR hadn't had

polio, and hadn't been limited in his mobility, she would not have been able to go out and do the many things that she would do. Because she became his eyes and ears. She went and investigated this. She went and looked at what was going on here and came back and reported to FDR. So, the circumstances of his limited mobility and her ability to be an independent woman at that time, which is an unusual combination, led us to have two extremely important people in our country's history.

Brenna Lissoway: You know, a question just occurred to me as you were describing the story of that park that you managed. And that is, here you're somebody with a forestry background, and you've come through the ranger ranks and done a variety of things in your career. Then to end up at a historic site like that and then your final position, again at another important historic site.

Bruce McKeeman: Right.

Brenna Lissoway: What's your feeling about just having people's backgrounds and their ability to manage, you know, sites of a particular type? Do you see what I'm getting at?

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: Like, you know—

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I think this goes all the way back to being a generalist and having a wide variety of interests. I mean, the benefit for me is that my wife's a historian. I'm a forester. I'm a botanist kind of a guy, and my wife's a historian. So, one thing that helped me was being able to talk to her about what's the significance of this. Other than, I mean, I have all the resources of the park, I can read all these things. But her interest in American history and British history in general, you know, is a sounding board for me to say, "Well, wait a minute. What about this?" Or "How does this fit in?" Or "I remember this from over here. But how's it relate to over here?" I mean, my wife is an amazing person and a wonderful resource. But I think it's do you have a single focus, or do you have an eclectic interest in life. For me, being able to experience the whole spectrum – small archeological site, large major natural area in the park system, active geologic stuff at Hawaii Volcanoes, you know, to small historic sites, to Johnstown, natural urban area in Washington. It's a lifetime of opportunity to experience the different resources that we have in this country. You know, we have both a natural and a cultural history, and we need to respect them both. So, having that opportunity was great.

Bruce McKeeman: There are other people who are totally satisfied with being at one spot at one time dealing with one type of resource, and there's nothing wrong with that. But I think as you get into management, having that broader spectrum, having that broader experience, gives you a better feel of how to manage an area.

Bruce McKeeman: The other part for me was that my career, if you wanted a promotion, you had to move. There was very little of being in one park and going from a

GS-5 to a GS-12. I mean, it just didn't happen. If you wanted a promotion, you need to move. So, we moved several times, and I think I'm richer for it. And have an amazing experience. I mean, it's been a great career and a great run. Every area has helped enrich what I know and what I appreciate about the service.

Brenna Lissoway: I want to give you an opportunity – we're getting a bit short on time – but talk about your last post.

Bruce McKeeman: Okay.

Brenna Lissoway: And maybe talk about some of the highlights of your superintendency.

Bruce McKeeman: Sure. Well one of the intriguing things is that at the Home of FDR, we also have the FDR Library.

Brenna Lissoway: Oh, okay.

Bruce McKeeman: Which is run by the National Archives. So, you have a presidential library run by the national archives within the national park side of the Home of FDR.

Bruce McKeeman: Moving on to Herbert Hoover, we have a similar situation at Hoover. So, we only have two parks in the National Park System that have co-located presidential libraries. One is Roosevelt's. The other is Hoover's.

Bruce McKeeman: Now Hoover is the only president prior to FDR to have a presidential library managed by the National Archives. And the reason for that is because he lived so long after his presidency. His is actually the third presidential library. Truman's was the second.

Bruce McKeeman: So, a great opportunity of working with another agency at the archives at FDR. Being able to go to Hoover and knowing some of the intricacies of how the archives process works. And then being able to establish a relationship with the director of the Hoover Library. Some of the past history at Hoover was some of the conflicts between the park superintendent and the director of library. So being able to go in there and know what I was walking into. And some of that issue was, well, you're not a professional historian. I am. So, you need to do this.

Bruce McKeeman: So, I didn't go in with any pretension. I said, I'm a manager. I want to manage this resource. Part of managing this resource is being able to work cooperatively with you.

Bruce McKeeman: We also had the Hoover Association, which was a private support group, primarily for the library. But the three of us – the director of the Hoover Association, the director of the library and myself as superintendent, developed a very good cooperative working relationship – and so we were also able to get the Hoover Association to help support some of the park projects, which wasn't happening before.

Brenna Lissoway: I see.

Bruce McKeeman: So, it may have upset the director of library a little bit because he wasn't getting quite as much money. But we also were able to work cooperatively and say we're here for the benefit of telling the story of Herbert Hoover. And it's an amazing story. The story that most of the public understands isn't anywhere near what the man is. I mean, wrong place, wrong time. He gets blamed for the Great Depression. It was a worldwide depression. It wouldn't have mattered who was sitting in that chair; they probably would not have been able to make a difference.

Bruce McKeeman: He took a lot of that personally. Here is an individual – and I won't go into the whole interpretive story. (laughs) Here's an individual orphaned at the age of 10. Couple of dimes sewn in his pocket. His baggage packed up. Put on a train and sent to Oregon from West Branch, Iowa, to live with an uncle. His parents were Quakers. His mother was very big in the Quaker Society, Friends Society. His uncle was running a Quaker school in Oregon. Went to that. He was in the inaugural class, the initial class, at Stanford University. Became a mining engineer. Met his wife there, who coincidentally came from Iowa, but they didn't know each other beforehand. She also became a mining engineer.

Bruce McKeeman: He got a job with a mining company out of Britain who sent him to Australia. He convinced them to buy a played-out mine. Struck gold. Made millions of dollars for the company. Did this also a couple of other places. Became known as the doctor of sick mines. He and his wife co-wrote the textbook on mining engineering which is still used today in universities. Became a self-made millionaire.

Bruce McKeeman: During World War One, he was asked by the president to help bring people out of Belgium. They were caught in the midst of the war. Saved hundreds of thousands of lives, particularly women and children. He is a hero in Belgium. Guaranteed their passage. He called his friends in industry. He said, "I need some boats to get these people back to the U.S." He guaranteed every single one of their passages. The cost of their passage. And there were only a handful who didn't pay him back.

Brenna Lissoway: These are all things that I think are generally unknown about this president.

Bruce McKeeman: Right. Right.

Brenna Lissoway: So, it could be argued that you were walking into a controversial site, in a sense. You're interpreting the history that a lot of Americans probably – it's like well, he's not a very popular figure in American history.

Bruce McKeeman: He's not a very popular figure at all. And the visitors who come out of being there after being both at the park where we have his boyhood home and replica of his father's blacksmith shop, and several other historic buildings, and the gravesite. Both he and his wife are buried there. And the presidential library. People come out of there going, "I never knew." His historical reputation is solely tarnished by the Depression. His

accomplishments as secretary of commerce is phenomenal. I mean, he is responsible for standardizing many things we take for common today, like two by fours, and nuts and bolts and nails. He was the first Secretary of Commerce to speak on television. And it goes on and on and on. I mean, absolutely fantastic person who got a bad rap. I would certainly encourage anyone to go look into it further. He was amazing.

Bruce McKeeman: The management issue at Hoover is that it is in the middle of town. West Branch is not a big town. But you come off the interstate and you come down into the park. We had the only open greenspace in the community. So, there was lots of public political dealings, allowing a lot of special events in an open space where many parks would say no, there's no direct connection or nexus between the activity and the park. But as the only open public space, and since it was outside the historic district, then there were things that I was able to do in working with the mayor and a council and the fire department and chamber of commerce, of being able to help the community put on activities by utilizing the open space. That normally wouldn't have occurred.

Brenna Lissoway: Right.

Bruce McKeeman: We look at many parks saying, "Oh, that's just a small historic site. Nothing goes on there." I mean, the amount of activity that goes on at Herbert Hoover Historic Site is amazing. We have prairie and we do prairie fires. We burn half of it every other year. We have an amazing cultural landscape situation. We own the main street that goes into town. So, once you get off the highway, get past the gas station, you're in the park. And so, again, dealing with access. Is it a park issue? Is it a town issue? When I got there, we were trying to plow a main town roadway with blade plows and pickup trucks. And they had regular sized city snowplows with sanders on the back.

Bruce McKeeman: So, one of the things I did was go to the city manager and say, "We need to figure out how you all can do this. I will pay you a set fee to do the snow plowing on this hill, on this road. Some winters you may make money. Some winters it may cost you money. But I'm not going to play with how many hours did you have here or there. Tell me what you want to do that."

Bruce McKeeman: So, they came up with a figure, and it was significantly less than what the park was paying in overtime for the maintenance guys to go out and plow this road with inadequate equipment. So, one of those, how can we make this better? How can we work cooperatively with a community, with another agency, and improve the circumstances for both the community and the park.

Brenna Lissoway: It just requires thinking a little bit differently, it sounds like.

Bruce McKeeman: Yeah.

Brenna Lissoway: So, I have to ask, was the superintendency what you expected? That role?

Bruce McKeeman: It was.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay.

Bruce McKeeman: Being a superintendent, you're in the chair. It's yours. And you can make out of it what you want. Are there challenges? Absolutely. But it is your opportunity to directly make a difference. To support the staff. To get the resources you need to do the job and to develop a program to help the public appreciate in this instance, understand a person who has a bad reputation. So, no. I very much liked being a superintendent. I mean, yeah. There are bad days. There's no question about it. But having the opportunity to have a direct impact on how you manage and preserve and protect the resources, and present the story to the American public, is unexcelled from anyplace else.

Brenna Lissoway: So how did you make the decision to retire?

Bruce McKeeman: (laughs) Well, I'd been at Hoover for a few years. Was going through my evaluation with the regional director, the deputy regional director. And they said, "Well, we need to consider what your next step is and what your next job is."

Bruce McKeeman: I said, "Okay. Well, we need to talk about this." I had maxed out my retirement because of my law enforcement stuff. I had 6C retirement. So, I was working because it was still fun. There was some political things coming down the road that were aimed at how do we cut park budgets and how do we eliminate parks, in essence. It was a political agenda being pushed by that particular president. What it meant to me was spending the next two or three years fighting to maintain what little we had to begin with, which is an admirable thing to do. It's something that I would certainly have continued to do. My internal position was that I wasn't going to lie to the public. If some reporter came to me and said, "Well, do you have everything you need from this administration?" There was no way that I could say yes. And I didn't want to put the regional director in a bind, necessarily. I told the regional director that I'm not going to lie to the public. I will do everything to keep you and me out of trouble. But I'm not lying to the public.

Bruce McKeeman: I thought about it long and hard. Finally decided as much as I wanted to stay in there and fight the fight, because that's what we should do, I could see that the next four years, anyways, were not going to be a fun time. There wasn't any way that you could outrun the challenge of what was coming down politically. So, I finally decided that maybe it was time to go do something else. So, I retired.

Brenna Lissoway: Yeah. And what have you been doing in retirement?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, I'm the director of a hiking group in Prescott, and lead hikes. We do a couple of hikes every weekend between Labor Day and Memorial Day. I teach at seasonal law enforcement academies when I have an opportunity.

Brenna Lissoway: What do you teach there?

Bruce McKeeman: Authority and jurisdiction. History of NPS law enforcement. Natural resource management – some of the ones I teach. I, for a while I was involved in a mayor's committee for the preservation of open space in Prescott. Until we get a new mayor, and that committee seemed to disappear.

Brenna Lissoway: Did I see that you've had some international work?

Bruce McKeeman: Yes.

Brenna Lissoway: Since you retired?

Bruce McKeeman: Right. The International Technical Assistance Program in the Department of the Interior, funded primarily through the USAID, has projects in many countries, primarily Jordan as well as Africa, Indonesia, Georgia, some South American. Both retirees and active employees are eligible to go on these assignments. They put out vacancies announcements like everything else. And if you feel you're qualified, you submit your resume. I did a two-week basic ranger skills training in the Republic of Georgia. Then I was selected, along with two other retired folks, Bill Wade and Phil Young, to do a one-on-one field mentoring program at Petra Archeological Park in the Kingdom of Jordan. Over a two-year period, we were over there three different times for a total of 12 weeks. Did an operations evaluation, basically, for Petra, and worked with the field rangers to help them improve their field skills. Fantastic. Everyone should take an opportunity to do that.

Brenna Lissoway: So, what did you kind of come away with, participating in an international context with park management?

Bruce McKeeman: Well, it's, you know, extremely different when you – we know what our system is, and in Georgia, as a post-Soviet republic, it's really interesting in there's lots of dedication. I mean, park rangers are park rangers are park rangers. They are there for the protection of the resources, and to do what they can to maintain the area they're responsible for.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the interesting things we found in Georgia was, what I would call, a relative lack of appreciation on the part of the public. Litter everywhere. I don't know the total reason. My suspicions are that they don't have a personal buy-in. That because of the Soviet era, where everything belonged to the government, there wasn't any personal attachment. Yeah, it was a nice place to picnic. Nice resource. Beautiful waterfalls. Nice river. But it belonged to them. It didn't belong to us. So, there was no personal standard of care or concern. Which I found really amazing, particularly since that particular park was created in 1912, and they have a number of marvelous protected areas in Georgia.

Bruce McKeeman: Jordan's a little bit different. The former king, who married an American, established the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, and set up a number of nature reserves within the kingdom. It so happens that Petra creates 90 percent of the total tourism income in the country of Jordan.

Brenna Lissoway: Wow.

Bruce McKeeman: It is a bucket list place. Phenomenal archeological resources. But it is now managed by one of the directors of the development authority. So, there's a whole different focus, not so much as we would have it under archeological and resource protection, but under how do we drive the economy to get more income?

Bruce McKeeman: In the transition from the Ministry of Antiquities and Tourism to this development authority, there has been a loss of the legal protective authorities in the park. One of the requirements was that they had to create a whole new set of laws to protect the park, which needed to be approved by a local government official, and not the minister of antiquities or the king. It's been seven or eight years in trying to get those laws created, since the laws aren't created, the rangers have no authority to do anything except by bluff and puff. Well it doesn't take an endemic population long to figure out the bluff and puff has no teeth. And so, there are many challenges at Petra which need drastic change.

Bruce McKeeman: One of the things we did as a crew is, we left a list of basically 20 operational improvements, from quick, easy, cheap, to highly controversial and difficult and expensive. Unfortunately, today they haven't even ticked off the easy, quick ones. I mean, Dr Emad Hijazeen is a director over there. He's a wonderful person and has a very great interest in the park. Just that his management style, he has a difficult time either making a decision, because he doesn't want to upset the population because of Arab Spring or delegating. Those kinds of managers have their fingers in everything and are very involved and very good folks as far as wanting to do what's right. But have a difficult time sometimes making those initial decisions.

Brenna Lissoway: It's interesting. I want to segue and just ask you a couple more questions about your park service career. One is, you know, in your estimation, what makes a good leader? And if you can point to maybe someone in particular that you admired in your career, and what about them made them a good leader, that would be great.

Bruce McKeeman: I think a good leader is someone who has a good, solid background and knowledge in the resource and has an ability to listen to the individuals that they're supervising or working with. We always at some point have to make a decision one way or another. But if you're willing to listen and take input and give everyone an opportunity to express their views and concerns about an issue, and then make a decision, doesn't have to be a consensus, necessarily. But a decision is made based on everyone having an opportunity to give input.

Bruce McKeeman: That's the way I tried to manage when I was a manager was okay, we have this issue. I want to hear your opinion. I don't want you telling me what you think I know, or what you think I want to hear. I want you to tell me what you think. Doesn't mean that's what we're going to do. But you have

the opportunity and the right, in my view, to tell me where some of the pitfalls may be. What we should do. What's the right thing to do for both the resource and what we're trying to protect. Then we'll make a decision. It may be one you agree with. It may not be one you agree with. But once we've made a decision, my expectation is that you're on board with the decision. You had your chance. We took all the input. I'm sitting in the chair. The decision's been made. I now expect you at least when you're on duty and officially to support the decision that's been made and help implement it.

Bruce McKeeman: So, having folks with that type of attitude. Dick Martin, for certain. Butch Farabee. Butch was a great one that helped me do a lot of that. I considered him a great mentor. Bill Supernaugh helped me to a great extent as did Jim Brady and Rick Smith. And of course, we're talking about the Yosemite gang. Except for Bill Supernaugh. I mean, those guys were willing to listen to me and to give me an opportunity to go out and make mistakes and have my back. With guidance. Didn't say, "Here's how you do it." The analogy for me is there's the end zone. Here's the out of bounds. You figure out how to get there. And we need to be able to give our employees the opportunity to make those kinds of decisions.

Bruce McKeeman: For my personality, having someone sit there and say, "Not only this is what I want you to do, but this I how I want you to do it." I mean, okay, at that point I'm just a minion. You know, don't tell me how to do something. Tell me what the results should be. What's the goal and what's the end zone? And then let me figure out how to get down there. So that's the management style I think is important and critical and values employees. Values their opinions. But we also have to understand is that ultimately, it's one person that's going to take responsibility for what happens. And we need to respect that individual's right to make that final decision.

Brenna Lissoway: So, my final question for you this afternoon is what is the thing that you accomplished in your career that you're most proud of? What is your legacy for the Park Service, do you think?

Bruce McKeeman: I think and hope that my legacy is that he did what was right for the resource. And he stood by his people. But it's always about the resource. And it should be, did we do what was right in order to protect the resource and provide for the public understanding and appreciation and support the staff.

Brenna Lissoway: Okay. Thanks so much. (laughs)

Bruce McKeeman: You're welcome.

[END OF TRACK 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]