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Warren Bielenberg  
October 22, 2015

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones and Thea Garrett  
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen  
Digitized by Casey Oehler

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ANPR Oral History Project

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The narrator reviewed and corrected this transcript.

Audiofile: BIELENBERG Warren 22 Oct 2015

[START OF TRACK 1]

Lu Ann Jones: So first of all, why don't we all hear our names? We'll go around the room. You'll be primarily miked, but we'll see how we get it.

Warren Bielenberg: Warren Bielenberg.

John McDade: John McDade.

Martha Wiley: Martha Wiley.

Jessica Metz-Bugg: Jessica Metz-Bugg.

Micah Day: Micah Day.

Thea Garrett: Thea Garrett.

Lu Ann Jones: And this is Lu Ann Jones. So let's see how we're—

Lu Ann Jones: Let's see. And what year were you born? Do you mind telling me?

John McDade: No. I was born in 1956.

Lu Ann Jones: All right. So, let's see what we—

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. So we'll get started. And we've already introduced ourselves as part, well, we're going to start this formally. So this is Lu Ann Jones. We're at Ranger Rendezvous at Black Mountain, at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly. And this interview is part of the Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project. So could we all introduce ourselves?

Warren Bielenberg: I'm Warren Bielenberg.

Lu Ann Jones: And you are the person that's being interviewed.

Warren Bielenberg: I'm the interviewee.

John McDade: I'm John McDade from Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Martha Wiley: I'm Martha Wiley from Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

- Jessica Metz-Bugg: I'm Jessica Metz-Bugg with Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Cherokee Central School System.
- Micah Day: I'm Micah Day from Great Smoky Mountains National Park.
- Thea Garrett: I'm Thea Garrett from Acadia National Park.
- Lu Ann Jones: And this is Lu Ann Jones from the Park History Program, WASO. So, Warren, do we have your permission to record this interview?
- Warren Bielenberg: Yes. Yes, you have my permission.
- Lu Ann Jones: We'll also ask you to sign what we call a release form at the end. I should also say that if there are any questions that we ask that you don't want to answer, you are certainly free to say, "That's not something I want to talk about today." All right?
- Warren Bielenberg: Yes.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, I like to start at the beginning. When people were born, where they were born, a little bit about your background before we get to the Park Service.
- Warren Bielenberg: I was born in Saint Paul, in the hospital in Saint Paul, Minnesota. We lived on a farm, and then when I moved to six months old, we moved to the big city of Stillwater, Minnesota. My dad was the Surge man. He repaired Surge milk equipment and things for Sears Roebuck, and then he started an electrical business. Stillwater's on the Saint Croix River, which is now a Park Service area. But it wasn't when I was growing up there. We had this beautiful ravine behind our house, which I would play in for hours and days at a time. So I think that was my start of the love of the outdoors. My mother said that I had a neighbor when I was five years old, I'd go to my neighbor's house and watch birds. So I still do that today. Now they come to my house. But we still do that. And I've always been kind of outdoor stuff.
- Warren Bielenberg: I was one of five children. Our parents always told us to get a job away from home so they had a place to come visit. So we all did pretty well at that. My oldest sister worked in summer camps, and so she worked one in Maine. So we got to go to Maine one summer to visit my sister. And she worked in Massachusetts, and went there to an all-girls Jewish girls' camp. When I was 16, that was kind of fun. And then, when she was in graduate school in Denver, we went out to visit her. And then we went to a place called Mesa Verde National Park. I had just finished my freshman year in college. We went on this tour to the cliff palace. And of course, that would have been in 1963, I think. At that time, my mother, when she traveled, she wore a dress. If you've been to Cliff Palace, you have to climb up these wooden ladders in through the ruins. The ranger told my mother she could come last, because she wore the dress. Then we had this tour. I don't know who the ranger was on the tour. But afterwards my mother said, "You know, that's what you should do."

- Warren Bielenberg: So that was my really first introduction to the Park Service. I mean, I read stuff about Park Service. And one of my favorite authors when I was growing up was Sigurd Olson and all of his books. So that was kind of my background that way.
- Warren Bielenberg: Well, I hated high school. Didn't want to go to college. I thought I was going to be an electrician like my dad. The guidance counselor brought me in one day and he said, "Well, Warren, what are you going to do when you graduate?"
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, "I don't know. I think I'll just go work for my dad." He said, "Well, have you thought about college?" I said, "No. I hate school."
- Warren Bielenberg: He said, "Well, but your tests, you have high aptitudes in the outdoors. And University of Minnesota has a program called wildlife management."
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Oh. Well, that sounds interesting." So I signed up. I had no reason to go to college. I made it through my freshman year with a 1.47 grade point average. But I learned to drink lime vodka and play pool. Those were the two accomplishments of my freshman year.
- Warren Bielenberg: So, then a friend of mine, my roommate, actually. No, he wasn't my roommate then. But he was flunking out, also. He was going to this little school in Wisconsin called River Falls, which is only about 25 miles from my home. I actually was familiar with it, because my dad had a job at River Falls, wiring a couple of buildings, on the campus. So he had the electrical work in the new girls' dorm. I had worked in there all summer, and I actually had the key for the electric box, which somehow I managed to keep. I don't know why I did that, to this day.
- Warren Bielenberg: Not many people know this, okay? (laughter) So this is not being written down, okay? But I'll tell you, this is kind of weird. Anyway, when I was at school there, it was a time of panty raids and all that. Well—
- Thea Garrett: We are recording. (laughter)
- Warren Bielenberg: Well, the girls, they had a reverse panty raid on our dorm. So every Wednesday, all of the dorm counselors and RAs (Residence Assistants) would all get together for their meeting. So this one Wednesday night, we went and had a raid on the girls' dorm. I had the key to the electrical box. Went down in the basement, turned that on, shut the power off in the whole building. And we had a successful raid. So successful that next week they had the state police there to keep from having another one. (laughter) I don't know where that, the key is someplace out in the fields someplace. But anyway. I think I've only told that story twice before. So, I don't know why I even said it now. But it's just kind of one of those things it triggered.
- Warren Bielenberg: One of my good friends at River Falls lived in the far eastern, over towards Green Bay in Wisconsin. I started going home with him on weekends. Every weekend we went hunting and fishing, every weekend. Then he was going to go to Stevens Point, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point the next year. I said well, okay. So I applied

and I got accepted into there. So I went to three colleges in three years. Stevens Point had a College of Natural Resources. They had a conservation major. They had a major in forestry, soils or wildlife. Now they have a full accredited PhD program in natural resources. So a lot of Park Service people actually have graduated from Stevens Point. But then I went there. It was funny, the next summer after my third school and my third year, my dad said, "Well, where are you going to school this year?"

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "I'm staying at Stevens Point." So I graduated from Stevens Point. I was on the five-year plan before it was acceptable or necessary, you know.

Warren Bielenberg: After that, I started applying for seasonal jobs. So I remember two Christmas vacations, I sat in front of a little manual typewriter typing out SF171s, or whatever the form was, and sending them out to park areas. Like 35 or 40 of them, send them out for seasonal jobs. Never heard word one.

Warren Bielenberg: One of my advisors had been a seasonal many years in Yellowstone. Actually was a very good friend with Edward Abbey. They were in separate fire towers. So he introduced me to Edward Abbey's readings or writings and all that. So I have kind of a warped background in that regard, too. He tried to get me a job in Yellowstone through the district ranger. I called Dale Nuss, whose nickname was Nasty Nuss. He was kind of a real dictatorial district ranger, and he kind of blew me off. I never got to work as a seasonal.

Warren Bielenberg: But in the fall of what would have been my fifth year, I took the FS double E test, the Federal Service Entrance Exam, which was the way to get into the federal government. I tell people, the only reason I took that test, it was the opening day of deer season in Wisconsin, which is a holiday, you know. Everything shuts down for deer season. But I took the FS double E. It was because I was hungover from a party the night before, and I missed my ride for deer hunting. So that's how I took the FS double E. And that's the honest to God truth.

Lu Ann Jones: So where did you take it?

Warren Bielenberg: In Stevens Point, Wisconsin. And then I went home at Christmas break. When I came back from school there was this big brown envelope about this thick. It said congratulations, you've scored whatever score. And it had all these Job brochures from different federal agencies to apply. Well, the only one I filled out was for the Park Service. Right about Easter I got a call, I got a letter and then I got a call that I had to go to an interview. The closest Department of the Interior location was in the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin. So, I drove down there.

Warren Bielenberg: Well, my major was in conservation. I had enough credits that I could get another major in biology. If I had been a major in biology, I'd have had to take calculus and organic chemistry. But by doing it the other way, I didn't have to do those things and I got the major. Then I took a camp counseling course and a one-credit teaching course. So I had a minor in outdoor education. I had written a paper on outdoor

education in the Park Service. Now this would have been in the spring of 1967. So there wasn't a tremendous amount going on in environmental education. But there was some, and I had written this paper.

Warren Bielenberg: So, I go to this interview with the Fish & Wildlife Service refuge manager. He didn't know jack about the Park Service. One of my superintendents would say that you can baffle them with bullshit, and that's what I did. I mean, I threw out all kinds of names and stuff. He had no idea. But I sure sounded like I knew what I was talking about, right?

Warren Bielenberg: So, I graduated. The day after graduation, my roommate and I went up fishing for three days and camping. I came back to the house I lived in just to pick up the last of my stuff, and looked in the mailbox and there was this big brown envelope. It said, congratulations, you have been selected to the intake ranger training course at the Grand Canyon starting on July fifth.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah. Report to Albright Training Center on July fifth. So there it was. Just walk in the door, GS-5, permanent employee, just like that. So the first 12 weeks of my employment in the Park Service was sitting in a classroom at Albright Training Center, Introduction to Park Operations where, I mean, we did everything. It was introductions to everything. So we had budgeting, and we had personnel stuff, and we had the FBI there teaching us how to do hand-to-hand combat. That got away from me, John. (laughter) And firefighting, and rappelling, and packing a mule, and stuff that I have never used at all. (laughter)

Warren Bielenberg: But then, my first assignment was on the Blue Ridge Parkway, just over there in Oteen. Right when you come off of US 70, the first turnoff on the parkway was where my assignment was. Well, when I, let's see, 1967, what was going on then? Hmm. The Vietnam War. So I had this notice for a physical that I was supposed to have in Minnesota on July tenth. I was starting work in the Grand Canyon on July fifth. So I went to the draft board. A lady at the draft board went to our church. I said, "Dorothy, I've got to go to Arizona for this. I got a job."

Warren Bielenberg: She said, "Well, when you get to Arizona, just register." So I did. Ten weeks in, we got our assignments, and my assignment was come over here [Blue Ridge Parkway]. We graduated, and two days before I left, I got the envelope from Phoenix telling me I had to report for a physical on such and such a day. Well, that was the day I was going to be back in Minnesota to pick up my stuff to move down here. So I stopped and I saw Dorothy. She said, "Just let them know when you get to North Carolina." Which a fool, I did. And on December 20<sup>th</sup>, I got my draft notice. So I signed off on my radio. And I went 10-7 for US Army, [hope to see you] in two years.

Warren Bielenberg: I went to basic training. My first airplane ride was from Minneapolis to Fort Campbell, Kentucky on January 10, 1968. The height of the Tet Offensive in

Vietnam. Kind of scary times. But I made it through basic training and went to advanced infantry training at Fort Benning and was a field radio repairman, which would have been frontline duty. There was 104 people in the class. The first six names in the alphabet were sent to Alaska. I was the fifth one in the alphabet. They sent me to Alaska instead of Vietnam. I guess I can't complain. I didn't get shot at, that's for darn sure. And it was a lot more comfortable than in the jungle. I got out of the army and went back, came back down here. Actually there was a vacancy at Mount McKinley, Denali now, and in correspondence with the administrative officer, I told her that I was a permanent employee, and I'm on military furlough or whatever it's called, and I'm going to be going back and I would love to stay up here. She said, "Oh, we'd love to have you." So she started working on that. Then she up and gets a job and leaves and nobody else gave a care about me or that job.

Warren Bielenberg: So, I got this call, they actually called me from Asheville to Anchorage, we want you back here on such and such a date. I said well, let me call you back. Can I call you back tomorrow on that? I really thought about just staying in Alaska. I really loved it up there. But I decided well, I can always come back to Alaska with the Park Service. But I might never be able to get back in the Park Service. So I came back down here. The thing was that I was a GS-5, step one, when I got drafted. When I came back, I was a GS-7, step two.

Lu Ann Jones: How did that happen?

Warren Bielenberg: Honorable discharge. Yeah. And then I started working on the parkway again as a road ranger. I mean, somebody asked me well, what did you do? I said, everything. I mean, cleaned toilets and worked at the visitors' center, Craggy Gardens, and cut boundary line and worked accidents and wrote tickets and fought fire and all of that stuff. That's what you did, a little bit of everything. In like November of '71, I saw a vacancy announcement for a job at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, which is up in northern Wisconsin. We had visited there on a field trip from summer camp when I was in college. I filled out my application and no, you didn't fill out application. It was all that punch card stuff at the time. But I started calling the park and bugging the superintendent, telling him I'm interested with this job. Well, this was a brand new park. Just recently staffed. I don't remember the dates, created in '67, no, '70, I guess it was. So, the first staff – anyway, I didn't get the job that was advertised, which was this chief ranger job.

Warren Bielenberg: But then I got a call right after that. The superintendent said, "Well, I'm sorry, but I hired somebody else for that job. But would you like the job as an interpreter?" I said, yeah, I'll do that. Heck, yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: So, went up and moved to northern Wisconsin in March of '72. I'd gotten married in August of '71. My wife was from, just two ridges over from here in New Haw Creek. And it was interesting. She had never been anywhere other than here and Daytona, Florida, I think, in her life, just the road between the two, and then moving to northern Wisconsin. I remember we were up trying to find a place to live. And driving around and the snow was deep. Couldn't see the stop signs



because it was plowed up. And all the cars had these orange balls on the antennas. Well, around here, that was a radio advertisement, right? Up there, it was so you could see cars over the snow. (laughs) It was a safety issue then. Anyway, we ended up buying a mobile home.

Warren Bielenberg: I was the fourth person on the staff. Totally way in over my head, out of my league. It was an interesting experience, because when I got there, the first day, a moving van came on Sunday. The chief ranger lived in the trailer next to mine in the little trailer park. And he said, "Tomorrow at eight o'clock, I'll pick you up and we have to go move the office." Well, where's the office? Okay. So they were in over a drugstore in downtown Ashland. We moved into the first house that was acquired by the park. A lady's husband had died, and so she sold. So it was right out on Little Sand Bay, in the park. So I lived like from here to the parking lot from Lake Superior. And our office was there. I didn't live there at the time, but later on.

Warren Bielenberg: So, the first day we moved, well, actually we went out and started painting that house and getting ready, and then we moved for the week, and moved the office up. What do you do in a new park, you know? I'd only worked in the Park Service, basically, for two years. I'm driving this road out here. I mean, I had no experience. I'd never worked in a campground, I never did a lot of things. But yet here I was, the fourth person on staff and a park interpretive specialist. Chief of interpretation or whatever.

Warren Bielenberg: Our superintendent, I won't – well, he's dead now, so I can tell you his name. Bill Bromberg was a person that he would not do a single thing unless he had personal gain from it.

Lu Ann Jones: Was this the bad supervisor that you—

Warren Bielenberg: It's the first of the line. (laughs) Yeah. That's the first one. Yeah. No, actually the second one. First one would have been on the Blue Ridge Parkway. I remember – we had a big Dodge Ram 4X4, and we had to go to his house. His wife was an antique dealer and we had to move antiques from a store to her house. He stored the park boat at his house and used it, and the park snowmobile. He lived 35 miles from the park, and he would come in at ten o'clock in the morning and sit down and read the newspaper and eat his lunch. Then he'd come out where we were having lunch, and sort of look around for someone to give him food, and then he'd turn around and leave at two. I mean, he'd been kicked out of the Virgin Islands. He'd been the superintendent of the Virgin Islands but kicked out. And was floating around with no job when they created staff at Apostle Islands, moved him there. I mean, the Park Service, I don't know if they still do those things. Well, from my days here, so I know they don't. Yeah, he should have been fired multiple times, probably. Because he would not deal with anybody that he felt was below the rank of colonel. You know, even if you were a civilian. He wouldn't deal with people unless they were a power. He was just a strange man that way.

- Lu Ann Jones: How did you end up learning your job if you didn't have a good supervisor?
- Warren Bielenberg: Well, I'll tell you, Doug Barnard, who's now dead, was the chief ranger. He also graduated from Stevens Point. And I remember him as a big hulking bastard in a bar there. That's how I remember him. He was like six-four and weighed about 250. I don't know if you ever, well, you're too young to remember him, but he died as superintendent of Isle Royale. But he was a big, boisterous, loud, domineering personality. And he was one of those people that was ready, shoot, aim, you know? [makes gun noise] Jump on something, say something, and then – I mean, I remember, we'd drive to work together. And he said, "Look at that sorry piece of shit over there. They should [unclear]." I said, "Well, you don't even know him." Which was [unclear] Anyway, he had experience and was very smart. Our administrative officer had been kicked out of the North Atlantic Regional Office, or the Philadelphia Regional Office, as incompetent. So they shipped him out. Well the Great Lakes parks, Sleeping Bear, Indiana Dunes, Picture Rocks and Apostle Islands were all created, they were all in the Northeast Region. But Northeast Region, Philadelphia, was all these historic sites. They didn't want that stuff, and so they dumped any troublemakers out there. That's how I got my job. They didn't know me, so.
- Warren Bielenberg: But so, some of the superintendents, you've talked to Don Castleberry.
- Lu Ann Jones: I'm talking to him this afternoon.
- Warren Bielenberg: Ask him about, well, he was at Indiana Dunes as assistant superintendent. But the superintendent of Sleeping Bear Dunes was, I mean, he stocked his whole garage with surplus property. He built his house with surplus government property. I mean, things like that. Things you do now, you'd be arrested for thinking about some of that stuff. If you had taken an oak basket out of the museum collection and had it at your house for a party, you know, you could be arrested for felony theft, right? Well, maybe you couldn't, because you'd write it off the right way. (laughter) But they were doing that stuff all the time. It was just crazy. Anyway, I forgot where I am. But anyway.
- Warren Bielenberg: So, I was at Apostle Islands. The big thing that I did, there'd been this idea for this park, and there were promotions for it and they were talking about a million people a year coming to the islands. It scared the bejesus out of the local people. Northland College, which is in Ashland, Wisconsin, started the Sigurd Olson Institute for Environmental Studies. So I got to hang out with Sigurd Olson at meetings, which was really cool, since he was my childhood idol, which was really neat. But this institute started working with the second superintendent. Then we hired a person from the Forest Service. Actually, he had been the first director of the institute. Was hired into the park, became the resource management specialist for the park. But through the institute, we did a whole series of community meetings about what we wanted that area to look like. I don't know if it started at the college and the park was receptive. I know the first superintendent wasn't involved at all. I mean, he was at the president of the college level, but he never did anything with the meetings.

But I got to work real closely with a lot of the professors at the college, and the community people.

Warren Bielenberg: If you go to Apostle Islands now, you go to the little town of Bayfield, which in the winter had a population of about 300 people. In the summertime, on a weekend, you'd have ten thousand people there. They were talking about ambulance service, fire protection, police. They didn't want it to be a Gatlinburg. They didn't want garish signs and fudge shops and stuff all over. So they instituted zoning regulations on signing. If you go up there now, it looks a lot like it did when I was there in 1972. Really good, I mean, the businesses have all changed. There's a lot of frou-frou restaurants and bars and gift shops and things like that. But the facades, the landscape of the town, is very similar to what it was. So they were really good at that. And the whole region has been kind of guided through those early efforts of the institute.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, what was your interpretation of the park?

Warren Bielenberg: Most of it, I always told people that I was the chief of interpretation because I could never be an interpreter. In Shenandoah, that was my favorite line there. But because they had all this promotional stuff ahead of time, basically my job, I mean, what I ended up doing, was a lot of more factual stuff, of more factual things about the Park Service. There's no way we're going to have a million people here. We're not going to have hotels on the islands. There's not going to be a four-lane highway here. I mean, those were the ideas that had been thrown out. So, a lot of it was more about what we're not going to be, what we're going to be and what we're not going to be, as opposed to natural history and culture.

Warren Bielenberg: One of the really coolest things that I did, one of my neighbors in the trailer park was the NCO of the Coast Guard rescue station. Oftentimes after work, he and Doug and me and Scott would get together and have some brewskis. And one day he said, "You know, we got word from Duluth today. We're supposed to go out to Michigan Island and take the glass out of the light tower and bust up the lens and get it out of there and replace it with a little strobe light.

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Really? You're going to do that? Can we get that?" He said, "My job, I have to take it and destroy it."

Warren Bielenberg: So, the next morning, I got on the phone to the commandant, or the officer in the Duluth Coast Guard and asked him about that. He said, "Well, that's our order, sir. If you have a problem with it, contact Cleveland."

Warren Bielenberg: So, I called the commander in Cleveland and asked, I said, "You know, this is a national park area. We have seven lighthouses. This is part of the cultural history here. What can we do to protect this?"

Warren Bielenberg: He said, "Well, the light has to come out. If you want to take it apart and take it out and replace it with a 32-inch high steel platform so we can put the strobe light on it, you can have it."

Warren Bielenberg: So how do you take a Fresnel lens apart? Hell, it was a three and a half order, which is the rarest of the lenses. So Ross Hopkins, who was a historian in the Park Service, had written a book on lighthouses. So I called up Ross and I said, “Ross, we have to dismantle a Fresnel lens out on Michigan Island. How do you do that?”

Warren Bielenberg: He said, “I don’t know. I’ve just written about them. Contact this Coast Guard—” senior whatever he was, retired. He gave me a name. Some guy in New Hampshire or Massachusetts. And I called this guy up. He was so excited to hear about this. And he said—

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Warren Bielenberg: He told me, and I wrote it down, exactly how to go in there and how to dismantle this light. So we took the patrol boats out to Michigan Island and we had Doug and the other ranger, Bob Lanine and myself. And we had two student interns, Chippewa, they just had graduated from high school, Larry, Larry Morrin and whatever. Mark, Mark Gokey Larry Morrin ended up being a regional director for the BIA. Small world, huh? But he started as a GS-1 intern with us in the summertime. But anyway, that’s how things work sometimes.

Warren Bielenberg: So, we went out there and we took this light apart and we numbered all the parts and we lowered them by cable instead of having to carry them down 78 steps. Well, some of them we had to carry down in backpacks, we hauled some of this stuff down and we put it in storage. Then, maybe three years later, two years later, we acquired a store at Little Sand Bay and we made that into our first visitors’ center. I had two seasonals, Karen Lindquist and Billy Morrin, and myself, we rebuilt the lighthouse. And I had taken pictures, photographs. And we had it like where this easel is, that’s where we had it on the stand. And then I had pictures on the two walls of the view from the Michigan Island lighthouse. Of course, at that time, they were so pixelated, you had to be standing back 20 feet before it looked like, otherwise just gray and white images, you know?

Warren Bielenberg: But they still have, if you go to Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and go in their visitors’ center now, which is in the old county courthouse, which is a unique story in itself, that light is still there. And they’ve improved it. They have almost a wraparound now, and they’ve got real nice color, panoramic view of like you’re just in the lighthouse. It’s really, really cool. A really neat accomplishment, I think. And every once in a while they’ll call me about something that I did in 1975. What did you do in ’75 [directed to Thea Garrett]?

Lu Ann Jones: Were you alive in ’75?

Warren Bielenberg: Were you alive in ’75? (laughter) Yeah. So the courthouse, the office, the courthouse is an interesting, it’s a brownstone. In the Apostle Islands, they quarried brownstone. So after the Chicago fires, a lot of the buildings were built

with Apostle Islands stone. So buildings in Omaha, when I worked in the regional office, some of the buildings in downtown Omaha were from Apostle Islands brownstone. So, it was really neat.

Warren Bielenberg: The courthouse – they had one of those county, for whatever better word, pissing match, where they stole the county courthouse from one city to another. They moved it from Bayfield to Washburn. So this lovely stone building was there. Then during World War Two, it housed German prisoners of war, that would work in the apple orchards and the farms around there. It's a neat history on the building. It was used by a contractor to store stuff in. And there was a lady in town who was like the official historian. Her name was Marjorie Benton. Her father had been a lighthouse keeper out on Michigan Island. So I mean, she was really a neat lady. She'd talk your arm off, your ear. And I would sometimes, I would—"Marjorie, yeah. Okay, how's things going today? Okay, yeah. Okay. Yeah, that sounds great." Because she'd go on for like hours and hours and hours. (laughs) But anyway, her dream was we needed to save this building. So we took that on. And ended up that the guy that owned it worked out a deal with GSA [General Services Administration] that we'd finish it off as the park headquarters. Interesting things like that.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, it says here that one of your accomplishments was you had three GS-11 positions. Is that right?

Warren Bielenberg: No, when I left. When I left. So I was a GS-9, okay? And then when [Bromberg?] retired, Pat Miller came up as superintendent. Pat had been the operations evaluation team chief out of the Midwest Regional Office. And he was a real son a bitch to work for. I enjoyed him. I got along with him pretty well. But all the other people hated him.

Lu Ann Jones: Why did they hate him?

Warren Bielenberg: Oh, he was a domineering Napoleon type. Do it my way or no way, you know, pompous, walk around. But I was the last of the original people. So I was his resource person. I'd been to all the islands – not all the islands, because we didn't own them. We'd go exploring them and all that. So I was the resource person. So I was kind of his right-hand man. Whenever he left, he'd make me the acting superintendent and all that. But our chief ranger, Lee Anderson, came from Blue Ridge Parkway. The chief of maintenance, Dave Kangas, had worked on Isle Royale and then worked at Assateague, and then he came back to Apostle Islands as chief of maintenance.

Warren Bielenberg: The second year that those guys were there, the operations evaluation, Lee and Dave took the regional office people out on a boat trip around the island. It was the first time either one of them had been on the water in official capacity. The chief ranger and the chief of maintenance. On Stockton Island, which is our largest island, ten thousand acres, we had a campground and a group campground, and we had a ranger station. We had a seasonal law enforcement ranger and a

seasonal naturalist that were out there, chief ranger and the chief of maintenance. We had maintenance, not Job Corps, but it was like a state work program that did tremendous work. We hired all local people and they did all kinds of work for us. They were out there on the island. And the chief of maintenance and the chief ranger had never been on those islands. Because Pat, he made you, basically you're chained to the desk. But every Thursday, he'd go out on the island. He'd go around in the boats and he'd come back. And he'd come in and he'd [unclear] maybe go to the chief ranger or chief maintenance officer. "Goddamnit, Kangas, I was on Stockton Island, they're doing this and this and this. Why are they doing that and that?"

Warren Bielenberg: And he'd say, "Well, Pat, that's what you told us." [Grumbling imitation of Pat] He said, "Well, all right, Pat." He'd go in his desk – this is a great lesson – he goes in his desk, pulls out his work plan for the year, that had been signed by the superintendent. He said, "All right, Pat, now this is all the things that you want me to do this year. Which of these don't you want me to do so I can do what you want me to do now?" And he turned it back on him. (laughs) That was a great lesson. He stood up to him. But that was just the work atmosphere. He was just, I mean, the families hated him. And Lee Anderson switched jobs with the chief ranger at Ozarks. And within a year, he developed cancer. Probably had it earlier. And to this day, his wife swears that he died from the stress put on by the superintendent. The work situation. Yeah. I mean, it was really bad. It didn't affect me that well because I was special. I was the knowledge place.

Lu Ann Jones: Why do you think the Park Service tolerated that kind of leadership style?

Warren Bielenberg: You'll have to ask that to Castleberry. He was higher echelon than me. No, it was really frustrating. I was very, very frustrated many times. Because seeing the things that were done that were wasteful or illegal. Hopefully it's not like that anymore, but it probably is. You maybe just don't hear about it as much anymore. I don't know. You work in a great park. I don't see it in your park. But other parks, yeah, I mean, there's real issues.

Warren Bielenberg: I mean, one of my best friends was superintendent at another park. On paper he was the best superintendent. In the fall of the year, they would get all of the division heads together, and they would plan out the year. I mean, it was goal-oriented and budget-based. It was awesome! It was some of the best I'd ever seen. And then the year would come around, and he'd micromanage everything to the nth degree, which just totally destroyed all of the, the way I looked at it, destroyed the previous stuff. But he wouldn't listen to me. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Well, how did you get from Apostle Islands to Fort McHenry? That's a really different set of issues.

Warren Bielenberg: (laughs) Okay. Well, we used to get jobs, they would advertise a job. At the beginning of the year, you would fill out your experiences and your interests, okay? And then they had like the IBM punch card. I don't even know how it

worked. But they would stick the thing in, and if your holes matched the holes they were looking for, your name fell out or stayed out or however it went.

- Lu Ann Jones: People have explained that to me.
- Warren Bielenberg: That was the way that the employment. So if you didn't match all the holes, there was no chance in getting it. Well Pat Miller had gone to Washington. And Dave [Carico?] was the head of employee development or whatever at the time. Pat came back to me and he said, "Warren, I looked at your forms there. And you don't give yourself enough credit. You know, you do budget." We did 10-238s every year, and we did the budget, and I managed the budget. I didn't manage just my budget, but I managed some of the other budgets in the park, too. He said, "You don't give yourself credit for any of that stuff."
- Warren Bielenberg: And I said, "Well, you know, Pat, I don't really—"
- Warren Bielenberg: He said, "You do it more than a lot of other people do. And they're getting jobs and you're not." So, I did that.
- Warren Bielenberg: So, I get this call from the superintendent of Fort McHenry. I said, "You're in Baltimore, right? A historical area?" "Yes." "And you want me?" "Yes."
- Warren Bielenberg: "Why would you want me? I'm not a historian. I'm a naturalist."
- Warren Bielenberg: He said, "Ah, hell, I've got all kinds of historians here. I want someone who can manage them."
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Do you have housing?" He said, "Yeah, we've got two Mission 66."
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, "I'll take it." (laughs) Because I wasn't going to go to Baltimore if there was no housing available. So we lived right inside the gate at Fort McHenry. There was, like I say, the superintendent and my house, right there and then the maintenance area. We had some other housing inside the fort in the historic structures. I mean that's, how and why, I don't know.
- Warren Bielenberg: And then, that was some interesting stuff there. (laughs)
- Lu Ann Jones: Did you have a question from Fort McHenry? Were you that person—
- ?: Oh, [unclear].
- ?: Oh, yes, just, did you [meet?] seven different—
- Warren Bielenberg: Seven. No, we did, Fort McHenry, if you know Fort McHenry, it's this peninsula in Baltimore, surrounded by the Patapsco River and the inner harbor. Forty-four acres, if I remember right. And this nice big open area. So whenever there was a presidential, they would like to use Fort McHenry as a landing zone, because it was easy to secure. It had a fence all around it and you could control everything.

So that's why. They didn't come to visit Fort McHenry when I was there. They had come multiple times prior to when I got there, what was going on? Oh, the centennial? The 1976.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, Bicentennial.

Warren Bielenberg: They had all these big events and stuff going on there. And I just remember that, you know, we had these special events going on. I call up the newspaper and TV stations to try to get coverage out there. I remember this one reporter said, "You know, it sounds like fun. But I've been there so goddamned many times for presidential shit, I'm not coming back unless you have, the thing blows up. Or a plane crashes." That's basically what he said. I mean, it was just like that. (laughter)

?: So you didn't really have anything to do with any of the presidential—

Warren Bielenberg: Oh, heck yeah. I was the contact for the Secret Service and the White House staff. Oh, yeah. I mean, they came to me. I get a call from the director's office or the head of the, I can't remember how I got the calls. But the regional director would call, or the Washington office, somebody in the Washington office would call and said, "You know, the president's planning to be in Baltimore, and they would like to use Fort McHenry. The Secret Service is going to be in touch with you." And I'd say, oh, okay.

Warren Bielenberg: So, I'd get in touch with the superintendent and say, "Well, they're going to do that."

Warren Bielenberg: He or She'd say, "You handle it. You handle it." So you'd work with the Secret Service. The first couple of events, the first couple of them, I would call in the SET team. The regional, we had regional, the law enforcement folks that would come in. In the regional offices, I think they still had park police captains in there. Like the third event, Captain Bobby, he said, "You know, Warren, you could call the Park Police and it would be a whole lot easier to do this."

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "If you call me, we'll call them. And they'll bring up motorcycles, helicopters, horses, whatever you need." I said, "You're kidding."

Warren Bielenberg: He said, "No. That's what we do." So the next four, when I'd get that call, I'd just call up the regional office, or whoever the contact was in Washington, and then they'd come to the meetings with me. But we'd sit down, and you'd deal with the Secret Service. God, they're great to deal with, because they know exactly what they want to do, right?

Warren Bielenberg: And I just remember when President Carter was coming, let's see, was Carter before Reagan or after Reagan?

Lu Ann Jones: Before.



- Warren Bielenberg: Before. Okay. President Carter was coming. The agent in charge, he said, “Well, the president’s going to be here May tenth. And we need to close the fort down.”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “No, we can’t close the fort down. I’ve got 20 school buses coming in that day. We’re not closing the fort.”
- Warren Bielenberg: He said, “Well, what can we do?”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Well, what can we do?” We negotiated that the president was coming in at like eleven o’clock, so the school groups had to be in before, by nine o’clock the buses all parked. And then at ten, 10:30, they could be anywhere. But then at 10:30, they had to be inside the fort or inside the parking area where we had visitors. And we had visitors that we allowed to be in there. But you probably couldn’t do it that way now. But we had armed guards, and they had bomb-sniffing dogs, and all that kind of stuff. But then they would plan the whole route all the way to the convention center, wherever the president was meeting.
- Warren Bielenberg: I remember a number of years ago, under Carter, they did these, what do they call it, enterprise zones, I believe? It was a big economic thing. He and Rosalynn made this really big deal about taking the train to Baltimore, save money instead of the – well, all the helicopters were at Fort McHenry. If there was a problem, the two helicopters were parked right there. So it would cost the same amount, basically. But they just didn’t come and use them there. So that worked really well.
- Warren Bielenberg: But we got to the school kids when the president came and the helicopters landed, and then they saw the motorcade close up I mean, that’s a really neat experience. They didn’t get their class experience that they were signed up for. But they got probably a better one.
- Warren Bielenberg: Remember when Reagan was shot. Tim McCarthy was the Secret Service agent that was shot. I had been working with Tim and Reagan was supposed to come to the park like six days after he was wounded in the attempted assassination. So the next year, I guess it was the next year, Tim was the lead on another one of our things. Like I say, the Secret Service was great to work with because you knew exactly what they wanted. They made great impressions on me.
- Warren Bielenberg: I mean, the greatest impression was they had these snipers on the roof of the visitors’ center. They have these targets lined out. From Fort McHenry, about a quarter mile, there’s a big grain elevator. They told me afterwards that during the time, there was a guy that was sitting in the window of the grain elevator, eating his lunch. They had the scope on him the whole time. If he had made any kind of movement, they’d have blown him away. They’re serious about it.
- Warren Bielenberg: But then the other hand, the White House staffers are totally different. I mean, they want (snapping fingers) access, they want everything. You’re working with the Secret Service for three weeks in advance. But then like three days in advance, you get a call from these people, and they want to set up the press and all this kind

of stuff. So, then you have to negotiate back with the Secret Service on what we can do here.

Warren Bielenberg: But I did a pretty good job with that with those folks. Because I get this call one day from the Secret Service liaison, or the White House liaison. And she said, "Well, you know we have the president coming in on such and such a day." I said yes. She said, "I just talked with" blah, blah, blah, who was the White House lead for the last one. She said, "Let him handle, whatever you want, you just let him do it." And so she said, "Do whatever I need to have done." So I set it up for her to make it work. I mean, I thought that was a great vote of confidence when they called and said, "Do our work for us. Make it easier." But it was really a tug between those two, protection and security, and then openness to the president. So that really is a big thing. But no, it was only, it was six presidentials and one vice-presidential. So Mondale came through one time. But none of them ever came to visit Ford McHenry.

Warren Bielenberg: A funny story. When Carter came, I had asked the Secret Service Agent-in-charge, Flag Day at Fort McHenry is June 14<sup>th</sup>, I believe. And they were coming in May. And I said, "Is it okay if I give the president an invitation to Flag Day for he and Rosalynn and Amy to come to Flag Day?"

Warren Bielenberg: He said, "Yeah, do that."

Warren Bielenberg: So, I'm standing in the receiving line. And I'm at the next to the last person in the receiving line. It's all protocol, they've got the mayor and the senator, and they've got, however it goes, all the way down. And the ladies at the end here, I'm here, she's here. She said, "I don't know why I'm here. My precinct was the only one that didn't carry the president."

Warren Bielenberg: And I said, "That's all right. I'm probably the only registered Republican in line." (laughter) I was at that time, but I no longer am. (laughter) But I had this, I had my fancy dress jacket on, and I had this invitation inside here. So here I am. I shook hands with president, I unzipped my jacket, I put my hand in here, and all of these Secret Service agents that came on the helicopter that didn't know I was doing that, started reaching for their stuff. Yeah. That was, we communicated, but not to everybody, I guess.

Warren Bielenberg: The other thing that I was cautioned not to do – remember Sam Donaldson [the television reporter]? He could be a real bonehead, right? Well, if you land a helicopter in park land, you need a certain amount of permission to do that, right? Sam Donaldson just comes and lands in a helicopter and runs up there. He doesn't have permission. I'm going to write him a citation. The Secret Service agent said, "He's an asshole. Don't worry about it. If you did that, you would ruin your career." (laughter) So, it was fun dealing with those. It was a whole different level. And I don't know how many people get to deal with presidential visits and all that, but it would have been kind of fun to have them come to the park, do something in the park. But they had worn that out during the Bicentennial. So.

- Lu Ann Jones: What time is it now, because I think that—
- Warren Bielenberg: A quarter to twelve.
- Lu Ann Jones: Oh. Well I'll go a few more minutes, and then you can get lunch. I'm wondering, at what point did you see yourself, that you were going to make a career of the Park Service? Was that fairly early on?
- Warren Bielenberg: Oh, yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: That you knew you were going to stay in for the long haul.
- Warren Bielenberg: Oh, yeah. I mean, I never had a doubt about it. I mean, other than staying in Alaska, that was the only time I ever thought not to. But actually, I retired probably earlier than I should have, or could have, probably. The thing called GPRA [Government Performance and Results Act] just sort of drove me up the wall. It was a waste of time and money in my estimation. So much unproductive time was spent on that. I heard Fish and Wildlife Service had two GS-14s in the Washington office that did their entire GPRA program. We had it down to seasonals in parks working on it. I mean, that kind of drove me. GPRA. Great Planned Retirement Activities that's what I called it.
- Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) Well, when you started thinking about your career, did you have a plan for how your career would unfold? Or did it just—
- Warren Bielenberg: Well, when we were in that 12 weeks of Introduction to Park Operation, we had to write down our career goals and where we'd like to work. So my career goal was to be a GS-11 district ranger. And my three parks that I wanted to work at were Shenandoah, Great Smoky Mountains or the Everglades. My first assignment was on the Blue Ridge Parkway. So I was pretty good, I got in between two of them. My roommate was from Organ Pipe, and he got assigned to the Blue Ridge Parkway. He almost went nuts because he hated the vegetation and the humidity. It wasn't big sky and desert. So, yeah, you don't always get those kind of things. But I was pretty lucky that way, I think. And I was never a seasonal. I really was never a GS-5, except for three, well, the three months of school, from July until December, so what is that? Four months? Five months? And then I was a GS-7, and then I got promoted to a GS-9 to go to Apostle Islands. Then two and a half years later, I got promoted to an 11 there through accretion of duties. When I left there, they hired three GS-11s to do what I'd been doing. Okay, so that's where that thing came from. So they hired chief naturalist, cultural resource specialist, and a natural resource specialist. It was all GS-11s. So. Yeah, when you're in a brand new park, and things are growing, there's opportunity there. But I had no clue what I was doing. (laughs)
- Lu Ann Jones: What drew you to the eastern parks, given that you'd grown up in the upper Midwest? What kind of drew you to these eastern parks?

- Warren Bielenberg: Wow, you know, I really don't know why I selected those three. I had never visited them. I'd read about them, I guess, enough and had seen them. That's a good question. I'd never really thought about that. Well, we never went to the Smokies or to Shenandoah or to the Everglades.
- Lu Ann Jones: Was it the natural resources that you were drawn to?
- Warren Bielenberg: More so, yeah, I think so. I mean, growing up in Minnesota and living in Wisconsin, you know, North Woods and all that. There was really no parks, there weren't any parks up there at that time. Voyageurs wasn't there. Isle Royale was, but Voyageurs wasn't. Apostle Island, Saint Croix, none of that stuff was around. So I guess that was the attraction was trees. (laughs) Trees and birds and butterflies and good stuff.
- Lu Ann Jones: One topic that we were interested in, the stress debrief?
- Warren Bielenberg: Oh, God. Well, have you ever been through, you know what that is? Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. So I mean, it's pretty common place now. In your park or in your home or in the school, like any time there's like a shooting in the schools, the people come in to counsel the students and the teachers and all that. Well, that's relatively new. And in Shenandoah, what year would that have been, I was there '86 and '87. So I had one of my district naturalists during seasonal training, she would talk about seasonal jobs as being the most stressful job there is. And she got people's mind working that way. To me, it was the greatest job we had. I mean, yeah, there's stress and hard work and all that. But she kept hammering that, that that year we had, before I got there, one night the rangers were all up at Big Meadows playing poker and drinking beer and they got a call. A lady had poured gasoline over herself and burned herself up on the shoulder of the road. And they had to go out and deal with her.
- Warren Bielenberg: The University of Virginia in Charlottesville, just over the mountain from the park, had the start of this program. There were two ladies, two professors, that came up and counseled with the park staff in dealing with this visitor suicide. Really nasty one. And helped get that through there.
- Warren Bielenberg: Well, the summer, God, was it '88? It must have been '87, I don't remember. Anyway, I had an employee that committed suicide. The previous week, we had a law enforcement ranger that committed suicide by running a hose from the exhaust pipe of the ambulance in the fire cache, committed suicide. My employee—
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- Warren Bielenberg: —had, it was the first year as a seasonal. Excited as heck about the job. Had hiked the Appalachian Trail the year before. And in seasonal orientation, he had stood up and he said, "My name is blah, blah, blah, and I'm applying from New

Hampshire and I graduated from Blair. And I had two goals in life: One was to hike the Appalachian Trail and one was to be a ranger in the National Park Service. And last year I hiked the Appalachian Trail from Springer [Mountain] to Mount Katahdin. And now I'm a seasonal ranger." I mean, he was excited about it. He was doing it. He also had depression. But none of us saw the depression. In August, like August fifth, whatever Herbert Hoover's birthday is, Herbert Hoover's presidential summer camp was in Rapidan down in the Rapidan River in Shenandoah. It's still there. And we would open it up to the public that weekend, on that Saturday, for the public tours. He didn't show up for work that day, which is very unusual, because he was very dedicated and timely. He didn't show up for work. And we checked. His roommate said he hadn't come home last night. So we started worrying about that. His car was found on the Blue Ridge Parkway. He worked down on the southern end of the park. His car was found on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We checked with his roommate and his roommate said that he said he was going camping for the weekend. But it was strange. He didn't take most of his gear. He'd taken his tent and his backpack and some other stuff, but he didn't take his other camping stuff that he normally would have taken.

Warren Bielenberg: So, they started a hasty search around where the car was. And then we called in search teams and dogs. And we searched. At one time, we had military in there. We had 375 people that were working on this search all over, looking for this person. And then like four days in, they found the tent where he had been, where his tent was. His tent was collapsed. And inside the tent was a cooking pot with 48 wrappings of sleeping tablets that was in there. And there was a receipt, a paper bag and a receipt from a local drugstore for two packages of sleeping tablet. He had evidently just taken all that stuff and drank it down. And so between the law enforcement ranger and I that were working together on this, we called CDC [Center for Disease Control] to find out what would happen to a 23-year-old male, six-foot-one, 185, in great shape, if he took that much of this sleeping tablet. And they said that within 24 hours he would go to sleep. In 48 hours he would wake up in an agitated state. And then in 48 more hours he'd be dead, or something like that. I mean, it was just, oh, crap, really. So this search went on. We never found him. Never found him.

Warren Bielenberg: But the two ladies were at our camp the whole time. I was the information officer for that. So I had to do these press briefings. I mean, they had live radio and TV there all the time, and phone-in interviews and stuff all the time. And dealing with that. The ICP, Incident Command Post, was on the maintenance area on the Blue Ridge Parkway. And all of the search and rescue people were staying a long distance away. They would bus them to motels like 40 miles away. The closest places to stay. So here these people were out walking through the woods for 12 hours a day, and then have to go for an hour, and then they'd sleep for six hours, and they'd get up and have to do it again. I'd walk across the street and camp out in one of the government houses there in the maintenance area.

Warren Bielenberg: She would come up to me every day. And she said, "How are you doing?"

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "I'm doing fine." You know, I'm getting eight hours of sleep a night. And I'm not busting my butt out there in the woods like they are. I'm doing just fine." That goes on.

Warren Bielenberg: Like 13 days into that, or 14 days, I'm doing this interview on TV. And all of a sudden (snaps fingers), just like that, I went up to her and I said, "Okay, I've got to go." You could just feel it. It just hit like that.

Warren Bielenberg: So, I called up my assistant. He came up to take over. When he got there, I was doing another interview. I just told him what I had been doing and who was coming. And he said, "You know, I can't do what you're doing."

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Yeah, you can. Just tell the truth to these," you know. I learned some really good lessons on. I mean, there's certain things when you're dealing with the media, you know, they tend to skew things their way. I got to the point where there was media that I trusted that they'd ask you questions about the search and all that. And there's certain things you can't tell, just because. But there's other things that if you tell them, "This is the reason I'm telling you this, but I can't tell you this for this reason." And everyone accepted it. People say how bad it is dealing with the media. And in my experience, I have really kind of set ground rules and given things off the record and it's been honored. I mean, you get messed up sometimes, you're on the camera for ten minutes and they use 30 seconds of what they want of those ten minutes. But it was what you said, so it can't be real bad. But the stress debriefings.

Warren Bielenberg: We had another employee at the same exact time was on suicide watch. I mean, it was, I don't know. The Park Service, I don't know if it still does, but for a long time it has the most suicides of any federal agencies. I think the military's taken well over that now. And, why? People are very passionate about their jobs. They're very idealistic about what they do. If they can't control it, they lose control on that, that's what those folks were saying, anyway. And you can see that in people.

Warren Bielenberg: But back to the young man that committed suicide. When I was dealing with his parents, his parents never came down. I would talk to them every day, a couple of times a day, on the phone. But they never came down from New Hampshire. Which I found a little bit odd. But his mother said to me, "I just wish he would have listened to what he told his sister."

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "What do you mean?"

Warren Bielenberg: She said, "His sister was in the hospital suffering from depression. And he wrote letters that carried her through that." We later found out that he had written his job applications recovering from an attempted suicide. I mean, you didn't know that. If you had talked to him, you would never have known that. He was so excited about doing stuff. But just something – you know, depression is really, we don't know what's going on with people that way.

Warren Bielenberg: So, anyway. So that's it. That's the critical incident stress debriefing. And it still is used. It's probably used more now than ever before. I mean, Park Service have people that are trained in that, that go around with incidents. And almost every incident, you're on fires, there's usually somebody that has a training for it. Yeah. Do they use it in the park? Have you experienced it in—

?: Not [unclear] experience, no.

Martha Wiley: My husband was on the CISM team and went to Mount Rainier. The one [ranger] that was killed.

Warren Bielenberg: When the ranger was, yeah, yeah. That was a tough one. But it's really valuable. It really gets through. It's sort of like this, you just sort of sit down and talk about your feelings. Anything goes. Very, very helpful.

Lu Ann Jones: Maybe we can end on a little lighter note. You said that you developed a reputation as being—

Warren Bielenberg: I just told you that personally. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, oh!

Warren Bielenberg: Have you told these people that?

Lu Ann Jones: No. No I did not betray anything. But just, a good sense of humor, I'll put it that way. So how did you earn that reputation? And to what advantage have you used that humor?

Warren Bielenberg: I'm very serious in everything I do. No, I don't know. I like to joke around with people and give them a hard time. My wife can always tell people that I don't like, because I don't mess with them. So if I don't joke with you, you're in trouble, John. (laughter) But, yeah. I told you. For a period of time, some people referred to me as the Don Rickles of the Park Service, because I was so caustic and antagonistic and cutting. I had a superintendent that counseled me a little bit about, "You are a supervisor now. You can't be acting like this." I said yeah, you're right, I can't.

Warren Bielenberg: But then in Omaha one of my employees, he asked Castleberry about me once, because he had me come into the regional office. He said, "This place needs to be lightened up." (laughter) It's a give and a take, right? So I mean, I always try to enjoy what I do. And hope people enjoy – I mean, I volunteer in Cades Cove and I'm a tour bus driver, basically, into Cades Cove and tour guide up to Newfound Gap in the park. So, I don't tell jokes. But usually there's a little humor involved with it and some funny stories. My favorite funny story going to Newfound Gap has to do with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and being an ambassador for the 75<sup>th</sup>. And Dolly Parton was the official ambassador. Were you here then?

?: No.

Warren Bielenberg: In 2009, we had a rededication of the park up in Newfound Gap. And prior to that, Dale Ditmanson and Dolly Parton had been up at the Knoxville WBIR doing some PSA [public service announcements]. Dolly is, you know, she's like five feet, and Dale was six-four. They were up at the station and they were going to do some shots, you know, still shots. So they go together. Dale puts his arm around Dolly and his hand goes right on her right breast. And she looks up and she says, "They're real. Are you a real ranger?" (laughter) Dale tells that story, and he says, "I didn't wash my hand for three days." (laughter) So I tell that on that bus, because we always go to Newfound Gap where this was. I have people go up and stand where Roosevelt stood and where Dolly stood and all that. Then on the way back, I tell them that story. Yeah. So.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, thank you very much for being our guinea pig.

Warren Bielenberg: Okay. The guinea pig. You going to buy me lunch now?

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. I've got a yellow tag that will help us do that. (laughs)

Warren Bielenberg: Let's go.

[END OF TRACK 4]

[START OF TRACK 5]

Warren Bielenberg: When this hierarchy, like you were talking about, when I became an intake ranger and had to go to the Grand Canyon, I loaded up my personal possessions. My mother drove with me out to Denver. And I dropped her off at my sister's. Then I drove out to the Grand Canyon and spent the night at Four Corners areas, Cortez, maybe. And then drove through the reservation, Navajo reservation. There was a couple of two young people hitchhiking. So I gave them a ride. They were hippies from Boston. Now this was July third, fourth, third, of 1967. And they were going to the Grand Canyon for a love-in. So we got to the entrance station and I had my envelope. I said I'm a new ranger and going to the Albright Training Center. The ranger told me, you know, go in and you'll see the signs for the village, and then you go on, and you'll see another sign. He told me how to get there. Then he looked in the car and said, "Are they going to be rangers, too?"

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Uh uh. They're just some friends I'm giving a ride to." So I dropped them off down by the El Tovar Hotel in the center part of the Grand Canyon. Then I went to the training center and walked in and went into a room. One of the teachers, instructors was there. And introduced himself. He said his name was Don Jackson. I said, "Well, my name is Warren Bielenberg." He asked me something. I said, "Well, Mr. Jackson." He said, "No, no. In the Park Service, we go by first names. I'm Don. Mr. Jackson, that would be my father." So that's the way it was.

Warren Bielenberg: Then I told him about picking these two people up. He said, "You what?! You brought hippies in for the love-in? Oh my God!" And I thought, my career is over,



the first day, before I started. (laughter) But yeah, that was the hierarchy. The first name stuff.

Thea Garrett: First names. That's good. So we should begin officially. This is the—

Warren Bielenberg: Part two.

Thea Garrett: Thea Garrett. And you can introduce yourself.

Warren Bielenberg: Oh, Warren Bielenberg.

Thea Garrett: On October the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Warren Bielenberg: Correct.

Thea Garrett: And we are at Black Mountain, the Blue Ridge Assembly YMCA.

Warren Bielenberg: For?

Thea Garrett: For the Ranger Rendezvous. Your 39<sup>th</sup>.

Warren Bielenberg: Thirty-eighth.

Thea Garrett: Thirty-eighth.

Warren Bielenberg: Thirty-eighth.

Thea Garrett: Thirty-eighth. And so we're picking up our conversation. Was there anything in particular that you wanted to return to?

Warren Bielenberg: Well, we talked about how I got started, and we talked about Apostle Islands.

Thea Garrett: Yeah. Then—

Warren Bielenberg: Then I went to Fort McHenry. Asked how I did that. And then some of the experiences at Fort McHenry. A couple of things there. Shortly after I got there, I was called the chief, I was chief of visitor services. So I was the chief ranger and the chief of interpretation. And I had four permanent, three permanent employees and five or six seasonals. We did a lot of school programs. Shortly after we got there, Labor Day. And shortly after that, the school programs started coming in. I was just sort of observing stuff. And the one, they went into the interpretive office, which was smaller than this space we're in. There were four desks in there. On the back of the door, there was a list. It was a list of schools, the bad schools. So they put the name up there. I said, "What is this about?"

Warren Bielenberg: He said, "Oh, we always have a problem. They come every year. The teachers bring the kids into the visitors' center, they see the movie, and they send the kids out and say, 'Be back in half an hour on the bus,' and they sit there and smoke

cigarettes and drink coffee. And the kids go running around, climbing over the walls and doing everything.”

Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Well, what do we do for them?” They did some programs, but they really didn’t do curriculum-based programs. One of the seasonals, John McGarry, his wife worked for the state of Maryland schools, and she was in curriculum development. So between her and John and then the rest of the staff, we got together and started writing up curriculum. It was based on the Maryland curriculum. So for grades like one to three, or four/five, five/six, whatever the grades were, we had programs that met the state curriculum. All the way up to high school. One thing that happened in Fort McHenry during the Civil War was the Dred Scott, habeas corpus, not Dred Scott, the habeas corpus Supreme Court. Dred Scott was in Missouri. But habeas corpus. So we could actually, for senior high school, political science or social studies, they did a program and had the curriculum on that habeas corpus Supreme Court case. This, I mean, was a full range. After that, the first year, the next spring, we instituted it. And we said we would not do a program for any schools that did not have reservations, and did not [unclear]. And then we would have groups that would come in, in the spring, especially, when they were just doing field trips for get out of school, I guess, we would have groups that would come in and they would want a program. We’d say, “We have programs. You need to register ahead of time.” So we got people. We did programs for every single school. Well, at first we did for every single school. Totally burned out the staff. And then we did, we just took reservations and did it for a certain number every day. But we would get 20, 25 school groups in a day at Fort McHenry in springtime. I mean, it was just a constant turnover of people. That wasn’t really an education much, but that was, before there was an environmental education and curriculum when all that stuff has been developed in the Park Service over the years. So, we were kind of ahead of the curve on that one.

Thea Garrett: Yeah, were there any guidelines governing what [unclear]

Warren Bielenberg: We were following the state of Maryland curriculum. So our programs were based on, you know, if they were going to come down there, we wanted it to be worthwhile for the teachers to get something out of it. I think they still use some of those programs. The flag program.

Thea Garrett: You wrote about the Baltimore Harbor development that happened and that really shifting the demographic or the amount of visitation that the park received.

Warren Bielenberg: Did I say that?

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: Well, they were doing the Harbor Place development in the inner harbor. When I got there, there was the Maryland Science Center. That was really the only development on the harbor. Then they created this big mall-type harbor place of

shops and restaurants and all that stuff. And it changed our visitation patterns. On Saturday mornings, we would have sometimes eight to 10 tour buses. They would come to Fort McHenry from around the area. There would be adults waiting for the restaurants and stuff to open in Harbor Place. So that changed. So we had to do different things for that. We didn't do programs for all of those buses. But just the pattern changed. And then as we did change the school pattern some.

Warren Bielenberg: My daughter was like two years old. We would go around to the garbage cans and pick up aluminum cans and take them back and crush them. Sometimes we would crawl into the dumpster. And I'd go into the dumpster with empty bags and throw the recycling aluminum cans for her college fund. I just remember one time, we went in there, into the dumpster, and there was this garbage bag. In it there were all these little miniature liquor bottles, and I thought, what the heck? We went back to look at the schedule and there was a high school from New York City that were on their way to Florida. (laughs) So that was in the garbage. So, you can tell visitation by garbage.

Thea Garrett: Yeah. It's the archeology of garbage patterns.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah, you can do those kind of things.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: And the other really, I think, fun thing that we did there, that I enjoyed, was the wayside exhibit plan for the park. It's 42 acres, 44 acres, something like that, peninsula with a walkway around the seawall and then the fort, and then the visitors' center. And then there's a picnic area. And a statue, a big green statue called Orpheus with the Awkward Foot. The muse, let's see, I don't remember the Greek thing. We'll look it up.

Thea Garrett: Yes.

Warren Bielenberg: Orpheus with the Awkward Foot, he's the muse of music or something like that. In Greek mythology. But it was built in honor of Francis Scott Key writing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in 1926. And the dedication of that was by, I read it was the first transcontinental radio broadcast by a US president, Woodrow Wilson. So, kind of interesting. But here's this big green statue with the ribbon and holding a lyre. And he has this big fig leaf. That's all. It was up in the picnic area. So it was like a hundred yards or so from the visitors' center, but you could see it. And people would walk up, and then there was a pathway that went up to a picnic area, which is up there. And often you'd see little ladies out there, looking up on the back of the, behind the statue and all that.

Warren Bielenberg: So, one of the stories at Fort McHenry started with the Revolutionary War, and then the big story was the War of 1812. But then it was prisoner of war facility, and Union during the Civil War. That's because they had the guns pointed at the city of Baltimore and arrested the mayor and many of the city council people without charges. But that's how the habeas corpus case came about.

- Warren Bielenberg: During the Spanish-American War, it was a big army hospital. And there were thousands upon thousands of men, people who had died there in yellow fever. And then during World War Two, it was a Coast Guard training facility. So this whole timeline of military history. So we attempted to do all of that. And then the harbor, ships coming in from all over the world. To me, it was just fascinating. I wanted to do stuff on flags, national flags. And ships, types of ships, different types of ships and all that. My historians, they wanted to stick with the military stuff. And then the basic tenet of a wayside exhibit is to answer questions of something you can see. So I wanted a wayside talking about Orpheus and the dimensions of the fig leaf and whose statue and the whole thing. And I won. [unclear] lost and we won. So that exhibit was set up right outside the visitors' center. So, you look out and see Orpheus and answer your questions about those things.
- Warren Bielenberg: But there was a code on the waysides. They were sort of like the black band. But we had a soldier of a different period. So it was a soldier of the War of 1812, the Civil War, and World War One. So those were the keys to the different things [unclear]. I don't know if other parks do it that way, but that was our wayside [unclear] which was really kind of cool. That and then we had this special events, we had, during the summertime, called the tattoo evening retreat on Sunday. We did like every other weekend on Sunday. We'd have the First Army, the Marine Corps, Drum and Bugle Corps, and the Navy and the Coast Guard and the Air Force. Different ones. We'd honor somebody in the community, and they'd be the honorary colonel. Sometimes we'd get six, eight thousand people to come for those things.
- Warren Bielenberg: Defender's Day, there was always a big, big, big celebration that would bring upwards of ten to twelve thousand people to the grounds with fireworks and all that. So it was exciting stuff. I mean, urban, urban park. But lots of stuff going on.
- Thea Garrett: Yeah. And probably a dramatic transition from Apostle Island.
- Warren Bielenberg: Oh! Yeah. (laughs) The year that I moved, if I remember, we had two days that the temperature was above 80 degrees at Apostle Islands. That was in May. When I got to Fort McHenry, it was Labor Day weekend and it was like 95 degrees and probably 100 percent humidity. I thought I was going to die right there on the spot. And dirty air. Oh, from all of the industry around there. I mean, right behind our house was a Bethlehem Steel shipyard. So, lots of cultural changes. We shared, the armory was a naval reserve center. And then there was a Baltimore fire boat station were our neighbors on one side. So. Lots of different things.
- Warren Bielenberg: I remember one Fourth of July, there was a bunch of guys out playing soccer, out in the field. I was talking to them on the way home and they were off of a ship from, I don't remember where, Australia or someplace. So we all went on the ship and had picnic or lunch with the guys on the ship. And we met really neat people from all over. I mean, I know Oprah Winfrey. She was an evening anchor, I mean,

a weekend anchor on the news. And one time it took seven takes before she got the things right in her introduction. So, I knew her before she was famous.

Thea Garrett: So, then the transition, what spurred you to leave Fort McHenry and move to Delaware Water Gap?

Warren Bielenberg: What urged me to?

Thea Garrett: Or spurred that transition?

Warren Bielenberg: Well, I had been there for a number of years and wanted a change of scenery. So I applied for many, many jobs. I think I applied for like 27 jobs, and had been on like the top three or four for a couple of superintendent positions and some other ones. Our superintendent retired and I was acting superintendent for five months for Fort McHenry and Hampton, and that kind of broke me of wanting to be a superintendent. After our new superintendent came, she and I, we had some issues. Our office space, her office door was across the hall from my office door. But yet, I had to go to her secretary and make an appointment to speak to her at work. Not a real good situation. She was all about dust over the doors. But like the guy said, the fort's falling down but she's worried about dust over the doorjams. I mean, it was difficult. I had a lot of internal problems, and had been tested for a number of like ulcers and those kind of things. Just stress from day-to-day stuff with having to deal with her. And then I got offered the job at Delaware Water Gap. Actually it was a promotion, no, it was a lateral, yeah, it was a lateral, no, it was a promotion from an 11 to a 12. I had to cancel my appointment in Baltimore. And they set me up with a specialist in East Stroudsburg. And after I got there, I never had another problem. Never. It was all stress-related stuff. Yeah. It was just a matter of wanting, have been there for a number of years, for four years. I started applying after four years and I was there for five and a half. So I mean, it was just the way the system works. You applied for vacancies.

Warren Bielenberg: Delaware Water Gap was a really interesting and different, a recreation area, but the history of it – it was going to be a reservoir, Tocks Island Dam, and the Park Service was going to manage the land around it. During the Vietnam War, the Corps of Engineers was prohibited from doing public works programs. So that was cut back. During that time period, the local communities elected officials that were – and this is the story I tell – that were against it, and that fought against it, and got legislation changed. And so after the Vietnam War when it came about, the politics had changed, so they passed legislation to stop the Tocks Island Dam. While I was there, in 1978, the Park & Recreation Act of '78 created the Middle Delaware Scenic River. So part of the Wild and Scenic River Act, they couldn't build a dam. So it was further and further, kept getting pressure from New York City, because that was going to be a water supply for New York City. It wasn't power generation, it was a water supply.

Warren Bielenberg: But I was there after some really nasty things had happened. When the land was acquired and then nothing happened to it. People were kicked off their land, and

then hippies came and that was what people said, oh, these hippies came and moved in and squatters were living in all these places. At one time they had the US marshals and the Park Police and the Park Service start one morning before sunrise at one end of the valley, and just came and swept everybody out. It was some pretty nasty part of the Park Service history. But I wasn't there for that.

Warren Bielenberg: Biggest thing we had was removing commercial vehicles from Highway 209, which is the US highway that goes right through the park. It had a speed limit of 55, 50, 55, and trucks would be doing 75, 80 miles an hour on it. Locals called it Ho Chi Minh Trail because of all the fatalities on it. So it was a matter of safety to just try to calm things down. It probably took federal legislation. I don't know, I can't remember the whole story on how they did it. You might ask Bill Wade sometime, because he was there at the time, how that all came about.

Thea Garrett: And was there other, sorry, were there other safety-related decisions that you were making? Not just related to the road, but also—

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah. We had a big problem with drownings, yeah. I mean, Delaware Water Gap is a beautiful resource. Could never create Delaware Water Gap now as a recreation area. But 100 miles from New York City and Philadelphia. So how many millions of people are in a day's drive, a few hours' drive? And it was heavily used. On weekends, the beach, Springfield Beach, would just be covered with people. That always upset me that the law enforcement rangers would say, "The damn Puerto Ricans are down at the beach." I went down there, I hired, I had to recruit to hire Spanish-speaking seasonal rangers to work. Because that was our main, not our main, but a pretty substantial visitation was from Spanish-speaking people. Come to find out, very few of those people were Puerto Ricans. They mostly were from Ecuador and Colombia and the mountains and the green hills reminded them of home. And just getting out of the city. And they'd come out in a taxi or their car. And there would be three generations, 12 people in the vehicle coming out and having an all-day picnic. It was tremendous. But yet, it was just, it was difficult to do traditional Park Service stuff. Well you're in a national park, so you can do interpretive programming, in a recreation area, you have to talk to your friends in Cape Cod, it's a lot more difficult to do interpretive programs. Because people are there to recreate, they're not there to learn, right? So that's always a challenge.

Warren Bielenberg: But we did have a pretty significant problem with people drowning, canoeing or swimming in the river and drowning. So we worked with canoe liveries, and we worked up a brochure, basically, that had a tombstone on the front. And its title was, "27 people have died. Will you be next?" Which we gave to the canoe – and they wanted them – the canoe outfitters. And would give them to their clients. But inside there we would have little brief summaries of, you know, like, "July 12, 21-year-old man drowned swimming across the river. Alcohol involved." And there was this whole, I mean, if there was a drowning, it would be someone between 18 and 25 or whatever. There were statistical things like that. And it was almost

always alcohol-related, or swimming without a life jacket, you know, canoeing without a life jacket, doing all this kind of stuff.

Warren Bielenberg: One of the things that always frustrated me, I made all of them, when we did river programs – well first of all, I had a fight with the superintendent to allow my rangers to wear shorts on river programs, and not wear the flat hat. And that was a challenge. Bill Wade stood up for me and we were able to – but the rangers, the interpreters, they could wear shorts on the program, but they couldn't come into the headquarters office in shorts. They had to change into their formal uniform before they came into the office. That was [Inks?]. (Thea Garrett laughs) But we do this canoe interpretation and show people how to paddle. We'd stand in the water and everybody would have on life jackets. Then you'd have a guided canoe thing going down the river. And invariably the park patrol boat would come up and there'd be two rangers standing up there with no life jackets on. Then the people would say, "Well, how come they don't have life jackets on?" And you'd say, well, they're stupid.

Warren Bielenberg: Actually, we found the inflatable life jackets, which they actually then started to wear. Those things were so—

Thea Garrett: [unclear]

Warren Bielenberg: So, then a really cool thing that happened, I was over natural resources and cultural resources and interpretation. I was the chief of, let's see, the chief of, I don't know the name of, but it was really kind of strange. The chief ranger was the chief of, let's see, the chief of resources protection and visitor management. And I was chief of resource management and visitor services. But I had to deal with natural and cultural. I had two, what were they called, the resource management graduates, that program. Meg Weesner was one. And Beth Johnson was the other one. So they technically worked for Washington, but they were working at Delaware Water Gap and worked for me, basically. So I was doing that, natural resources, and then cultural resources. We had a pretty extensive museum collection, but it was very poorly stored. So I actually worked with the regional office and got some money. We converted a school that we had into an environmentally controlled and secure building for our museum collection. Then we had a whole bunch of stuff that had been collected over the years from houses that were being torn down, architectural stuff; it was a whole big barn, just loaded, crowded with stuff. I worked with the regional director and the regional curator to be able to swap out all of that stuff for some things that we needed, interpretive, the historical pieces that we needed for our collection. So we culled a whole bunch of stuff which, it was all legal. It was legal. So.

Warren Bielenberg: Then I went to a training course at Shenandoah. It was on curation of natural history items, pelts, plant material, [balms?], things like that. So I went there and I had met a couple of people in training over the years. Chuck Anibel was the assistant chief naturalist, and Dennis Carter was the chief naturalist. So Chuck

was teaching the course. And when I got there a little bit ahead, I went up and talked to Dennis just in his office. I said, “Hey, Dennis, how’s it going?”

Warren Bielenberg: He said, “Oh, I’d trade jobs with you in a minute.” I said, “Why would you do that?” He said, “Well, you’re the closest thing to a national park other than Shenandoah in the region.”

Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Well, that’s interesting.” I said, “I really couldn’t do anything about that. I’d have to talk to my family.” But okay, we left it at that. And then we had some, after the class, the next night, we had some social time. We really didn’t talk too much about it anymore, but it was just this thing that plant.

Warren Bielenberg: So, on Monday, when I get back in the office, I call the regional office. And Bill Supernough was the associate, what was his title? Associate for operations or something. Anyway, he was an advocate of dual careers and swapping jobs. So he thought that was a super idea. He said, “Well, Dennis needs to get out of there. He’s been there too long. And you need to get away from Delaware Water Gap, because you and Amos (Superintendent Amos Hawkins) don’t get along” we’re like oil and water. After Bill Wade left, things got really bad. He wouldn’t even talk to me. Wouldn’t even make eye contact. It was real interesting on how to deal with it. But anyway, so he said, “Well, the superintendents are meeting just over across the road. I’ll go talk to them at lunchtime.”

Warren Bielenberg: So, he called me back after lunch. He said, “Well, I talked with Jerry [Taze?], who’s the acting superintendent at Shenandoah, and I talked with Amos, and they both thought it was a good idea.” But Jerry said that he wouldn’t be able to do it until after their—

[END OF TRACK 5]

[START OF TRACK 6]

Warren Bielenberg: —fiftieth anniversary. That was their big event going on, that was pretty interesting. And I had talked to my wife, and she was interested in it.

Warren Bielenberg: So, Amos came back and never said a word about it. Then a couple of days later, he called me in and he said, “Well, I just got a call from the superintendent of Shenandoah. What’s this about you wanting to swap jobs?” He said, “Yeah, I’ll let you do that. But you can’t do it until we finish the public meetings for the GMP.”

Warren Bielenberg: So, it was a go. We could do that.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: So, like three months later, Dennis and I swapped jobs. So, it worked out.

Thea Garrett: Oh, that’s great.



- Warren Bielenberg: Yeah. Yeah.
- Thea Garrett: So, there's been a lot of interfacing with the community of Apostle Island. And then I assume, was there also for Fort McHenry?
- Warren Bielenberg: One thing at Fort McHenry, it wasn't so much the public, but it was with the other attractions involved.
- Thea Garrett: Okay.
- Warren Bielenberg: Ever work at a visitors' center desk, you get questions about things other than your park. If you're in an urban area, if you're in Baltimore, people ask, "Well, we've seen Fort McHenry. What else can we do?" So there's all these attractions around Baltimore. The science museum and the art museum and the flag museum and the railroad museum and all these other things. I'd never been to them. So we started what was called the Baltimore Attractions Association. So once a month for like six months in the winter, we would meet at a different association and get kind of behind the scenes of each of those attractions. So it really opened our eyes to what other people are doing. And then we got so we could, you know, "You're a new employee? Two o'clock over to the C&O Museum, the railroad museum, they're ready for you and they'll give you the tour." And it didn't cost anything. So we started that. I think they still, I mean, it was part of like the chamber of commerce and then the convention bureau. But it just started with me and one other person saying, you know, we need to do something about this. It helped all of the different attractions in the area.
- Warren Bielenberg: Then when they opened Harbor Place, flag tied in with that, too. So we got to know what was going on. Baltimore was really a neat city. If you have to live in a city, it's a pretty a neat one. Omaha's a neat city to live in, too. Lots of stuff going on.
- Thea Garrett: Yeah. And then you also—
- Warren Bielenberg: And then we started what's now known as the Fort McHenry Guard. I had one of my seasonal employees (John McGarry) was a big military historian and reenactor and all of that, and very interested in it. He had been up to Fort Henry, Ontario, and they have this living guard, I mean, it's like huge, almost like a total year-round reenactment group. Where people almost enlist, I don't know all the details. But he had this idea, it was really a neat idea. But John, other people didn't like him. So if he would have presented this idea, the whole thing would have just been thrown out. So I had, my assistant (Hyman Schwartzberg) was another military historian, really kind of weird in what he did. I learned a lesson there on when you interview, read people's applications and they put down their references, you know, usually you put down references if someone's going to speak goodly of you. Nicely, kindly, wonderfully. I learned after that that, learn to talk to people that work with that individual, either above them or below. Because

he was very, spoke down his nose at people. He was a little bit of, felt above things. But he did some really good things.

Warren Bielenberg: I started exploring with him this idea and he jumped all over it. And then he took off with it. And then it expanded to the whole park. And then John got back involved and really directed it, trying to back door, playing, yeah, you've got to play how things get done, right? Personalities and how to make it work.

Warren Bielenberg: So, we started that program with just a half a dozen or so volunteers. And now I saw all over the internet that the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Baltimore, and it was all the Fort Henry Guard. And it's a huge thing now. And you can go on the internet and see all kinds of things when they're marching and doing their drills. And they have a whole junior program now that goes all the way up into [unclear]. So it's really something. I don't take any credit for starting that. Except the beginning of it. You know, things grow beyond it. So, yeah, it was really exciting. I hadn't even thought about that.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: What else do you have?

Thea Garrett: In addition to that time there, you also did the friends, the development of the friends group.

Warren Bielenberg: (laughs) Yeah. You know, the Park Service can accept donations. So there was a tour group called the Baltimore Tour, it was two women, two Jewish women from up in Pikesville. And they had a bus that was colored multiple colors. We called it the gay bus because it was gaily colored. Nothing derogatory. Roxy (Lipships) and oh, I can't remember her name (Ruth Vader). Anyway, they worked the bus on tours. They would come in like three days a week and do tours. Sometimes we did tours for them. Usually we just gave them information and trained them and things like that. So, they could tell the story as well as we could.

Warren Bielenberg: They did what was called an insomniac tour. It started like at ten at night and went all night long, and they ended up at some restaurant, Little Italy or someplace, in the morning for breakfast. But you went to things like, you went to the church, Green Street Church where Edgar Allan Poe was buried, and where they think that he was inspired to write "The Pit and the Pendulum." This cemetery under the church, you look down through there and there was bones and skulls. There was just a mass grave. It was really eerie to go in there at night. And then went to the newspaper to see the newspaper printed, and the fish market when they're bringing in the fish. They did different things. It was amazing how they had it set up.

Warren Bielenberg: It was very popular. But oftentimes they would end with raising the flag at sunrise at Fort McHenry. Whenever they did that, one of our rangers would be on the bus with them. So they wanted, you know, you're helping us, what can we do? So they donated, I said, "Well, you know, what we could really use, in our

lunchroom, we could use a microwave oven.” So, they went and bought us a microwave oven, donated it to the park.

Warren Bielenberg: Well, the superintendent (Juin Cross) never talked to me, but she went to the regional office and complained that I was accepting gifts. The regional, the associate for administration called me up and she told me about this. She said, “Don’t worry about it. Everything’s legal. I saw the paperwork. You’re not in any trouble.” And then the next year, on her performance evaluation, was to develop friends and do things.

Warren Bielenberg: But anyway, we started then, kind of from that offshoot was, it was done through, started with Flag Day and with the Baltimore tourism association, Flag Day Committee and [a member of the group?], maybe DVA, disabled vets, I don't remember. But it happened with Flag Day, and we started again.

Warren Bielenberg: Oh, we would also do, we’d get requests from the convention center to do, could we open the fort at night. That’s what really kicked off, but yeah, we would get funding to pay for our overtime, basically. But then, “We’ll give you a thousand dollars to bring 65 people in.” You know, so we started the friends, that’s how we started. It was called the Patriots. I don't know if it’s still called the Patriots, or if it’s rolled into the Fort McHenry Guard now. I don’t know, I haven’t been there. But that was the start of the friends group there. And I got in trouble initially because I was doing it illegally. I wasn’t.

Thea Garrett: So, one of the things I was wondering about also just throughout your experience, you never had the opportunity to be seasonal, was how did you build training? Was a lot of that just accidental—

Warren Bielenberg: No.

Thea Garrett: How deliberate was the training that you received?

Warren Bielenberg: Well, the Park Service had training courses. They did a lot of interpretive courses at Harpers Ferry. At one time I figured how many weeks I spent in training at Harpers Ferry or over at Albright. It was almost a year of my career was in training. Some of it was beneficial and some of it was fun and some of it was both. I think a lot of the benefit of the training was meeting other people and talking about how they do things and kind of networking. If you have a problem you can call up somebody. You know, “This is what we’re doing. How would you do it?” Or, “What would be the best way to do this?” So that’s a real value of it, so grow that way. I was fortunate, I mean, when I was at Fort McHenry, I would call the regional chief of interpretation, Chet Harris, and bounce things off of him. Before you were born, probably, was this program on TV with Fran Tarkenton, was it *That’s Incredible!*, I think it was. So, we had people who were having psychic experiences at Fort McHenry, ghosts and things.

- Warren Bielenberg: I ended up with, there was a lady that came one day, her name was Dorothy Bathgate. She said, "I haven't been here since, like in 35 years, but this was where I had my first psychic experience. And is it okay if we go—"
- Warren Bielenberg: It was a cold November day, I remember that. I said, "Well, I'll walk with you." So we walked up into the fort. She was talking about, there's a pool here that wasn't here when I was here before. I said, "Well we used to have a cesspool. Now we're on city sewer. So, I don't know what that is."
- Warren Bielenberg: So, we walk along. She said, "Oh, there's a woman up here who's crying." She was telling me the difference between hauntings and spirits and sightings. It was just really weird.
- Warren Bielenberg: Then we went out on the outer battery, the Civil War battery on the outside of the fort. We were walking along there. I can't remember exactly how it went. She said, "Oh, there's a soldier there."
- Warren Bielenberg: And I said, "Yeah? Really? Where?" I said, "What's he doing?"
- Warren Bielenberg: She said, "Well, he's standing. He's standing like this."
- Warren Bielenberg: We were down this way. I said, "Where's he looking?"
- Warren Bielenberg: She said, "Well, he's looking up there."
- Warren Bielenberg: Oh, okay. I said, "Well, let's go see him." So we start walking that way. And oh, he's gone. I said, oh, okay. And again, this is a cold November day. She had this cheap little reel to reel or cassette tape player, battery-operated. So we go into my office to warm up and she starts playing her player. And we're out in the outer battery. And she and I are talking. And then there's this voice that says, "I'm cold. I'm cold. I'm cold." And it wasn't any of us. (laughs) And then this thing that she saw, our superintendent, Dennis McGuinness, had always, swears he saw a soldier. His wife Helene would never admit to that. We had these big aerial photos of the fort. And he would always say they walk around the seawall every night after work. I mean, we'd close the park at five so he and his wife could walk around the seawall. As soon as he retired (snaps fingers), I changed the closing hour in summer to eight. So it was open to the public. Another story.
- Warren Bielenberg: So, I went into his office the next morning. I said, "Hey, Dennis, refresh my memory. You were telling me once about this soldier you saw. Where was that?"
- Warren Bielenberg: So, he always had an extendable pointer in his pocket. He whips that baby out and he puts it right on the spot where she said the soldier was standing. I said, "Where were you when you saw it?" He pointed to where he was, which is a direct line from where the soldier was looking. I said, "I've never really asked you. What was the soldier doing?"

- Warren Bielenberg: He said, “He was just standing there, holding this rifle, looking at us.” (laughs) And I said, okay.
- Warren Bielenberg: So that kind of started a period of what we called psychic archeology of Fort McHenry. This lady, I mean, I swear to God, she was, I wouldn’t say dumb, but she was dirt poor. Her 1995 Walgreen’s tape recorder was probably her prized possession. I made her a volunteer so I could buy her cassettes and batteries for her tape recorders. We started doing these, she and her husband would come down different nights. John and myself and once in a while some of the other people, we would go with her and pick up these things, she’d bring out these facts. Holy cow, up here there was, there’s bodies, and this guy with a beard, oh, he was wounded badly. Nobody had beards during the War of 1812, but okay. She would tell us these things.
- Warren Bielenberg: Lo and behold, Scott Sheads, one of my seasonals, one day he comes back, he’d go to the National Archives in the Library of Congress on his days off. He comes back and he says, “Hey, Warren, look at this!” And he had a newspaper article from Baltimore about this Hassidic Jew who died who had been wounded during the Battle of Baltimore on Clagett Battery, on Battery 3 of the park. And here he was, he was a Hassidic Jew, so he had a beard. He was paid to serve for a rich man, basically. And he was wounded on this bastion where she said this bearded man was laying wounded. You know, she couldn’t do the research, because none of us knew. Other things that she did was the same thing, it came out like that. She’d say these things, and then six, eight months, a year later, somebody would come up and say, “Hey, remember what Dorothy said? Look at this!” I mean, it was just weird.
- Warren Bielenberg: But then there was this—
- Thea Garrett: How overt was the part, was this sort of becoming a part of—
- Warren Bielenberg: It started to become something. It started to become big. We did a haunted tour, like at Halloween, a candlelight tour. I checked all this with the regional office. Could we do this? He said, what you’re doing is telling stories of the park. Experience of the park. So as long as you don’t do scary things like a haunted house type thing, yeah, it’s fine. Because it’s just a different way of approaching the park history. I mean, it was really detailed. We talked about the different levels, hauntings and spirits and ghosts and things like that. But then the whole thing was a guided, like a walking tour of the park grounds by candlelight. And there would be people in costume, or in uniform, at different points. Not to scare anybody, but just to be there. People would walk by and we would talk about whatever happened, the event in question. You know, the rangers were the guides, and the whole bit. It was so popular. I mean, we had to issue tickets and it would sell out. We did it for a couple of years. It just got big.
- Warren Bielenberg: So anyway, some of the ghost stories, we had an archeologist, Bill Stokinger, who’s the archeologist – no, back, in the historical and archeological records, park

files, in there he found record of a soldier who committed suicide. His name was John Drew. John Drew was on guard duty and had fallen asleep and was arrested and brought into a cell. And in the morning when he, this was in the surgeon's report, in the morning he took his bedding out, got new bedding, smuggle a musket in, took his shoe off and sock and put his toe in the trigger and muzzle in his mouth and blew his brains out. The brains and blood were over the cell. This was in the surgeon's records.

Warren Bielenberg: So, a lot of people had experiences in this one cell. And Dorothy was one of the first ones, that was where she had her first experience was in this cell. So we started going in there. You'd move with your hands, going along the wall, like at chest-high, and then at someplace you would start feeling a change of temperature or something. To me, it was just you held your hands so long your nerves would react to anything. But people would swear. Like 90 percent of the people would do it in the exact same spot. So yeah, there probably was something. I just couldn't do it.

Warren Bielenberg: But anyway, I wish I would have taken and written reports every night we did something on that. Because it was amazing. Because like 90 percent of the stuff that she came up with just in walking around, we found out it was true. I mean, we could find it in the records that it was true.

Warren Bielenberg: So, this Stokinger, the archeologist, he theorized that John Drew, since it was the Civil War, his would have been the guard house up by the main gate, which was only there for a period of time. He, whatever reason, was probably in the original one, inside the 1814 fort. But on the third of July, 1974, I guess that was when we were having the big oil crisis and stuff, we were having this huge military program at Fort McHenry. We were having the First Maryland Regiment, we were going to do the history of the soldier. It was going to be televised on PBS. We were having fireworks. It was huge. We had military equipment in for displays and all that stuff. and the night before, just at closing, I saw Dorothy and her husband. And there were people running around, doing all kinds of stuff. The park was closed. I said, "The park's closed. So, what are you doing?"

Warren Bielenberg: She said, "Well, we're just here."

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Well, let's go for a little walk." So I walk them up to where the old guard house was, just to see what she would come up with. We got up there, and I said, "Now is there anything going on here psychically?" (laughs)

Warren Bielenberg: She said, "Oh, there's a lot of horses and wagons coming in and out here all the time."

Warren Bielenberg: So, then we walk down around the seawall. All of a sudden she stops and she said, "Why were there bodies piled up here?"

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "What do you mean?"

- Warren Bielenberg: She said, “Well, there’s bodies piled up right here.”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Dorothy, I have no idea.” (I later found out that during WWI Army Hospital period there was a crematorium at that location.)
- Warren Bielenberg: Then we start walking a little bit further, and she says, “Where did they move the bodies?”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “What do you mean?”
- Warren Bielenberg: She said, “Well, there were bodies buried here, but they’re not buried here anymore. Where have they gone?”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Dorothy, I have no idea what you’re talking about.” (This was a soldier’s burial site, and the bodies were later moved to the Green Mount Cemetery.)
- Warren Bielenberg: We’d go a little bit further. And we’re getting down to the fence road, the old hedge, where Dennis had seen the soldier. So I’m looking. We walk there and I’m looking. And she said, “Are you looking for the soldier?”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Yeah, every time I come by here.”
- Warren Bielenberg: She said, “Well, he’s up there.” I said, “Really?” “Yeah. He’s up there. He’s looking at us.”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “Really? What’s he wearing?” I said, “Hold on a minute. John? 614-410? This is Warren. I’ve got Dorothy down here. She sees John Drew. Okay. What’s he wearing?”
- Warren Bielenberg: So, she describes to John what he’s wearing. And I said, “Let’s go walk closer to him.”
- Warren Bielenberg: John says, “How many buttons?”
- Warren Bielenberg: “Eight.” She describes this uniform. We get like 20 feet away and she said, “Oh, he’s gone.”
- Warren Bielenberg: Just then, John popped up over the wall. He said, “I just saw a flash of blue.”
- Warren Bielenberg: I said, “I didn’t see anything.”
- Warren Bielenberg: So, then we go into the fort. John is this expert on military accoutrements and all that. He later came back and told me, he said, “Look, this is what Dorothy said.” And there was a period of time where in the quartermaster report, there was this greatcoat with eight buttons, or 12 buttons, whatever it was, that was only issued and only worn at the fort for a one-year period. And that was when John Drew committed suicide. How’s that?

- Warren Bielenberg: So, it gets even better. So we go inside the fort. Now it's all shut down. We're the only people there. Dorothy and her husband are sitting on the stone wall right in front of the guardhouse, and there's a door and a window. John and I are sitting on the ground talking. John, he'd had psychic experiences and poltergeists and all that. I – Dorothy said to me, "One of them's going to have to tap you on the shoulder before you believe." I said, yeah, I know. A door handle turned and the door opened before I got my hand on it one time. Things like that. So, I wasn't a true believer, but I know it's out there.
- Warren Bielenberg: So, we're sitting there, talking about different things. All of a sudden, John says, "Dorothy, is that John Drew?" She turns around, she says – or he said, "Do you see somebody in the window?"
- Warren Bielenberg: She turns around. She says, "Yeah. John, if that's you, give us a message." I'll swear to God until the day I die, I'm looking at this window and I hear (knocks). That's Plexiglas, not glass, but it sounded. I mean, a finger tapping and I – yeah. To this day. (laughs)
- Warren Bielenberg: But then, and I can't remember the timing now, if *That's Incredible!* wanted to do a story on the ghosts of Fort McHenry. I called the regional office, and they said, you know, "As long as it's the factual experiences of the rangers, you can do that." Then we had a meeting, a staff meeting, and we came to the consensus that it's getting out of hand. No more, no more, no more candlelight tours, no more talking about ghosts. If anybody brings it up, you can believe what you want. But we just said no more. Because if that would have been on TV, it would have been inundated with people coming down there and trying to do things with ghosts. But anyway. That's a little off the track, huh?
- Thea Garrett: But it's interesting. I mean, that's a really different style of interpretation that probably wouldn't necessarily be able to happen now.
- Warren Bielenberg: The thing was that, working with a psychic, and she was telling us these things that happened, you know, 150 years, 160 years ago, and earlier. And to be able to verify it after the fact. And I know that she never researched it, because our people didn't know about it until they would come across it accidentally or whatever. But yeah, it was some interesting stuff. That's why they ran me out. No. (laughs)
- Thea Garrett: Well, you mentioned that that's also when you got the sense that you had no interest in a superintendency.
- Warren Bielenberg: Yeah.
- Thea Garrett: What didn't you find appealing about that position?
- Warren Bielenberg: You know, it was just kind of the overall total responsibility for everything. And dealing with, it was more at Hampton than at Fort McHenry. Because at Hampton, we had this very strong group, Hampton had been run, basically, by the



MPCA, Maryland Preservation, I can't remember what it was called. Anyway, it was a group of high, you know, rich social women that would basically think they ran the place. There was a little restaurant called The Tea Room in the historic house, and then they would have this big Christmas gala where they would close it down for a week to decorate. I mean, it was just not, they were basically saying what was going on there. Then we started staffing it and removed their people, and they got upset about that. Anyway, all that was going on, a lot of that was coming to a head, dealing with regional office and them and making some of those changes. But it was just, I mean, I lost hair then. And I would sweat and smell. To me it was really stressful. It wasn't fun anymore. So that's what broke me of wanting to be a superintendent. I was never really a good supervisor. My theory on, I would try to hire the best people I could for—

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Warren Bielenberg: —the job, and then give them broad parameters and let them do the work. And it usually worked really well. I mean, some people needed more supervision than others. But most people had really good ideas and could do the work. It makes my job real easy. So, I always tried to hire people that could do things that I couldn't do, and then I would do some other things.

Warren Bielenberg: Let's see, Fort McHenry, Delaware, Shenandoah. Shenandoah was another interesting time because it was a time when fees came into the park. We had this big meeting. At that time, the chief of maintenance (Rodney Lowe) ran the entire park budget. When the old superintendent (Bob Jacobsen) retired, we got a new superintendent (Ron Wray) in. Things were kind of on an even keel with everybody, except the old chief of maintenance still thought he ran the park. Then we had this big meeting, we're going to get a half million dollars of fee money, what can we do with it? I said well, for a hundred thousand dollars, we can restore the interpretive program back to what it was in 1976. So I got this money. And that really ticked him off. He got money to drill new wells for water, drill for new water sources in Big Meadows and Skyland. And then he complained all the time because you have 15 seasonals, and they get paid to study and prepare for programs. Well, yeah, pretty neat to be able to let people have prep time, instead of doing all that on your own time. You know, you guys (maintenance) will get paid overtime if you were working, and our people just come to expect that. So, we had these little internal pissing matches, I guess.

Warren Bielenberg: At the end of the year, we had an evaluation. It was big kudos because our program, he (Chief of Maintenance) complained because well, there's only 10 or 12 people on the programs. Yeah, it's a whole lot better than having 40 people on a program. He just didn't get it. And he complained about that.

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "So, what did you get with all of that four hundred thousand you had. Six dry wells? Hmm." Yeah, that was, but anyway, it was interesting times. We did

some visitor wayside exhibit planning and started a raptor program, which they still, I think, do at Shenandoah.

Warren Bielenberg: But I was only there like 26 months. Then I got the job in the regional office. That was kind of scary. I'd applied for the regional chief of interpretation in Philadelphia. Almost all of my counterparts in the region kept saying, well, when Warren gets in there, we're going to do this, and all that. Then I had a six-week detail, and while I was in there, I decided I don't want to live and work in Philadelphia. (laughs) So I took my application off of the associate for operation's desk. Withdrew my name.

Warren Bielenberg: Then I got a call from, I was there in region and I got a call from the superintendent, from Bill Wade. He said, "Have you heard, did you get a call from Warren Hill?"

Warren Bielenberg: I said, "Who's Warren Hill?" He said, "Well, he's the ARD for operations in the Midwest Region. They're going to offer you the job." I said, "What?! Really?" He said, "Well, that's what it sounds like to me."

Warren Bielenberg: So, the next day I get this call about would I be interested in that job. I didn't jump over the phone and say yes. But I had already talked to my wife about the possibility. So I string him along for a day or two, so he'd think I was really studying on it. But the decision was made like in two minutes. (laughs)

Warren Bielenberg: So then, the big thing was, well, what are your goals? You know, people say what are your goals when you go in the regional office. I said, you know, I really hadn't thought about that, but my goals are to cut down on paperwork from the park to the region, if I can, and to return phone calls. And that was what I did a lot of. I didn't have a lot of money to help parks with things, but we could help them however we could, we would. People said just returning phone calls would be great. Because it would frustrate me to have to call the region or call somebody and never get a call back. Send a memo in and never get a response back on it and then have to do reports. You probably have to do reports. But trying to cut back on those things. We were successful, I think, in doing some of that.

Thea Garrett: That's good. And then there was also massive reorganization.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah, we went through it, what, 1995, we went from 10 regions to seven field offices. Or seven, yeah, were there seven regions then, or seven field offices? But we were the Great Plains or the Great Lakes. Our region was split into Great Plains and Great Lakes. I was selected as the chief of visitor services and I had, the first year I had maintenance, public health and safety, law enforcement, ranger activities, fire, concessions, interpretation and education. Basically everything that the ARD for operations had.

Warren Bielenberg: The next year we reorganized again. I had to apply for the job every time. They were temporary promotion. I had applied for the job. Then next year we went from the Great Lakes and Great Plains support office to the Midwest support

office. So they changed that around, and then I applied. Then that year, I continued to have maintenance and the public health and safety then under [DOR?] that is under the regional director. So that went back to the chief associate regional director. But it was kind of eye-opening. I mean, I know a little bit about a whole lot of things. I'm not a specialist. I'm a generalist. I took an interest in, I mean, I worked maintenance. And I was on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Anytime I saw the maintenance guys out working, I would stop and talk with them, and have lunch with them and just, you know, interact with them and help them out however I could on their job and they'd help me on my job. It works out that way sometimes. And fire, I've done a little fire 15 years earlier. But I hadn't really been involved with the formal fire program, so I got involved with that. Then looking at the jobs we were doing, I rewrote job descriptions to what the people were doing. I got three people promoted to GS-12s. Or no, GS-13s, I think. Yeah. Anyway, and that really ticked off my counterpart in the other area, because he started trying to do the same thing. But he was basically exaggerating, lying, to try to get promotions for his people. That was good, I think.

Warren Bielenberg: We reorganized one more time. And I think then maintenance went – no, I think, I don't remember. It's been a long time ago.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah. But good, fun things. Got to do new parks in – we inherited North and South Dakota and Arkansas, so we got 12 new parks. More things to learn, more people to deal with. I was a cooperating association coordinator, so I got to deal with all the cooperating associations in our region. Eastern was the biggest one. But then we had, I think a total of 12 real small ones. That took up some of my time, too.

Thea Garrett: So, one other question that I was thinking about is when, at what stage in your career did you really feel, if at all, the change in who the NPS director was? How directly did you feel impacted through those transitions from director to director?

Warren Bielenberg: Well, when I first started, George Hartzog was the director. And George was very, very powerful, and would deal with Congress. I don't remember the sequence of them. But I remember Bill Whalen was director when I was at Delaware Water Gap. I guess he was director – yeah, he was director when I was at Fort McHenry, because we had him as an honorary colonel one night. He flew in on Eagle One, he and his wife, to be honorary colonels. That was the first time I think I met Bill Wade. And then we had, it seemed like every year there would be the focus of the year, something like that, that came out of the Washington office. You were supposed to incorporate it in everything. One year, the big one was on energy. They had a meeting of the superintendents and the chief of interpretations – they had it in Harpers Ferry – and we had a dinner, and Bill Whalen was up and people were asking him questions. It was probably in, it was either '78 or early '79, because it was after the Park & Recreation Act of '78, which added a lot of areas and expanded areas in the Park Service. A lot of the

things people, they weren't high on Park Service priority, but they were on politicians. It was really the start, in my estimation, the start of the real pork barrel politics.

Warren Bielenberg: So, somebody asked about Thomas Stone, which he was a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Maryland. His house that he was born and raised in or whatever burned to the ground and they rebuilt it. They made a national monument, Thomas Stone House. Why is that in the Park Service? Bill said that Congressman Phil Burton from California had I think maybe a budget committee or something very powerful. He would basically sell parks for votes. Bill said that he had questioned that, why all these things. His answer was, Phil Burton said, "When you raise show dogs, you're going to have some shit." That was the answer they gave for this. But once an area was in the Park Service, you supported it 100 percent. There wasn't any opposition to it, I mean, any movement to remove it.

Warren Bielenberg: But over the years, I mean, I'm sure that the directors, they're political animals. So they kind of follow the whims of whoever the administration is. And it does affect, I mean, the Park Service, to me, has gotten much more political than I remember it being – although George Hartzog basically would go to Congress and tell them what they needed, and Congress would seem to really follow up the needs. But it was frustrating to me, knowing that we would submit requests for repair projects and programs. The Park Service would develop a priority list and it would go into the budget cycle. Then Congress, it would be kicked out in committee. And then they would add their projects to it. Then you'd get, instead of two million dollars of projects you need, to get four million dollars of projects that they wanted, that didn't really help the Park Service. That's partly who we're getting to our, you know, 10, 11-million-dollar backlog is that they don't fund the things we need.

Warren Bielenberg: Another frustrating thing for me was building visitors' centers, per se, since that was my interest, for other facilities. But visitors' centers in particular, you'd build the building. At one time in the Midwest region, we had five visitors' centers that sat empty. They didn't have exhibits in them. Because you had the money for building but not for that. And then you didn't have any money to staff it or to maintain it. I think that's still the case, you know.

Thea Garrett: So that's an example of what you're given, the money, and how it's stipulated, not meeting, necessarily, the needs of the park.

Warren Bielenberg: I mean, you know, the congressman likes to have new bricks and mortar that he can cut the ribbon on. But he doesn't care how it operates after that. Or if it operates. Maybe that's too naïve in saying it that way. But I think it just has become quite a bit more political, where they don't, Congress, we still work for Congress. Congress is supposed to still work for the people. We don't want to [go that?].

- Thea Garrett: So, there are a couple of questions I have, maybe two or three, to sort of flesh out—
- Warren Bielenberg: Okay.
- Thea Garrett: —your career. And one of the things that I was wondering about, you've spoken about supervisors where maybe some of those interactions had some conflict in them. Who were the people who you looked to as either role models or who—
- Warren Bielenberg: Over my career?
- Thea Garrett: Throughout your career. Who were the—
- Warren Bielenberg: There would be different people at different times. I mean, I hold Bill Wade in high esteem. And Don Castleberry. He was a deputy regional director in the North Atlantic Region when I was there. And then he was regional director when I went into Midwest region. And Bill Schenk was deputy regional director in the Midwest, and then regional director. You know, for bigshot guys.
- Thea Garrett: Were there qualities that were shared across the board? Qualities that they shared?
- Warren Bielenberg: I think open and caring, and listening to people. Budget and money. You know, you need to have it to operate. If you're a division chief, you know that. In the Midwest region, I would do requests for funding to add money so we could do things. The associate at that time (Warren Hill) said I'm never going to put in anything that I can't control. I said if you don't put in for it, you don't ask for it, how are you even going to have a chance of getting it? So to me it was frustrating that way. I think the Park Service, is pretty conservative. And I don't think we've really, I don't think the Washington office maybe hasn't fought for money over the years that they could have, where other agencies have gotten it. I mean, in thirty-some years, I was in the Washington office on two or maybe three occasions, and never more than a few hours. So, I can't complain about that.
- Warren Bielenberg: But you know, role models, boy. Don Defoe, who was a park naturalist when I went on the Blue Ridge Parkway. When I got out of the army, he was the district naturalist. He was just an awesome, a wholesome person and hardworking and dedicated. He and I left the same day from the parkway. I went to Apostle Islands and he went to the Great Smokies as assistant chief naturalist. I always wanted to work for Don. Don said, "I want you to come here and I'll work for you." "I don't want you to work for me, I want to work for you." And he didn't want to be the chief. (laughs)
- Warren Bielenberg: But I went and visited him a few times. He always did his office work detailed. But he always did, I mean, not always, but he did the museum collection, the insect collection, the herbarium. That was his passion. He would do that at home at night. Then he finally got a job where he could get paid, I mean, that was his job to do that. But he was just so honest and straightforward. I mean, I was this little buck ranger. I'd ask him these things and he'd help me. We'd go

birdwatching. He'd say, "Well, you know what you're doing. You could lead the bird walk." All these kind of things. So, he helped encourage me that way.

Warren Bielenberg: At Apostle Islands, we had this maintenance man, (Henry Bressette) old Indian, Chippewa, from the community, that had worked in the woods all of his life. He had a really strong work ethic. And he had no idea about the Park Service organization. But he was just a wonderful man to deal with. And common sense. One of his favorite, he said, "You know, white man, you cut down the trees. You plant grass. You fertilize and water it. And then you complain about having to cut it. Think about that." (laughs)

Warren Bielenberg: Then the gentleman I mentioned earlier, Dave Kangas, had his budget planned out and approved, and then the superintendent wants to change, "What don't you want me to do?" That, to me, was really strong leadership and good planning.

Warren Bielenberg: Chet Harris at the regional office in Philadelphia, I could call Chet anytime and he would give me sage advice. Not always what I wanted to hear, but it would always be good advice and good guidance. Boy. Up and down the line, there was people at all levels.

Warren Bielenberg: Scott Sheads, I think I mentioned his name, he was a seasonal ranger at Fort McHenry. I had a cert, and I worked this cert, and I had a couple of people that I had offered jobs to and they called me back and said they got a better job out west or something. And got down to the very bottom of the list and here was this Scott Sheads. He had one semester of college and worked in a grocery store, or something like that.

Warren Bielenberg: I called him up and just asked him a few questions and then offered him a job. He just started screaming on the phone. I thought oh my God, what am I getting into? Within a half an hour, this noise erupted out in the visitors' center desk, and it was Scott. He didn't own, I don't think, to this day I don't think he owns a car. But he had hopped on a bus and he had come right down there and just wanted to go all over. And he was so enthusiastic. But, you know, he never, I mean, he had a semester of college. That was it. So he couldn't really go anywhere in the Park Service. And yet, I think he got permanent after I left. I don't think I hired him as permanent, I don't remember that. I think he got permanent after I left. But he just, on his days off, when he's working, if he wasn't doing a program, he was up in our library, our HARP, Historical Archeological Research Program, just learning and studying and getting facts. He'd spend his days off at the Library of Congress or Smithsonian, wherever, just improving on himself.

Warren Bielenberg: And the Bible of Fort McHenry was Walter Lord's book, *By Dawn's Early Light*. One day Scott came back and he says, "Hey, Warren, look what I found!" He had documentation that the big flag was not flying overnight. It was raised in the morning. Scott, after I left, like three or four years, five years later, Scott publishes a book, *The Rockets' Red Glare*, and Walter Lord writes the foreword to it. He's written probably four or five books, and has had probably 50 or more

articles published in the historical magazine of Maryland History Society. But he could never be a park historian because he didn't have a degree. So he's hired as a seasonal in '78. So he's going to probably come close to retirement. But he's still there. He's the first interpreter I ever saw get a standing ovation for his presentation. I mean, people would just fawn over him and just applaud. It was just amazing to see.. That's the other thing. He did not like people. But once you got there, man, he's just a natural interpreter. Amazing person.

Thea Garrett: That's fantastic. Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah.

Thea Garrett: [Thoroughly. From every angle?]

Warren Bielenberg: Go to Fort McHenry sometime and just see if Scott's still there. Yeah. We wasted all our time, girlie.

Thea Garrett: We have. And is there anything that we haven't covered—

Warren Bielenberg: I don't know. Man, I can't remember.

Thea Garrett: —that you would like to – one thing—

Warren Bielenberg: And the one thing, you know, when J.T. and them, Lu Ann asked me about doing this, my question, "Why me?" I wasn't a regional director or anything. I mean, I ended up being a GS-14 in the regional office, so that's scary as heck right there. So hopefully it helps you somehow. It's a whole different perspective on things, I'm sure.

Thea Garrett: Oh, yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: And everyone would be, because everyone has their own personal story on it. So, I hope I didn't embarrass you with anything.

Thea Garrett: No, not at all. It's fascinating to listen to people's trajectories and where they find their inspiration.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah. Things I didn't do. Oh, man. At Apostle Island, I told this to Lu Ann. Our office was out at Little Sand Bay, right on the lake, a hundred yards from the Lake Superior. Right across the street from us, Irene and Roy Hokenson lived in a house they built in 1935. He was a commercial fisherman on the lake. He and his three brothers were commercial fishermen. One of his brothers died in a fall storm on Lake Superior. He had this amazing barn, the old barn that had all of this fishing stuff in it. I would go over there and talk to Roy. Irene would bring over a snack. I mean, they hated the Park Service, because they were going to take their land. But she'd bring over a rhubarb pie and apple crisp and pumpkin, you know, she'd bring stuff over. Sweet rolls. We'd go talk to them, and they'd have these wonderful stories. I wanted to tape them, interview them. I asked them, can I

bring a tape recorder and record you? And they said no. And I never got them recorded. But yet, their house, the barn, the fish dock, the ice house, and their old boat, are one of the main interpretive stories at Apostle Islands. I think I kind of gathered that, and it was really interesting there. Their nephew, the man that died, his son, was just a hateful man. Hateful man. Bobby was a hateful man. But I went to church with him and his wife. And his wife was a wonderful lady. We would have coffee after church. We'd be sitting down there, and Bobby would start haranguing me. His wife would say, "Bobby, shut up and leave the man alone. He's trying to do his job." She would support me all over the place.

Warren Bielenberg: Things change. Twenty-five years later, the park invited me back up for their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was in the regional office. They invited me up to be on the panel discussion on the formation of the park and all that. Bobby was in the audience. At that time of year, they had a big fish boil. Bobby was one of the people there. And I went up and he served me the fish. He said, "How are you doing?" He said, "I want you to come out to the place. I got Dad's truck and we've just repaired it. I want the park to buy it." I said, really?

Warren Bielenberg: So, after church on Sunday, I go out to Bobby's place. And he's got this Hokenson Brothers fisheries truck, 1936 Ford or Chevy or whatever, I don't remember what it was. But all decked out. He wanted to sell it to the park. He had come to realize that the park's not all that bad. Because he was a lazy, angry man. (laughs) But things change over the years.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: You were going to ask me something. You pointed your gun at me there.

Thea Garrett: I do, and I lost it. I totally lost it.

Warren Bielenberg: I do those things all the time.

Thea Garrett: But gateway communities are fascinating. Those community interactions are incredible.

Warren Bielenberg: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Fort McHenry, we dealt more with, not so much the immediate, I mean, the city, more for the business aspect of it. But our direct neighborhood, Locust Point, which was the neighborhood right by the park, we did have some interaction with the community. Because some of our maintenance men were from that community. So we have that thing. And that was good. But yeah, excuse me, Apostle Island's a brand new park now. You're bringing a whole new culture into it.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: And I think we did a good job. I won't take credit for it, but I think overall the Park Service did a really good job with the community. But with the help of



Northland College and the Sigurd Olson Institute really helped make that park what it is today.

Thea Garrett: Yeah.

Warren Bielenberg: It was fun. I still have fun. Because since 2006, I've been volunteering at Great Smoky Mountains, in Cades Cove. And since 2001, I've been information officer on fires.

Thea Garrett: That's great.

Warren Bielenberg: I've been in 13 states on fire assignments over the years. And oil spill in the Gulf Islands, and Hurricane Sandy at Gateway. Still good. Still having fun. Driving that tour bus. Telling people about the park. And I got an email last week from Dana Soehn in the Smokies for the centennial, the park was having centennial ambassadors. And asked me if I would consider being one. So there's like 25 volunteers that will be ambassadors for the park. We did that during the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in—

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Warren Bielenberg: —2009. So that was cool.

Thea Garrett: That's great.

Warren Bielenberg: So, somebody said yeah, I don't know what's going on in the Park Service. I can't say that. I probably have my fingers in too much. Oh, I served on the Great Smoky Mountain Association Board of Directors, the cooperating association, for six years. And then I served on the NPCA Southeast Regional Advisory Council for six years. Tracy Kramer told me last night that I was one of the original, founding members of the advisory council. Phil Francis took my place on it now. So, it's in good hands.

Thea Garrett: That's amazing.

Warren Bielenberg: What?

Thea Garrett: Just the breadth and extent of your career.

Warren Bielenberg: Yeah. And it's scary to think about somebody that didn't even want to go to college and had no real clue about what's going on in life. And then stumble through a career, end up in the regional office and be asked to be the leader of a big team. I mean, I'm still overwhelmed by all that. (laughs) Now they pay me not to work. Which is the best part of it.

Thea Garrett: That's great. Well, thank you so much.

Warren Bielenberg: You're welcome. Did we babble for an hour and 24 minutes? No.

[END OF TRACK 8]

[END OF INTERVIEW]