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Martha B. Aikens
September 13, 2012

Interview conducted by Bill Mansfield, Christine Arato, Ray DePuydt, Meghan Foster, and Jodi
Morris
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

MARTHA B. AIKENS

September 13, 2012

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Transcribed by Technitype Transcripts

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Stephen T. Mather Training Center

[START OF INTERVIEW]

- Bill Mansfield: This is Bill Mansfield with the Legacy of Learning Oral History Project at the Stephen Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and it's September 13, 2012, and we're interviewing Martha Aikens. We've got four interviewers here, so I'm going to have them – y'all introduce yourselves or just state your name for the recorder so the transcriber will know. And maybe you should start off first, Miss Aikens.
- Martha Aikens: My name is Martha B. Aikens.
- Christine Arato: I'm Christine Arato.
- Ray DePuydt: Ray DePuydt.
- Bill Mansfield: I'm Bill Mansfield. I think I've already said that.
- Meghan Foster: Meghan Foster.
- Jodi Morris: Jodi Morris.
- [Unidentified]: We'll get right into it.
- Bill Mansfield: Go for it.
- Meghan Foster: Okay. Miss Aikens, can you tell me about your childhood? I know it's kind of a broad question, but—
- Martha Aikens: Well, I grew up in a small town in Mississippi on the Gulf Coast. It's about thirty, forty minutes from New Orleans, so hurricane country. I grew up with two brothers and my mom and dad, of course. My dad was from a small town called Columbia, Mississippi, which is about an hour from where we lived. My mom actually grew up on a farm which is still in the family, and that's about two hours from where we lived. So, we used to always tease them, you know, it's like the city boy and the country girl, and she had these stars in her eyes with my dad.
- Martha Aikens: In those days, of course, it was quite unusual for an African American male to own a vehicle, and my dad owned this little truck, but it didn't have a door on the driver's side, and so we always teased my mom that, "God, you must have really liked this guy for him to drive up in a truck with no door on the passenger side."
- Martha Aikens: And my dad would always say, "Well, that was more than a lot of people had." So, we grew up in a kind of small family where there was a lot of give and take.

- Martha Aikens: I grew up reading a lot. I liked to read, still like to read a lot, and so that's where I sort of learned about the rest of the world. Today it would be called a Bucket List, but when I was a little girl and reading about all these different places, I wrote up my own list of the places that I would like to see when I grew up.
- Martha Aikens: My dad and I were very, very close. We were like kindred spirits. I'm more like him than my mom. He had to drop out of school because his parents died when he was really, really young. The older boys, there were eight of them, and there were four boys, and my dad and his older brother dropped out of school to help his grandmother take care of the rest of the family. So, he dropped out in fourth grade. Through my reading, I would read to him, he learned how to read, and I didn't realize it at the time, but the way he would ask the questions, I knew he was listening, and he would ask me to show it to him.
- Martha Aikens: Then we started reading – my dad was an athlete, so then he had me reading Sports Illustrated and all these sports books, and I learned how to pronounce very difficult names, because these men came from all over the world. Their ancestors, rather, came from all over the world, so they had these difficult names, Irish names, to pronounce, Polish names, and all that. So, I would be struggling to pronounce them, and my dad would correct me because he would have heard them on the TV. So, we were very close-knit that way.
- Martha Aikens: I walked to school every day. We took a shortcut through the woods, which we would call the pasture, and we'd jump over the big ditch to walk to school. So, I remember talking to the young lady who spoke to me about the interviews, and she asked me, she said, "Well, how did you feel coming from Mississippi and going to the Grand Canyon and hiking and all this stuff?" I said, well, you know, in my mind's eye, it was just another walk in the woods, you know, because we went through the pasture to go to school, and when we visited my grandmother and my aunt and uncle, who owned farms in central and northern Mississippi, we were in the woods all the time. They owned a lot of timber and they owned cows and all that, and you'd be chasing the cows and riding the horses and hitting the mules, so it was no big deal for me.
- Martha Aikens: Is that enough?
- Meghan Foster: Yes. So, would you say you, as a young person, immediately felt a connection to the outdoors?

- Martha Aikens: Yes, because I essentially grew up in the outdoors. We visited regularly on the weekends my grandmother. My grandfather died before I was born, but my grandmother lived to be ninety-eight, and I am her namesake, so we were there all of the time. And I had two aunts and an uncle who had farms up there, so we were in the woods all of the time. And we still have those lands. So, it was second nature for me. So, when they said hiking in the woods, you know, it was no big deal.
- Martha Aikens: Since my childhood, we spent a lot of times out of doors. Like I said, my dad was an athlete. I grew up with two brothers. Maybe it isn't obvious, but in that era, if you were a male, you were going to be athletic, and so both my brothers lettered in all of the sports. So, we were out all of the time, and I did the same things they did until I was thirteen and my dad decided that that was enough of that. I couldn't do that anymore. So, I did everything that they did up until that time.
- Meghan Foster: So, it sounds like you were a bit of a tomboy there for a while.
- Martha Aikens: Absolutely, absolutely.
- Meghan Foster: You said that you loved to read. What other interests did you have as a child and then as a young adult?
- Martha Aikens: Well, there weren't a whole lot of options in that era for African Americans, you know. We didn't have rec centers and all that kind of stuff. There weren't summer programs and all of that. So primarily reading and athletics was our outlet, and for us, the athletics was just playing outside until school started, and then there were organized sports. My dad did not want me to play basketball and all of that stuff, he thought I would get hurt, so he sort of directed me toward music. So, I played in the band. I played the B-flat clarinet in the marching band and I played the bass clarinet in the concert band.
- Meghan Foster: You mentioned to Lu Ann [Jones] that you had a conversation with an English teacher and mentor?
- Martha Aikens: Exactly.
- Meghan Foster: Was that in high school or in college?
- Martha Aikens: Yes, high school. Well, she was my mentor in high school. She was my English teacher. But when I finished my student teaching – my dad always wanted me to be a schoolteacher when I grew up. You know, in his era, that was the epitome of the career a woman should have, was a schoolteacher, and so he put that in my head that I was going to grow up to be a schoolteacher. So, I trained to do that.

- Martha Aikens: The policy of my school at that time was to send you to a completely diverse environment from where you grew up and where you were most comfortable, so they sent me to the Delta, fields and fields of cotton and all of this stuff, and it was out in the middle of nowhere in a trailer. And the kids had such low, low self-esteem, and they didn't realize or understand that there was a world out there much bigger than the little world they were a part of, so their career goals were to grow up working on the farm, and the second highest or the highest, I should say, was to work at the chicken factory. I actually had students who worked at the chicken factory at night, and they came to school during the day when, needless to say, they slept most of the first-period class because they were tired. I had a couple of young women who worked cleaning after school, cleaning people's homes and offices, with their parents.
- Martha Aikens: So, there wasn't a strong emphasis on education, which was, of course, diametrically opposed to what I'd been taught coming up. In my family, we very much valued education and there wasn't any question as to whether or not you were going to go to college. You know, even if the family, extended family, had to help, you were going to go to college.
- Martha Aikens: I remember when I was in college, my grandmother and a cousin, a first cousin, was also at school, at the same school at the same time as I, and we would get these little boxes from my grandmother, and inside would be three or four dollars that she'd tied up in a handkerchief with some pecans or something like that. So, there was always support for education, and there was always this discussion of what you were going to do with your life beyond high school.
- Martha Aikens: So, when I went to Thomastown and these students had such low expectations for themselves and no real-life goals, why, that was foreign to me. So, then I decided, because some of them could not read – even though I was teaching tenth, eleventh, twelfth grade, some of them could not read, so I took it upon myself, without permission from anybody, that I would have these after-school classes for these students for them to at least learn to read. I would read passages to them from books that I had read or from books that I thought I was going to share with them before I realized how far that they were; there was no foundation to do some of the lesson plans that I'd spent all that time planning. So, I read to them.
- Martha Aikens: One of the mothers came to visit me. She complained to the principal because she thought that I was putting ideas in their heads that was going to be detrimental to them. But one of the most rewarding things about that whole period was that some of those students, they really did learn to read well enough to do well in the class.

- Martha Aikens: So, the students that they thought would be D students, C students, they turned out to be Cs and Bs, and they wanted to see more than Mississippi. So, I felt vindicated, even though I was graded down a bit for not getting permission to do these things, so I got a B-plus. The principal said, "Well, you really are an A student, I appreciate your dedication, and you went over and above, but you did get this complaint, and you did do this without permission." But I felt pretty good.
- Martha Aikens: But then I decided that I didn't want to teach because it required so much of you, and I felt like I would have nothing left for me if I had to give at that level for thirty years or whatever, and so I decided that I didn't want to do that.
- Martha Aikens: So, when I went back to school, went back to my university, I got a minor in sociology. I decided that I would be a social worker, still working with people, still trying to do something good, still trying to improve people's lives the way I thought my dad would want me to. So, I was still going to do that.
- Martha Aikens: So, I got this job as a social worker trainee, thanks to my mom's connections. So, I started out with that, and I thought I was doing really good, but then you come across people who are struggling in ways you can't imagine as a social worker. So, I never brought home a paycheck. I was driving my mom's car. My dad secretly gave me his gas card, and then I was borrowing money from my dad to buy lunch because I never brought any money home. You know, the schedule of fees that they give you to cover clothing and shoes and food, it was never enough. It just was not there. It wasn't realistic. I never understood how they really expected people to live on that from month to month.
- Martha Aikens: So, I guess it was about the fifth or sixth time I went to my dad for lunch money, then he said, "Baby, I don't think this is the right job for you" (laughter).
- Martha Aikens: So, Mrs. Johnson is the English teacher I've referred to earlier. So, I was talking to her about it and I said, "You know, I've made two career selections. Both of them were wrong. I have to really think about this, and I'm sort of at a loss."
- Martha Aikens: And she said, "You know what? You need to get yourself a good government job."
- Martha Aikens: So, I applied to what was then the Civil Service Commission, so you know how long ago that was. I was certified for three agencies: Agriculture, the Forest Service, the Commerce Department, it was their Human Resources Division, and the National Park Service.

- Martha Aikens: So, I told Mrs. Johnson, I said, “I’m going to be very methodical about this. I’m going to write out the questions that I want to ask them, and then I’m going to buy myself some time. I’m going to tell each of them I need to think about it, and I will get back to them. I’m going to interview them just as seriously as they’re going to interview me.”
- Martha Aikens: So, I wrote out all these questions, and I took them to her, and I let her review them. She said, “Oh, these are great. You should be able to make a decision from this.”
- Martha Aikens: So, I talked to the Forest Service person, and the only thing that I remember about that that sticks in my mind is that that person was obviously reading from a list of questions, too, and writing down my answers. It had a very distinct beginning and a very distinct ending.
- Martha Aikens: Then I talked to the person over at the Commerce Department, and this lady was very nice, very warm, but then I knew from what she said that it was going to be a desk job, desk job, desk job, with all of the negatives that go with that, and I didn’t hear a lot of positives. And even though she sounded very warm, very engaging, she didn’t sound very excited about her job.
- Martha Aikens: Then I called the Park Service. Well, the number given was actually the number for Albright Training Center, and Ann Baugh was the person who answered the call. Have any of you heard of Ann Baugh? You’re such young people. Well, Ann Baugh was actually the secretary for Albright Training Center, but she actually ran the place, right? So, she answers the phone, and she’s all bubbly and excited, and she’s just talking, talking, talking.
- Martha Aikens: I remember two of the questions that I asked her, the same questions I asked all of the other people. “To what extent would I be working with people?”
- Martha Aikens: “Oh, you’ll be working with people all the time.”
- Martha Aikens: Then I said, “Will there be opportunities to travel?” Remember we’re going back to what would today be my Bucket List. “Would there be an opportunity to travel?”
- Martha Aikens: “Oh, you’ll be traveling all the time,” and she just sounded so excited about where she worked, and she was describing the Center and the Grand Canyon and blah, blah, blah, blah.
- Martha Aikens: So, so much for deliberating on all the choices, right? I go, “I want this job. What is the next step? What do we do next?”

- Martha Aikens: So, she said she would send me this package and everything, and she said, “I’ll let you know,” blah, blah, blah, blah, “and we’ll be talking a lot within the next few days.” And that was my beginning with the National Park Service at Albright Training Center as an intake trainee.
- Martha Aikens: I remember when I arrived – I don’t know whether or not we still hold the record for the largest class ever at Albright, but if we are not the largest, we’re certainly among the largest, because there were like fifty-three of us. The range was all across the board, folks like me who had never worked for the Park Service before, folks who had done seasonal work for the Park Service before, folks who had worked part-time for the National Park Service before, folks who were full-time with the National Park Service but had never had that Park Service orientation. So, it ran the full gamut of who was there.
- Bill Mansfield: What year was that?
- Martha Aikens: That was ‘72, 1972.
- Jodi Morris: Can you tell us a little bit about what was the makeup of the class? Were there very many other women in the class?
- Martha Aikens: No, there weren’t. We used to call ourselves the Magic Eleven because that was the number of minorities and women in the class, and then within that little group was another group which was rowdier than the outer group (laughs). So that was folks like J.T. Reynolds. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of him. Jerry Rumberg, his dad was a regional director at the time. We lost Jerry quite a while ago in a car accident.
- Martha Aikens: Then there was Cookie – she is a Ute Indian – and myself and Louise Driscoll, who at the time was fifty-three and an Equal Opportunity manager here in WASO [Washington Office], so that was a group within a group. And Dan Peregoy. I don’t need to name all of them, but there was a group within a group, and so we were sort of the wild ones in the group. You know, you’re young, you’re foolish, and whatever, whatever, but we would run down the canyon and run back up after class. We did just some really ridiculous stuff because we were the party animals in the group. We were always having these little socials, and we’d dance and carry on in the middle of the canyon. But it was funny.
- Martha Aikens: And, of course – I shouldn’t say “of course,” and I imagine it’s pretty much the same these days, no matter whether it’s park operations or orientation of some sort, whatever they’re doing these days to orient new employees to the National Park Service, it’s very competitive, and physical fitness has always been part of our culture in the National Park Service. I imagine it still is.

- Martha Aikens: So, the class was divided into three groups. The blue group, that's the group that got to jog and run and hike in the canyon and all this stuff during the physical fitness period. Then there was the white group, and they got to walk real fast on the trails. Then there was the red group. They got to walk real slow on the pavement, on the roadway, right? So, the blue group, we really had to show everyone that we deserved to be in the blue group, so we would do all sorts of stuff and just flaunt it.
- Martha Aikens: Then we had to do all these different kinds of presentations. Well, for me, since I was trained in doing lessons plans and getting up before people, whether it's a classroom or a group of teachers or whatever, to speak, so the speaking part was no deal. The hiking thing was no deal. The physical part of it was no deal. What was the stumbling block for me was the audiovisual stuff. Oh, hated it, especially slides. The slide camera cells, which I'm sure they don't use anymore, do they?
- Bill Mansfield: No.
- Jodi Morris: I still have one (laughs).
- Martha Aikens: Oh, I'm so happy for you all that you don't have to use those anymore. But anyway, my first presentation I decided to do – and you had to do a presentation with the slides, you know. That's just something you did. Everybody had to know how to do a slide presentation. So, I chose to do mine on Fred Harvey, right, because even though I loved being out in the woods and walking and hiking and all that stuff, biology I got a B in when I was in school, but that was really, really memorizing stuff, and I thought I was memorizing it just to pass the test. I never thought I was going to actually be trying to use any of it.
- Martha Aikens: I'm sorry, what were you going to say?
- Bill Mansfield: I don't know who Fred Harvey is.
- Martha Aikens: Oh, Fred Harvey, he's the guy who brought the trains to the Grand Canyon, and there's a little Fred Harvey studio, photography, and all that stuff. See, that's why I did Fred Harvey.
- Martha Aikens: So, anyway, I decided to do Fred Harvey since everybody and their brother who came before that class did theirs on some natural aspect of the canyon, you know, the flowers or the trees or the birds or something. I stuck with the people, right? So, I did Fred Harvey. No slides in the slides library for Fred Harvey, right? Surprise, surprise. So, I'm down there in the basement, trying to make slides. I mean, this is somebody who doesn't even know how to use the slide thing first, and now I'm going to go down there and make some slides, right?

- Martha Aikens: So, Dale Thompson saw me down there struggling. Stu Crowell was actually my counselor, but Dale Thompson, bless his heart, he sort of kept an eye on me. He saw me down there. He just passed by the room. You know how the instructors come in the evening, just like they do here to check on the students who may be working late, to see if they need any assistance or anything. Well, he saw I was struggling trying to make those slides, so he said, "I'll help you."
- Martha Aikens: So, we made these slides, and I went through them with him, with those slides. Worked perfectly. I get in the classroom, right, and I'm up there doing my thing, and I'm just going along, going along. The thing gets stuck. Well, I never stopped. I just kept going and going and going. J.T. and Jerry Rumberg are just on the floor, laughing. When it was over – J.T. always called me Picayune, he made fun of my – my hometown is Picayune, Mississippi. It's an Indian word for "running water," I think. But, anyway, he would always call me "Pe-cane-ya." He called me that until we retired. But anyway, he'd go, "Pe-cane-ya, that was outrageous what you did. Did it ever occur to you to stop?"
- Martha Aikens: I said, "Why would I stop? I had this wonderful presentation. You all just had to look at Fred Harvey for longer than you planned, but that's not my problem."
- Martha Aikens: But he and Jerry Rumberg just fell out. But the instructors said that was the thing to do, said, "You know, it isn't as if you can stop and go in the booth and fix the thing." This is Stu Crowell, and he said, "Another thing, you're out in the field and you're doing these presentations in the evening, there's nobody there to help. So, what you do is you just apologize, and you keep giving your presentation." So, I did.
- Martha Aikens: So, the whole while everybody else was doing theirs on nature, I would always pick some personality and I would do the personality. But I got better at making the slides and practicing more than once.
- Martha Aikens: So that was my experience at the Grand Canyon. The demonstrations I had no problem with because you have objects usually that you're handling or you're having the visitors handle, or it's something that's static that they're looking at, so I never had a problem with that. I only had a problem with the audiovisual part of it.
- Martha Aikens: I wasn't afraid of the mules because we had those on the farm. These are the working animals on the farm, so I wasn't afraid of them. The orienteering part, when you're using the compass, well, you know, I didn't have a problem with that because once you figure out the formula for the thing, you're okay.

- Martha Aikens: Then, of course, you're there with these macho guys. They don't want you to do it anyway, so you only had to demonstrate that you knew how to do it, and then you're done. The guys do it the rest of the time.
- Jodi Morris: None of us actually came in through an intake program, so can you explain a little bit how long did it last, what kind of instructions were you given when you first showed up there to prepare to come, and what were they telling you you were being prepared for with the intake program?
- Martha Aikens: Well, I came in at a time, as most of my colleagues did, when the National Park Service felt that they needed to hire more historians, sociologists, and so that was the primary makeup of my class. You had some folks like J.T. who had Park and Rec backgrounds, and like Jerry Rumberg, but most of us had history/sociology backgrounds or some field related to cultural history or social science or somewhere in that kind of broad area. That's why the class was so large, and that tells you about how long ago that was when the Park Service was actually recruiting based on projections of what the agency was going to need in the future.
- Martha Aikens: This class – and you're calling on my memory now. This class – let's see. I think the class was three or four months long, and we actually started at the Grand Canyon. It was called "Introduction to Park Operations." So, every aspect of park management we covered over that period of time, which was interpretation, and even though I always chose people, it had to be directed toward ecology or something related to nature. Then you had to do something cultural. Then you had to do something regarding a national recreation area.
- Martha Aikens: We did field trips, which exposed us to the different kinds of sites that make up the National Park Service, which gave you some sense of where you would be most comfortable and where you were most likely to be able to work in your chosen career field. So, we did that.
- Martha Aikens: Then there was also emphasis on urban areas, because during that period of time the National Park Service was bringing in urban areas, Gateway National Recreation Area, Golden Gate, some of those big national recreation areas. So, there was also some orientation and quite a bit of time devoted to urban areas.
- Martha Aikens: As a matter of fact, then you've also got to remember this was a period in time where conservation education, environmental education was also cresting. So, some of us were chosen to go to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, George Williams College, to spend some time focusing on conservation/environmental education. After that, we had to choose – well, we didn't get to choose.

- Martha Aikens: You could say where you thought you wanted to go for your urban assignment, but ultimately WASO Training Office decided where you were going to go for your urban assignment. My urban assignment was in Washington, D.C. Some folks went to New York. Some folks went to Philadelphia. So, you had to have this urban experience as part of that whole training.
- Jodi Morris: How long was the urban intake?
- Martha Aikens: The urban intake part, the honest truth about it is that it lasted until you got an assignment. Okay. The whole experience, the whole experience, “Introduction to Park Operation,” was supposed to have been this large piece at the beginning at Albright, and then you were supposed to have this middle piece for some of us at George Williams College. Then the urban piece was supposed to be like six months. Out of the urban piece, initially I was supposed to go to Vicksburg, Mississippi, and they thought that would be cool because I have this training and I’m from Mississippi, and I thought, “No. Vicksburg, Mississippi?”
- Martha Aikens: So, have you heard of Bill Wade? Golly dang. Okay. Bill Wade, second-generation Park Service. George Mahaffey, second-generation Park Service. And Tony Dean. These guys, they were supervisors at that time what is now National Capital Region and – what do they call it now? All of the Washington area parks, I’ll say that. In those days, it was divided into three areas. George Mahaffey had one, Bill Wade had one, Tony Dean had one. J.T. was assigned to Bill Wade. I was assigned to George Mahaffey. They were responsible for our urban experience.
- Martha Aikens: During that time, I worked on Operational Lightship, you know, doing the weather thing for kids, and then I did Expand, which was going into the schools, talking about different ecological things and the web of life, stuff like that. So different kinds of experiences all in conservation-environmental education, because I had all this brand-spanking-new knowledge from George Williams College, I wanted to go out and use it, right? So, they gave me Washington, D.C., with all of these new environmental programs.
- Martha Aikens: So, they said, “Vicksburg.”
- Martha Aikens: I said, “Nuh-uh.”
- Martha Aikens: And I talked to Wade, who loves a challenge, even today. He said, “Why in the world would they have spent all this money training you to work in conservation-environmental education?” Because I did really well at George Williams College, because I already had the background for the lesson plans, right, based on all that teacher stuff.

Martha Aikens: So, he said, “Why in the world would they have spent all this money and all this time training you for this new emphasis in the National Park Service and then send you to Vicksburg where you’re going to die on the vine?” And I went, “That’s what I was thinking.”

Martha Aikens: So, he and George, my counselor, and Tony Dean, they took it upon themselves to find me another assignment. So, who do they call? They researched it, and they learned that Everglades was just beginning this new environmental education program, and who was in charge of the Division of Interpretation in the Everglades but two second-generation Park Service people, George Robinson, Bruce McHenry. So, you know, these second-generation Park Service people, they had this special connection, so they called down there, and so they said, “Oh, yes, we could use her. We need her.”

Martha Aikens: At the time, the Park Service also had – because remember this era where there’s so much emphasis on conservation education, environmental education, the Park Service had also selected a group of folks to send to get their master’s degree in environmental education or conservation education or something very similar to that, right? So, they had already taken one of the graduates from this program. His name is Frank Wilson. But he was like, fifty, sixty-something. So here I come in, you know, brand-spanking-new with all this training, and I’m twenty-two (laughs). So, Bruce said, “Well, we’re going to put you over here with Frank and see how you do,” and they essentially created this position for me. It didn’t exist before Wade called them and asked them, “Would you like to have an intake trainee,” and told them about my background and my personality.

Martha Aikens: So, Bruce said, “Oh, yes, send her.” So, they put me over there with Frank. The two seasonals we had were Carol and Mike Watson. Now, I know you’ve heard of Mike Watson. Somebody?

Bill Mansfield: I’m afraid I haven’t.

Martha Aikens: I’m striking out all the way (laughter). Okay.

Bill Mansfield: That’s why we’re talking to you because you know this stuff and we don’t.

Martha Aikens: Okay. So, here we go. Mike Watson and Carol Watson, they were seasonals assigned to the Environmental Ed Program, and guess what? They were former schoolteachers, so we hit it off really well, right? But Frank Wilson was supposed to be supervising us. But these guys, I was younger than them, but they were much, much younger than Frank Wilson.

- Martha Aikens: So here we are with all this energy, and Carol is just bubbly, right? I don't know what I am, but she's just bubbly. So here we are around old Frank Wilson, and he was nervous all the time because of all this energy, you know. You have this youthful energy, all this energy, right? And we have this idea, and we want to do this, and we want to do that. Well, needless to say, it wasn't working out real well.
- Bill Mansfield: This was down in the Everglades?
- Martha Aikens: This was at Everglades.
- Bill Mansfield: This was kind of like your first permanent assignment.
- Martha Aikens: This was my first permanent assignment. So, Bruce decided this wasn't working so well, because here you have somebody – we're rarin' to go, we have all these new ideas, and Bruce and George were so devoted, number one, to the Park Service, secondly, to interpretation as a field, and finally, to recruiting and retaining young people who they viewed as the future of the Service, and they felt a special responsibility to building and creating the same kind of love for the agency and for the profession as they. So, they spent a lot of time talking to us.
- Martha Aikens: We had the Everglades National Park Cooperating Association, and every year George would select all of these books and just give them to us. Well, you know, he went way up in my mind right there. Every year we started the season, we would have all of these new books, and they wouldn't just be on nature, ecology, whatever. They'd be *The Little Prince*. They'd be all of these books.
- Martha Aikens: The whole idea was to create this kind of intellectual curiosity so that you wouldn't get in a rut. You do the same slide presentation for the next five years, or you have the same approach to your slough slog, or your swamp tromp that you did when you started out that first season. So, he would do all of these kinds of theories, and he would challenge you to challenge him on these precepts and these theories.
- Martha Aikens: We always had seasonal training, and it was a big privilege for a permanent employee to be responsible for the seasonal training. So, you were always challenged to go beyond what was thought to be the traditional or what was thought to be truly characteristic of the kinds of interpretive mediums we were supposed to use. So, there was always this energy.
- Martha Aikens: Bruce was like the Pied Piper. George was like the intellectual. Bruce was like the Pied Piper, real people person. So, the combination was, I feel, just a wonderful way to begin your career in the National Park Service.

- Martha Aikens: If you ask some people what was your best assignment, or the most important assignment in your career in the National Park Service, and if they came through the Everglades during that period, most of them will say the Everglades. I certainly would, and I've always been very grateful to them for the kind of background that they gave me to begin my career in the National Park Service.
- Ray DePuydt: So, what else did you do after that? You left Everglades to go to – I know you had a big long list.
- Martha Aikens: Yes, I left Everglades going to Gateway National Recreation Area. I got there because—
- Ray DePuydt: Which is where?
- Martha Aikens: That's in New York. I'm sorry. That's in New York City. That's one of those – remember I was talking to you about the recreation areas. Well, that's one of those recreation areas that we brought into the Service in the eighties.
- Martha Aikens: But, anyway, Jack Stark was superintendent at Everglades National Park, and I don't remember how I got there, but anyway, I got a special assignment to work with Jack Stark in the front office on the general management plan. So that's a lot of going out with the public meetings and writing up a bunch of stuff and responding to folks' letters and all this kind of thing.
- Martha Aikens: So, Jack decided that he would take an assignment as a regional director, went to the North Atlantic Region, which at the time was in Boston. So, he gets to Boston and I'm still at the Everglades. Now I'm interpretive specialist. I'm responsible for all of the written media about the park and the brochures, and we review books and things for people who are writing books on the Everglades, and either doing the seasonal training or working with whoever's doing the seasonal training and troubleshooting for any of the program areas within the Division of Interpretation.
- Martha Aikens: So, Jack goes to be regional director. They have this managerial vacancy at Breezy Point in Gateway National Recreation Area. So, he rings me up. He says, "I think it's time for you to move into management."
- Martha Aikens: I said, "Well, okey dokey."
- Martha Aikens: He says, "It's at Gateway National Recreation Area in New York."
- Martha Aikens: I said, "New York? Are you kidding? Me in New York?"

- Martha Aikens: He says, “You’ll be fine. I promise you you’ll be fine. I’m going to have the superintendent call you, tell you all about the job, and then you call me.”
- Martha Aikens: So, Herb Cables called me, and he talked to me about the job, described the job, where they were. They were doing a general management plan. So, he described where they were and what they were trying to do, what the job was, and what he would want me to do as a manager for Gateway.
- Martha Aikens: So, I listened to him and I wrote down what he said, and so I called Jack back, and I talked to him and I told him what my concerns were. Number one, it wouldn’t take a genius to figure out that the cost of living is going to be a heck of a lot more in New York than it is in south Miami, right? And this was going to be a lateral for me. Then I told him, I said, “You know, I’m open,” which was one of the reasons he thought that I was really good, because I was just open to whatever anybody wanted to say in terms of job opportunities. You know, you’re young, you say, well, this is the time to experiment with all these different things.
- Jodi Morris: But how old were you at this time? How long had you been with the National Park Service?
- Martha Aikens: I’d been at Everglades for five years then, so I was going to be twenty-nine when I got to New York.
- Martha Aikens: I said, “The other concern I have, I think I could figure out how to live there on my money, because I have savings and everything.”
- Martha Aikens: He said, “I’m not surprised. I knew you would have savings. So, what’s the other concern?”
- Martha Aikens: I said, “My other concern is I don’t want to get stuck there. I want to do other things.”
- Martha Aikens: So, he says, “I’ll make you this promise. When I leave, I’ll make sure I get you out.”
- Martha Aikens: I said, “You’ve got a deal.”
- Martha Aikens: So, I pack up, and a friend who worked as a seasonal there – and I had a guinea pig. There was one of the seasonals who, she’s been a veterinarian for years, she was in vet school, Toy Tillman, and she had this guinea pig. This guinea pig, she mated. I didn’t want any pets, right? I could barely take care of myself. That’s still true today. I didn’t want any pets. But she just thought she wanted me to have one of Clover’s babies, right? So, what are you going to do? She brings the thing and she puts it on my desk. It’s bright orange with a white tip on its nose, so I called it Headlight.

- Martha Aikens: So, Headlight and I pack up, I put her on the seat, and she used to love to just peek up and just freak people out right as we're driving down the highway. So, I put Headlight in the car, and we headed out. This friend drove with us to New York, because she just couldn't believe I would drive to New York by myself, but it wasn't a big deal to me.
- Martha Aikens: So, anyway, Headlight and I get to New York, and so I think it's not going to be such a big deal. You just look in the paper, see what apartment you want first. You know, you figure out where you want to live, and you try not to be too far from where you're going to work, right, and then you just ring the people up. No. Had to get a real estate agent to find a place to live in New York City. Then I thought the parking space came with the apartment. No. Had to go on a waiting list to park under my building. So, every night I would come in, it was scrambling to try to find a place to park. Really, really neat.
- Martha Aikens: But, anyway, as luck would have it, one of the maintenance foremen was from Mississippi, Bob Harris. He just fell in love with me. Fortunately, for me, I say God was looking out for me. Because I had never driven in snow until Albright, and so you have two lessons driving in snow. Who cannot manage that, right? You can succeed if you've only got to do it two times. So, driving in snow, not the thing for me. So, you get to New York, and they have serious snow, and I'd only driven twice in the snow, and that was at Albright, and that was how many years ago now? So, he would come and pick me up every morning and drive me to work. Even though I had a doorman on my building, he came over and he said, "Oh, these locks will never do." So, he put like four more locks on the door. So, it would take me forever to get out of the door.
- Martha Aikens: But, anyway, he was a lifesaver, and then he knew how things really worked in New York, which I didn't. So, he went down to talk to the guys in the garage and helped them out there a little bit with some of their financial goals, and my name moved up on the list, and so I finally had a space. Because I would be coming in at twelve, one o'clock at night in the summertime, and so he said, "This is not a safe thing," so he took care of that.
- Martha Aikens: But I remember my first season. I arrived in May. We had to get ready for Memorial Day, the big onslaught of people. They said, "That's just a precursor for when the real season begins. What you really need to be ready for is Fourth of July."

- Martha Aikens: There are thirteen bays in Riis Park, which was part of my unit, and everybody traditionally had their bays. It might be two, but everybody had a special place to go on that beach. If anybody crossed over, nuh-uh, not good, problems. So, we had to manage the beach most of all. That was the biggest part of that job was managing the beach.
- Martha Aikens: So, I was doing really good, and I was so happy because I never had that much money in a budget in my life. I was just ordering stuff. I was so excited, "Oh, we could do this." I had bought all these beautiful picnic tables, and I resurfaced the basketball courts and resodded the baseball fields. I was having a lovely time. I mean, they couldn't process the stuff as fast I was ordering it. I was going around and made me a big long list of all the stuff I was going to do. Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, right?
- Martha Aikens: I was not ready for Fourth of July. In terms of the facilities, we were ready. Everything was clean. I'd just spent all this time hiring people for the bathhouses and all that stuff. So, I thought I was ready. Fourth of July, these people came from everywhere. They parked all over on the people's lawns every which way. And we worked with the city bus system and some of the private bus companies so that we wouldn't have this onslaught of people, right? So, in my mind, I'd created this strategic plan, and it was going to go this way. Those people came from everywhere.
- Martha Aikens: Then that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was they all wanted to leave at the same time, and we had this queuing area, queuing area for the buses. Of course, you learn this from Disney World, right? Queuing area, right, people jumping over the stalls. I could not believe it.
- Martha Aikens: My parents had come to visit me for this first season because my dad was really concerned about me being in New York City, and so when he saw all those people, he said, "I have never ever seen this many people, not even on the TV." He goes, "I don't know about this job for you" [laughter]. Then, of course, it didn't help any when I finally got home at three that morning. I was so tired, the last thing I remember was bending down to untie my boots, and apparently, I just keeled over, and my dad found me the next morning. He goes, "What in the world happened?"
- Martha Aikens: I said, "I guess I fell asleep."
- Martha Aikens: So, he says, "I don't even think you have to stay in this job."
- Bill Mansfield: What was the name of the maintenance man that was such great help to you?
- Martha Aikens: Bob Harris. Robert Harris, yes.

- Bill Mansfield: One of the things I've heard is that the Park Service was largely a boys' club, very male oriented.
- Martha Aikens: Oh, absolutely.
- Bill Mansfield: What was it like for you to come in as a woman to work with these men and, in some cases, even be in charge of them?
- Martha Aikens: Well, believe it or not, the largest obstacle was certainly not being a female; it was the color of my skin.
- Bill Mansfield: So, race played a part.
- Martha Aikens: Yes. The woman who I told you was fifty-three, Louise Driscoll, who came into the Park Service and she was an EO [Equal Opportunity] manager, one of the presentations she did was double jeopardy, and she talked about being African American and being female. But the first thing people see when you're African American is the color of your skin, and then if they get around to messing with you about the gender part, they get to that. But initially it's the race thing.
- Martha Aikens: At Everglades, I was the first African American to have a full-time permanent job there, and for Bruce and George you had these liberal Democrats, you know, not a big deal for them. However, for me it carried a very special responsibility, and there was some resistance on the staff. Not everybody was happy about it on the staff. First of all, they created this job for me, but they created the job for me not because of the color of my skin, but because of the training I'd had. And Bruce talked about that. It went over George's head. He saw nothing with it. But since Bruce was the people person, he was more sensitive to what was going on around me, and he was very concerned for me. So, he talked about that. He had everybody to understand that I wasn't an Equal Opportunity selection, and he talked about my background and what I'd done. He said, "This is why she's here."
- Martha Aikens: But some still had an issue with it because I got media attention. Okay? You know, some people had been there doing those same little alligator demonstrations and snake demonstrations for years. The media never came out to cover them, right? I'm there and I'm doing it, this is my first time doing it, I'm on TV. So, there was some resentment there.
- Martha Aikens: Then on the trail I'm doing the same interpretive walks and slough slogs and swamp tromps that everybody else is doing, but there were times when people refused to go with me. So, Bruce was sensitive to all of that, and there were times when I know they were concerned about my safety, because I would see law enforcement rangers, they'd be on the trail somewhere.

- Martha Aikens: They'd be trying to make it inconspicuous, but I knew they were there, and I knew why they were there. So, there are those kinds of things.
- Martha Aikens: Then there would be the flipside of that. People would come into the Visitors Center and they'd say, "Is the little colored girl working today? We want to go on her walk." So, there was that, and there would be times when they would get special requests for me. So, there's a flipside of that. So, for me, it's the color my skin first.
- Ray DePuydt: But the Service then was trying to change or something? It seemed like it had a lot of support from above to move around and take these jobs on, right?
- Martha Aikens: Well, the Service, I feel, in most instances, not all, they're looking at what you bring to the job. They're not concerned about the color of your skin. Now, there were some jobs that the Secretary of Interior would not consider me for. Because of the color of my skin, he was concerned for me. So, they would never send me to Alaska.
- Jodi Morris: Did he actually talk to you about that or tell you?
- Martha Aikens: The assistant secretary did. So, you know, there are issues like that, and they're prevalent today. People don't want to talk about them, they don't want to admit it, but that's the reality of where we live.
- Bill Mansfield: It is a hard thing to talk about, but I think it's important to put it on the record.
- Martha Aikens: Yes, exactly. It's the reality of where we are. At Castillo de San Marcos, which was where I'm – I'm skipping along. I'm sure you want to go along with the sequence. Do you want to stay in sequence?
- Bill Mansfield: We'll take it as it comes.
- Martha Aikens: Okay. Well, I was going to give you another example. At Castillo de San Marcos, first African American, first woman to be superintendent at that park. It is the major tourist attraction for the little town and at that time sort of for the immediate area. It had been just a given with other superintendents prior to me that they would be members of the St. Augustine Historical Society, and they voted with the balls, you know, dropping the balls in the box; black no, white yes.
- Martha Aikens: Well, I got blackballed twice, and the historian for the park, Luis Arana, who's Hispanic, his conscience bothered him because he knew what was going on. He was a member. He knew what was going on, and so he came to talk to me about it. Of course, you know, I'm blithely going along. I didn't care whether I was in it or not.

Martha Aikens: But he said, “I feel really guilty about this, and I feel like I’m part of that because you don’t know what is going on and what has happened. But I think it should be a personal goal for me for you to become a member of this organization.” But, see, I never knew anything about that, but he did.

Martha Aikens: I know that there have been instances where other superintendents who had the job before me were part of things, part of this organization, or they were the president of this or the chair of that, and it wasn’t offered to me. When I thought it was important in terms of me being able to be successful in a job, I pushed it. When it felt more social than professional or official, I didn’t bother with it.

Bill Mansfield: What other strategies did you have to deal with this sort of thing? Because, I mean, you’re a pioneer in two different realms, race and gender.

Martha Aikens: You know, by the time I completed my assignment at the Everglades, and there were still issues with race at Gateway, which was a big city park, and at that point I was thinking, “Well, at least I won’t have to deal with that part.” But that wasn’t true. When I got to New York and I was telling you about how the people parked all on people’s – well, the park is surrounded by well-to-do white folks. Even though they wanted these upgrades for this national recreation area, Riis Park, they wanted the upgrades, but they did not want other races there.

Martha Aikens: So here you have this little idealistic, liberal-minded African American woman telling you, “If you take the money, you have to take what comes with that.” Did not like that. I was just very blunt, so I go in and I come up with a lot of resistance, about the ball field, and I come up with all these different ways with advertising in big papers all across the city, we’re advertising in the little regional local papers for the neighborhoods. They were not happy with me. So, they boycott the park, and they did all these kinds of things. They’d call me on the carpet just about every Sunday morning. Here we are at somebody’s house, and they’re complaining about what our visitors did to their property and we’re lowering their property values.

Martha Aikens: But I’ve always been a very observant person, and so I’m looking around and I see – I went into, I think, about three of the five homes that border or buffer the park. They’ve got these high-powered telescopes, because two of the three bays that are immediately in their back-view shed are nude bays. So, I never said anything, I just casually went over there, “Oh, what a beautiful telescope,” to let them know that I know they’re watching.

Martha Aikens: So, I said, “Well, what proof do you have that your property value has gone down? Have you done a marketing survey for the neighborhood? Have you done comparisons? What can you show me?”

Martha Aikens: And then they just started crying. Herb Cables said, “You are one cheeky something-something.”

Martha Aikens: I go, “Well, you got to survive.”

Martha Aikens: But I remember going to the public meetings, you know, and people spitting at us and calling us all kind of name, because Herb Cables is African American, too, and pretty much his entire staff except, I think, for two people were African Americans, right?

Jodi Morris: This was at Gateway?

Martha Aikens: This was at Gateway. Most of them were recruited locally. And you know why? Because there weren’t many folks who were what we would consider coming from the traditional Park Service background who were willing to come to an urban area.

Bill Mansfield: So, you went from Everglades to Gateway to San Marcos.

Martha Aikens: Okay. Let me go back and pick up the story. When Jack Stark decided to go to the Grand Tetons, which is where he owned property and the area where he planned to retire, he rang me up and said, “Martha, I want you to apply for the Departmental Manager Development Program.” This is a management program that is sponsored by the Department of Interior, and they don’t select more than two or three from each agency to go through this special training. So, I applied.

Martha Aikens: Herb Cables was furious, because I’d only been there a year and a half, and by then I had done, what, three, three seasons. He goes, “Well, we haven’t finished the GMP. She needs to do this. She needs to do that.”

Martha Aikens: Jack said, “But I promised her when I was leaving, I would make sure she got out,” and so he kept his promise. Even though Herb tried to stop it, he couldn’t. Jack Stark made sure that it went through.

Martha Aikens: So, I left, going back to Washington for the department’s management program, and that program lasted a year. The purpose of that program is to train you to go across agencies, and so you learn much more about the sister agencies within the Department of Interior, and the whole idea is that the best managers in the department should be able to go across any of the bureaus. So that was for a year.

Martha Aikens: So, we did that, but what happened there was we started out with Bill Whalen as the director. So, the program began under Bill Whalen. Bill Whalen’s position was we were supposed to give him three parks we wanted to work in after we finished the program, and he would make sure we got one of those or something very similar to those experiences. Only

problem was he got fired like two months before the program was complete.

Martha Aikens: Russ Dickinson comes in and he says, “No, no, no, no. No special consideration for these folks. They should apply for the jobs just like everybody else. They have to compete just like everybody else.” So here we are, and when he came out with that announcement, we were like weeks before finishing the program, so everybody’s frantically running around trying to – I mean, there were five of us at that time. Bill Wayland asked the department for a special exception so he could have two more, and so there were five of us at that time. One wanted to go back to Denver, one wanted to stay in Washington, so there were three of us who wanted to get back to the field, and Ernie wanted to go back. Ernest Suazo wanted to go back to Alaska.

Martha Aikens: So, there were only two of us who were really openly competing for jobs. So, they were all worried, worried, worried. I was not. I don’t know why. I can’t explain to you at this point, but I don’t know why, but I didn’t concern myself with it.

Martha Aikens: The colleague who wanted to go back to Denver, well, she had a friend who had just completed an assignment in Africa, teaching at the College of African Wildlife Management, and the two areas where the State Department was looking for help was in interpretive planning and in conservation education.

Martha Aikens: So, we go to talk to Rob Milne, the guy who was over at the Office of International Affairs at the time, and so we talked to him, and he says, “Well, it is so wonderful that you guys came by, because we don’t have anybody to go for this next assignment.”

Martha Aikens: We went, “You found them.”

Martha Aikens: So, we went there for three months. She taught interpretive planning, and I taught conservation education.

Jodi Morris: Where were you in Africa?

Martha Aikens: Tanzania, and the school was in a little town called Mweka at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro or Kibu.

Martha Aikens: So, I went there then, but before I left, I’d given this friend, Maryann Lawler, who became the budget officer for the department, I gave her a stack of job applications that I had completed with a little cover letter. I said, “If you see anything in the vacancy announcements that you think would be good for me, just fire off one of these bad boys,” and so she did.

- Martha Aikens: So, then I get this telegram from Clem Penner, who was the chief of the Division of Training at the time, says, “Joe Brown, regional director for the Southeast Region, is interested in you being superintendent at Castillo de San Marcos. He’s reviewed your application. He knows about you.”
- Martha Aikens: I mean, you work in Everglades for five years and you go back and forth helping the regional offices on different things, then your name is out there. You know how that works. So, he knew me from my work at the Everglades, and they’d been talking to him about what I’d done in the interim. So, I get back, I accepted the job. I sent a telegram telling him I accepted the job. When I got back, I was loading up, Headlight and I, going to Castillo de San Marcos. So that’s how I got to Castillo de San Marcos.
- Ray DePuydt: Where’s that?
- Martha Aikens: That’s in St. Augustine, Florida, which is kind of northeast Florida.
- Ray DePuydt: That’s where you had to become part of that club for the Historical—
- Martha Aikens: St. Augustine Historical Society, yes. You know, I’d be walking down the street in my uniform, people would be yelling the N-word out of their trucks. So, you know, after a while, it just doesn’t penetrate the armor.
- Christine Arato: So, you came here to Mather, arrived in August of 1988, and you’re certainly breaking the gender barrier. You’re the first woman director here. Was that the case also in terms of race, were you the first?
- Martha Aikens: Yes.
- Christine Arato: What was it like? I mean, what was the staff like? You were coming to a place that was full of Civil War history. What was that experience?
- Martha Aikens: Well, I got along with Don Campbell better than any of the other former superintendents, because with males there’s this macho thing they have going on. They have a special language there. So, women, we don’t tend to deal with that. Then when they know a little bit of your history, you’re not a threat to them. You’re not challenging to them. It’s all about the work. So, I approached him that way and I approached him with a lot of respect, knowing that the center is only going to be successful if the park supports the center, because we rely on them for so much.
- Jodi Morris: Was Don superintendent of the park?
- Martha Aikens: Yes. So, you can’t have that tension there, you know, if you’re going to do well together. So, we got along really well.
- Martha Aikens: Bob Stanton, regional director, well, you know, I knew him from years past. He was one of the people I shadowed when I was with the

Departmental Manager Development Program. He was one of the people I shadowed, so we got to know each other very well, and I'd done some work for him.

Martha Aikens: So, when we set stuff up – and one of the things that working in the park does for you, which is why there was an emphasis on it at one time, was to only bring in superintendents here who had actually worked in a park, because you have to complete the same kinds of forms, and the only difference here is there's an extra layer that you have to go through. Because your package has to make the priority list for the park, and then once it gets on the list for the park, then you have to do the politicking to get it up on the list and have it stay on the list once it gets to the regional office.

Martha Aikens: So, you have to nurture, first develop and then nurture, all of those relationships at this center with the park and with the regional office. So, you know the language and you pretty much know how to package it once you've been in the park because you've done it so many times. So, it's just second nature.

Martha Aikens: But one of the most nurturing experiences I've had is in training and development. In training and development, I worked with Clem Penner, African American female, Flip Hagood, African American male. These were my supervisors. Anytime I had any involvement in training, they were my supervisors. So, the kinds of things that you would have to go through if I was talking to or if I was trying to deal with a white manager who knew nothing about me would be very different.

Martha Aikens: But I knew Clem before when I went through the Departmental Manager Development Program, and once you're in training, you're forever in training, you know, because even though I was a superintendent out here, even when I was in Everglades as an interpretive specialist, I was asked to come here to teach, asked to come here to train. So, you know they already know your name, they already know something about you, and you're comfortable with them and you're comfortable with the environment.

Martha Aikens: With Flip and Clem, they already knew me, and so we didn't have to go through this thing of establishing rapport. I didn't have to try to demonstrate credibility in my field or whatever I was going to be teaching or doing or whatever. I already had it. So, there's a difference there. So, instead of starting at ground zero, if the scale is ten, you're already at nine.

Christine Arato: Right. So, when you got here, you had these relationships, and you'd been here before. What were your goals or accomplishments? What were you stepping into? Did you have expectations for the center?

- Martha Aikens: Oh, I did, and they were both infrastructure and they were also curriculum-based. With the infrastructure, there were things as simple as getting the stripes on the parking lot, or as complicated as getting the elevator in. I followed Bill Wade here, and I saw him later, and he goes, “How did you get Don Campbell to approve that elevator?” So, there are things like that.
- Martha Aikens: Then, of course, you know, if you’re the superintendent, there’s always the money issue and there’s always this thing of priorities, so you’re always competing, competing, competing for money. Then, of course, given that my background is interpretation, you also want to be careful that you’re not biased in that area. Here, the emphasis during my tenure was interpretation, cultural resources. We did some natural resources, but primarily that was at Albright. So, our focus was primarily in interpretation and in cultural resources.
- Martha Aikens: So, my goal was to have a structure for those curriculums that allowed for advancement, progress, and whatever, but that would always be a basic set of skills that one should come away with, with each of those classes, and that we should always have a stated curriculum that we could always say, “Well, the base curriculum is this.” And you tweak it a little bit at the top, but you always have the base curriculum.
- Christine Arato: Was the split between Mather and Albright established when you had here, yours was cultural and theirs was natural, or was that something you worked out?
- Martha Aikens: No, it was already there when I came.
- Christine Arato: So, when you came here, were there spots, were there gaps that you found that you thought, “This is what we need to target next?”
- Martha Aikens: Oh, we did. We did. Whereas there was ranger skills – at that time, we’d gone from park operations. There’d been several iterations of basic park operations.
- Martha Aikens: But what we tried to do was decide that, for instance, if your career field was interpretation, then what would you need at the 5 level? What would you need at the 7-9 level? What you would need at the 12-13 level? So that’s what we tried to do.
- Martha Aikens: We tried to come up with assessments. That was a big thing during my tenure, trying to come up with assessments so that we could actually figure out where we were in terms of the skills that people already had, whether they got them through academia or through experience, but what skills did they already have, and what skills should we be responsible for providing that would be truly the responsibility of the training center?

- Christine Arato: So, in listening to how you're talking about your early career and people helped you along and opened up opportunities, in having this sort of progression were you trying to formalize or give a sort of venue to people to do that, or were people still important?
- Martha Aikens: People, people, that was always my focus, because what I learned early on, even before we got finished park operations, the Park Service has not been able to – and there are many different reasons for it – but they've not been able to stick to a career ladder for any career field. So, I remember Jack Stark telling me that one of the things that would benefit me most in my career is that I was open for anything.
- Martha Aikens: Let's see. Can I remember ever really applying for a job? Because, you know, I was just open. People would say, "Well, are you interested in this?"
- Martha Aikens: I would say, "Okay," and I'd just send in application. I think for young people, that's really important. You have to be open to whatever opportunities are out there. And you may not want to go to an urban area, but I'll tell you what, Jack Stark couldn't have gotten me into the Departmental Manager Development Program but for Breezy Point. You know why? Because I had managed more money and more people than anybody else competing for one of those slots. That's the difference. So, you have to look at the whole thing, you know. Certainly, would I have chosen to go to New York on an assignment? I love visiting New York, but living there? Would not have done that. But I trusted Jack Stark to advise me on what he thought was best for my career.
- Martha Aikens: And when I put those numbers down there and I went on the interview, one of the interviewers said – you know, they put you through these different interview things to whittle it down, and so you're going through this process of several interviewing stages. So, in the very first one, the lady said, "Did you really manage these many people?"
- Martha Aikens: And I go, "Yeah."
- Martha Aikens: "And how in the world did you get this much money?"
- Martha Aikens: And I said, "Because I kept spending and I kept spending. They kept giving it to me, and I kept spending and I kept spending."
- Christine Arato: Which might be the first time in the Park Service you're rewarding for spending (laughs).
- Martha Aikens: Yes, exactly, and they could see where the money was going. Bob Cunningham, who was my supervisor at Gateway, he left Gateway going to Denali in Alaska, and when I would go in with my request for money,

he goes, “I need to suit up, because Martha’s coming in here.” Then after I’d beat him down and beat him down and beat him down, and he still said no, then I said, “Okay, I think the unit that needs this most is—,” you know, I would say Sandy Hook or I would say Jamaica Bay or something.

Martha Aikens: He said, “But I know that she’s going to give me good advice on where she really thinks the money should go after she can’t get it. Only if she can’t get it, then she’ll help out somebody else.”

Martha Aikens: But, yes, so had I not taken that urban assignment, I would have not been very competitive for that slot.

Christine Arato: So, did someone place the call and say, “Martha, I want you to go to Harpers Ferry to lead the Mather Training Center”?

Martha Aikens: No. Flip Hagood, where I worked before, he was the selecting person, and he did interview me. He interviewed me along with all of the other people, and he says, “Well, I’ll have to get back to you, but this was a wonderful interview.” Well, I knew it would be, because I’d been up here so much, I could tell him what I would do. Which means what? I had an advantage over the other people.

Christine Arato: You seem to be a person who likes challenges. So, what were the challenges here you knew when you were stepping into them?

Martha Aikens: Well, the biggest one was getting here, because I know I wasn’t moving to Harpers Ferry. Well, while I was here there was this thing called the Women’s Conference, okay, and they started out as part of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the National Park Service, they started out with one lady, but it wasn’t coming together at all. So, with just a few months left, guess who Herb Cables gave it to? He was the deputy director at the time. Moi.

Christine Arato: This is while you were here?

Martha Aikens: Yes. So, tried to manage the center and pull together the Women’s Conference in such a short period of time, I mean going back to the very, very foundation for the thing, like selecting the site. Then, of course, there were so many women who wanted to be involved with the Women’s—

Jodi Morris: What was the focus of the Women’s Conference? Explain a little bit more about what it was.

Martha Aikens: Well, I changed the focus. Initially, the focus was going to be issue-based. Well, I remember from 19 – when was I in the – the time I was in the – that must have been ‘79, ‘80. The Women’s Conference before ‘91 was in 1980, issue-based.

- Jodi Morris: Was this for women employees or is it based on women's history?
- Martha Aikens: Women employees. The purpose of it being issues-based is you're trying to destroy the glass ceiling for women in the Park Service, so you tried to figure out how to get them into more leadership positions, more management positions, more supervisory positions. There are women who want to do all of these things, so you're trying to figure out how to help them get there, because, as Bill alluded to earlier, the Park Service was pretty much a white male-dominated organization. I don't know what it is now, but that's what it was back then.
- Martha Aikens: So, in the eighties, it was an issue-based conference. What are the obstacles? What are we going to do to eliminate the obstacles? And how are we going to measure whether or not we've eliminated these obstacles?
- Martha Aikens: Well, you know, you come up with this wonderful document, it sounds really good, and I was one of the authors, and the Park Service, for whatever, didn't do very much with that. Okay? So, this lady, I can't think of her name now, in '91 she wants to do another issues-based conference as part of the celebration for the seventy-fifth.
- Martha Aikens: So, when they asked me initially – because I wanted nothing to do with it, but they asked me my opinion, so I said, “Well, before you do another issues-based conference, why don't you take the document that was developed in the eighties and use that as a starting point to see what was good about that that we didn't do anything with and whether or not it's feasible to pick that up and actually do something with it now, at least as a basis for this conference.” They didn't want to do that, so, you know, I was fine with that and happy not to be involved in it.
- Martha Aikens: Then here comes Herb Cables, “No choice. You have to do this.”
- Martha Aikens: So, Flip said, “Well, Martha, it's an order. We don't have any choice. You have to do it.”
- Martha Aikens: So, I went to Herb Cables and Director [James M] Ridenour at the time, and I said, “I understand that I don't have a choice, but can I redesign the conference?”
- Martha Aikens: They said, “Well, yes, because there's no design in the first place. We don't have anything.”
- Martha Aikens: So, I said, “Well, then we're going to make it a celebration of women and we're going to make it a training opportunity. I'm a superintendent of a training center. We can do assessments on the women, and we know how to put together a selection criteria, we know how to work with the regions to select the women, because that structure's already in place. And we

know how to do assessments, we can figure out who should be part of this.”

Martha Aikens: So, they were glad to get rid of it, so they said, “Okay, go on, do whatever you want to do with it,” and so we did that.

Martha Aikens: But the only problem was women kept going, “We think we should be part of it. We think we should be.” Ended up with a planning team of seventeen women.

Meghan Foster: Lots of talking.

Martha Aikens: Superintendents, regional directors.

Jodi Morris: Too many cooks in the kitchen.

Martha Aikens: Seventeen women. So, what I decided I would do is really just dissect the conference, and I gave the women managers the responsibility for – because we decided that we should make a contribution back to the Service. At the time, they were pulling together the Ranger Museum, and so we were going to make this big contribution to the Ranger Museum, right?

Martha Aikens: So, Sandy Walters, Anne Belkour, Maureen Finnerty, big superintendents, right, big managers, and Marie Rust, regional director, so that’s what I gave them. Then the employee development officers, we actually did all of the work. The training community actually did all of the work in terms of developing selection criteria, doing assessments for the regions to actually apply and give us back the information after we gave them all of that. But we let the regions actually make the final decisions. We did all the work, and we said, “This is what you gave us. This is your list. You have so many slots,” and we based the number of slots on the number of employees, number of women in any particular region. That’s how we got the makeup of it.

Martha Aikens: Then I said, “But, you know, this is not going to be a women, women, women thing. We’re going to have any man who applies,” and we had three or four men who applied. I said, “It’s a training opportunity. If they want it, they can have it,” and so we had three or four men come. We had lots of male instructors. I mean, who else were you going to draw from, you know? White male-dominated agency, so lots of men.

Martha Aikens: Then I had my old buddies, J.T. and Bill Wade and all those guys, who were very much involved in the Ranger Museum and raising money for the Association of National Park Rangers, so they were out there doing their thing. Of course, you know, I had them waiting on the women, so you know the women loved that, you know, Bill Wade and all these

macho guys (Rick Gale, Mike Finley) waiting on them. And we had a banquet. So, one of the guys go, “Why do you all want to have a banquet for women?”

Martha Aikens: I said, “Because we love dressing up and we love admiring each other dressing up.”

Martha Aikens: So, we had a big banquet with the desserts on fire and all that stuff. So, it was wonderful, and Director Ridenour was so pleased, because the feedback was really, really good. He consulted with the department for some other bureaus to do women’s conferences based on the one we put together with the training curriculum, so it was very good.

Martha Aikens: Peggy Woodward and Gloria Baker, they were my left and right hands, and, of course, they were here.

Christine Arato: So, they were here at the center?

Martha Aikens: Yes. Then when they ordered me to be involved with Discovery 2000, well, I pulled some of those same folks, you know, training managers, Lucia Bragan, Pauline Jue, Anne, Peggy, and Gloria.

Christine Arato: What was Discovery 2000?

Martha Aikens: You guys don’t know Discovery 2000?

Christine Arato: No, that’s why I’m here talking to you.

Martha Aikens: Okay. Discovery 2000, which was led by Jerry Rogers, bet you know that name. Jerry Rogers, well, anyway, it was his swansong. He was on his way out. They thought in 2000 it would be a good opportunity to take a look at the agency in terms of where we were, our mission, and where we thought we needed to be within the next twenty years or so. So that’s what Discovery 2000 was about.

Martha Aikens: We had a natural resources track, a cultural resources track, an education track. In education – I’m trying to remember now. Yes, I had the education track. So, the format was you would have a guest speaker, you would have a former director of the National Park Service who you felt was most supportive of the subject of your track, whether it was education, natural resources, or whatever, and then you would have a series of workshops in the day or in your track any way you thought fit.

Martha Aikens: So, my guest speaker was Maya Angelou. My regional director was Russ Dickinson. When I worked in the Division of Interpretation, we were rewriting the policies regarding living history programs and cultural resources, something, something, something. I don’t remember all of them, but we were rewriting all of those policies. So, Russ was getting all

of these letters and he would send them to me to respond, so we got to be very close, and I learned how to write for him.

Martha Aikens: I remember when I was just so sick of the Civil War people, and so I fired off a letter and sent it to Russ, and Russ called, “Martha, we want to watch our tone.”

Martha Aikens: I said, “Okey dokey. I’ll send you another one.”

Martha Aikens: But, anyway, we got to be close with the give-and-take of working for him on those policies and other issues related to interpretation. He was president of Eastern National at the time, and so I rang him up and told him I needed his help and blah, blah, blah, blah, and Eastern National paid for Maya. Maya reduced her salary for me, her fee, and so Eastern National paid for it.

Martha Aikens: Then I closed out with a presentation from an organization in Philadelphia called Quiet Riot. I was superintendent at Independence at the time when they wanted to do the thing in 2000, which I didn’t want to do that either. But John Cook, who was involved in the Women’s Conference – remember I told you about you have to have the right folks involved in your stuff. So, John Cook was one of the regional directors I involved in the Women’s Conference. We had several people there serving as mentors. Employees at that grade level would never have an opportunity to sit down with a regional director at John Cook’s level. I mean, he’d been regional director three, four different regions. So, to have the opportunity to sit down with a John Cook, well, they valued that so much.

Martha Aikens: So, he told Bob Stanton, who was director at the time, he said, “You know who you need to make sure you have involved in this 2000 thing?”

Martha Aikens: This is the way Bob Stanton tells the story. So, Bob Stanton says, “Who?”

Martha Aikens: “That Martha Aikens. If anybody could have pulled off that mess with the Women’s Conference the way she did, you need to have her involved in this.” So that’s how I got involved in Discovery 2000.

Martha Aikens: But, anyway, I closed it out with a group called Quiet Riot from Philadelphia, and what it is, is it’s a mixed-media presentation on ecology. So needless to say, they’re banging drums and they’re doing drama, and they have all this stuff going on, so it’s really difficult to tell where you could focus your attention because there’s so much going on. Well, you know, at the end of the day when everybody comes back together, I felt that’s what you need, sort of a burst of energy, and people just loved it. So, the day began with Maya and ended with Quiet Riot. So, they just loved that.

- Christine Arato: It seems to be a nice bookend for a woman who started her career fearful of the slide carrier (laughs).
- Christine Arato: So, to get back to the issue of technology, we're looking through some of the old course catalogs. I noticed there's a transition from a typewriter to a micro-processing computer during your tenure here. How did technology influence or change the track of training and learning and development during the course of your career, particularly when you're here at Mather?
- Martha Aikens: Well, one of the things you must learn as a manager is determine who you can trust. That's very important. Then you have to be able to let it go, but first you have to be certain in your own mind that you can trust this person. So, what you do is you give them little tests. They don't know that they're being tested, but you give them little tests. If they deliver, if they are as good as their word and if you feel in your heart of hearts that they're going to work as hard as they can to get it for you, then you leave them alone.
- Martha Aikens: So that's what I did, because I had absolutely no interest in anything. I mean, I have my computer, and I go on it now once or twice a week maybe, because I do volunteer work which has nothing to do with what I did for my career. So, it's separate and apart. So, I check that once or twice a week, because I know people are sending me information on what I'm to do next or something. But other than that, nuh-uh.
- Martha Aikens: I have a friend who is working in Saudi Arabia, and she wants me to Skype so bad. You know, she wants me to Skype. I mean, "Girl, I am not interested in learning how to do no Skype." But she was lonesome, and I was partly responsible for her taking the job over there, so I went to another friend's house and Skyped with her from there.
- Martha Aikens: Then when she came home – they give them a couple of weeks back stateside – and so when she came back, she came over my house and she hooked the thing up so I can Skype with her. But I have absolutely, positively no interest in that. So, the young people who were interested in that, I just let them go. So, I was very lucky to have Dave Dahlen, who's here now, and I had Dale Ditmanson, and I had Connie Backlund. I just said, "Look, this where we need to be. I don't know how we're going to get there, but this is where we need to be."
- Christine Arato: Were they all at the beginning of their careers? Because all these people you named are all big-time superintendents now.
- Martha Aikens: Yes, they were. They were.
- Christine Arato: They were the people who stand out in your mind as the doers, the people you relied on?

- Martha Aikens: Well, I trusted them to do different things, you know. Everybody comes with a very different skill set and personalities are very different. So, you figure out who works best with what, and that's part of studying people. As a manager, you have to learn to do that. You have to study people. I mean, they going to be studying you, but for different reasons. But you have to really study people, because nobody gets to operate within their strength all the time, but whenever you can, you always want to go to their strengths, and that's what you do. I mean, Connie Backlund, detail person, detail, detail person. Detail, detail. Ditmanson, very organized and very sort of aggressive, but very ambitious. So, you know that that's where he's going. Dahlen is more of a people person. So, you play to those strengths.
- Christine Arato: Did you have pet projects here that you entrusted to the people and their strengths? Were there things you thought, "I have to get done while I'm here, this is important"?
- Martha Aikens: Well, the elevator was one, because it bothered me that here we are, a training center, and we're not truly accessible. That was a big deal for me. So, I worked and worked and worked to get that.
- Martha Aikens: Then the notion that we would be changing the curriculum constantly, that bothered me, because if you're going to be changing the curriculum constantly, what basis do you have to measure anything? You see, you can't measure anything if you're changing it all the time. Tweaking it is different from changing it completely. But if you have a skill set for each of those major grade-level categories, then you have something to work with. Then you can go back and measure.
- Martha Aikens: The more that you can prove these skills to say that this is what we need and what we're always going to need as long as there are parks, then you have something. So, we focused a lot on trying to figure that out and working with that.
- Christine Arato: I'm trying to understand the dynamics. So, were the impulses to change the curriculum coming from inside the Park Service or outside? Where were those pressures coming from?
- Martha Aikens: Well, this goes back to one of the questions you asked me earlier. One of the frustrations of working here for me is that everybody thinks they know training, everybody thinks they know how to do training, and everybody wants to have their imprint on it in some kind of way. So, you have to develop a strategy, which is where the assessments come in, which is where the skill sets come in, and you can prove that these are the skills that are needed, because here you have five thousand people who you've done an assessment for and they're at this grade level, and they said this is what they need and this is what they want in order to do their jobs.

- Martha Aikens: You can compare that to the job description that wasn't prepared by Mather Training Center folks, but this is the job description that is accepted by the Service. This is what's in the system for the Service. So, if that's a match and that's a match, then you have a good argument, and so then what you do to keep everybody happy is you tweak it up here. So, the regional director who says, "Well, you know, they're not getting this and they're not getting that," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, then you figure out how to put that up at the top, and you challenge that regional director to tell you what it is exactly they think they need. You know, whether that's bringing them out here, I mean, we've actually brought them out here to design a portion – not the entire course – a portion of the course exactly the way they think it should be happening.
- Christine Arato: Now, bringing them out here, that leads me to think about when you were here Cook Hall was a dormitory and students came here, and that's changed. How important was that residential experience?
- Martha Aikens: I think it was critical. But one of the things, another frustration with training is that so often the people above us feel like it's really a luxury or it's really icing, it is not central, it is not core to who we are as an organization. So, whenever there's a budget cut, the first thing they go to is training and travel. Well, both those things are key to us being successful in delivering trained employees for the National Park Service.
- Martha Aikens: Because of the way the National Park Service is structured – and I can't tell you how many times I made that argument – because of the way the National Park Service is structured, we are all over all of the states, the trust territories. We have people doing international assignments. So, to say that you can't have any travel or you're going to cut the travel by 50 percent and we're going to do all of this regionally, that was my last big argument before I left, to show the difference between trying to do some of the training regionally and trying to do it centrally. I mean, the quality goes down, the consistency goes down, so essentially, it's wasted money. It's wasted time and energy. I feel very, very strongly about that.
- Martha Aikens: When we worked, I don't know how long to try to get a new dorm, we went through all kind of iterations and justifications and whatever, whatever. And, of course, when Fish and Wildlife built their center right down the road, then it was, "Well, you can use that." So, we had to prove why that wouldn't work. First of all, Fish and Wildlife didn't want us over there. Secondly, it's not the same as being on your own property with your own folks who care about you and who are vested in the outcome of your experience here. It's just very different.

- Christine Arato: When did that come onboard? Was that while you were here that was sort of on the horizon, something you—
- Martha Aikens: It was on the horizon, yes.
- Christine Arato: I wonder, too, this center is on the grounds of a former historically black college, Storer College, and there's that connection to history, which is part of Park Service's mission. I mean, was that at the forefront when you came here?
- Martha Aikens: Well, I'm responsible for this room.
- Christine Arato: Oh, I would like to hear more about that, yes. Because Dave told us he wasn't really sure, so now we have a chance to get that down.
- Martha Aikens: Yes. Well, you know, they come here at least once a year for their celebration, and so we would revisit the history of this place, which, of course, was one of the first schools to train former slaves. So, they had all this background and all of this history, so we did an oral history project also as part of that.
- Martha Aikens: So, I, along with Don Campbell, because you can't do squat here without Don Campbell, along with Don Campbell, we made a commitment to them that we would develop a place for them where they would always feel comfortable. It would be a place that was very much a part of the students' experience here.
- Martha Aikens: So, I figured the best way to do that would be to have a library, conference area, where we displayed all of the pictures, which I guess are over on that side, and there would be references. I didn't pay attention, but there should be pictures out in the hall and something about this room, but it was when I was here, anyway, so that the students who come here would know something about the history of this building.
- Martha Aikens: Then, of course, Don Campbell is thinking, "If Mather ever moves and we get this building, then it would become part of our interpretive program," and they could also use it for some training facilities also. But it would become part of the interpretive program.
- Christine Arato: Now, when we talked to you briefly on the phone yesterday, you mentioned you went to Alcorn, in Mississippi, which is also a historically black college or university.
- Martha Aikens: That's right.
- Christine Arato: Did that really play into your understanding of this place as a special place?

- Martha Aikens: Not really. What did it for me were the people and their love of this place. I mean, they get so excited when they come here every year, and they just thought that the Park Service was just wonderful for Don and I just to spend time with them and to appreciate who they were. And these people went on to become really high-level professionals in their chosen career fields. So, they remember this place with such fond memories, and when you listen to them talk about how they used to have athletic activities out here and how they dressed up for the dances and things, it was just exciting to me to listen to them. So, it was very much about them.
- Ray DePuydt: So why did it go out of business?
- Martha Aikens: Well, which is the same thing that's happening with historically black colleges and universities. Now students have options, many, many more options.
- Ray DePuydt: Yes, to go elsewhere.
- Martha Aikens: Exactly.
- Christine Arato: So, what you did here and your relationship with the Historic College Alumni, university, that group, that community, did that also influence what the park does in terms of their interpretive program? It seems like a rich relationship.
- Martha Aikens: Well, actually, we worked together, but the park had its own program, so I didn't influence their program. They had their own program. If anything, they encouraged me to move ahead. I'm trying to think of – there were two African Americans who worked at the park, a young woman, and a young man, and I worked with them quite a bit. So, they were actually very committed to their program in the park, which made me be even more committed to my program up here, because, you know, they wanted a fluid experience. When the Storer College folks came, they didn't want it to be the park this and Mather that. They wanted it to be the park.
- Christine Arato: Now, there's another NPS entity on this campus, the Interpretive Design Center. Were they also a partner in this and giving you technical advice on the room, or what was their relationship with the training center?
- Martha Aikens: Well, I mean, the relationship was very, very close. It had to be because a lot of our focus was on interpretation, right? So, a big part of interpretation is interpretive planning. So, all of the exhibits we consulted with them on, whether it was the one out there or the one here, because you want to know what is the realm of possibility, and then you have to figure out the budget. I don't know anything about it. I can look at it and tell whether or not it makes sense, but in terms of being up to date and knowing what things cost in the way of interpretive planning, didn't know that.

- Martha Aikens: Then, of course, it was an easy sell to Bob Stanton, who was regional director, because he had met some of these people and he knew all about Storer College, so he wanted to be supportive of it also.
- Christine Arato: So, speaking of the realm of possibility and budget constraints, I notice a note in one of the course catalogs that the courses for the first quarter of fiscal year 1991 were cancelled. Do you remember that, what happened there?
- Martha Aikens: I don't remember. I don't remember what happened, but it could have been a situation where there was no money, we didn't have a continuing resolution signed or something like that. It could have been something like that, but I don't really remember. I left in – where was I in '91? I left in '91.
- Christine Arato: So, thinking back on your years here, can you point to an accomplishment, you say that “That’s my legacy here. That’s what I’m most proud of”? Anything stand out?
- Martha Aikens: Well, I would have to say that it would be the progress. I would say three areas. It would be the progress that we made in terms of doing assessments and developing skills courses. That would be on the curriculum side.
- Martha Aikens: On the physical side, I would say getting the elevator approved so that the building is completely accessible. Then I would say this room in terms of cultural resources and really having the park become more of a community entity, because those folks were always – and they brought their children and their grandchildren. So here you have an opportunity to pass along or help pass along a legacy. So, I would say those three areas.
- Christine Arato: Any challenges or disappointments here at Mather, things that hadn't gone right or you wish you had been able to turn to when you were here? You were here such a brief time.
- Martha Aikens: Yes, I was. I would say that you could see things on the horizon, and I knew that there would be battle after battle after battle to keep this center open, and not only just open, but viable. I see that as a continued struggle for the center.
- Jodi Morris: One of the new emphases for this center is going to be on distance learning for employees, and so because of the travel restrictions, and how do you think that – I know one of the other concerns for the National Park administration is employee morale and that sense of being part of something bigger. How do you think that's going to impact that?
- Martha Aikens: Well, that began to happen when I was – I mean, we were always doing that, but we were very careful in selecting the courses that were

appropriate to deliver that way. We never saw it as a direction, which it's a direction now as opposed to another medium, you know. So that's a big, big difference. I'm sad to hear that, because what that does is it forces the training community to try to convert what are really skills classes, hands-on classes, to a distant learning medium. We've had experience after experience after experience that says that doesn't work.

Christine Arato: Obviously being here together learning how to do oral history has made a big difference. I'm not sure we could do that on the phone. But one of the other goals of this particular interview was also to support an administrative history, to understand the history of Mather Training Center, and that always helps the manager to chart directions for the future. Is there anyone else you would recommend that we talk to, to really understand the history of this place, other directors, but also people who you thought were key in this institutional memory?

Martha Aikens: Well, have you spoken to Flip Hagood?

Christine Arato: No.

Martha Aikens: Yes, I would speak to Flip Hagood, and he could actually answer that question about why there were no classes in '91. I'm trying to remember when did I go to Philadelphia? In '91, but anyway, he would more likely be able to answer that question.

Martha Aikens: Then I would talk to Lucia Bragan. She's an employee development specialist. She has worked with both training centers and she has worked in the Division of Training for decades.

[Unidentified]: What was her last name again?

Martha Aikens: Lucia Bragan, B-r-a-g-a-n.

Ray DePuydt: I saw that you worked on something in 2005 about reorganization of Mather and Albright. Is that right?

Martha Aikens: Yes.

Ray DePuydt: There's a notebook in there.

Martha Aikens: Yes.

Ray DePuydt: And what was the history of that?

Martha Aikens: Well, that was already under way when I came back to Division of Training and chief of Training in Washington. They were trying to figure out how to provide the staffing appropriate for the mission for each of the training centers, which included Mather, Albright, and it also included the Historic Preservation Training Center, and the Capitol Training Center in

Washington, so four different centers. Now, you know that there's going to be a big problem and that your chances of succeeding with an open-ended goal like that when they also tell you that there's not going to be any budget increase and you have to do it with existing FTEs.

Ray DePuydt: Kind of a more-with-less thing?

Martha Aikens: Yes. So, when I came in, they'd already started that. They'd already been working on it. They hired these consultants. They'd already been working on it a couple of years. So, when I came in, my supervisor at the time asked me what I thought of it, and I was very honest in what I thought of it. I also said to her that given pretty much how we knew this was going to end up, that it was a waste of money to continue paying consultants to develop a strategy that we couldn't apply. Okay?

Martha Aikens: So, then it became a matter of trying to figure out what we could do that would support some of the recommendations in the plan. So, we did that, and it turned out just about the way I thought it was going to work out, not very good.

Martha Aikens: So, what I said was, "We will try to implement it in stages. This is what we can do this year. Maybe we can do this next year, maybe we can do that the next year."

Martha Aikens: But what happened was there were these ensuing budget cuts, and not only was there budget cuts, but there were also serious reductions in travel for the training center, and so we lost money, lots of money. So, there was no way that we could even fathom moving into the next phase, and so we were sort of crippling along.

Martha Aikens: But what happens politically – and I don't think many employees really understand this – what happens politically, when Congress feels like they have to cut the executive branch, then they essentially set targets. But what the staff people will do on the Hill is usually the chief of staff, if they feel like they have a rapport with the superintendent or with the comptroller or the budget officer for that agency, they will ask that person for a recommendation, because the last thing they want to do is to come up with a stupid idea for a budget cut, right, something that cannot be implemented. So, they will contact somebody in the agency. If it's construction, most of the time it's the superintendent. If it's operational, most of the time it's the superintendent.

Martha Aikens: But sometimes if they don't have any contacts with any superintendent that they trust or that they feel like they can confide in, they'll go to the comptroller or they'll go to the Budget Office. If that comptroller or budget officer has a bias – or let's face it, because it's human nature, you

like some people more than you like other people. If that person doesn't like somebody, then they can recommend that for a budget cut. If they don't like cultural resources, then they'll recommend that for a budget cut. If they don't like training or they don't value training as much as some of us might, they might recommend that for a budget cut.

Martha Aikens: Then when it comes down from Congress for all executive branches to reduce training and travel by such and such and such, okay, then the budget officer or the comptroller can say, "Well, I don't have any choice. This is what Congress said we have to do." That's what happens.

Ray DePuydt: So, then the plan that was all that work that was in that thing for 2005—

Martha Aikens: DOA.

Ray DePuydt: It never got—

Martha Aikens: DOA, you know. At the time I wasn't able to say that. All I could say was we have to do this within budget and within FTEs, existing FTEs. We could try to balance this out based on the number of students going through.

Martha Aikens: You know, you have a criteria by which you figure out how many administrative staff can you really justify for this center based on the number of students going through and the kind of support that they need. So that's what you can do for phase one. But then, you know, it gets to a point where they're cutting and cutting and cutting, then you don't have any choice but to cut the courses.

Ray DePuydt: Yes. So, there was kind of a collapse in the staff between the centers or, what, for administration, or what were they trying to do?

Martha Aikens: Well, what we were trying to do was balance it out so that all four centers had some administrative support. And then, see, the Historic Preservation Center, they were sort of like a contracting entity. They sold their services to the parks, so they were pretty much helping themselves. But Albright, at the time, had Fundamentals. That was their big thing was Fundamentals, and they were trying to do something with Natural Resources. So, I was begging the program managers to go halvesies with me or to completely pay for it out of some program that they might have had. So, we were doing those kinds of things to try as best we could not to reduce the course load too much.

Ray DePuydt: Yes, because then you kind of just lose the function of the — it fades away.

Martha Aikens: Yes.

Ray DePuydt: So why did you retire?

- Martha Aikens: Because I just got so tired of it, and I felt like there wasn't a real commitment to the agency and what we were trying to do, and there comes a point where – and it goes back to Bruce and George and those kinds of things that are deeply ingrained into you in terms of what you should be doing and the level at which you should be doing it. So, I just felt like I was at the point where I couldn't contribute any more, and I didn't want to be in a position of hurting employees by trying to give them something or convince them that I'm giving them something when I really knew I wasn't.
- Bill Mansfield: Well, we've held you hostage here for about the past two hours, and we've been bombarding you with questions, and we truly appreciate you taking the time to answer them. Now it's your turn. Is there anything you want to tell us that we haven't asked about?
- Martha Aikens: I don't think so. Well, I guess I would just say my longest assignment was at Independence National Historical Park, and it was at once the most challenging and most rewarding assignment. I went there thinking that I would be there three, maybe four years, maximum five, and I was there almost eleven, because we did a general management plan.
- Martha Aikens: Then we went from that to a development concept plan, and Secretary Babbitt didn't want to change superintendents in the middle of all of that because it was a very political situation with the mayor there, who's a big Democrat in the party.
- Martha Aikens: Where there were many, many times when I was just wrung out, there were also really peaks there. I met Nelson Mandela. I met Bill Clinton. He came to the park several times. I met both of the Bushes. I met Nancy Reagan and Mrs. Bush, Oprah Winfrey, just a lot of people. And I certainly would not have met those people had I been in any other job.
- Martha Aikens: So, I feel like I grew professionally as well as a person, because I'd never been tested that way before. When Herb Cables and Director Ridenour offered me the job, Director Ridenour told me that the primary goal that he wanted me to focus on while there was to bring Independence back into the National Park Service. He thought it was functioning more as a city park than as a national park. So, he says, "You have to go in and you have to reestablish Park Service principles there. You have to go back and refocus on the mission of that park." So, there were many heart-to-hearts with Secretary Babbitt and briefings with Secretary Babbitt and his staff, because it was such a political situation. So, I would say that.
- Martha Aikens: I would say that the assignment that is most near and dear to my heart will always be Everglades.

Bill Mansfield: Okay. Well, this has been great. I really do appreciate this. Of course, you realize that we need to get you to sign the release form here down at the bottom.

Martha Aikens: Oh, did I sign it in the wrong place?

Bill Mansfield: You signed it. I don't think you signed it in the place where the lawyers are going to be looking.

Bill Mansfield: And I have one question right quick. Earlier on you talked about how influential your father was.

Martha Aikens: Yes.

Bill Mansfield: But you failed to tell us his name.

Martha Aikens: His name was Walter Aikens.

Bill Mansfield: And your mother's name?

Martha Aikens: Eleanor Aikens.

Bill Mansfield: Okay. Like I say, this has been great. You've been a teacher all your life in one setting or another, and now you've had another little classroom with us here. Thank you so much for—

Martha Aikens: Oh, you're quite welcome. I hope that the stomach growling isn't on your tape. (laughter)

[END OF INTERVIEW]