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NPS Oral History Collection (HFCA 1817)  
Harpers Ferry Center's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Oral History Project



Marc Sagan  
June 16, 2010

Interview conducted by Michele Hartley

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Interview with: Marc Sagan

Interview by: Michele Hartley, NPS Employee

Interview Date: June 16, 2010

Release form available: No (retired at time of the interview)

Transcript reviewed by interviewee: No

Transcript reviewed against original audio by NPS History Collection staff: Yes

Transcript time stamped: Yes

Marc Sagan:	00:00	All right.
M. Hartley:	00:00	Yeah.
Audio Tech:	00:00	Okay. We're done.
M. Hartley:	00:04	Okay. Well, I just want to first say we're here with Marc Sagan, and it is okay that we're doing a recording of our interview?
Marc Sagan:	00:13	Sure.
M. Hartley:	00:13	Great. Thank you. If you could, please introduce yourself. Give me your name, and what position you held here at the center.
Marc Sagan:	00:25	Let's see. My name is Marc Sagan, and I'm trying to remember whether I became the manager of the center. No, I didn't. While I was here or before I came, I was the chief of the division of interpretive planning at first, and I had an office picked out upstairs, the office with the best view, looking right up the river, and then Everhart, Bill Everhart, who was the manager, he was the director at that time, I became the first manager. Said, "No, I want you down here in that office right there." Damn. When there was, this turns into a longer story.
Marc Sagan:	01:13	There was a guy named Walker who was the director during the Nixon administration. And he was inclined to get rid of the people who were high in the previous

administration, in Hartzog's administration. And Everhart was certainly in Hartzog's administration. So he moved between here and Washington, but he never stayed in either place very long. He was hard to get. It turned out that he worked himself into good graces after a while. He wrote a report on, I think it was roads in the National Park, and the report was very well thought of throughout the service, so Walker said, "Must be good." And Everhart was taken into Washington. And in any case, Bill never sat down. He stood. He had a standing desk and that was about all that was in his room. And the standing desk got higher and higher with papers and then the assistant manager, the assistant director would leaf through some of it.

- Marc Sagan: 02:25 Well in any case, the assistant director was Doug Hubbard and Doug had been a border patrol man in Texas and that gave him something to talk about with Ladybird Johnson. And then she, after a year or so, on this association. She decided that he would do better as a director of the Nimitz's museum in Texas. So Doug retired and there was no manager, no director. And there I was. The only guy there. So I tried to be the manager, the director for a while and it worked all right except that when I had to do something that the division chiefs didn't want done they didn't want to do it. I was just the division chief.
- Marc Sagan: 03:20 So eventually I decided to hell with this. I'm going to be the director. So I had cards printed up and it said "Marc Sagan, director." No one questioned it and I'm still the director. And I don't know that it was ever made official. I was the second director of the center. One day... What was the name of the... I don't remember. What was the... We had a very good director of the Park Service who died recently. He was National Capital Parks, an ex-marine. Anyway, he said "Would you object to being the manager instead of the director?" And I said "Is the pay the same?" "Yup." "Okay." And he said "Sure." He said "We got too many directors of everything, so you be the manager." And the manager of the Denver Service Center was Deny Galvin, so I think I was in good company. And that's how I became the director.
- M. Hartley: 04:27 So about what time was that? What time period?
- Marc Sagan: 04:27 I asked my wife that. I can't... As you can see, I don't remember names. I remember my own name, but when the

hell was it? I retired in '86. I don't know. It was probably '76, something like that. Something-

- M. Hartley: 04:48 Oh, so right around the '76 celebrations?
- Marc Sagan: 04:52 Yeah. Yeah. That was a big deal. We got a lot of money and we had several big projects. I don't know if they ever came to much, but we produced five sets and we had two traveling shows, an Indian show and a performing arts show. And what probably made the most impact was that there were several bicentennial parks that got a lot of money for new visitor centers and that sort of thing.
- M. Hartley: 05:21 So how many people were here when you were the manager?
- Marc Sagan: 05:26 I think we got up to 122. And that included full timers, but not the seasonals. We had about 20 seasonals too.
- M. Hartley: 05:37 So the way we do business is a little different now. Could you describe what was happening in this building? What kinds of things were people doing that you were essentially overseeing?
- Marc Sagan: 05:53 Well we've changed some. I'm not sure how it works now because I've made it a point to stay away from the place and not be under foot. When we were in Washington, we did the same work that we do up here except that we were far apart. The audiovisual group was in the penthouse and interior. The museum group was out on Temple S, a half hour ride from Washington. They were everywhere. And there was. There was an interpretive planning group, which was under me and we were not in interior either. We were in, I think, next to the Roger Smith Hotel, which isn't there anymore in Washington.
- Marc Sagan: 06:42 And it was difficult and there was no correlation between what we were doing with a museum exhibits and audiovisual, for example. With the result that they both did everything and neither one worked very well.
- Marc Sagan: 06:57 So I didn't have an idea of getting everybody together. That was beyond me. But Vince Gleason did and he and Everhart came up here one day and Vince said, "I think we should have a central office in the Park Service that does all the interpretive stuff." And somehow or other--and the

training too. So the training center was under Everhart. It worked fairly well. When I got in, I couldn't see why the training center should be under us. It was a central office job and not our job. So there was no opposition so it moved and I think that didn't belong to it.

Marc Sagan: 07:48 But what we did was, we started with an interpretive plan for each park. And that's where the mistakes used to be made all the time. Either the park naturalist or historian did an interpretive plan or else there was no interpretive plan. And pretty soon he decided. He, she, it decided--At that time, there weren't very many women--"We're going to do this with our exhibits." And then five years before or after somebody said, "Let's have a film for this park." We were looking at the film, forgetting about the exhibits, and we're going to do a film. The film was loaded with the same stuff the exhibits had, but didn't do it as well. And so forth, the wayside exhibits that parks did themselves and publications happen and the cooperating association decided to do something.

Marc Sagan: 08:44 So it worked surprisingly well, looking back on it. Except that none of it worked very well. So I wrote an interpretive planning handbook. I remember writing the damn thing and I had an awful job with it. On the day that King was assassinated, we were still in Washington and I was way down in the subbasement in the library saying, "How am I going to write this thing?" I had written part of it, but I couldn't. And coming by was a guy named Myron Sutton, Park Service friend. We had started in the Park Service about the same time. And I said, "I'm having trouble with this book. I've written most of the book and nobody knows what I'm talking about and they won't accept it and it means no--." He said, "All right. You're not accepted as an authority. You're just a guy like me and talking. Why don't you write it and then people will realize that writing it makes you an authority?"

Marc Sagan: 09:50 I didn't have any better idea, so I wrote it. And that was the interpretive planning handbook. And Myron was right. And at that time I used to go to the park with--I was the interpretive planner, in effect, and--Do you need me to stop talking? Okay.

Marc Sagan: 10:15 We would spend three or four days just getting used to the park and seeing what's around and listening to the guy. And

then I'd put some ideas together and so forth. The biggest problem with the field people was they were accustomed to the old approach. So they said, "Well you left out such and such from the exhibits." That's right. I did. Because it's not exhibitable. And the same thing with the film. "Well who's going to remember that if you say it in the film?" That's some factual stuff ,that belongs in publications. Oh, okay.

- Marc Sagan: 10:52 That's kind of the way it went. And eventually we had-- Everhart gave me two or three interpretive planners, Alan Kent was the first one after me. And we grew into five or six people. Then we moved to the Roger Smith Hotel or thereabouts. And interpretive planning became another division. One day.--You didn't ask me this story--I take great pride in this. During the Kennedy administration-- Was it during the Kennedy--No. Stewart Udall was the Secretary of the Interior. It might have been the Kennedy administration. And there was a Japanese guy whose name I've forgotten who was the White House photographer. And it might have been the Kennedy administration.
- Marc Sagan: 11:50 And he came over to Interior for a few days to look around to see if he could improve the photography of the, having to do with the agencies in interior. And he knew something about the parks and he said, "You know, the problem with the Park Service, the reason why you don't have good photography or good anything else in the media, is that you people are buried way down low. These should be division chiefs." So everybody in Interior was a branch chief in the Park Service, in our group, who was a branch chief became a division chief. And we all got one or two great promotions, but Everhart made sure that I was the first because all the others were sort of division chiefs already and I was very way down low.
- Marc Sagan: 12:44 So suddenly I was, for one day at least, I was the only division chief and the rest of them were lower. Anyway, that's how I became the division chief.
- M. Hartley: 12:55 Well it sounds like you're being a bit humble because it sounds like through your interpretive planning guide you really set the guidelines and stage for a comprehensive way to produce media in parks.
- Marc Sagan: 13:14 It was. I was an exhibit planner. And for a couple of years I was an exhibit planner and I had a hell of a job doing it

because I didn't know what was wrong, but I knew something was wrong. I'm trying do something that doesn't want to happen. And I can't imagine anybody looking at this exhibit and reading it and remembering it. And the same thing with films. And the same thing in publication. It's all screwed up. I hadn't figured out a system and why some things work with exhibits and why somethings don't and work with a publication.

- Marc Sagan: 13:45 Finally, I got it through my skull, but it was hell trying to convince anybody else. There were a few regional chiefs of interpretation, two of them, in fact. Rob Burrell, who has died, and Pete Shed, probably died. Said, "Okay that makes sense. You come with me and we'll go to some of our parks that we're going to do something and see if you have any ideas." Well I did. I enjoyed traveling with them.
- Marc Sagan: 14:18 I remember--this is a complete aside. There was still a lot of tension in the south. They were killing white guys because they trying to integrate. And Pete said, he came from Texas, I think, and he said, "Now you--when somebody stops to talk with us, you don't say a word. Let me do the talking, you understand?" "Yup." He had a nice southern accent. And I never did talk because I was inclined to say something about "Why won't you let those black folks drink out of the same water fountain?" Mustn't say that. Anyway that was Pete. Pete and Burrell, who were helpful and through them the other regional chiefs of interpretation gradually got the idea. There were a few that didn't get the idea or didn't want it and they eventually moved on to other work.
- Marc Sagan: 15:22 So it worked. I despaired of ever--What's that?
- Woman: 15:30 You done?
- M. Hartley: 15:30 No. No.
- Woman: 15:33 You having a problem?
- M. Hartley: 15:34 No we're not, but we're kind of not really done.
- Woman: 15:37 Okay. You need like five minutes?
- M. Hartley: 15:38 10.

- Woman: 15:38 10?
- M. Hartley: 15:38 We can probably... We need hours, to be honest, but...
- Marc Sagan: 15:48 Yeah. I didn't know I'd be so loquacious. I have nothing-
- M. Hartley: 15:53 Marc, can I ask you what was your background before you came here and what drew you to the National Park Service?
- Marc Sagan: 16:03 When I was in college at the University of Massachusetts, headed by a guy named William Vinyl [spelling 00:16:12] who had worked for the Park Service and told Park Service stories, but I thought I'd end up in a museum or some place like that. One of my fellow students got a job, a seasonal job, at Catoctin and then he was followed by another one and I think, "Well I might be able to try it as a seasonal." And I got the job at Catoctin and eventually I became a state park superintendent on the south side of Catoctin which is now Cunningham Falls State Park. And then eventually Catoctin hired a full time naturalist and that was me. I moved over again. Then Mission 66 started and I got a job at Grand Canyon. I was a naturalist at Grand Canyon for about two years. North, South Rim, but I did North Rim in the summer. And that's how I got in.
- Marc Sagan: 17:18 I left there to become a museum exhibit planner mostly because my wife is a gardener and she couldn't have a garden at Grand Canyon. She wanted a garden. So we moved east and my education really started when I was a museum exhibit planner, getting around to the parks and seeing what--You stop thinking about my park and you think, "How will I communicate this and what's involved and so forth." And as an exhibit planner, I told you I was most unhappy because I knew it wasn't working. My exhibits were as good as the next person's, but I could see that it was not good.
- Marc Sagan: 18:00 So I started to have a little bit of influence when I became division chief.
- M. Hartley: 18:07 Do you have a favorite media type? Not to put you on the spot or anything.
- Marc Sagan: 18:11 Yeah. Favorites, depending if you use any of them correctly, that's the favorite. It works.



- M. Hartley: 18:23 Could you give us the highlight? Because we do that in interpretive planning trips. Like what's AV's strength? What's publication's strengths?
- Marc Sagan: 18:32 Yeah. You do it. Good for you.
- Marc Sagan: 18:33 I wondered the other day whether anybody knows what I'm talking about anymore. It maybe had faded.
- Marc Sagan: 18:41 If you have the gun that John Wilkes Booth used to shoot Lincoln and the bullet, my god that's something that's worth going to see in like the theater. Many years before we started to do that, I did an exhibit plan for Ford's Theater, which was once the whole thing was a museum. And I didn't have any idea what I was doing, so I told the story about Lincoln doing this, this, this, this. His whole life was laid out in 15 or 20 exhibits, maybe more. I knew it wasn't working and so when it finally dawned to me that that's not what you do with exhibits, you don't tell stories unless the story has to deal with things all the way through. You show the objects which are the evidence of the story. And it's just common sense now, but it wasn't then.
- M. Hartley: 19:37 Yeah. And I guess before we--So I have my time watcher. Is there anything as you're thinking of coming back for the 40th, any particular memory that keeps coming up about the center?
- Marc Sagan: 19:56 Lots of them.
- M. Hartley: 19:56 I'm sure.
- Marc Sagan: 19:57 Nearly every day, not every day. Outside here there's a brick patio and trees all around. Trees are great big trees. Originally it was concrete. The same color as the concrete entranceway. There were no trees. And anybody who came inside was blind. They'd take a minute or two to recover their eyesight. It was so bright. So I said, "Well let's add some shade." The cheapest way to do it. I hired--I didn't hire, I called Ed Peach, who was a landscape architect from Washington. I had worked with him before coming here. And I said, "I'm doing a little plan. I'll drill some holes in the concrete and we'll put some trees in." So he did and there was this story that goes with the trees, but I won't tell you that.

Marc Sagan: 20:50 They were little trees and a little patch of dark shadow everywhere, but it didn't work. We said, "We got to get something different colored." "Well, just color the concrete." "No. That'll wash out." We finally got a contractor to come in and brick the whole thing and the trees were planted. In the process of doing it, one of my division chiefs, one nut--I had three nuts out of five.

M. Hartley: 21:22 Do you want to list names?

Marc Sagan: 21:24 No. One of his daughter's is a lawyer. When you go home, what you going to do with this tape?

M. Hartley: 21:33 It's for the administrative history of the center, so yeah.

Marc Sagan: 21:37 You better not talk--He was a very excitable guy and he didn't agree with tampering with the plan. He said, "You're destroying government property. You're a vandal." I said, "I'm just trying to make it more comfortable to walk in." "No, no. I'm going to turn you in to the police for vandalizing government property." I said, "Come on. You won't get anywhere with that." Now he was inconsolable. I said, "I'm going to do it." And I did it and I called Bill Everhart, who was at that time in Washington, and I said, "Vince is on a war path. He's going to turn me in to the police." I left it and he must have got Vince down a level or two. Or maybe his daughter said, "You don't have a case."

Marc Sagan: 22:29 So when I look at that brick, I remember Vince and he was nuts.

M. Hartley: 22:36 Well thank you very much, Marc.

Marc Sagan: 22:39 Pleasure.

M. Hartley: 22:39 I really appreciate it. I hope you have a great day.

Marc Sagan: 22:41 Thank you very much.

M. Hartley: 22:41 Yes.

END OF TAPE