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Ernest Quintana
December 11, 2014

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones and Lilli Tichinin
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

ERNEST QUINTANA

By Lu Ann Jones and Lilli Tichinin

December 11, 2014

Washington, D.C.

Transcribed by Technitype Transcripts

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

This transcript has been reviewed by Ernest Quintana and corrected. Words included in brackets are clarifications added by the narrator.

[START OF TRACK 1]

- Lu Ann Jones: I'm just going to say, first of all, I usually do a short introduction. This is Lu Ann Jones. And you are?
- Ernest Quintana: Ernie Quintana.
- Lu Ann Jones: And we are here in the Eye Street Building of WASO. It's December 11th, I believe, 2014, and we're here for an oral history interview.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, thank you so much. Do you give me permission on the recording to conduct this interview for research and education purposes?
- Ernest Quintana: Absolutely. Yes, I do.
- Lu Ann Jones: Thank you so much. Well, it was just a great pleasure to meet you yesterday.
- Ernest Quintana: Thank you.
- Lu Ann Jones: It was very helpful, and I read also some background material that you had sent me, I think several months ago, that I rediscovered today after our conversation. I like to ask people kind of at the beginning a little bit about where you were born, your family, what they did, and just those origin stories a little bit.
- Ernest Quintana: Oh, yeah. So, thank you. Background. Let me start with my father's side of the family. He was born in a little pueblo in New Mexico, San Geronimo. It's located between Santa Fe and Las Vegas, New Mexico, but way off into the foothills.
- Ernest Quintana: My father attended school up through about the eighth grade. Then out of necessity, he had to go to work to help support the little ranch that my grandparents, his parents, lived at. This was prior to World War II but not much prior to that. He was drafted and he served in Europe for the duration of the war and then he came home. He was very quiet about why he decided to pack up and leave his home, but he did. After the war, he came back to San Geronimo, and I suspect—he said it was a hard life. It was a very, very hard life. A lot of it was subsistence living. They had their own little garden, their corn, their cows, and so what they had, they grew, and what they didn't have, they sold for money. So, it was a hard life.
- Ernest Quintana: He then went to Arizona to work in the mines there in Miami, Arizona, where he met my mom. My mom's side of the family originated from New Mexico as well, but she grew up in the little mining town of Arizona. That's where I was born, Miami-born, so that's how I came to be there in Miami.
- Ernest Quintana: When my dad was working in the mines, he had a close call [mine accident] because he was working underground. It was good pay for that

time, very dangerous work, and had a close call and he decided, “You know, maybe there’s got to be something better out there.”

Ernest Quintana: So, we packed up, by then it was my older sister, myself, my mom, and he then took us off to a little community at Twentynine Palms, California. Not much there – this would have been probably 1953 – but there was, at that point in time, employment at the new Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center that was just starting to be developed there. Prior to that, it was an Army airfield. They were looking for civilians to be employed there, and he worked there for the rest of his life. So that’s how I came to be growing up in Twentynine Palms, California. As I told you earlier, the city of Twentynine Palms, to the south is Joshua Tree National Park, and then, obviously, to the north is the Marine Corps Air Combat Center.

Lu Ann Jones: When you were in school, for example, did you have particular teachers who were good guides for you? I’m always interested in, again, just in your education. Any people that were important for your development?

Ernest Quintana: There were a number of people that were important and a lot of it I realized then. Many I didn’t realize till later in life how important a role they played in helping me to become the person I am today. As I explained earlier in our conversations [yesterday], I did not have a lot of confidence in myself, but others saw in me what I couldn’t see. There were a number of biology teachers. There was even a typing teacher, of all things, that just kept on me and said, “You’ve got to learn to type.” Back then and still now, using the keyboard on the computer, it’s important to know how to type, and that had tremendous benefits later in life. And that there [influence by teachers] was only in junior high.

Ernest Quintana: Later on, in high school, I had an English teacher, Mr. Crutcher [phonetic]. Bless his heart. He helped me so many times, sometimes probably out of frustration just to kind of give me a little boost. But I didn’t realize how much he really played a role in my development until later in life. I wish I would have had an opportunity to thank him when he was still around, but I did not. There were art teachers, there were others as well, even counselors that were very instrumental in helping me see the errors of my way, I guess you might say. [laughs]

Lu Ann Jones: What were you developing an interest in when you were in high school?

Ernest Quintana: Oh, I was all over the board. Maybe that’s why I didn’t recognize much of an ability or potential for myself. I say that now because I’ve obviously totally turned around now with the help of others, but through high school I was lost, I guess might be the best way to put it. Again, teachers, educators all tried to encourage me and help me. And ultimately, while it didn’t pay off right away, it did later on in life.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you were there close to Joshua Tree [National Park].

Ernest Quintana: Yeah.

- Lu Ann Jones: And you said yesterday that you had an awareness of Joshua Tree as a park, but not as a part of a larger system, I believe was how you put it.
- Ernest Quintana: That's right.
- Lu Ann Jones: What was your experience with Joshua Tree?
- Ernest Quintana: It was a great big beautiful backyard. [laughs] And we enjoyed it as that, but then I did not understand the concept or the mission principles of what the National Park Service stood for. I just thought it was a great place to go to and just have a great time, but later on in life is when I began to understand the value of parks and the National Park System.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, you said that you went to college for a while and then left.
- Ernest Quintana: I got asked to leave; academic probation. [laughs] That was pretty clear. I was partying more than I was studying.
- Lu Ann Jones: And where were you at that point?
- Ernest Quintana: I was in San Bernardino, [California]. I lasted a year and a half. I mentioned before that I got put on academic probation. Back then the draft was still on, so as soon as that happened, I believe they must have notified the Draft Board, because shortly thereafter, I got drafted, the best thing in many ways that happened to me as a life experience. I did go to Vietnam; I did have a close call; I did lose some very good friends and people there. The military, through my experience in Vietnam, helped me to understand more about myself and more about how fragile life is and how quickly it can be taken from you, and so you'd better make the most of the time that you have now.
- Ernest Quintana: So, I was fortunate enough to come home, a little banged up, but I came home, and then that's when I went back to Twentynine Palms and I had the good fortune of having known Mr. Boots Dott. He was the chief of maintenance at Joshua Tree National Park. I went to school with his son Jim Dott.
- Lu Ann Jones: How do you spell that last name?
- Ernest Quintana: I believe it's D-o-t-t. And Mr. Dott is the one that basically grabbed me by the shirt collar, because he knew my money was running out after I was discharged, and said it was time to go to work, "And I have a job for you if you want." He's the one that introduced me to the National Park System, and what a wonderful start. From then on, forty-one years later, great career, great time that I had in my career. I shouldn't be so egotistical in saying a great career. That's for others to decide. But I had a great time. [laughter]
- Lu Ann Jones: I know we talked about this some yesterday, but just here for the record, so what did you start out doing there? You said that you had a beginning that was a little bit different than some people might have at the Park

Service or those who were able to mature through the ranks. So, tell me a little bit about what you were doing and the opportunities that arose then.

Ernest Quintana: It was different in the sense at how I was introduced to the Park System. In other words, I had someone who basically grabbed hold of me and said, "Let's try this," and they also provided me an opportunity to enter the Park System through the Veterans Readjustment Act as a maintenance worker trainee. It was a wonderful time, and the trainee program at that particular time provided opportunities for entry-level individuals to gain experience and knowledge of the many disciplines within the maintenance field: roads and trails, building the utilities, signs, painting, welding, trails. It was just a wonderful time, because I was exposed to pretty much all of the maintenance activities that occurred in that park.

Ernest Quintana: Now, while I was having a good time there, I also began to look around and say, "Wow. There are many other career opportunities within the Park Service," and then that's when I had a chance to change positions with another trainee who was in the park technician series. That basically was the entry level into the rangers at that point in time. And he was not comfortable where he was at. I was comfortable, having a good time. But he approached me and said, "You want to change?"

Ernest Quintana: And I said, "Yeah."

Ernest Quintana: So, we talked with our supervisors, and he said, "As long as we have a body, we're fine." So, I've got a career track now as a trainee in the park technician series, and that was wonderful as well. That's basically the career path that I stayed on, the rangers, right on up through chief ranger, superintendent, and, ultimately, regional director.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what were you doing as a technician at that point? Did you tell us yesterday that you were often dealing with people in the community in that position or as a park technician at that level?

Ernest Quintana: Oh, that actually came later. As a park technician, I was more in the Ranger Protection Program, although at that stage of the NPSLE [National Park Service Law Enforcement] Program it was still very loose. After that, I went into [applied, accepted and transferred] to the Park Ranger Interpretive Program as an interpretive supervisor, and that's when I had the opportunity, using the skills that I learned as a ranger, to then work with the community, community organizations, more in the field of interpretation. Again, just a wonderful experience.

Ernest Quintana: I also had chances to work in the park at campgrounds, just talking to the visitors, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. Now, early on, it was difficult for me to get up in front of groups. I have a tendency now to not be able to stop talking. Now I really have enjoyed – I've gotten over that fear that a lot of people have early on of public speaking. That goes back to another teacher and this one in college that helped me tremendously. That

individual also had a significant role to play in how I was able to develop as an individual and use the skills that he showed me through his teaching and how to be comfortable in a public-speaking role. So, then I just took that, and I've been running with it ever since. [laughter]

Lu Ann Jones: What was his advice that was key?

Ernest Quintana: I don't know if it was advice. It was just constant patience, you know. I'd be the one, like, whenever you'd have the assignments, you've got to develop a presentation and you've got to give it in front of the class, my whole strategy was be the first one, get it over with. It never worked that way. I'd always be the last one and I would be in there in misery in that seat, just saying, "Oh, now he's looking at me and he's going, 'It's your turn, Ernie.'" I'd get up there, and he just kept encouraging me, encouraging me.

Ernest Quintana: One time – oh, it must have been halfway or towards the end of the semester, it just clicked, and I just started talking to the group and I felt comfortable about it. He pointed to me and said, "See, you just did it." From then on, I realized, well, I did. [laughter]

Lu Ann Jones: You've got a beautiful voice and very nice modulation—

Ernest Quintana: Well, thank you.

Lu Ann Jones: —and inflection. Again, you just draw people in.

Ernest Quintana: Well, thank you.

Lu Ann Jones: It really is a beautiful gift.

Ernest Quintana: Well, he, again, saw that, and I thank him for – a lot of educators maybe would have just said, "No, there's too many other students. I don't have the time here." He didn't give up on me, thank goodness. [laughter]

Lu Ann Jones: Well, at what point did you start kind of seeing ahead and kind of looking down the road and beginning to realize that there was the potential for building a career in the Park Service?

Ernest Quintana: That was probably when I was an interpretive ranger. I began to see and learn what the National Park Service was all about. I began to understand that this is one of many parks across the country that would be available to me, should I choose to apply and be accepted to work in, in many disciplines. It was at that point in time that I began to realize I'd better do something about finding a way how to work a career path to get there.

Ernest Quintana: One of the things I had to do – if you remember, I had dropped out of school – I had to go back and get my education. The Park Service – and this is a wonderful individual within the Park Service, Rick Anderson, was the superintendent [at Joshua Tree National Park]. I talked to him. I said, "I really like what I see here. I want to make this a career, but I realize that

I'm hurting myself, holding myself back because I haven't completed my degree, my four-year degree."

Ernest Quintana: He goes, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I will grant you a leave of absence without pay. You go back and you do—" I had to do basically two years of study still. "You do two years in a year and a half and you make the Dean's List every semester, I'll hold this job for you. If you do not meet any of those conditions, all bets are off."

Ernest Quintana: I said, "I can do it."

Ernest Quintana: Now, at the time I also had a wife, had a baby three years old, and I had one on the way. So, I said, "I can still do it." That meant going to school full-time, working part-time. Thank goodness for the G.I. Bill. We just barely made it. Summer, obviously straight through, full loads, more when I could do it because I knew I had to do it all in a year and a half. It almost killed me, but I did it. [laughs]

Ernest Quintana: Oh, I was so grateful for also the support I got from my wife, Myra. I couldn't have done it without her. Oh, man. When we first went – married housing – I went to Northern Arizona University. Married housing wasn't available when we got there, so we rented a little trailer. This was in high country, so it was wintertime when I got there. It was cold. The trailer was actually kind of bowed in the middle, so the sliding trailer front door never really shut all the way. The snow would pile up on the top of the ceiling, so much so that it would snuff out the heater part. Oh, my goodness. But, what a trouper. She hung in there with me. Thank goodness six months later married housing opened up, and I was able to locate my family into quality quarters. And then I got my degree.

Lu Ann Jones: And what was that in?

Ernest Quintana: Since I was in the ranger series, I got it in criminal justice. I loved it because it not only spoke to the aspect of my work that had to do with criminal law, but it also spoke to the social sciences. It was heavy in the psychology and sociology, and that I thoroughly enjoy because it had to do with people and working with people and trying to understand behavior. It all just came together nicely and fit my career as a park ranger.

Lu Ann Jones: So, what park did you go back to?

Ernest Quintana: That was at Joshua Tree National Park. They held my job in the park, so I went back. That's where I started.

Lu Ann Jones: So, when you went back at that point, what position did you have?

Ernest Quintana: What I ended up going back to then was the same position, but then shortly thereafter, I transferred to Saguaro National Park. So, I guess I could say [that while at Joshua Tree National Park] not only did the superintendent support me, but my immediate supervisor and division

chief supported me as well, and that was a lot to ask them. Although they were able to backfill because I wasn't getting my pay, they still held the position for me.

Lu Ann Jones: So how did you make that transition from one park to the next and kind of just making the transitions? Remind me again what position you were at, at Saguaro.

Ernest Quintana: At Saguaro, I went there first as a unit manager. I was hired there from Joshua Tree to serve as a unit manager for the west unit of Saguaro National Park. That basically was like a mini-manager, where I had Maintenance under me, had Interpretation, and I had Protection, and I think – no, I didn't have Fire. Those were the three things I had. So, it was like a little park off by itself within a bigger park that I managed, and I reported to the superintendent, who was on the other side of the city of Tucson, on the east unit. Great resource, beautiful park.

Ernest Quintana: I lived in park housing. At that point in time – this would have been in early eighties – Saguaro National Park west was considered remote. It's a lot different now. The city of Tucson and Marana and Avra Valley have basically surrounded that west unit. Back then, there was a duplex in the park. I had one and the permanent protection ranger had the other, and the other closest neighbor was a ranch house a mile away. Beautiful experience.

Ernest Quintana: I worried about my boys, because I had three boys then, but a great school system. They would get up in the morning and go to the Visitor Center, wait there for the bus. The bus would come through real early in the morning because it was a long ride to school, pick them up and take them off. They had a great time. I enjoyed them. They enjoyed it. Because I did worry. There was no neighbor kids. They had to actually put them in a car and then go see their friends, it was that far away. But when the season came and the seasonal rangers put on their interpretive programs, they would be right there in the front row. After about the second and third program – the interpreters really got a kick out of it – the interpretive ranger would ask questions, they'd always raise their hands. They said, "Everybody but you, **you** and you, what's the answer to this one?" Because the kids had been there, and they knew it. So, they had a great time.

Ernest Quintana: I worried about them, though, because that was their backyard, Saguaro National Park, and there was rattlesnakes and javelina. I'd caution them about, you know, "Be careful where you go hiking, walking, and where you sit down," and so they were understanding of that. I told them there were not only things that can sting you and bite you out there, but those things that can poke you too. [laughter] The cactus is unforgiving, as my one son found out one time riding his bike. [laughs] Yeah, he kind of ran right into the cholla – boom!

- Lu Ann Jones: Oh, my gosh. You're beginning to be a supervisor of people. Were you developing a kind of supervisory style or philosophy? How did you kind of grow into that role of being a supervisor?
- Ernest Quintana: You know, that's an interesting question. I don't know if I really developed a style. I think it is who you are and what you want to make of it. I know early on there was a lot of mistakes I made, because I thought, "Oh, I'm the supervisor. I've got to make tough decisions. I've got to hold people's feet to the fire." Sometimes that didn't work. [laughs] Sometimes that backfired. And I would step back and kind of assess that and I said, "We're just a small operation here. We've got to get along. I've got to understand that others have an important role to play here and they're talented and they know what they're doing, so I've got to trust them to do their job. And when necessary, I can step in, but don't take on the little things. If it's something major, then you address it."
- Ernest Quintana: There were a couple of times when I actually went back to one of my employees. He was upset when I had talked to him, and I went back and apologized. I said, "You know, I was wrong in how I handled that. Now, let's both work together on how we're going to do things in the future, but I was wrong in how I handled it." He seemed to accept that, because after that we worked together very well. So that was a little lesson that I learned kind of the hard way, the school of hard knocks, I think. Maybe that's the way I'd put it, and a lot of it was just that, learning as you go.
- Lu Ann Jones: Now I see notices about trainings for supervisory people moving into supervisory positions and things like that. Was there training that you were taking along the way to introduce you more to the Park Service and to those concepts of responsibilities as a manager or supervisor?
- Ernest Quintana: Yeah. Then, maybe not so much so now, but training was a part of my career development, very much so. I think the Park Service, early on, did a great job of providing training opportunities that would help me not only in my current position, but helped me grow to be prepared to take the next level of supervision as well.
- Ernest Quintana: I think I'm concerned right now, to be honest with you, that perhaps that may not be the case as much. I don't know why. Maybe we were a smaller organization back then and the money went further. But I know that I had many opportunities to attend training, and I did, and it was all absolutely valuable and wonderful, a lot of it there in the park, in-house, and some of it I would travel away to, to attend.
- Lu Ann Jones: Yeah, I think travel is a real issue these days.
- Ernest Quintana: Well, yeah, it is. I understand that, you know, with the restrictions and the conditions that are placed on employees for traveling, it probably does restrict either the number or the distance they can go to training.

Lu Ann Jones: That's one of the things that we deal with now. So, then, you went from one side of that park to the other side, is that right?

Ernest Quintana: I did. Within one park I made two moves. I moved there and established my family in the west unit. But then the park reorganized halfway through my eight-year tour there, so I picked up the family and moved out of government housing. Then I had to find a place to rent in town, which meant actually relocating my kids out of the schools they were into a new school. It's pretty disruptive. It was just like a move to another park. The only difference is this is the same park, but a totally different location. But it ended up working well. I basically went from the unit manager to become the chief ranger over both the west and the east unit, and I had responsibilities for programs of Law Enforcement, Interpretation, and Fire for both units. The one thing that I didn't have any more was Maintenance.

Lu Ann Jones: What difference did it make that you were now living in the community or in housing in the community as opposed to park housing, interactions with the larger community in which you worked in Tucson, I guess, beyond park boundaries?

Ernest Quintana: Actually, you would think it would have brought me closer to the community, but it didn't. When I lived in the park, there were small gateway communities that I would associate with because either my kids went to school there or it was important to them because they were living right next to the park, or the fire department responded to the park. When I lived in the city, it wasn't the case, so it was almost like just living in a neighborhood but not necessarily having the neighborhood really attached or affiliated to the park, so then it changed in that regard. I had a closer relationship with the communities when I was actually living in the park.

Lu Ann Jones: Interesting. Were there particular challenges with gateway communities at that park or other parks that you lived in? How did you kind of learn to negotiate with gateway communities and build relationships?

Ernest Quintana: Actually, that was an important part of supervision, is being accessible to gateway communities and listening to community leaders about their concerns—

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Ernest Quintana: —and being sincere about what we can try to do to accommodate or compromise a position or accommodate one of their requests. A lot of times we couldn't. We'd have to say no. But if there was an opportunity to work with the communities, I always tried to find a way to do so.

Ernest Quintana: A lot of it had to do with "We'd like a trail," or, "We'd like access to this particular part of the park." A lot of it had to do with working with

gateway communities as far as zoning for what occurs next to park boundaries. Obviously, they could do whatever they really wanted to, but we just tried to use our influence and see if they would help protect the park.

Ernest Quintana: So, it was challenging, but it was exciting at the same time, as far as being able to work with communities, because that, to me, again is working with people, trying to get people to understand our position and the reason why we're asking them to do this or why we respond that we can't help your community. So, it was more than just responding; it was a matter of communicating to them *why*, and that was important.

Lu Ann Jones: You said that after you were in Arizona, you went to Santa Monica Mountains.

Ernest Quintana: Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: Was that a new park at that time, a brand-new park when you were there?

Ernest Quintana: I would consider it – it was still a new park, although it had been in existence for a little while. A little while might be twelve years, maybe more, but still a new and developing park, a very challenging park to work in, still, but a beautiful resource, great community support.

Ernest Quintana: The boundary in essence went from Los Angeles County into Ventura County – I believe it was Ventura County – and included a number of cities, a number of state parks, a number of highways. [laughter] You had to use the freeways to get from one portion of the park to another, but when you really found the park, the natural resource, just gorgeous, just beautiful. So, it had its beauty and it has – still has – its importance within the National Park System.

Ernest Quintana: There was a controversy when the concept of recreational parks came in, a lot of people going, "Oh, why are we in that business? Maybe that should just be with states and county governments." But I can see differently. I understand why it's important to have those as part of the National Park System because they play an important role and great experience there as well.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you said that that was kind of your urban park experience. Was it assumed that you would need to get the urban park experience, particularly if you wanted to continue to move upward, to generate options for yourself? Was that an expectation at that time?

Ernest Quintana: Well, it was for me, yeah. My thought was if I wanted to advance in my career, it was important for me to have a diversity of park experience: natural parks, cultural parks, urban parks. And that helped me, I believe, to become a better manager and a better supervisor, understanding that there are challenges in each of those parks that are different from one of the other. So, I thought it was important for me.

- Ernest Quintana: I've also today seen individuals that have not necessarily transferred like I did to have an experience in different parks as a permanent assignment, and they seem to be doing quite well, but I think they're the exception to the rule. When I came in, especially if you were in the ranger series, there was an expectation that you would move, or you'd stay at that one position for a long time. So, I moved around because I knew ultimately at that time in my life, I'd like to try being a superintendent, and that's where I moved to next. [laughs]
- Lu Ann Jones: What did it mean for you to be a superintendent? What did that aspiration entail?
- Ernest Quintana: Oh, it was special in many ways. Being a superintendent of a park, probably one of the best assignments there is in the National Park System. You are the mayor of that piece of ground, and the responsibility for what happens there ultimately lands on your shoulders. The responsibility of how that park interacts with the communities lands on your shoulders. The welfare of the employees is your responsibility.
- Ernest Quintana: The other component of why it was special for me to go to my first superintendent position is I went back to Joshua Tree. I went full circle, went back to the park I started out at, as a superintendent. So, I was going back to be the superintendent, not only in the park that gave me my start in my career, but in the community that I grew up in. It was just special pride.
- Ernest Quintana: My high school class, I don't know how big it was. My senior class, maybe 100, maybe 120 students, and that's not very many compared some of the high school classes my kids went to when they were going to Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. But it was a thrill when I got selected on the Hall of Fame from my high school because of my achievement of becoming superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park, and that was just a thrill, and I still cherish that.
- Ernest Quintana: I had an opportunity to speak with the high school students, and my message to them was, "You know, you never know what's out there for you. And when opportunities present themselves, grab hold of them. While you may not believe in yourself right now, understand that others can help you begin to believe in yourself."
- Ernest Quintana: So, it's just been wonderful. Being a superintendent was just a great, great experience, and I was there for about eight years as well.
- Lu Ann Jones: Even in that general wonderful experience, there must have been particular challenges.
- Ernest Quintana: Oh, yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: What are some examples from Joshua Tree? I know there are a lot of tribal relations, for example, there in Joshua Tree, proximity to urban areas that

can create all sorts of issues there. What were some of the resources issues that you dealt with there or community issues? Could you give kind of an example of a challenge and then how you responded to that?

Ernest Quintana: Sure. A number of challenges, actually, throughout my career, and, to me, that is what kept my experience exciting in the parks I worked in. I was having fun, but I was having fun because I was dealing with some very, very key issues. At Joshua Tree National Park, we went through a general management plan, big planning process for, okay, how are we going to manage this park for the next twenty years? A lot of community involvement, public input, meetings.

Ernest Quintana: One particular aspect of the general management plan that created a lot of controversy had to do with climbing. Joshua Tree National Park is known as a climbers' park. It has a boulder field, not a lot of high-pitch multiple climbs, but it has a variety of small-pitch climbs. The controversy was we were going to regulate how the bolting aspect of climbing was permitted in the park. Now, bolting means that there's a little hole that's drilled in the rock, there's a piece of metal, an anchor that's put in. Then there's a bolt that's then screwed into that metal anchor, which is attached to the rock, and then on that is a little piece of metal with basically a hole in it so your carabiner hooks through there. It's a protection device. If you slip and fall, supposedly that's supposed to catch you.

Ernest Quintana: But what we were seeing is, wow, for years we've been allowing the climbers, the climbing community, to just put them up wherever, and after a while, we got to thinking we wouldn't let just anybody go out there and chip a hole in our natural resource and stick something permanent on there. I said, "Something's not right here." But to change that practice, it was going to take a lot of work and a lot of convincing, because the climbing community said, "We've been doing it forever. So, are you telling us we can't do it anymore?" And they also said, "Well, it's the safety issues too. If you're telling us we can't replace one that's weak, that's a safety concern."

Ernest Quintana: So, we had to manage through that and lot of, lot of emotion on the issue, again from the climbing community, and they had a strong voice. They were well organized. So, we had to manage through that. I won't get into how it resolved unless you want to, but we did.

Lu Ann Jones: Briefly, how did it?

Ernest Quintana: I use the term which is not necessarily always a good term to use in the National Park Service, but it's "compromise." It was basically understanding. "Okay, we're not going to be able to do away with it, but we can stop any additional bolts being put in." We basically understood.

Ernest Quintana: They [the climbing community] said, "Our bolts on these rock faces are, in essence, trails, like that you put on the ground."

Ernest Quintana: I said, "I can live with that." I said, "Now, I can also live with the fact that if one of them becomes unsafe and comes loose, that you can replace it without getting permission. But if you start to develop new routes, you need permission from us." And that was the accepted rule. By then I think it was okay with the climbing community because they had pretty much established quite a few of these vertical routes on the wall with using their bolts, but there were still some that said, "I'm not so sure I want to be restricted by that."

Ernest Quintana: The other part was, "Well, how are you going to regulate that? How do you know, if I'm out there and you can't see me, I'm putting a new route in?"

Ernest Quintana: I said, "Well, I'm not going to be able to catch it all, but if I do, you'll understand that you're in the wrong, and we'll address it at that point in time." So, it was a compromise.

Ernest Quintana: The park also did a Wilderness Management Study. That also was controversial in the sense that we were proposing wilderness in areas where there were two-track roads, dirt roads, and if we had wilderness, then those would be eliminated. So, we had the four-wheel-drive community which used the park not by just driving wherever they wanted to, but by using the dirt roads that were designated as open.

Ernest Quintana: So, we had to work with the four-wheel-drive community on the whole idea of we wanted to expand wilderness, but that meant closing off a lot of routes. So again, we had to say, "Okay, we need to make sure that there are still some recreational opportunities for using their Jeep to go from Point A to Point B on a designated road." So, we provided for that. Again, that was somewhat of a compromise, give-and-take. We got a lot of wilderness added to the park, or at least proposed, and eventually, through legislation, it was added to the park, and we still have a lot of roads that were open to recreational vehicle use.

Ernest Quintana: Oh, there was another – at Joshua Tree National Park, an external threat. When the park was established in 1936, it was bigger than it is now. In the forties, I believe because of the war effort – I may be wrong on that, but anyway, a large portion of the park was removed, deauthorized, and where the park used to be was now an open-pit mine, the Eagle Mountain Mine, and they mined that for years.

Ernest Quintana: In the eighties, when I was there as superintendent – I think it was the eighties. I'm losing track of time already. [laughs] The mine was then closed because, obviously, it was either played out or it wasn't cost-effective. But the mine owners needed to reclaim the site, so the way they wanted to reclaim it was to create what I would call the world's largest dump, bring in all the garbage from L.A., California, Southern California by rail, putting it in, around and in the open pit mine and burying it. I basically said, "What a mistake. What a disaster for a natural resource that

is right next to you.” It [the park area removed for the mine] was like a horseshoe, the part that was cut out of the park, and so the mine was right here, and that’s where the dump would be, in the center of the horseshoe. I believe that fight is still going on, but let me tell you, I took a lot of heat – using my words – for taking a strong position against that idea.

Ernest Quintana: Our sister agency, the Bureau of Land Management, supported the idea through a land exchange that was necessary in order to allow the dump to go through. There were a lot of individuals from the conservation community that weren’t necessarily on board [supportive of the parks position] at first either, because Mine Reclamation Corporation had promised a windfall of money from the dump fees to go to conservation efforts, to buy land elsewhere, so they were excited about this tremendous amount of [conservation] money for *years*. It could have been even just a dollar a ton that they would put a surcharge on for the garbage that would have added up to millions and millions of dollars. They were saying, “Look at all the good we can do by buying other land to put in conservation and be protected.”

Ernest Quintana: But I said, “Look at what it’s going to do to this beautiful park.”

Ernest Quintana: So, a very difficult time early on. A lot of politics weighed in. There was a point where it got so heated that the Washington office even called and said, “You know, we’re going to take over this part of your interaction with Mine Reclamation Corporation,” and they did. [laughs] I hollered and stomped my feet and did everything I could, but basically, I had to adhere to the wishes of higher-ups.

Ernest Quintana: Thank goodness for Friends groups. If it wasn’t for Friends groups, if it wasn’t for private citizens coming forward and taking this on and saying, “We’re not going to let this happen because this is an environmental disaster,” there would be a dump there now. It’s not the federal government that has been the one organization that has stopped it; it is the Friends. Thank goodness for Friends.

Ernest Quintana: And it’s still, be honest with you, even to this day right now, not necessarily totally settled, although all the court decisions have been in favor of the Friends against the dump, [not] allowing a dump to go there. But, oh, there was some heartache there, a lot of heartache and a lot of tough times. But I understand. A lot of times that’s just the way it is, and you can’t take it personal. It took me a while to understand *that*. [laughter] But I did. And I knew that our Friends would continue the good fight, and they have, and they are.

Lu Ann Jones: Do you have any – I know you’re very interested in the community.

Lilli Tichinin: Yeah. I was curious, you know, going back to your home park and your home community, were there any particular challenges or particular opportunities that came about because you already had connections with

that park and with the community as well? But you were coming back sort of in a new role as park superintendent, so I'm very curious what that was like and if there was anything that was sort of unexpected.

Ernest Quintana: You know, thinking back, it was all very positive, and it could have been, obviously, the total opposite. I'm not quite certain why that occurred. My sense is – and I feel really good about this – is the small community that basically raised me was very proud of the fact that one of their native sons is back in a very key role as a superintendent. I think it also had to do with the fact that I wanted to make sure that the relations between the park and the gateway communities were always upfront and priority.

Ernest Quintana: At first it was a little bit of a push-and-pull to get the employees to come along [participate in community events/celebrations], but every little community has – like Twentynine Palms had Pioneer Days, Joshua Tree has Turtle Days, Yucca Valley has something else. I don't know what it is. So, these are like – we're up in every parade. After a while, the guys said, "Ernie, another parade?" [laughter] But we would put these floats together. It was like a flatbed truck with some streamers on it, rangers in uniform, and we made it fun. But we were a part of the community because we were always in the parade.

Ernest Quintana: Then the community loved this, and they started a Christmas Light Parade. Then I go, "Oh, no. I might get in trouble here, but I think we're going to be involved in that too. And how are we going to do this?"

Ernest Quintana: So, we would use the little tiny – I call them Cushmans [vehicles], the kind with the dump bed that go up and down. We'd light that up like a sleigh, and I don't know how we did reindeer on it, but we lighted it all up. [laughter] We had the best time, and the community loved it. They [the community] came out.

Ernest Quintana: Maybe that's why we had such a good working relationship, is not only do they know me because I grew up in the town, but they understood in a very sincere way that we wanted to be a part of the community. It was important for us to be a part of the community and it was important for us to listen to the community, especially when they had some ideas. There were sometimes when I had to kind of back away a little gracefully from some of the ideas, but I was very fortunate that they understood the reason why I had to say no sometimes. I was lucky in many respects, in that the community not only respected the position [I held], but they respected me as well.

Lu Ann Jones: When you would come to a park and here you are the superintendent, how did you get to know your staff? Even though you were known in the community or some of the community, how did you get to know a staff and then to gain their trust and confidence in you?

- Ernest Quintana: That's a good question as well. A lot of the staff, in Maintenance primarily, maybe in Administration, too, because they didn't move around that much, were there when I came back full circle, so they knew me. But then a good majority of the staff was new. I think it was important for me to gain their trust. It was important for me to lead by example. It was important for me to show that I supported them as individuals and wanted to do everything I could to make sure that while they're there, that they had the resources that I was able to muster in order for them to do their job and then to let them do their job. I thought it was important for me to use the chief rangers in a way that they felt that they had some say in what occurred within their disciplines. I had to realize that I kind of set the direction but let them find a way to get there.
- Ernest Quintana: Now, I also had a hard lesson sometimes in being a superintendent, in that when you're a superintendent, I found out, employees take very literally what you say. I had a beautiful office. I had a good view of the mountains, but then this one tree started to have a branch that was growing into my view, and I said, "Oh, man, I can't see the mountains that often."
- Ernest Quintana: And an employee was just about out there with a saw, said, "We'll take care of that." [laughter]
- Ernest Quintana: I said, "No, no, no. No, I'm fine. I can still see the mountains by looking this way."
- Ernest Quintana: But at that point in time, I said, boy, you have to be careful in what you say because the employees will take it for gospel and they'll say, "Okay, Ernie said this. He wants it done." I said, "Oh, my goodness." So, I got a chuckle out of that. That's when I realized, ooh, be careful what you say, even when you're just trying to make a little jest here.
- Ernest Quintana: But I wanted to make sure that I did not trample on the responsibilities of the lower-level supervisors. Very hard for a person that's hands-on, and I am hands-on. I said, "This is what I want to do," and in my mind I'm already thinking, "Let's do this. Let's do this and this," and I'm just fighting that. I said, "Don't, Ernie. Let them work it through."
- Ernest Quintana: A lot of times, the hard part was watching the employees work a situation or a project, and I'm going, "Ooh, I think that's not going to work," but holding back long enough for them to all of a sudden be – not that they would hit a wall or get hurt, but they would realize, "Whoa, whoa, we've got to back up. Let's try it." That, to me, was the way you learn.
- Ernest Quintana: Now, you always had to be there, and you catch people before they fell off a cliff. You didn't want that to happen, but in the same sense, you wanted them to be able to make the adjustments. So that was a valuable lesson as well, trusting in people to be able to do the work and to do it in a manner where they will still accomplish the end goal, but perhaps do it in a way that *they* felt the best way to get it done.

- Lu Ann Jones: How did you learn to discipline people? At some point, there must have been problems there.
- Ernest Quintana: I don't think you ever learn to do that. I've actually had to – the hardest thing I've done is dismiss someone from federal service. I don't know if you can ever really prepare for doing something like that. I think what guided me was make sure that you do everything you can to help that employee first, to see if that employee wants to help themselves. In this particular case, the employee, for whatever reason, chose not to and kept violating a very, very serious policy. Eventually, after counseling after counseling, I felt that I had no choice, in order for that employee's protection, but, more importantly, for the protection of other employees, had to take disciplinary action.
- Ernest Quintana: There's no easy way to go about it, but it's important that you do it directly. In other words, it was important for me to talk face-to-face with someone that I needed to discipline. If that person was in my chain of command and direct authority, it was my responsibility to talk to that person. Now, if there was another person on down, then I would have a talk with their immediate supervisor, and then that immediate supervisor would deal with the disciplinary action, but I would be a part of the discussion with the immediate supervisor so I fully understood where they were going.
- Ernest Quintana: But the ones I had to directly deal with, I don't know if there's a training course that really can prepare anybody for that. The only thing I can recommend is do everything you can to see if you can help the employee correct the behavior, to see if you can help the employee understand what's happening, and you hope that the employee gets the message and a light comes on and things get better, because ultimately you want to save them.
- Ernest Quintana: I'm a firm believer that everybody deserves a second chance. You don't necessarily get a third chance, but you deserve a second chance. And that's served me quite well many times. But you've got to understand the procedures. You've got to trust and have the confidence and the talents of a great HR person, absolutely essential. They're the ones that can help you navigate through the sometimes very difficult process of disciplining an employee.
- Lu Ann Jones: Yeah, that must be very hard.
- Ernest Quintana: Oh, it is. Again, I don't know if there is any training course that really prepares you for it. You've just got to do the best you can, again, for the employee, but always looking out for the interest of the organization and the other employees, obviously, because they're a part of that organization.
- Lu Ann Jones: At what point did you go into SES [Senior Executive Service] training?

Ernest Quintana: That was Joshua Tree, when I was there.

Lu Ann Jones: And so, was that with the assumption then that you would perhaps be a regional director?

Ernest Quintana: I was on top of the world as a superintendent at Joshua Tree. There are many people who asked me, "Why are you going to punish yourself? You've got a great park. You've got community that loves you. They work well with you. You're happy. You're in your hometown. Why do you want to go to the SES training, where everything then becomes at the discretion of somebody else?"

Ernest Quintana: Somebody else at that point in time said, "I'll tell you, Ernie, we need you here and we need you here today."

[END OF TRACK 2]

[START OF TRACK 3]

Ernest Quintana: And I got to thinking about that. But it was that next challenge. It was always that next opportunity, and in my career, that was always the next brass ring. I'd grab one and I'd see one a little further out. I said, "Oh, I want to do that," and pushing myself and making sure that I didn't push myself so far that all of a sudden I'd hit a spot where I'm going, "Oops, I'm not as effective as I thought I would be." That's always a concern, for me anyway. I said, "Okay, I want to advance, I want to advance, I want to advance, but I want to make sure that I do good by the employees and by the organization. I want to make sure that I succeed in that respect."

Ernest Quintana: So, I had the opportunity, and I knew it would be, again, a difficult time late in my career, in other words, towards the last half of my career or the last quarter of my career. [I applied and] Was selected [into the SES development program], and the cost of the training was significant, and I had to find the majority of that out of park budget, so that was hard. I had to be gone from the park a good majority of eighteen months, I believe it was [difficult in many respects], and not only from the park, but for my family as well. But, again, it was that next challenge.

Ernest Quintana: When I completed the SES training, Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program, you always wait and say, okay, you may or may not get the call. There's no guarantees [you will be appointed to an SES position]. You put yourself through all that misery for that length of time, and nobody may ever call you. [laughter]

Ernest Quintana: But when the call did come, it was wonderful, in the sense that, wow, you know, somebody sees in me again a potential here and they offered me a great opportunity. But the opportunity was leaving my comfort zone in Southern California to go to the Midwest, a place in the country I've not traveled in before, to become the regional director of the Midwest Region headquartered out of Omaha. Totally a place where I thought I would

never end up being, but it ended up being one of the best assignments that I've had, as a regional director.

Ernest Quintana: Of course, by that time I'm an empty nester, so it was just my wife and I. Now, that was another – I don't know if I mentioned this – another kind of difficult part for me in all the moves that I made. I think my kids were fine, you know. It's a struggle when you pack up and you have to go to a new school system, new friends when you're in junior high and in high school, especially in high school, but I also realized that every time I move, my spouse, Myra, my wife, she had to start her career all over. She is just a trouper. She'd go, "No, I'll find a job."

Lu Ann Jones: So, what did she do?

Ernest Quintana: She's worked in a number of positions, because it was one of those things where when we were at Saguaro, she worked in a management capacity or a floor capacity at Papago Bingo. That was what was available. [laughter] Then when we were at San Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and Joshua Tree National Park, she worked for a property management company. Now, when we moved to Omaha, she works for the City of Omaha for the Omaha Housing Authority. She has a tougher job than I did as regional director.

Ernest Quintana: But she's finally [able to concentrate on her career] – because my last assignment as regional director, and I've been retired now for probably three, three and a half years, was at Omaha, and Omaha has [now] been, since we've been married, the longest place we'd stayed in one spot. So it's allowed her to work her career longer than she's had an opportunity to in other parks that I've had, because I'd transfer and she'd have to put in her notice and start all over with something else. So, I felt bad about – because she's a talented, sharp individual – about not staying put so that she could also have her career. But I feel good now, in the sense that she has an opportunity here in my last duty assignment, by not moving, to really excel in her career.

Lu Ann Jones: I was going to ask you, because that is something, I'm always curious about is how the families negotiate those moves.

Ernest Quintana: [laughs] Well, "negotiation" might be an interesting way to put it. I was very fortunate, and Myra understood early on that my career or the choice of career that I went into, in order to advance, and from my words, necessitated, it was necessary to move, to transfer. So, she understood that, and she was just terrific, and she accepted that early on. I think that's important early in your career, because for a lot of people it's hard. But she was very supportive and understood that early on, and I think that had a lot to do with the success that we've had together for now forty-two years. Well, she stayed with me, so I'm assuming it's worthwhile. [laughter] We're still together.

- Lu Ann Jones: Again, like coming into the Midwest Region, how did you orient yourself to all of the – there must have been, in any region, a ton of—
- Ernest Quintana: Oh, so much.
- Lu Ann Jones: —issues. How did you—
- Ernest Quintana: Again, I was so excited. I was a kid in a candy store. I was going, “Where do I start?” Thirteen-state area, the parks within that thirteen-state area, ranged everywhere from Arkansas up to the Canadian border, as far west as the Dakotas and as far east as Ohio, and then the states in between. All of the parks, large and small, and historic trails and cultural sites that were there, all of those, in one shape or another, reported up to the regional office.
- Ernest Quintana: My management style was one that is if I’m going to get a call from a superintendent, say at Arkansas Post, about an issue, I need to be physically on site to see what he’s dealing with in order to fully understand the issue. So that meant, ooh, I think it was like sixty-some parks that I needed to see, physically be in every park as quickly as possible.
- Ernest Quintana: That was my first goal and task that I put to my assistant and said, “Get me somehow to each one of these parks.” I first said, “I need to do it within twelve months.” That was unrealistic. I would have been just chasing my tail and not being effective. But I did do it. I went to every one of the park sites, and some of these were well off the beaten path, like a Nicodemus. [laughs] It’s not easy to get to. But I’m hoping that the park employees and park managers appreciated the fact that I took the time to visit their park. My sense is that it did make a difference.
- Ernest Quintana: I went back to my time as superintendent. I was thrilled when the regional director came down, because that was important for me for that person, the RD, to physically see the place that I manage as a superintendent, and to convey to that person, by looking at the resources, the challenges that we’re facing, so I can better understand them. So, I knew it was important for me when I was a superintendent, and I said, “Well, if I’m going to be a regional director, I want to make sure I do the same thing.” And it wore me out. Oh, it was exhausting.
- Ernest Quintana: Now, the reason I could do that, I had a terrific deputy, David Given. I could leave the shop and go to the parks and talk to the staff, meet with the superintendent, address the issues, because I know I had a terrific deputy and a great staff in the regional office that took care of business. If there was something that came up, they would manage it, so that allowed me to be out and about as much as I was early on when I first became a regional director. I absolutely needed that. I could not imagine being able to visit all those parks without having the great staff back in the regional office.

- Lu Ann Jones: What do you think are the most important things that regional directors do?
- Ernest Quintana: Well, there're a number of important things that regional directors do. One of them I've described as serving as a filter, buffer between the Washington office and the field, trying to screen a lot of information that comes from the Washington office so that in a way that maybe we can get this data without having to overburden a lot of the parks, and then we would do that where we could at the regional office. If we couldn't, we'd take it on down to the park level.
- Ernest Quintana: In the same sense, the parks would also have an opportunity to vent [laughs] to the regional office, and then, okay, then I would obviously carry a concern, but I would serve as the sounding board or the place for them to vent, and that was important as well. But it was important also for the parks to know that I carried the information, not necessarily in the same tone, but I carried it on up to the Washington office to my superiors. That I saw as a key role for the regional office.
- Ernest Quintana: Obviously, a lot of the other things that we had to do had to do with administration. You manage the budgets. You make sure every park adheres to law and policy. You deal with the issues having to do with evaluations, both of personnel and how parks are operating. We also provided expertise in the regional office for a lot of the smaller parks. They [small parks] may not have a cultural resource specialist. We do. "We can help you with that." Not every park could afford to have a specialty in every area, so we would serve that role. We also helped manage, on a regional basis, any national issues that needed attention. We served as the hub for human resource concerns, equal employment opportunity issues that came up.
- Ernest Quintana: So, everything that basically parks had to contend with in one form or another either went through the region or were touched by the region before they went down to the parks, even to the form of priority-setting for the limited dollars that we had for either land acquisition or capital improvement. It was from the region, and we would prioritize whatever came up from the parks.
- Lu Ann Jones: One of the things I was reading a couple of items that I was able to capture on *Inside NPS* about various accomplishments, and one of the things that was in it was how you had really made diversity in the regional staff a priority and had really made great accomplishments in that. First, why was it a priority, and how did you make it happen?
- Ernest Quintana: That's been a priority of the Park Service since I came on in the seventies, and, unfortunately, we have not made great progress in improving the diversity of the workforce. Even as hard as I have tried to make that a priority, I wouldn't call it a success on my part, of what I've done. We tried a number of different approaches. I used staff in ways that I would

ask them, just say to them, “What can we do? What sort of programs can we implement? How do we get young people, especially out of college, to consider the National Park Service as a career? How do we go to the universities and colleges that are basically from communities that are, like, Historically Black Colleges or colleges that have a large Latino community? How do we go to them to encourage them to come to work for the Park Service?”

Ernest Quintana: We tried a number of different approaches. It was kind of hit-and-miss, to be honest with you, and maybe it still is, and maybe that’s why we still haven’t found that perfect way yet in order to grow within the organization a diverse workforce, because if you don’t have a diverse workforce entering, you’re not going to have, over time, a diverse management workforce, either mid-level or upper level. And, unfortunately, I think the Park Service still to this day, as hard as we have tried, we have not succeeded.

Ernest Quintana: So even though I think I’ve had a few successes here and there, I wouldn’t classify it as having attained a goal or an objective. I think it was just more of a matter of we had a few successes here and there. But we were trying. We were trying so hard, and I believe the recognition I got was more for that. Maybe we had a better record than others, but it wasn’t sustainable. I’m still scratching my head as, you know, what is it that we can do to not only bring individuals in, but to sustain that momentum and then help employees grow. We have a long way to go yet on that, but I am proud of what I have done, as far as trying to do a better job of recruiting diverse candidates into the Park Service. I’m just disappointed that I wasn’t able to do more.

Lu Ann Jones: I think that is a challenge that’s still discussed a lot these days. Well, in terms of – was part of what you did kind of figuring out, as superintendents decided to leave or kind of the right superintendent in the right park or trying, if a park had the certain challenge, to try to bring in the superintendent that you felt like would be matched to address those challenges? In terms of, like, personnel at that level, what happens at the recruitment level?

Ernest Quintana: [laughs] My process that I used to hire on new superintendents involved, obviously, you do the announcement and then you have the list of candidates, and I would have key regional associates, directors come in and help with the read of the applications so that we would collectively kind of narrow it down to the top three. So, what I wanted to do was involve a number of staff, leadership staff within the regional office, in helping to find the best candidate for the job because it was more than just me. I was ultimately the selecting official, but I wanted input from a number of individuals that I trusted.

- Ernest Quintana: Now, we always looked at candidates who we felt would fit the particular park that they were applying for. That's hard to do because a lot of times it's a name, not necessarily anything more than that, other than what the résumé gives you. But sometimes you can read through the résumé to see, okay, this person's going to do quite well in a remote area, or this person's going to do quite well in a river park, or this person's going to do quite well at a historic site. You can get that information from reading the résumés.
- Ernest Quintana: So, we tried our best to try to match up the talent to the parks that they were going to. I think, for the most part, we succeeded. I think most, if not all, RDs will tell you every now and then you kind of miss the mark. [laughs] It's always a roll of the dice, but I believe the process that I employed by using other staff to help not only read through the résumés, but then what I also did, and maybe it's a little different than other regional directors, I had a panel usually of three senior associates from the regional office do the interviews. I would sit in. I would take notes, but they would do the interviews, and after all the interviews were done, we'd sit down and compare our notes. That's how we ultimately came to, "We feel this is the best person for the position." I liked that aspect of involving others because it was more than just me picking who I thought might do a good job because I needed the input of the staff. Did that answer that, kind of?
- Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. I'm always interested in that. Again, I think hiring is one-part science and a lot of alchemy. [laughter]
- Ernest Quintana: No, that's it. Yeah. Yeah, like I say, it's a roll of the dice sometimes. Again, it's a name, and people, a lot of times you don't know them until they come in for the interview and you really don't know until they're actually in the position. [laughs] You kind of go, "All right, hit a home run there." Otherwise, you go, "Oops, we got a little work to do, but we're going to make it work."
- Lu Ann Jones: I guess we've been here almost an hour and a half, but I've got plenty of time. I don't want to rush us, but at the same time you might have other things you want to be doing this evening too.
- Lu Ann Jones: Some of the big questions that we ask are often things like, of all the positions you held at the Park Service, when were you the happiest, or what were the particular elements that would have kind of made things right for you?
- Ernest Quintana: Like I mentioned before, I don't think there was any one position that made me the happiest. There were moments within each of the positions that I held where I was happy. I could tell you when I was a park technician just starting out and I would be able to put on a backpack and go out into the backcountry and just keep an eye on the resource, see what

was going on. I'd go, "Oh, my goodness, I get paid for this! This is wonderful." I was happy.

Ernest Quintana: Even when I was a supervisor, interacting with the seasonals who were just full of life and eager and anxious, you know, I'd want to get close to them because I'd want that energy as well, because half the time I was just exhausted. I'm trying to develop schedules here, and I'd see them talking and I'd hear their enthusiasm, and they'd want to get out there and work. And I said, "I'm happy. I'm feeling good." Even as a manager, I'm going, "Wow, we're really accomplishing some terrific things here," and that made me happy.

Ernest Quintana: As a regional director, even, when you're further removed from the park and from the resource, but you're still very tied to employees and the Park Service at another level, still excited, still happy about what we were doing. We brought in two new units to the National Park System when I was a regional director. How exciting! You all go, "Wow!" And it went very well.

Lu Ann Jones: Which ones were those? River Raisin?

Ernest Quintana: River Raisin [National Battlefield Park], and I believe it was Clinton's boyhood home. It might be a longer title than that. [President William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home National Historic Site in Hope, Arkansas] A wonderful experience, wonderful time, and just great to be a part of that. I was happy when parks succeeded.

Ernest Quintana: A good friend of mine and a terrific superintendent, Mark Engler, down at Homestead National Monument of America – there's another lesson that I learned. We had the money to build a Visitor Center for that park, and Mark is just a visionary. He's a terrific interpreter and a great manager. He came up with this idea, said, "This is what I think our Visitor Center should look like, something really futuristic-looking." It had the roof that kind of swooped up.

Ernest Quintana: I said, "Oh, my goodness. This is Nebraska. I could see this going on in California. I think the neighbors are going to run us both out of town." [laughter]

Ernest Quintana: He said, "No, no, no. Look at it. There's a ploughshare."

Ernest Quintana: "Oh, Homestead National Monument. Well, okay, but the cost just might have gone up, too, because it's such an odd roof." And I was almost going, "We can't do that, Mark. We can't do it. We've got to be a little bit more conservative, more traditional."

Ernest Quintana: Thank goodness he prevailed, and he did, because now that building in itself is just wonderful to look at, and obviously the story inside is even better. But that's a good example of where at the end I felt good. At first, I was going, "Oh, I'm so worried. This isn't gonna fly. The community's

going to be up in arms. We're going to build this monstrosity of a building here."

Ernest Quintana: They loved it. They *loved* it. And Mark, in his way, understood that, and he showed me the vision that he saw as well. So, made me happy, made me feel good.

Lu Ann Jones: Once you did begin to understand what the mission of the Park Service was, why was that particularly appealing to you?

Ernest Quintana: I think it fit within me personally what was important to me, that was preservation and protection of just a small portion of a greater landscape, and it was preservation and protection of areas that I felt were so significant that they needed that. I think it was understanding that, because it was values that I had and held, and especially if I started to look at all these places, oh, my god – these are just some of the prettiest or best story of who we are as a country are park sites. That mattered to me and that's why I think it connected because it had value for me, as well, as an individual.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, there's another question that I sometimes ask and may be a little harder. But if the Park Service was living up to all that it should be, what would it be doing today? Where do you think its greatest challenges are?

Ernest Quintana: Oh, how do I put this? Its greatest challenge?

Lu Ann Jones: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Quintana: From my perspective, it has always been trying to maintain a national park or historic site in the condition that it's in when you get there. If every new superintendent that comes in or park employee keeps that in mind, then you know it's going to be protected forever in the way it was intended to be protected, unchanged. That's going to be harder and harder for future park managers to do because of the tremendous influences that are occurring external, outside of the park boundary. There's a lot of change happening. There are new perceptions out there – well, not necessarily new, but maybe they're just more in the majority now, as far as what to do in parks, where in the past it was not even thought of. It's going to be harder and harder for future park managers to be able to maintain what we have in a protected state because of external threats and because, in my opinion, perhaps there'll be pressure to open the parks up to more use.

Ernest Quintana: I think there has to be a good balance between use and preservation, and I think we have that balance, so I'm fearful, in some respects, as to what the future holds for parks. But I'm confident in the employees that we have right now and that they're going to do just as good a job, if not a better job, of protecting them and preserving them as I did and those who came before me did. So, they've got a tough challenge ahead of them. They're up to the task. I just hope that the public outside the Park Service provides us greater support. That might be a better way to put it.

Lu Ann Jones: I was thinking about these kind of external forces. Are you thinking about development? Or again you mentioned more use of the parks or different kinds of uses or climate change or all—

Ernest Quintana: All of the above. Yeah, yeah, yeah, especially those influences that are hard to combat, like climate change. That will take a concentrated effort of a greater community, the country, if not the world community, so that one's hard to deal with.

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Ernest Quintana: We know what's going to happen if we don't. There's increased pressure on parks by community development up to the boundary. There's increased pressure on parks by exploration for oil and gas. Even communities, I would say, are suspicious now of the federal government, and I put that in the sense of, "We've got to make sure that they, the federal government, do not lock away any more land." And that's their term, "lock away," rather than seeing it being protected for the use and enjoyment of future generations. So, I think it's all of the above, but that might be some of the key points, as far as what's happening right now.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, when you look back, are there particular people that you really admired that you worked with and think really helped meet some of those challenges during the time that you were active in your career in the Park Service? Either people that may or may not have had a reputation throughout the Park Service, that might have been more locally, that you admired and appreciated their mentoring, as well as people who were very visible leaders in the Park Service?

Ernest Quintana: Not so much individuals, but what I admire is the passion that the local conservation community – I say local; it could be national as well – but the local chapters of a national conservation organization have for wanting to help you protect that park. I think they are the key more so than the Park Service in being successful in how we protect the parks into the future. We can do so much. We need the help of outside organizations. We need the help of the community in order to be successful in protecting parks, absolutely a must. So, I don't know if it's really an individual, but I think it's individuals within those organizations who choose to be involved and give of their time in order to protect the parks and preserve open space.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you're here in Washington now on the board of the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees.

Ernest Quintana: Yes.

Lu Ann Jones: So, have you been involved with that since you retired from the Park Service?

- Ernest Quintana: No. My first probably two and half, maybe three years, I wanted to be just that step away and not necessarily walk right into another volunteer position or job, but after a certain period of time, I felt, "Okay, now I'm comfortable. Now I want to reengage to the point where I feel I can contribute, but I don't want to be seen as meddling. I don't want to be seen as, 'Ernie retired. How come you're back?'" [laughter]
- Ernest Quintana: So, I wanted to help in a different way. I wanted to provide what I could as far as my experience and expertise, provide that help through a board, and there's two I serve on. One is the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees – I'm on the Executive Council for that – and the other one is Western National Parks Association. I'm a board member there as well. So those two keep me engaged enough so that I get a feel for, okay, what's the pulse of the National Park Service from an outsider's, now, perspective rather than from an active-duty employee. So that's it.
- Lu Ann Jones: That sounds great. Well, are there other things that you've been doing? When you walked away, then what did you do? Once you weren't a regional director or the deputy director, what did you do at that point?
- Ernest Quintana: Well, it's interesting, because we've had that discussion with some other retirees that I've talked to. Usually, we're a tough organization, the National Park Service – my words – on retirees, tough in the sense that they're [the NPS leadership] saying, "Thank you very much." And they really sincerely say, "Thank you for your service. You did a wonderful job. Go off and enjoy retirement." So we're not necessarily embraced as far as a resource that might be available to perhaps a young supervisor or even a mid-level manager, as far as somebody to talk to, not necessarily to tell them what to do, but someone for a supervisor, if they don't have anybody to turn to, to bounce ideas off of. But you have to be careful in the sense that all you're going to do is be the sounding board, be a devil's advocate for them as far as discussing ideas, but the decision of what they do is always up to them.
- Ernest Quintana: But I don't think we're viewed by the National Park Service, "we" being those who retire, as that type of valuable resource. There might be a suspicion as that, "No, you're retired. We need individuals that are," what I've heard, "forward-looking rather than looking back." [laughs] And I didn't see it that way. I was hoping that the Park Service would have seen retirees as a terrific resource for individuals who have been there, done that, and a tremendous amount of experience. What a great opportunity, I think, to utilize a retiree to just be a mentor/coach, if anything, for an employee.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, we I'll save that [a comment] for when we turn the recording off. [laughs]
- Lu Ann Jones: This is going way back. I think you told us yesterday that, in part, even though there were people who did kind of all along the way kind of take

you by the collar and lead you, but there were also times that you kind of learned from negative examples, too. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Ernest Quintana: [laughs] Oh, yeah. It's important to not only understand but to admit that somewhere along the line in a course of a career, you're going to hit a wall. I don't see how you cannot learn to be a better person without stumbling or hitting a wall, and the important thing is picking yourself up. But if somebody else is there with you to kind of talk to them about it and say, "What happened there? I wasn't expecting that," and to learn from that.

Ernest Quintana: I believe sometimes we may not be, as an organization, patient with individuals. Like I mentioned before, everybody deserves an opportunity to make a mistake. Now, let me clarify that. In the Park Service, we take care of this country's greatest national treasures, so if you make a mistake and it has, oh, just a horrible, negative impact on a resource, that's something to deal with. You've got to address that. But if you're out there and you're trying to do right, but then you do stumble and somebody calls you on the carpet because, oh, you didn't either fill this paperwork out or you didn't do this correctly, you've got to be able to back up, understand that, adjust, and move on.

Ernest Quintana: I don't know if I've captured that correctly. I guess what I'm really trying to say is that we're human, and as much as we want to always do right, there are going to be a lot of times when that's not going to be possible. All of a sudden you're going to wake up this morning and say, "Oh, my goodness, what did I do? I should not have done that," or, "I wish I'd have gone this route rather than that route." But the important thing is the ability to adjust. The important thing is also the willingness to talk to people and say, I'd be honest with them, "I think I messed up," and admitting to the fact that you messed up and then moving on.

Ernest Quintana: All the training in the world is good, but all the training in the world will not prevent a bump in the road. It will always be that. It's inevitable in what we do. There are too many little landmines out there and you have to be conscious of them, but every now and then you're going to step on one.

Lu Ann Jones: Would you be willing to talk about a landmine episode? [laughter] This is for the benefit of future generations.

Ernest Quintana: Oh, my goodness.

Lu Ann Jones: And if you don't feel comfortable, that's okay.

Ernest Quintana: Well, some of the landmines that I've stepped on had to do with my interaction with other employees, which I corrected, obviously, so I probably shouldn't there.

Ernest Quintana: I did do one that I was kind of chuckled on. In my passion for wanting to protect the park – this is going back to my time as superintendent – I was

battling the Eagle Mountain landfill, which I talked about earlier. We were in court. Obviously, this had gone from appeal back to an appeal, back to court. Anyway, I was asked by a Friends group who was on the park's side about trying to fight off this horrible mega-dump being proposed next to the park. They had asked me to develop a letter for them that they would then have their attorneys submit to the judge as proof that the Park Service also supports our position as being opposed to this landfill. So, I did that. I should have called my supervisor. More importantly, I should have notified the solicitor, because they would have told me, "You can't do that, Ernie," because it ended up being what would be called an amicus brief. It was a friend of the court; it's a legal document.

Ernest Quintana: The embarrassing part for me was it had already gone, and the only way that it was found out that I had filed, basically stating the position of the National Park Service but I did it without notifying the Park Service, is when the other attorney that was the attorney for the landfill during the court hearing brought it up saying, "Your honor, I don't believe this is supported by the National Park Service. This might be the position of the superintendent, but he cannot – let's ask him."

Ernest Quintana: I'm going, "Oh, my." At that point in time, my heart sank. I said, "You're right. I stepped on a landmine," and we had to pull back. I said, "I do not have the authority. I did not have the clearance, first of all, nor do I have the authority on my own to submit that paper as a court document on behalf of National Park Service."

Ernest Quintana: Solicitor Ralph Myhan, terrific solicitor, reminded me, as well as did my immediate supervisor, "Ernie, what are you doing? What were you thinking? Come on up here. Let's talk about it." [laughs]

Ernest Quintana: I told him, I said, "Obviously, I let my passion for what I thought was doing the right thing get ahead of me. You're absolutely right. I recognize that now. I shouldn't have done that, first of all, without notifying you, and second of all, I should have realized that the only one that can file that has to be from the higher-ups, probably even the Washington office."

Ernest Quintana: That one I can describe because that one was just me. [laughter] And boy, it was very embarrassing for me and for the organization because it all was brought out in court. Then the embarrassing part was we had to retract that, take it back, said, "You're right."

Lu Ann Jones: Well, even if you stepped on some landmines, you must have done something right, because you've won many awards from the Park Service. I was wondering, is there any one of those awards that means more to you than others or any of those that particularly speak to you?

Ernest Quintana: No because they're all different in many respects for different things. I do value all of the recognition that I was given. Sometimes I'm a little embarrassed by that because it's never just one individual. It's never just

me as either the superintendent or a chief ranger or a regional director. There was always a team. There's always others that are a significant part of ultimately working either on a project or dealing with an issue. So, in many respects, I've always been a little embarrassed about receiving recognitions like that because I know it wasn't just me.

Ernest Quintana: One of the items that I – let me put it this way – that I hang on the wall in my office – there's two – is the one that was given to me by the National Parks Conservation Association, and that was for my work, of all things, dealing with the landfill. [laughter] I'm very proud of that one, and maybe because it was from an outside organization. I'm very, very grateful and proud of the recognition that was given to me from within, but when somebody does that from the outside, it's just extra special, I guess you might say, because others recognize the actions that I took who are not necessarily a part of this system, the Park System.

Lu Ann Jones: Do you have any questions at this point?

Lilli Tichinin: I don't think so. I think we've talked about almost everything that I was most curious about.

Lu Ann Jones: What else would you like to talk about?

Ernest Quintana: A little bit of advice for anybody that ultimately may listen to this or especially for individuals who are working in the Park Service right now, it's important that you embrace what the National Park Service is all about and stands for, but it's also important that you have fun, that you enjoy what you're doing.

Ernest Quintana: The hard part of anything and everything that we do is you're always going to be dealing with a limited amount of resources, not enough staff, not enough money, but don't let that weigh on you so heavily that you lose sight of the bigger picture, lose sight of the mission and principles of the National Park Service and, more importantly, forget to have fun, because if you're not having fun, something's wrong.

Ernest Quintana: I remember throughout my career what a wonderful experience and I enjoyed every moment that I was in, and I actually still enjoy reflecting back on that career as well, so I'm hoping that individuals who are out there now learn how to have fun in what they do. That's it.

Lu Ann Jones: That's a great bit of advice.

Ernest Quintana: Well, sometimes people forget that, and I think they get so caught up in work, wanting to do right, frustrated by the fact they don't have all the resources that, you know, that's okay. You do what you can do. Every now and then, you've got to be able to smile.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you learn how to set your priorities? I mean, that's one thing I've heard people say is that you just have to learn to kind of figure out what's most important.

Ernest Quintana: Well, figure out maybe not necessarily what's most important, but figure out what you actually have influence over. There are some things that are so big that the people worry about, and you can't change that and you're going to be running into many walls by trying to change something that you have no influence over. Focus on those things that you can change or that you can improve on. Then you're going to be happy.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, that sounds like a great place to end. Thank you.

Ernest Quintana: Thank you. I'm so excited about the whole idea of you reaching out to me and including me in part of the oral history project. I hope I was able to help out and provide what you needed here.

Lu Ann Jones: Absolutely. You're a fabulous narrator.

[END OF TRACK 4]

[END OF INTERVIEW]