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Rebecca Lacome
November 6, 2018

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones and Elizabeth Ehrlich
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen
Edited by Rebecca Lacome
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Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

REBECCA LACOME

By Lu Ann Jones and Elizabeth Ehrlich

November 6, 2018

Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Transcribed by Teresa Bergen

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript.

START OF TAPE

START OF FILE 1

Lu Ann Jones: Today is November the sixth, 2018. It's actually Election Day. And we're here in Harpers Ferry at Mather Training Center. This is Lu Ann Jones with the Park History Program. And we're going to be doing an oral history interview today with — can you introduce yourself?

Rebecca Lacome: My name's Becky Lacome.

Lu Ann Jones: And you were?

Rebecca Lacome: I've been doing interpretation and training in the National Park Service for 32, almost 33 years — going way back to starting as a seasonal, and then the last 20 years here at Mather Training Center as a training specialist for interpretation and education.

Lu Ann Jones: Great. Thank you for that introduction. And we also have —

Betsy Ehrlich: I'm Betsy Ehrlich, and I'm a designer over in the Harpers Ferry Center. I work in the Unigrid publications at the moment. But over the course of my career, I have worked with Becky closely on a variety of different training opportunities. So, I wanted to be sure that the work that she's done and the history that she has in her head is shared with others, because it's fascinating.

Lu Ann Jones: [Laughs] So thank you very much for contributing to our oral history program. So, Betsy, do you want to get started on the questions?

Betsy Ehrlich: Sure. Do we want to test that?

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. We can do that.

END OF FILE 1

START OF FILE 2

Lu Ann Jones: All right. So, here's our second file for the interview with Becky Lacome. And we're here with Lu Ann Jones and Betsy Ehrlich. So, Betsy?

Betsy Ehrlich: So, Becky, before you were part of the National Park Service, let's talk a little bit about just sort of the lead up to your entrée into the Park Service. Can you just tell us about your education and experience before you joined the NPS?

Rebecca Lacome: Well, I'm one of those classic Park Service tales where I knew by the time I was 13 that I wanted to be a park ranger. I've met lots of other people in the agency who had similar epiphanies as kids. You know, the family vacations, the cross-country vacations visiting national parks. My parents,

my mom especially, very much into history and nature and learning. And that was contagious to me as a kid.

Rebecca Lacome: A real formative element was being in Girl Scouts. All the way through, from little Brownies to graduating from high school. Just falling in love with nature and outdoor experiences. Continuing to love history, as my mom did. It was on a Girl Scout trip at age 13 where I had the big moment, I want to be a park ranger.

Lu Ann Jones: Can you tell us about, where was that? Where was that? Where did you grow up, and where was that moment?

Rebecca Lacome: This was, I grew up in Southern California. Every time we could escape the city and get out into nature — desert, ocean, mountains — I was in heaven. On this particular trip, the Scouts were in the Sierras. I don't remember the exact location, but I remember the exact moment. We were on a hike. I'm pretty sure it was a California state park ranger who was guiding our hike. I can remember stopping by the trail and looking out over a beautiful vista as he was talking to us, and looking at him and thinking, that's what I want to do.

Rebecca Lacome: It just stuck. I never wavered. I don't think I ever wavered. I took a couple of detours along the way [laughs] but that was what I sort of single-mindedly pursued then in college was getting my degree so that I would look appealing to the Park Service. So, I majored in American history, I minored in geology, trying to cover the natural and the cultural. While I was still in college, a really formative experience for me was being an SCA, Student Conservation Association, volunteer at Tumacácori National Monument at the time. Now it's a national historical park. And just having an amazing experience with that. So that kind of cemented it that I wanted to be a park ranger.

Rebecca Lacome: Interestingly, my original thought was that I wanted to be a back-country ranger and get away from people [laughs]. And because Tumacácori at the time was a small little place with a very tiny staff, and there was no one else really my age, I had lots of time to think about my future. They let me try everything. That's why it was such a great experience. And that's what small parks have always meant to me is the opportunity to have your finger in a lot of pies. So, they let me try resource management and cultural resources and natural resources, projects that I was working on with the staff there. They let me work with their collection. They let me do guided tours of the mission grounds there and work in the visitor's center.

Rebecca Lacome: In those days, and I still have it somewhere, I had the old uniform before women wore the gray and green. When women were with the public, they wore the stewardess-looking little zip-up front shift dress thing.

Rebecca Lacome: When I got to be with the public was when I realized that that's what I really loved doing. I can remember laying on my bed in this little teardrop trailer that I lived in in the desert there, watching a sun spider crawl across the ceiling and going, you know, I'm kind of lonely without other people, and I really like this interpretation stuff. I don't think I want to be a back-country ranger in a fire tower far from everyone else. I think I want to do interpretation.

Rebecca Lacome: They actually tried to hire me as a GS-1 or something at that point. But I only had one year of college left. And though it was tempting, and I've often wondered where I would be if I'd taken that job; I didn't accept it and I went back and finished school.

Betsy Ehrlich: Where were you in school?

Rebecca Lacome: I got my undergraduate degree at Chapman College, now Chapman University, in the city of Orange, California. Again, it was a small school, so it was a great experience, great learning experience. Lots of wonderful professors. And just feeling like a part of the local community there at the college.

Rebecca Lacome: Took a little detour with my first marriage, my first husband. I met him at Chapman. He wanted to become a marriage and family counselor, and that was going to take us nowhere near a national park, or so I thought at the time. So, I did go for a secondary teaching credential and got my education right up to the last point, I didn't completely finish it. But I got my education creds.

Rebecca Lacome: We were moving around a lot after he finally decided that he wanted to be a park ranger, too [laughs]. We started going back and forth from school in the school year to parks in the summer. Though it took me a while to get another paid job, I did a lot of stuff. I was a volunteer at Death Valley at Scotty's Castle. I worked for the concession there. I worked for the cooperating association and the concession at Mesa Verde one summer.

Rebecca Lacome: We didn't really get the opportunity where we were both hired as seasonals until the summer of 1980, when we were both hired as seasonals at Grand Canyon. So that was actually my first paid job.

Betsy Ehrlich: What year was that?

Rebecca Lacome: Nineteen-eighty.

Betsy Ehrlich: Eighty.

Rebecca Lacome: Yeah. And it wasn't in interp. You know, I had to take what I could get. So that was collecting fees and patrolling the campground and doing trail patrols. But had an awesome supervisor, who again tried to encourage us to have a diversity of experiences as young seasonals. Got my Red Card, did firefighting, search and rescue, rappelling, all that cool stuff that park rangers do, right? So, I had a good exposure to all of that early on.

Rebecca Lacome: Let's see. Then after that, my husband got a job with the Corps of Engineers as a park ranger and we moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky. That was great because I knew Mammoth Cave was nearby. And sure enough, after a year there, I got a seasonal job at Mammoth Cave, which led into my permanent job with the Park Service. So, I started as a seasonal there in '83 and became a permanent employee there towards the end of '86. This was in the days prior to the whole Ranger Futures/Ranger Careers. So, I was a GS-5 seasonal supervisor, and I supervised up to 12 or 15 other seasonals at a time. And again, wonderful experience. But we sort of started rabble-rousing as seasonal supervisors [laughs] because we were doing all the work. And we were hiring people and doing all the things that should be supervisor-level work as park technicians in GS-5 and -6 positions. They graciously gave us a -6 then, and we were supervising [laughs].

Rebecca Lacome: But Mammoth Cave was a great experience because it was a big park, right? And it had a huge seasonal staff. I was in interpretation. They did big seasonal training programs summer and winter, and that's where I got pulled into training. So, stop me if you want to ask any other questions here. But I was at Mammoth Cave from '86 to '91 and really got into the interpretive training end of things and just fell in love with it.

Lu Ann Jones: What did interpretive training consist of at that point?

Rebecca Lacome: The only way to see Mammoth Cave was on a guided tour, and so we had to have a huge interpretive guide force. It's a tradition there, cave guiding wise, there were many multigenerational cave guides and seasonals, many of whom were teachers during the year, and came back to do their first love of cave guiding in the summer. A lot of tradition. Steeped in tradition.

Rebecca Lacome: I got the opportunity early on to go through the Interpretive Skills training program, which was, I think, the first codified interpretive training program that the National Park Service had. I'm not sure exactly when it started. I want to say it was in the '80s, maybe early '80s. But they organized by regional teams of trainers and developed a curriculum. And there were, I think, four or five different classes. But most interpreters never got the opportunity to go. I felt very fortunate that I did get to go early in my permanent career. Seasonals, no way [laughs].

Rebecca Lacome: Seasonals have never gotten very many training experiences like that. But I did get to go through the two main interpretive skills courses.

Rebecca Lacome: So, what those trainers were doing — and one of them is somebody who I'm going to talk about later, who greatly influenced my career, is Dave Dahlen in the Southeast Regional interpretive skills team. You know, that was one of those times when I went to interpretive skills and I had another opportunity to have some clarity about how I wanted to focus my career. It was interpretive training. So, getting to really do that immersively on the front lines of Mammoth Cave was a great experience. And to carry forward what I'd been learning in interpretive skills to the front-line staff there, it was awesome. I was put in charge of developing a training for experienced interpreters, returning seasonals, after they got the cave tour part of things. Now we were going to work on the interpretive programs, which were big — and they were evening programs. There was a lot of living history that we did. We did children's programs and a lot of guided hikes on the surface, natural history type of stuff. So, I got to develop the first of what we called Surface Activities Training Program there for the interpreters, and work with the more experienced folks. It was awesome.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, were you still doing interpretive programs while you were moving into this role of supervision and training?

Rebecca Lacome: Yes. But less so. Because once I started supervising, I did a lot fewer programs myself. But I still spent lots of time in the cave auditing and then coaching as a follow-up with the seasonals that I was supervising. So, I went from having sort of deep experience with myself and going through the training programs that had me sort of understand how to become more professional. We can talk about how that transitioned and changed over the years, but what that meant at the time. And then trying to help my seasonals that I supervised really improve the quality of what they were doing. Or keep doing what they were doing well, encourage them if they were doing it well.

Rebecca Lacome: So, the supervision took a lot of my time, because summer and winter there were big training programs. And then I also got into doing some of the park media stuff. Betsy would cringe [laughs]. You would cringe if you saw some of the stuff that we were working on in those days. But it was primitive times. We were starting to use computers. But that's how old I am. We were doing the park newspaper in mocked up layouts the old style of cut and paste stuff to make brochures and on the copy xerox machine. We still had a mimeograph machine in the basement of the guide house that we used. But that and media stuff and working on special events. So, I got so I was doing less and less on the frontline interpretation.

Betsy Ehrlich: You mentioned that Mammoth Cave was a place that had deep tradition in interpretive programs. And you were involved in shifting things in training. Did you get pushback? Did you find that—

Rebecca Lacome: Oh, yeah [laughs].

Betsy Ehrlich: So how did you deal with that? You were still very young in your career.

Rebecca Lacome: Oh, yeah. It's funny because now that you mention it, I guess I've thought about it. I guess now that you bring it up, I realize that that was my first experience trying to transfer what I had learned at interpretive skills training. How to do thematic interpretation was sort of the big thing then. Some of these traditional cave guides that had been doing it for years; they just didn't want anything to do with the new ideas of how to do interpretation. A lot of them were either, because they were schoolteachers or students, they were very much into heavy, you know, providing lots of information. Like overloading the public with lots of information. Or they were performers. What David Larsen years later would call "interpretainment." It was all about getting the applause and getting the laughs and the cave jokes. If you've ever been on a cave tour anywhere, you've I'm sure heard some of the traditional cave jokes. But it wasn't what we were trying to understand as interpretation — which in those days was very much about supporting the Park Service mission and advocating preservation and using what we understood as thematic communication skills to do that. So, yeah. Definitely some pushback in those days. So, some convincing.

Rebecca Lacome: Duke was one of my seasonals. He was a retired teacher who'd been a cave guide for 30 years in the summertime. And Duke would not be moved. I can remember trying to use my best powers of persuasion to get him to use a theme [laughs]. He was into "interpretainment." He would delight the audience. He would entertain them. But it wasn't about Mammoth Cave; it was about him. So, when I finally figured out how to convince him that he already had some themes that he was already pulling on and encourage him that he was already doing this and he just needed to do it more coherently, that was a breakthrough. When I was able to say, "Oh, you really are already doing this." When I realized it and could help him realize it, that was sort of one of my early moments of realizing how to help people move forward. It wasn't by being critical, which I don't think I was ever harshly critical. I was trying to persuade him to use these thematic techniques. But really it came down to finding the positive in what he was already doing and pulling those threads. And that was a gem [laughs]. That understanding served me well for many years. Actually, later on it became a really coherent part of our training strategy here.

Betsy Ehrlich: It seems to me it's a sort of a theme in your career. Finding the positive and building on what exists and not necessarily tearing down old but building from the old. But I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Rebecca Lacome: No, that's well said. That's in my notes here somewhere [laughter]. Is not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. And we'll talk more about that, I think, when you get into the whole evolution of interpretation here.

Betsy Ehrlich: You've jumped through some of this that I wanted to cover. This has been really fantastic. But I want to get to the heart of the question that I know you're wanting to get to, which is the fact that you've had this front row seat to this evolution. You've talked about the pre-80s and kind of the '80s shift toward thematic interpretation. But it's evolved so much more since then. It would be helpful to just sort of have an outline of where those major transitions in interpretation and kind of correlate them with your career so with that outline we can maybe get into some of the different areas that you've had a deeper role in.

Rebecca Lacome: Sure. I just want to finish up by saying that I continued to be influenced by the first experiences that I had. After Mammoth Cave, I went to Homestead National Monument, which was a small park, and got a wonderful position that doesn't really exist too much anymore, which was a split position — they call it a split ranger position — where I did both interpretation/education and resource management. It sounds insane, but at this little park where there were only a few employees, I was doing frontline interpretation. For a while I was running the Eastern National Bookstore outlet. I was managing the collection, the cultural resource collection there, which was a pretty cool collection. I was the frontline in charge of the prairie restoration, which was a fantastic experience. I'd never done natural resource related management type things before. And to be able to go out and do, say, a prescribed burn or treat some exotic species [unclear] with the kind of things that we did, or mapping, surveying species, all we were doing, just amazing things. And then turn around the next day and interpret that, say, to a school group or something. I think that was real formative for me — having to use sort of both sides of my brain. And loving the opportunity to dig into the management preservation side of things, and then communicate about it. I think all interpreters need to have that experience [laughs] and maybe all resource managers need to have that experience, too, of the opportunity to try to do both.

Rebecca Lacome: Because they're joined at the hip, and if we can't communicate well about what's going on with our resource management efforts, which interpreters are often in many parks very isolated from what that process is in the field, and then likewise resource managers are very isolated from trying to work

with the public and explain and actually interpret why the resource management is important. So that was very formative. Continued doing training on a very small scale with the staff there.

Rebecca Lacome: Then I got to do a detail to a brand-new park, Tall Grass Prairie National Preserve. I was the first park ranger that they hired. I was on a detail from Homestead. But I got to be there as they were transitioning, doing their general management planning and their dedication ceremony. I got to have sort of a key role in that. So, I just had these really rich opportunities.

Rebecca Lacome: From there, I had gotten divorced and remarried. My second husband was in museum studies. My husband now, Michael. And while we were in Nebraska at Homestead, we were trying to get him a job after he finished his master's degree. He wanted to do exhibit design. Long story short, I saw the position announcement at Harpers Ferry Center for an exhibit specialist, what they call Visual Information Specialist, come open and I encouraged him to apply. And as Betsy can well attest to, the application process is no easy thing. You wait months before you hear if you've even gotten on the cert.

Rebecca Lacome: He did get called for an interview. He was very surprised. I wasn't, because this job had his skill set written all over it. But this is the story I've told many times to be careful of what you wish for, but nothing's sort of impossible in what you wish for.

Rebecca Lacome: I've got to back up just a second. Before he came here for his interview, and ultimately got a job at Harpers Ferry Center, I had been back to Harpers Ferry, to Mather, for the first Peer Review Certifier Workshop, and it was the birth of the Interpretive Development Program. I'll talk more about that in a minute. But it was all about training and coaching and interpretive standards, and developing those, really codifying those for the first time in the profession of interpretation. We spent two weeks here at Mather doing that. And I fell in love with the place and with the idea of what was happening in interpretive training.

Rebecca Lacome: I sent my husband a postcard back in Nebraska and I said, "Okay, I'll work here." It was an aerial view of Harpers Ferry. "I'll work here." And I circled Mather. I said, "You can work here, next door, at the Harpers Ferry Design Center." And then I wrote, "Ha, ha, ha," like that's ever going to happen that we would both get hired here. And of course, you know, it did.

Rebecca Lacome: He got his job here first as a Visual Information Specialist. I followed along from Homestead on the old dual career program, which I don't think they use anymore. But it enabled me to stay on the rolls, stay, you know, in a non-pay status. I volunteered here for a while. Then I worked into a

detail and a term position, and finally into my permanent training specialist position. So that's my long and winding path with lots of rich experience.

Rebecca Lacome: I guess I'll say before going onto — let's see, we were going to go onto — [laughs]. Where were we going to go?

Betsy Ehrlich: Well, I think, again, just that there's this sort of outline with these major transitions. Because I know you have them in your head. But as you mention a couple of things, it sounds like there are these big stages that are reference points in your overall career. And it would be good to have those sort of outlined.

Rebecca Lacome: Yes. There was the Mammoth Cave interpretive skills zone. And then coming here, and that experience with the first Peer Review Certifier Workshop here at Mather, and the birth of the Interpretive Development Program was a sort of a big new phase for the profession. Then after many years, we moved into another phase. So that's the way that I kind of categorize that broadly, although it's certainly not neat and clean [laughs]. But looking back on it, there were these sort of big areas of renewed or raised understanding and awareness of what we do as interpreters and educators in the Park Service.

Rebecca Lacome: So, I would sort of say that the early days of my career were based in interpretive skills was information-based interpretation, by and large. It was about information well presented. It was what we — I think sometimes seen as derogatory, but I don't think necessarily — what we would say "sage on the stage." It was very much about the interpreter, the park ranger, as the authority, the source of the knowledge, the font of knowledge for the public. Knowledge transfer, that it was always assumed if we did that well, people would care about national parks and support us in preservation just by learning more about these places. It was largely a one-way communication strategy. But then that was the way people were taught and learned at the time. That's the way I grew up learning. The teacher. The lecturer.

Rebecca Lacome: One thing that they actually taught us which now we laugh about, the mantra was, "Tell them what you're going to tell them" — this is what I learned in Interpretive Skills — "Tell them what you're going to tell them. Have a good theme. Introduce that theme. Tell them what you're going to tell them. Then tell them."

Rebecca Lacome: "That's the body of your presentation. That's all your facts and information and stories. And then tell them what you told them." In other words, recapitulate. Put a bow on it. And a nice conclusion. A very

traditional approach to teaching and learning and interpretive training at the time.

Rebecca Lacome: We were learning about Freeman Tilden, and Freeman Tilden has always been at the heart of things, and his six principles. But I remember going through Interpretive Skills training and having the sessions on Tilden. And then leaving that philosophy behind and moving over to the very practical thing of using a theme and a good introduction, a good conclusion, blah, blah, blah. Being on time. Neat uniform. Don't wear your sunglasses [laughs]. All of those sort of logistical things were emphasized. And thinking yeah, but what about what Tilden said? Because I don't really see that here.

Rebecca Lacome: So, then years go by and a group of interpreters led by Corky Mayo, who was the Chief of Interpretation for the National Park Service in the Washington office. And between he and David Dahlen, who was the Training Manager here for interpretation education at Mather at the time, and David Larsen, Robert Fudge, Sandy Weber, and a number of other people knew it was time for moving interpretive training forward, and our understanding of the profession. They'd really gotten into digging into what did Tilden mean by his six principles? [laughs] And I want to say that this next big phase, what the Interpretive Development Program became all about, and the heart of my career, was moving from information-based interpretation and this sort of "sage on the stage," to—

END OF FILE 2

START OF FILE 3

Rebecca Lacome: — meanings-based interpretation. And that's the best sort of short descriptor I can give it, is it became all about the meanings. It became about trying to fulfill Tilden's principle of making it relevant, of helping audiences find personal meaning in the stories of national parks. I had a thought. I guess it will come back. It just left. But it was moving away from information-based, and Tilden's principle that all interpretation uses information, but information in and of itself is not interpretation. And looking at the Interpretive Skills days and all that, it was about the information and moving into figuring out what the information means.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, you saw this transition coming in your own heart, because you were not feeling like the interpretive skills was really—

Rebecca Lacome: Right.

Betsy Ehrlich: — connecting with what you were learning in Tilden. But when you listed the group of people who were sort of leading the way, you didn't list yourself. Where do you see yourself in—

Rebecca Lacome: Because they were the first rabble rousers. And Corky Mayo as Chief of Interpretation for the Park Service really supported what he began calling the "Interpretive (R)evolution," with the "r" in parentheses. So, evolving the profession and the training program forward, he and Dave Dahlen intentionally brought together these groups of stakeholders or field interpreters who did the work. Wow, radical, right? And, you know, they willingly locked themselves in rooms trying to understand. And going out and looking at people doing the work in the field and trying to figure out where were those gaps between what we're doing on the ground and the philosophy, and where we think we need to move.

Rebecca Lacome: I think this is paralleling more largely, as it has all along, changes in the broader world of education and how people learn and how we teach and communicate. So, this was all just part of this movement, the Interpretive (R)evolution then led into the writing of a new big training module. It was called Module 101: The Process of Interpretation. And many, many interpreters, field interpreters, had a voice in that process. I wasn't one of them, because I wasn't part of the group yet. I was still off at Homestead. I think it really started when I was still at Mammoth Cave. So, I got exposed to it when I came for that first peer review workshop. So those folks were becoming the first trainers of that new curriculum, and they brought us together. Dave Dahlen bravely brought 40 interpreters from across the Park Service into the upper classroom for two weeks to try to take that new curriculum and the park ranger position description and identify core competencies. This is tracking along with Learning and Development in the Park Service, adopting what was becoming increasingly popular out in the rest of the world, in the private sector, of competency-based learning and training. And there was a big initiative in the Park Service for all the career fields to develop core competencies.

Rebecca Lacome: So, this was all tied together. They brought us into the room, and they had us wrangle with what were the core skillsets and then we began to work on the first interpretive standard by which they were planning for us to begin doing peer reviews and coaching. A huge, audacious idea. Dave Dahlen was a saint. He had greatly influenced me; I'll talk a little bit more about that later on, with his master facilitator skills. There was [laughs] I don't know, maybe he naively thought 40 interpreters would all agree on this automatically. But of course, this was not the case. There was lots of philosophical wrangling and debate. I loved it. I ate up every minute of it.

Rebecca Lacome: I felt like I'd fallen into heaven by being able to be in that ether, in that space upstairs, in the upstairs classroom. It's a sacred place to all of us as interpreters, because it is where a lot of that started.

Betsy Ehrlich: And this is a two-week—

Rebecca Lacome: Two weeks. Can you imagine doing that nowadays?

Lu Ann Jones: So, this was in the '90s?

Rebecca Lacome: This was in, I'm sorry, this was in the winter of '96. This was in January and February of '96. We had someone from the Maryland School District who came and talked to us about how to develop rubrics. And we developed the first rubric as a standard for peer review that we would use to — it became sort of the core standard for everything, but initially applying to the standard interpretive talk. It had two main parts, and they're still alive and well. And that's that interpretation, the talk, is "a catalyst for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections to the meanings of the park resources." The second part, that the program would "cohesively develop a relevant idea." So, you can see pulling the threads of thematic interpretation, but pulling it into the realm of audience relevance. And then pulling in the whole notion of helping the audience explore personal meanings.

Rebecca Lacome: That evolved as time went on. We began to really understand that there were two sort of broad categories of meaning. One was personal for the audience, for each audience member. Personal relevance. The other was these big notions of social relevance. That we realized if a place is worthy of being a national park, it has that level of significance, then it has broad social relevance and we need to be able to connect park stories and the wealth of information that we have about our parks to both help audiences find that personal relevance and explore the broad social relevance.

Rebecca Lacome: So that was a huge leap forward for the profession. It did not happen overnight [laughs]. We ended up identifying ten benchmark competencies based on the types of work that interpreters do based out of the park ranger position description. And we developed a huge, deeply complex peer review and coaching program. The focus of my career from 1996, when I first came here, till 2010, was coordinating and basically running the peer review program, which we went from doing much of that by hand in terms of collating the peer review responses, to developing a big — [laughs] bane of my existence, data-driven online, what we called the online review system for that. It was appropriate for the time, but the world was changing too fast and technology was changing too fast.

Rebecca Lacome: By the time we developed, fully fleshed out the training curriculum and the standards for all ten of the benchmark competencies, we were already beginning to see — [laughs] it was time to evolve again. We were already beginning to see that the world and our understanding of how people learn and what kind of experiences they want in parks, that that was changing as the world was changing.

Rebecca Lacome: So, I guess we have the information-based [era of] interpretation early on, and we move into the meanings-based [era of] interpretation, and the birth of the Interpretive Development Program, that was profoundly influential across the profession. Everything that we did here in the Park Service in the Interpretive Development Program — no one else out there was doing this. We started talking about meanings and relevance and intellectual/emotional connections. And connecting the tangible resources of national parks with their intangible meanings and the big universal concepts that they represented. We started this professional dialog and terminology that — we'll talk more about this later, I'm sure — but even while there was resistance within our professional workforce to change — because that always happens, right? Across the broader profession, people were eating this up like candy. Because no one else had been able to codify a lot of this before. Everybody talked about Tilden across the profession. But this was really blowing it open. This was blowing open a lot about what Tilden's principles really meant.

Betsy Ehrlich: Can you define the broader profession a little bit?

Rebecca Lacome: Yes. So, all the large and growing, especially during that time period, realm of informal learning in museums and parks at all levels — local, county, state, national and international, lots of international interest in what we were doing. Zoos, aquariums, any place where people encounter heritage resources, or stories about heritage resources. "Heritage" being both natural and cultural heritage. The National Association of Interpretation is and has been our professional organization that I think about a fourth of its membership has been National Park Service. But all the other government agencies that do this type of informal learning, informal education, and many government agencies also do formal education, working in formal curriculum programs with school groups. All of that, coming under this broad umbrella for the National Association of Interpretation.

Rebecca Lacome: I can remember belonging to that group from its early beginnings. But really, where the movers and shakers were in the Park Service. It [NAI] was still a small organization. They were talking about Tilden, and they were starting to dabble in training. They had national and local conferences at the time were kind of the extent of that.

Rebecca Lacome: Tim Merriman, who was the executive director for many, many years, came to one of our peer certifier workshops, which we had every year. Training, calibrating our peer review workforce out in the field. And he sat there as — and every year, we would push the envelope with that group of our understanding as professionals about what we do, and then plough that into the training, and our understanding of the standards. He sat with us

for a week. I want to say it was 1999 or 2000, I'm not sure. He stood up at the end when he was getting ready to leave and he said, "You people need to publish this stuff. This is amazing what you're doing in terms of the whole meanings-based approach. If you don't publish it, somebody else will." We're Park Service employees. We don't publish things. We've just got to get it out there and do it on the ground.

Rebecca Lacome: So other than our sort of training outlines, which we had for each of the benchmark competencies, we didn't have big narrative explanations of this. It was very shortly thereafter, later in the year 2000, I think, that NAI published its first definition of interpretation using a lot of our terminology. They did their own little twist on it, but it really was building off of that notion of intellectual-emotional connections with the meanings and [significance] of the resource.

Rebecca Lacome: That whole notion of connections, the notion of appealing to people's intellects as well as their hearts, that just went crazy across the broad profession. It's what people really needed in order to latch onto why we do what we do, and in order to figure out how we're going to do that better. They [NAI] began to develop their own peer review program, which is still going. They began to develop a curriculum for, sort of entry-level curriculum. They are in the process right now, as we speak, of finally at long last evolving their standards forward. Because they're still using standards that we stopped using eight or ten years ago.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, the growth of these peer review and coaching classes that are taking place, how much of the Park Service is that reaching in that period of time?

Rebecca Lacome: Right. Well, an interesting thing is that early on, Dave Dahlen and Corky Mayo had, with the enthusiastic support of the initial core of rangers who are working with them in the "Interpretive (R)evolution," and those of us who came along as the first peer reviewers, this was going to be mandatory. Working through the benchmark competencies which were tied to the position description at the 5-7-9 level was initially intended to be mandatory, in that you couldn't work through the career field, you went from a 5 to a 7 and a 7 to a 9, without working through these benchmark competencies and submitting a product for peer review.

Rebecca Lacome: [Laughs] It was about a year and a half into us promoting that that the program got its hand slapped. There was a group grievance filed in the National Capital Region. The interpreters on the Mall said, "You can't do that!" They filed a grievance and in fact the OPM said, no, you can't do that. You can't require them to do this as a basis for promotion or any

grade qualifying action. Okay. But I remember Dave Dahlen, they were pretty crestfallen, and David Larsen, pretty crestfallen by all of that.

Rebecca Lacome: As it turned out, I think that was for the better. Because the harder we tried to use the competencies and the standards as a stick, the more, somewhat understandably, people pushed back across the Park Service and their profession. And unfortunately, there was some hard feelings that developed because of that. People feeling threatened, and that they weren't going to get their next pay level. Even though it was all peer-initiated and peer-driven, and everyone was invited to become one of those peers, it was still seen by many as sort of an elitist bunch of people up there. And you know, Washington and Harpers Ferry are trying to tell us how to do our work.

Rebecca Lacome: Since no one had ever had anything like this imposed on them before, it's sort of easy looking back to see how there was a lot of resistance. So, there was sort of two camps. There were interpreters who were all over it because they loved the notions, they loved the philosophy, they loved the idea of having standards. And then there were another group of folks who were more the traditionalists who just really had a hard time seeing themselves in those new standards and the new training and were very resistant to change. A lot of the reason why was because we were asking them to give up some of their authority as the "sage on the stage," and to start using techniques to help audiences discover and explore meanings, rather than telling them what these places mean. That was really the crux of it. You can't impose meanings on people. People have to find their own meanings.

Rebecca Lacome: David Larsen was the big philosopher of the interpretive development program for all those many years. Hired by Dave Dahlen, they were the two employees in the program when I came along and got my initial detail to help them run the peer review program, which grew so fast they couldn't handle it. So, I came along and there were stacks of videotapes in Dave Dahlen's office. He was about ready to go crazy because it quickly became more than he could manage.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, what you're describing, it sounds like you had a really key role in being a close interface with all of these materials that are coming in and the people who are producing them. In order to even recognize that the camp that was not supportive of this was the concern that they were giving up their authority. Because otherwise, how would you know that? That that was what was the barrier for acceptance and participation.

Rebecca Lacome: I don't think we knew that initially. I think we understood, and somewhat empathetically, because Dave Dahlen was one of the most empathetic

people I ever met. Understanding how people could resist this kind of change. Because it's human nature to resist change. And especially when there's this — what you do is steeped in tradition in the National Park Service as an interpretive ranger. So, I think we had some level of empathy for that. But we also were kind of immersed so much in the need for the change ourselves and struggled at times to understand why people were so resistant. I think it wasn't until later, when we started to actually make the next move, the one [were ready but?] into blowing the philosophy open even wider, I think we realized where the real sticking point had been was with sharing authority as park interpreters.

Lu Ann Jones: Can I ask, too, about this time in '96 I was in the college classroom. So, certainly, the evolution that you're describing is very similar in all sorts of education settings. So how do you think the Park Service, you say the Park Service was influenced by general education theory, philosophy. But where else? I mean, it seems like it's almost in the ether that people in the Park Service were beginning to see that, I mean, were they saying we're getting a different kind of visitor, we have different goals with our interpretive programming? What's the stew that really is — we have different people coming in to be interpreters, who want a more capacious way of interacting with the public? I mean, what is the stew that's really fomenting this change?

Rebecca Lacome: Uh, yes [laughter]. Yes, to all of that. And much more. You know, one of the astonishing things looking back on my career is realizing how things were accelerating, and that that was largely a factor of technology. So as our ability to communicate and the ways that we communicated were changing, I think communication strategies were just blown open across the learning spectrum. And you know, good teachers and professors were on it, right? In terms of the Socratic method and real-life application, helping students begin to understand, well why do we need to learn this mathematical formula or this periodic table or whatever? I think there was still a lot of resistance there, too, in formal education. And to some extent, there still is.

Rebecca Lacome: But nobody was really exploring it for free choice learning, for informal learning, for people coming to parks. The Park Service was on the cutting edge of that.

Rebecca Lacome: I've got to say that one of the biggest blessings of my career, but also another reason I understand it was harder for the field, is we were sitting here, I can't remember how it's exactly been described, but in our "ivory tower," I guess, on Camp Hill, this very historic place in this very historic building that oozes with meaning and National Park Service significance, having these amazing conversations amongst our little staff here. And

pulling in these big stakeholder groups for these amazing conversations, especially really initially based on how do we help accomplish the Park Service mission, which is a pretty big deal, through these communication methods?

Rebecca Lacome: Dave Dahlen was the facilitator and the great orchestrator. David Larsen, who was the first training specialist, Dave Dahlen was training manager. Dave Larsen was a training specialist. And he was this great philosophical mind. He has oftentimes been sort of considered to be the second Tilden in interpretation. He would just spend hours and hours thinking about this. He'd go for long walks and he'd think about it. Then he'd come back and have great conversations. The field didn't get the benefit of those great philosophical conversations, unless they happened to be lucky enough to be in one of his big stakeholder groups.

Rebecca Lacome: What really blew that open in later years was that we had these ways to communicate without having to be in the same room. In the mid-90s and early 2000s, it hinged a lot on being together and having these fantastic conversations where we were figuring out what does that look like in informal learning, free choice learning. People are on vacation [laughs]. And beginning to see, it took a while for it to sink in, but I think beginning to see attendance starting to drop off a little bit at formal programs. And starting to ask why. And seeing parks as, you know, we started under Al Gore, Clinton/Gore that initiated the first big, started to downsize government initiatives.

Betsy Ehrlich: Reinventing Government.

Rebecca Lacome: Yeah. And the staff started to shrink across the Park Service. One of the first places where they always cut positions was in interpretation and education, because that was seen as sort of fluff in those days, not recognized for its critical role in preservation. But by linking to the owners, the public. Um, where was I? [Laughs] I'm sorry. I'm surprised this hasn't happened more [laughs].

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I have one more question. My experience in a formal education setting is that when you do let go of some of your authority, at that point you really have to know your subject, because students can take you anywhere. And that must be doubly true in an informal setting where you don't know who's going to walk up any given day, any given hour. So, did it begin to place different demands — well, clearly it placed different demands on the interpreters. But in terms of just their subject matter expertise, as well as the way in which they engaged audiences.

Rebecca Lacome: That's a great segue into what I sort of think is the big third move forward, the big third evolutionary movement that's happened in the last five years,

sort of -ish. Actually, no, going back farther. Time flies! I would say going back to 2010ish, maybe, and a little bit before that. And that was the notion of what we have come to call audience-centered interpretation, or learner-centered, where, as you aptly point out, the subject matter knowledge of the interpreter, because they can't just do a canned thing, right? So, it does become about letting the audience have at least some opportunity to lead the sort of direction or trajectory of the way that we explore the meanings, based on what's meaningful and important to them, or what they're noticing or what they're seeing.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, you're here at Mather at this point in time.

Rebecca Lacome: Right.

Betsy Ehrlich: The beginning of this.

Rebecca Lacome: Right.

Betsy Ehrlich: And riding the transition through. Because you came to Mather as a training specialist.

Rebecca Lacome: I came in '97. Volunteering first, then on a detail, then on a term, and then into the position that David Larsen had had as a training specialist.

Betsy Ehrlich: So really at the beginning of this second phase. So, you [unclear].

Rebecca Lacome: At the beginning of the meaning-based phase. I wasn't in on the group that developed that first Module 101 curriculum, but I came in as they were first implementing it and developing the standards and the peer review and coaching built off of that. So definitely tracked just about, and really when we first started to use the term "Interpretive Development Program" was about the second year that I started working here. And so, all the way through. And then that—

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Rebecca Lacome: — realization that, which we began to see for a couple of reasons that interpreters were not only moving from being "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," but what that really involved was a new set of facilitator skills that we hadn't really emphasized, codified or taught before. So, what we started calling interpretive facilitation. That would allow the interpreter to use their knowledge in a whole different way, by really helping the audience explore together. And it was about mutual learning rather than just learning from the interpreter. The interpreter's going to still use information. They're still going to use their good skills and techniques that they've had over the years. They're still going to want

to have something akin to a theme, but we kind of call it something different now. But it's going to be more exploratory with the audience, rather than a didactic "here's what this place is and means," and "what you need to know" and "what you need to think and feel."

Rebecca Lacome: I want to say that the best interpreters were doing this [audience-centered interpretation] at some level all along. But we started two things that codified the move to audience-centered experiences and a learner-centered approach and this group of facilitation skills. One was [interpreting] climate change. This big, huge, audacious, controversial topic that loomed large over all national parks. David Larsen started thinking about this and developing at a time, the Park Service was also at the time getting into the whole realm of civic engagement and trying to understand what that meant. That term quickly — we stopped using that term [civic engagement] really after about two or three years because it was loaded. It had a gazillion different interpretations inside and outside the Park Service. And we began talking more about audience experience and audience engagement.

Rebecca Lacome: But David Larsen had really charted out, he did a Venn diagram that we tested as we began to do climate change communication-interpretation training. It was our poster child issue for, you can't just go tell people the facts about climate change. You can't change people's minds on a topic like that. We want to think that we can, but we can't. And so there have to be other communication strategies. And Larsen talked about parks for climate change, and then for all of our topics that we interpret, a range of audience engagement strategies.

Rebecca Lacome: So, we're still going to have some traditional programming. We're still going to do bird walks and we still have people coming, [largely] the ones who already care about and deeply love this place who just want to learn more. They want to know the geologic story and they want to know the in-depth information about the Civil War troop movements, etcetera. They're hungry, they're sponges. We don't want to forget them.

Rebecca Lacome: They're important constituents and stakeholders. They have been "the choir" all along, right? They get stewardship. But they're not the large percentage of the American public. So, we want to provide those more traditional learning opportunities, but we want to start pushing ourselves as professionals to start moving across a spectrum where it's more learner-centered. So, there would be some sort of in between types of experiences where the interpreter builds into more traditional programming opportunities for audience expression, for audience contribution, for audience meanings to emerge. And that means conversation. That means dialog. That means discussion.

Rebecca Lacome: On up then to we began to explore the realm of the full facilitated dialog, where it's all audience-driven using a strategy that we learned from the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. Using an "arc of dialog," a fantastic and easily teachable model of how to work with an audience who've opted in — they know what they're getting themselves into — is a conversation or dialog about a thorny issue, about a controversial topic or a difficult subject. All parks have those. We've tended in the past to ignore them. But with things like climate change, or moving into the Civil War sesquicentennial stuff, all the civil rights issues, and everything freaking happening in the world [laughs] and being fomented in social media and across the media landscape, we can't just sit and ignore those issues in the national parks.

Rebecca Lacome: In fact, national parks are the places to have those conversations. They are the premier, primo places, because we can tie our understanding of history represented in these nationally significant places and landscapes to where we are now as individuals and as a society. And where, what does that mean for the future? What did we learn from the past and the present that makes us be better citizens, that helps us establish a more healthy planet and just society in the future? Big stuff. The big stuff, right?

Lu Ann Jones: Or even define what a citizen is.

Rebecca Lacome: Exactly! Exactly.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, you say "we."

Rebecca Lacome: Uh-huh.

Betsy Ehrlich: I think sometimes the "we" is the big Park Service as we're talking about as an agency. Sometimes I think "we" is Dave Dahlen, Dave Larsen, you, and others here at Mather, because you're the brainchild behind driving the direction of this program. So, I want to make sure we capture like—

Rebecca Lacome: Who's "we"? [Laughs].

Betsy Ehrlich: Who's "we," and where your contribution [is] within this. Because it is a big wave of change. And I'm interested in your role in that, and kind of your either comfort or discomfort. Because obviously it's a major change to your career—

Rebecca Lacome: Yes.

Betsy Ehrlich: — and where you think things are going, and where you've been. How do you characterize your own sort of experience with this as you talk about this shift into this more audience-centered, focused interpretation?

Rebecca Lacome: That's a great question and I'm going to absolutely go there. Just a little connecting thread that I want to put in. As we moved in that direction, the direction where we are now with audience-centered experiences, a great tragedy occurred in the untimely and early death of Dave Larsen at age 50. We lost a great mind. And that was a shockwave across the whole profession. He was well known in NAI and other agencies and across the museum profession. And we had to stop, and it was a bucket of ice water, really. We had to stop. We had just been exploring, just getting into audience engagement, this range of audience engagement strategies, what did that mean? Test driving that with interpreting climate change. And we lost David.

Rebecca Lacome: Katie Bliss came in as our [new] training manager at that point. And she'd been working with our program at one of our university partners in developing our big coaching program that we had. We had a big, broad, stakeholder-driven coaching program that paralleled the peer review program. And shortly thereafter we brought in John Rudy, as David Larsen actually had this gift for identifying these talented interns on the parks. I think John was our third really gifted intern that we had, and we were able to convert his position into a permanent position with our program so that he was our on-the-ground, he was our park ranger. While the rest of us were sort of now part of the training community officially in our jobs, John Rudy has been our on-the-ground, doing a lot of experimental stuff in Harpers Ferry park here and etcetera. And he's young and he's not afraid of experimentation and he's a social media guru, etcetera.

Rebecca Lacome: So that became our team. And as we started to move into this new realm, I'd heard about from a couple of folks [about] dialog stuff that was starting to happen where they were partnering with the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. And I hooked Katie and our program up with that, and we brought them in. And they helped us develop some initial training for facilitated dialog. It was a little bit of a cart before the horse, because full-on facilitated dialog is a specialized skillset.

Rebecca Lacome: It does require audiences to know what they're getting into. It doesn't fit everywhere in a park schedule or in an appropriate venue for audiences. And it works best when interpreters are well-trained in those facilitation skills, the park will set aside and advertise a special program of facilitated dialog and give the audience an opportunity to know what they're getting into. There's ground rules involved because the conversation is about sensitive and controversial topics. And there's a whole methodology for that. And it's a good, solid methodology.

Rebecca Lacome: But we Matherites go out full throttle with this stuff. Again, we had early adopters. We had our amazing interpreters out there who were just eating it up. They were all over it, they thought oh, wow, we really need this, we've got issues on immigration and civil rights and war and slavery and all these things that are swirling issues in the modern world. And, of course, climate change and other environmental atrocities. And we need this.

Rebecca Lacome: But then we had a whole lot of people who were like, "What?! This is not what I do as an interpreter." And as happened throughout the early days of the Interpretive Development Program, and again when we started moving into audience engagement dialog, these urban myths develop out there, and people start adopting and spreading these rumors that oh, "so we're all going to do facilitated dialog now. So, you're telling me I can't do my traditional programs. We're only going to do facilitated dialog, and that's not what I'd signed on for."

Rebecca Lacome: To our great chagrin, we tried so hard to nip all those naysayers, to nip that in the bud. But it's out there. It's still out there. And you can go to just about any park or region and you can find people who are saying, "No. This is not what I do. This is not what I signed up for. This is not what interpretation is about or for." Many of those, and I don't want to falsely categorize people. But some of those people are still stuck back in information-based interpretation.

Rebecca Lacome: So, coming back around to your question, the very long answer to your question, is wrestling with that understanding of shared authority. And I think we began to see that when we started moving into dialog. Really as we developed that and moved and took a step back from full facilitated dialog to what we call the ACE [Audience Centered Experience] training, which is sort of where we are right now. And that is a much more easily transferable use of those same skills in little ways. So, the pop-ups where interpreters facilitate audience expression in a variety of personal and non-personal services. Just small bits of opportunity for easy dialogic questions in traditional guided walks and tours, and just encouraging people to start to ramp into the more learner-centered, audience-centered realm.

Rebecca Lacome: To take baby steps where they don't feel comfortable with it and not be expected to have this full-on skillset. To go there, to develop those skills, if that's what they need, or if that's what their supervisor says they need [laughs] because of their park situation.

Rebecca Lacome: But we've backed it up. And the ACE training is much more accessible and has been really widely popular. Not to say that there still aren't the

naysayers out there. But the ACE class, the audience-centered experiences class has really been much better received.

Rebecca Lacome: So, in that transition, we really began to see that a big crux of the issue is letting go of authority. And Larsen talked and wrote a lot about shared authority, and what do you call it, "shared agency." And using the word "agency" not as referred to ourselves, as a government agency or bureau, but in the more broadly philosophical definition of that term as all Americans have agency or should have agency. They should have voice when it comes to their national parks. If we really believe that these places belong to the American public — "find your park," this is your park — then we can't always be speaking for them or to them. It really needs to be collaborative. And we're a long ways from completely figuring out what that means. But we've made some great strides. And I see where we are now at the edge of a related bundle of skills that we've been working with the Sites of Conscience again on. And that's community engagement training. I think some parks are really making great strides here with community outreach and engaging communities across the spectrum of what we do. Citizen science was one early effort out there. But moving into the communication realm is really more collaborative planning, collaborative media design and development, and this very wonderful opportunity for collaborative, interpretive programming in all kinds of creative ways that interpreters are coming up with for this. Giving the audience voice.

Rebecca Lacome: One of the big changes — there was a paper written that was initiated by the Washington Office of Interpretation and Development when Julia Washburn was our Chief of Interpretation. Actually, she became our Associate Director, and we had the first Associate Director for Interpretation/Education ever. And it was a study about, it was done by a university partner codifying a lot of these changes. One of the things these changes in society are coming from that are influencing the change in the profession of interpretation/education. But the big things that she came up with were these changes in learning theory, and people learn different now than they did in the past. You know, [unclear] largely social media, access 24-hour news cycle and accessed information was obviously going to change the way that people learn.

Rebecca Lacome: They don't need to hear the facts from rangers, because it's right there on their phone. They need more of an opportunity to have a meaningful experience, and the interpreter becoming the guide for that, the facilitator for that. So, learning theory, the way people learn, the technology, the whole notion of participatory learning, self-expression, personal preference and then this other big thing of changing demographics, were

all big influences moving us in this direction. And I think we don't know where that goes next. Everything changing so fast. One of the big [challenges], and we may talk more about this later on, but how do we keep up?

Betsy Ehrlich: Well, and that sort of leads into a question, I guess, about all these changes that you've been through. It seems to me you seem still like super excited about—

Rebecca Lacome: [Laughs] You think?

Betsy Ehrlich: — the next, as things continue to go forward. So, you've had an amazing capacity to not only ride and help direct this change, but not be, not feel pushed aside by it. All the work that you've developed for each of these stages, you're always into something new and you don't seem uncomfortable letting the old go, and just pulling forward the things that are most relevant and still maintaining excitement about the future. And at the same time, we're still losing staff and we're still losing funding. So, tell me about how you maintain that incredible enthusiasm and excitement about where this agency is going in this regard.

Rebecca Lacome: You know, and I realize that I still say "we" like I'm still working here [laughs]. And [I am now a] volunteer here. But I don't think I'll ever stop saying "we." It wasn't just a job. It was my life. I've really, and Betsy knows it, I'm a very spiritual person. And when I had that epiphany at 13, I think I later realized when I was in college that it was a spiritual gift. That it was a calling. It was my personal mission. And you don't walk away from that when you retire [laughs]. So even though for a variety of reasons it was a good time, it was at the time when I needed to retire, I'm not going to go into all those personal reasons, but it was a hard decision for me because I am so tied to the "we" of all this. It's in my blood. It's in my heart and soul. Both the Park Service and the profession. I never wanted to do this for another agency or another entity. And I never wanted to do anything else in the Park Service, though there were plenty of opportunities. I never wanted to leave here once I got here. And people kept saying, "Oh, you need to go do a detail. Be a chief. Get the next level up." And it's like, why would I do that when I love what I'm doing here?

Betsy Ehrlich: And you did have a wide variety of diverse jobs. I was going to ask you, what jobs have you not done, other than like leadership roles? But you've been, you've touched on a number of—

Rebecca Lacome: I've been an acting training manager. I was an acting chief of interpretation. I got enough of a taste of those things to realize that's not where I'm needed, and that's not where my skillset and my passion are. I can lead if I need to. I can do the supervisory administrative stuff. But my

heart is really in the work itself. So, I'm going to credit that along with, there is, and you know, the people in this profession that I relate most to, I'm sitting across the table from one of them, Betsy, because you're one of those people who is a lifelong learner yourself. It's just a part of your DNA, right? So, learning something new or seeing how you moved forward and become better at what you do, it's never threatening. It's not always easy, but it's never threatening and it's always exciting. Dave Dahlen and Dave Larsen were like that. Many people that I've worked with in my career that were role models to me for that.

Rebecca Lacome: Every time we put together a stakeholder group here, they were the ones that stepped up. They wanted to be a part of that conversation. By and large, they were the ones who embraced that notion of thinking ahead of what's next, of how do we get better? We want to be better because there's a lot at stake. We love these places. We love national parks. We want to see them preserved. We love our audiences. We want them to have awesome experiences. And we know we're doing great things, but we see a lot of ways that it's still not quite working the way we'd hoped and envisioned. So how do we move forward?

Rebecca Lacome: So, for me it was just, I just always felt like a sponge. I probably got that from my mom because she was a lifelong learner. She never got to go to college or anything. I've just always been a sponge. So, an opportunity to learn, an opportunity to grow. And then when I realized that a big part of my passion was helping other people embrace that and helping develop other people and empowering other interpreters to empower their audiences? Oh my gosh! Yeah. I'm kind of in heaven with that, even though I can't quite take the grueling grind of the daily work anymore.

Rebecca Lacome: So, I have had a gift, really, in this career to be able to embrace that passion, to wrestle with where the changes need to come and be a part of the brain trust for figuring that out when the field doesn't have that time, that luxury a lot of times. It does fall often on the people in the career field offices. And since the advent of competency-based training, it really has fallen in the lap of Learning and Development to identify what those core skills are and the philosophy, the backbone of why we do what we do. So, it's just been a gift to be able to be part of that.

Rebecca Lacome: And not just for myself and my own use but conveying that. And being an encourager, and being a coach and a mentor, that's just a gift.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, we have—

Rebecca Lacome: Yack, yack, yack, yack, yack, yack [laughter].

Betsy Ehrlich: No, this is great. I have all these questions [several talking] this is fantastic. I know you want to get to a little bit more about Dave Dahlen. But I want to follow up on this question, because it seems to follow sort of where you're going and your recent transition into retirement. So, you as a training specialist, you knew a lot of people, you touched a lot of people across the Park Service and for your retirement people from around the service shared their stories. And that was presented to you at retirement. And I just wonder if you could describe some of the stories and what they mean to you as the Park Service reflected back to you what you gave to them.

Rebecca Lacome: You're going to make me cry now, because the retirement party that Katie and John hosted for me, which I had long ago said, you know, I had so many friends, colleagues, across the Park Service. We'd get together now by conference call and webinar; we've been doing that very successfully in the Interpretive Development Program for several years now to do the big stakeholder work when we no longer have the training funds to bring everybody here. And it just, you know, I can't imagine with a retirement party and celebrating my career without all those people. So, I said, "well, we do a webinar for everything else, let's do a webinar for my retirement party." And Katie's like, "Yes, we're going to do that."

Rebecca Lacome: So, she and John set it up. They asked people to send stories, postcards, letters, and to tune in on the day if they were able and talk to me in person with the webinar [laughs]. We put it up on the big screen in the lower classroom, or in the upper classroom, in the iconic upper classroom. And I was overwhelmed. I really was overwhelmed.

Rebecca Lacome: I pulled up a couple of examples because you asked that question in the notes here. And I was trying to think of some specific examples. My overall impression was, but just really sort of, I guess I knew at some level, because I got feedback all along during my career from people who were so appreciative of my encouragement and my coaching and stuff. Let me just see if I can find these two examples that I pulled up here.

Rebecca Lacome: This is one from Resi Polixa who is one of our newer younger interpreters, rock stars. She's at Lowell. And she really embraced the whole audience-centered experience training and dialog, and she's running like crazy with it.

Rebecca Lacome: She had a good supervisor in Tess Shatzer who encouraged her, who was one of our early peer reviewers. There was a relational thing about all of us across time. But I think this is, I had lots of comments similar to this one, where people actually talked about how I influenced their careers. And while I knew I was influencing the trajectory of interpretation all

these years, I was emotionally taken aback, I guess, by people saying when I retired how much I impacted their career.

Rebecca Lacome: Resi said, "We've only known each other a short time, but everything we've done and all you've contributed to the IDP in the field have immeasurably shaped my entire career and influenced the motivation and attitude I take to my own work. I want to thank you for your inspiration and the way you've pushed me and interpreters across the field to continually improve, reach higher, think deeper, and continue to become more wholly and inclusively relevant. Something that you've given me that I hope to share with others is your mentorship, your guidance in the field, your encouragement for every person you meet to grow, and your hugs. You give the best hugs." [laughter]

Rebecca Lacome: One term that people have referred to me over the years is Mom. I don't have kids. I chose not to have kids because my profession is, you know, my child all these years. Michael and I decided shortly after we got married that no, we were just going to do the career thing. And when I was coordinating the Peer Review Program, I had just daily contact with all these folks across the field. The supervisors who were supervising—

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Rebecca Lacome: — the people who were doing the peer review work and submitting the product for peer review, the front liners themselves, and this wonderful cadre, this growing cadre that got to be a huge group of peer reviewers over time before we discontinued that program. And I was "Mom." (laughs) Sometimes I was their nemesis, too, because I was always having to nudge them. "Okay, you're late with your review" or, "Come on, you're supposed to get comments back on this." And I was always sending them more work (laughs). But the opportunities where I would get to get on the phone with somebody and they were having a bad day, or their supervisor was awful, or their career had taken a turn for the worse and they didn't know what to do, and the opportunity just on a personal level to coach those people and encourage them. I think I just have a natural affinity, a natural gift as an encourager. But I could give out the tough love when I needed to as well (laughter).

Betsy Ehrlich: Well, you mentioned wanting to get back to Dave Dahlen in particular.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah.

Betsy Ehrlich: And so, I want to make sure we circle back around to that, because I wonder if some of his influence isn't what you're carrying forward.

Rebecca Lacome: Well, yeah, you had asked the question about key people that influenced my work and my career. So, before Dave there was, I had a really amazing supervisor at Mammoth Cave when I was cutting my chops, right? Her name was Chris Hanley and she was totally overworked. I hardly got to meet with her that often. But when I did, she had the most amazing coaching skills. And she really inspired me that I wanted to be able to do that for other interpreters.

Rebecca Lacome: There is a method for coaching that is effective and a method that isn't (laughs). And when I talk to other coworkers who didn't get that from their supervisors, who didn't get that good coaching, I felt really blessed and lucky and I wanted to carry that forward.

Rebecca Lacome: John Batzer was my supervisor and the Chief of the Interpretation/Resource Management division at Homestead, my "little park" experience. And he brought me in because I was an interpreter to run the resource management and do interpretation. Because he was a resource manager, but he was running the big program. And he wanted somebody that would kind of balance out his natural resource expertise. Which I always thought was just an amazing thought and idea. And we were a team. I never felt like I worked for him, but always felt like I worked with him. He was fun, he was enthusiastic. He had contagious enthusiasm about everything we did. And he trusted me. He would help me learn my skills, and then he trusted me to go out and do it. He was a great example of that.

Rebecca Lacome: I had some bad ones, too, that were not so good examples, that taught me how to not do things. But then when I came to Mather, first for that first peer review workshop, although I'd seen him do training before that for Interpretive Skills. But then as he became my supervisor, Dave Dahlen, amazing. Just an amazing person. His patience, his grace under pressure, his ability to make everyone feel included. His skills as a facilitator to make sure all voices were heard, incorporated. Almost to a flaw. It was hard to get things done sometimes, because he was so conscientious about that, of not wanting people to feel excluded, and really believing in the power of collaboration.

Rebecca Lacome: I learned about group process from him in ways that became absolutely critical to the work we were doing. He went off to become a chief, and then he came back as a superintendent of Mather for a while. I just always continued to learn from him right up to the day he retired. And Mike Watson, who was a superintendent here as well. I just was blessed to have that leadership example.

Rebecca Lacome: David Larsen was my supervisor then after Dave Dahlen left. Dave Larsen became training manager. And I moved into David Larsen's training specialist position. And we were both so deeply passionate about the work. But we didn't always see eye to eye on things. I want to say that he was the big philosophical influence. I influenced the philosophy. I know that I did. But where my role then quickly, we realized, or I realized, that it was in pulling in that field experience, and the field voice, that I had this direct link to. And I sort of had this deep level of empathy and compassion for the field that sometimes other people didn't have. And so, I learned to embrace that passion.

Rebecca Lacome: And so, I learned to embrace that passion. And I learned from David Larsen how to embrace change and the importance of that. And the need to continuously be evolving. And of course, interpretive theory. That was, we lived in the golden age. I know there will always continue to be evolution. But I think those years, the '90s and the early 2000s, people will look back on that as the golden age. Tilden revisited; Tilden brought to a full understanding. And I think now we can actually move a little bit beyond old Tilden because of that (laughs).

Betsy Ehrlich: So, if that's the golden age, it doesn't mean that we've diminished since then. In fact, that's really just setting the stage a foundation for something.

Rebecca Lacome: Mmhmm. Yes.

Betsy Ehrlich: You're not seeing a decline since then.

Rebecca Lacome: No. No. There's a "but" to that, though. Because I think the next wave is really in learning the community engagement and the audience engagement. The collaborative strategies. We're working on the interpretive strategies; how do you bring visitor voices into interpretive experience? But I think we have a lot more to learn about how to be wholly collaborative, and to bring in all communities with a voice, all stakeholders and interest groups, appeal across generations and across the various interest spectrums, from people who don't think they care at all about a certain park or topic, and finding ways that help them see oh, yes, this is a part of my collective historical understanding experience that I need to understand and embrace, and here's how I do connect to it.

Rebecca Lacome: And then continuing to nurture those people who are already there and helping them expand what they think they already know and understand because they already love these places, to hear and include those voices and perspectives that they never would hear otherwise, because we're over here focused on what we already love, and not understanding why some people don't think they love it, or why some voices aren't heard and

included yet, but could be important in our understanding of what these places mean. So, I think that's the next big wave.

Rebecca Lacome: My "but" there gets to some of your questions about challenges, and challenges that we've always had. But moving forward, I see some big, difficult challenges. The place where we are in history politically right now. Of course, the Park Service is a political football, like all federal agencies.

Rebecca Lacome: And I've often counseled young interpreters, you're going to have to be prepared to ride that wave if you want to work for this agency (laughs). You know, the next government shutdown is only a coin flip away here. But I think a couple of things, the staffing has been deeply diminished. There's not enough people to go around. And we've seen the transfer of what we'd always hoped would be a professional level of expertise and training for interpreters and educators in the National Park Service. It's sort of the vanishing full performance ranger issue that we've had that's been escalating. So that those people who got through our measly career ladder to a GS9 and hit the ceiling of where it's very hard to go farther unless you go into supervision and management, those folks diminishing in numbers to the point of where the people doing the frontline work now are not the professional, permanent staff, or even seasonal staff in a lot of cases. They're volunteers, they're interns, they're cooperative association folks, they're partners. And many of those folks can do a great job. But they come and go.

Rebecca Lacome: We've always had this critical issue with our seasonals is that, we just start to get them well trained and they're gone. So, it's very hard for us to keep that professional level and have that expectation that we can attain that with our situation right now. And it's been, it's been driving the frontline work to lower and lower position levels to the point of where now in many parks, we don't even see park rangers doing interpretive programming anymore. It's people in volunteer shirts. So that's something, what do we do with that? Many of them want to learn. They're open to understanding some of this, but they don't have, but it's not their life. It's not what they do all the time. They have another life. They're volunteers [laughs]. I'm one of those people now. Picking and choosing where I'm going to engage.

Betsy Ehrlich: So, if the agency lives up to this promise of what audience-centered interpretation can do for the country and for the parks, given the situation we're in with so few employees actually doing that work, what do you think, what will the Park Service look like as we transition into people who are coming in for such short periods of time with something like that? The Common Learning Portal is going to be the avenue to sort of rescue

the situation because we can provide connection and activity and training for people that are not even in the Park Service?

Rebecca Lacome: Yeah. It's a tool. The Common Learning Portal is a big step forward in being able to share knowledge and resources. And a big part of that, which we're so thankful is now available that we can invite people to join the forums and have the conversation about the work. And we've transferred much of our sort of service-wide, national level coaching element into an online peer review coaching program through the Common Learning Portal. And it's kind of exploded during this last summer. Instead of bringing stakeholder groups in, we're training them to be coaches and peer reviewers [online in the CLP]. But it's not for a certification. It's for just the conversation and the expanding your understanding of the work, encouraging each other to keep pushing, pushing the envelope, and improving what we do.

Rebecca Lacome: But even that, I see a crisis of, because the Interpretive Development Program has always been based on this field involvement, of sort of a collateral duty that these folks are given permission by their supervisors to spend a portion of their time not working specifically on something that's just for the park, but contributing to this larger effort. And one of the reasons why we discontinued the original peer certification program was because it wasn't sustainable. Our folks didn't have time to do that anymore [laughs]. That was one of the reasons why we discontinued it and why it became unsustainable. But that's even more of a crisis now is we haven't had nearly as many applicants sign up for like our annual workshop which we're still having now for our online peer collaborators. Parks can't let them go. Or they are the supervisors and the chiefs now, and they can't let themselves go because things will fall apart if they leave or if they — so they're still getting at themselves, unfortunately still having to do it. Some of them did it on their own time. But it's becoming really difficult to recruit for that. You know the folks out there want to do it, but it's becoming harder and harder for them to carve out the space and time for that.

Rebecca Lacome: So, I see that as sort of a crisis point. Because what goes along with that, then, on the Learning and Development side of things is not a rosy picture, either. Because the same sort of staffing crisis has hit Learning and Development really hard. Like right now, many places across the Park Service, there's so many vacant positions. And people do take detailing into details into details. And gaping holes in consistency in carrying programs forward. And that's hitting Learning and Development really hard.

Rebecca Lacome: Then they continuously in Learning and Development try and reorganize things. I want to say that Learning and Development is sort of the stepchild of the National Park Service. And it's been in different directorates. It always gets lots of lip service about how important it is to equip employees to do professional level work. But it's never been resourced at the level that it needs to be, and not even at the level it is in other government organizations. That's a whole other conversation about why that is, or why we speculate why that is, looking back in my career. But that's a crisis point if what they're talking about now is de-specializing training specialists, so that we would not work for a career field. That there would be just sort of generic training specialists. And they develop training resources and training opportunities using the subject matter expertise of the people in the field. That's a great idea. But the people in the field really are losing less and less capacity to engage in those broader efforts for the good of the whole agency. Let alone, you know, in our case, the whole profession.

Rebecca Lacome: We are looking to the National Association of Interpretation to step up their game. They're trying, but it's hard, it's really hard. And they don't have staffing and resources, either. And we're hoping some of our university partners can help fill in the gaps. But it's even become challenging to maintain those ongoing relationships. So, lots of challenges ahead.

Betsy Ehrlich: In a potential reorganization of the Department of Interior, which you know, in my first sort of blush of that idea in thinking about your description of how the influence of what this group of people here did in the '90s, and that influence went out to the broader NAI, which included probably most of the rest of the Department of Interior and beyond state, local, zoos, etcetera. It seems to me that that wouldn't necessarily be a scary transition because this, the work that's been going on is moving ahead now is something that could almost easily expand to the other agencies, if it hasn't already through NAI.

Rebecca Lacome: It's been, yeah. Yeah. And other agencies have come to us to help them, because they don't have, the Park Service has the premier interpretive efforts among government agencies.

Betsy Ehrlich: So maybe there's some opportunity in that reorganization—

Rebecca Lacome: There could be. That's a good point.

Betsy Ehrlich: Maybe the generic training specialist is a bad move. But if a reorganization that pools resources together for training across the whole Department of Interior might bring some more energy into training in general, just by reorganizing and consolidating.

Rebecca Lacome: One can hope [laughter].

Betsy Ehrlich: So, we skipped over some specific questions here, and I just want to give you an opportunity to skim through things that you might have written notes about or that we haven't touched on yet that you definitely want to make sure that we cover.

Rebecca Lacome: I'd like to do the, you know, "what do you think are your key contributions." And there was something, maybe we can end with that question that said, it was something about how you know about your legacy, or something about your legacy.

Betsy Ehrlich: Yeah, what do you consider your key contributions? What do you leave as a legacy, is one?

Rebecca Lacome: And then I'd also like to do the phrases things. You have those phrases.

Betsy Ehrlich: Yeah [laughs].

Rebecca Lacome: That was kind of fun. So where do you want to go first? You're kind of working towards, you're kind of summing things up here, I guess.

Betsy Ehrlich: Yeah. And ending on a positive note. This has been fantastic, and you've covered a lot of these topics in a variety of ways. But it seems that looking forward, let's leave that for the last question, and just jump through some of these phrases, which could take us back a little bit. Yeah, I don't know if there's some that you wanted to jump into more than others.

Rebecca Lacome: I actually wrote a response for all of them, so [laughs].

Betsy Ehrlich: All right. So "visiting a national park is an opportunity to…"

Rebecca Lacome: An opportunity for unique experiences and the power of these places that tell these amazing national stories and represent these amazing national landscapes. Unique experience of something new and bigger than ourselves when we visit a national park. "National parks are places where…"

Rebecca Lacome: I was going after the connection idea there. Where we connect our own personal lives to the broader picture of major history, science, and importantly, in Interpretive Development Program 2.0, where we connect to each other through these places and the power of these places.

Rebecca Lacome: You know, how do you not love that notion? [Laughs] I don't understand why anyone wants to be resistant to that notion. And I can only think it's because they just don't understand yet what that means and the power of that. The power of national parks, not only connecting to this place which was what I was all over for much of my career was how do we help people connect to these places and care about these places and it's all about these

places to that sort of inward focus to the parks themselves and the Park Service, to that outward focus of the expansive power of these places to help us be better people, better citizens, and to connect us to each other. That blew my mind open when we started going there and started trying to articulate and codify that. Yikes. So.

Rebecca Lacome: "A teacher is someone who…" and I say sparks, catalyzes learning and application of learning, if they're a good teacher. An interpreter does that, but I want to say more than focusing on the transfer of knowledge, it's a different kind of learning that involves exploration of those sort of personal and social meanings of the natural/cultural stories.

Rebecca Lacome: I think the National Park Service has made progress over the last few years, I've really seen sort of ramping up in an effort, not coming out of interpretation, per se, but a lot is coming out of cultural resources and natural resources, too. But caring about issues of social and environmental responsibility. Telling all Americans' stories. Amazing work that's been done. For example, Carol Shively doing the work of cultural resources, the booklets on all American stories, the connections of different ethnic groups to Civil War history, things we never knew and talked about, you know? I think there's been great strides, though we've got a very long ways to go, to try to reach out and appeal to a more diverse workforce. I think we're doing well — not nearly as well as we need to — but bringing in young voices who've got that new level of passion and enthusiasm that the rest of us are kind of wearing out on.

Rebecca Lacome: And certainly, the more we can make progress as we're starting to do, some parks fantastically, on community engagement outreach, is I think there is sort of a coming wave or explosiveness about, and I think the Find Your Park campaign for the centennial really helped a lot with that, maybe inadvertently helped new audiences begin to see these places and experiencing these places.

Rebecca Lacome: I see it just when I go, I live right across the ravine from the big visitors' center parking lot for Harpers Ferry Historical Park. Every time I walk my dog over there, it's just like this parking lot is more full all the time. And there's so many young people. And there's a much more diverse crowd. And I just really think, and I saw that as a visitor and going out to do training in the parks for the last few years and through the centennial. We may be too successful. We got way more visitors than we know what to do with now, and we don't have the staff to deal with them, unfortunately. But I think people are discovering their national parks. They're finding their parks. So, I think we made a lot of progress there.

Rebecca Lacome: The last one was, oh, this was the one… "I know I made a difference in the National Park Service because…" I honestly had to think about this for a while. [Laughs] I think one indication for me that I made a difference, and it's been happening, it's been happening all along. I used to sort of get upset when it would happen. And that would be, we would hear from other sources outside the Park Service using our language, using our terminology, using our training resources, using our handouts. You know, this stuff is public domain, right? And we have put it out there. And since the advent of the internet and the Common Learning Portal, the stuff is out there, right? Yay, it's out there! But this interesting thing happens of when it starts to come back around and people are saying, "Hey, did you see this?" Or, "Hey, did you hear this?" Or NAI is teaching something and they don't even know it came from the National Park Service. So, we're not getting credit. And that used to bother me a lot when somebody would come and say, "Hey, look at this great PowerPoint for training, whatever." And you know, I'm just sort of biting my tongue not to say, because they're like, "Yeah, we're using this," and blah, blah, blah. Well, actually, that is my PowerPoint [laughs]. Or that is my handout. Or you took this other thing that I developed, and you mashed it into something else, and that's really cool.

Rebecca Lacome: But I really do bite my tongue because it's not what it's about, that I have some kind of claim to fame there, or some authorship there. If I wanted to have the cred, being a civil servant, being a public employee and being an interpreter with the National Park Service is not what I should have been doing all these years [laughs]. So. When the language and the influence of the work that we've done for this profession in this building [Mather Training Center] and in the Interpretive Development Program and through our stakeholders, when that is everywhere, as it really has become, and now with audience-centered stuff, yeah, it's exploding. It's going out there.

Rebecca Lacome: That's how I know I made a difference and in personal relationships, like Resi and so many others who thanked me for always answering the phone, always answering their emails in a timely way, of being there for them. I guess that's all I have to say on that. [Laughs] Forrest Gump. That's all I have to say about that [laughter].

Betsy Ehrlich: Which may also sort of answer the question, I guess, in terms of this other specific question, what do you consider your key contributions? But maybe not quite. You made a difference. You know it got out there. But what were, if you want to try and put a couple of things in parentheses, Becky's key contributions to the Park Service. What do you attribute to yourself?

Rebecca Lacome: I really believe that there are, you know, I believe that the good lord guides us to be—

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Rebecca Lacome: — in certain places at certain times, and to use our innate gifts and talents and personalities and passions. And so, I feel like my work ethic was important in my career. I oftentimes was like a worker bee, right? So, Larsen's doing the big philosophy thing. Dave [Dahlen] is running interference over here on the big management and administrative scale just to keep the program running, and I'm over here doing the nuts and bolts running the day-to-day stuff with the peer reviewers and talking to people in the field. And a lot of administrative grunt work around the old peer review program. A lot of detail stuff. And you know, I just dug in and did it, and I didn't mind doing it. I had the skills for that. I'm a Type A, so dive right into those details.

Rebecca Lacome: So, developing the work processes and sustaining those very practical things as well as then taking that sort of practical person that I am and inserting that into the big discussions of interpretive philosophy. Balancing Larsen's head in the clouds, and me with the boots on the ground here, I guess. And so, helping to develop that whole notion of being accountable to our professional competencies.

Rebecca Lacome: And there's lots of, I mean, a plethora of learning resources and stuff. I was the one who for many years did the graphic identity for all of our handouts. You know, now all this stuff, of course, is online. And John Rudy, who's sort of taken over that now, he has a whole different philosophy about that. But I came up through the graphic identity awareness. And it's got to have the arrowhead, it's got to have the bar, you know. I had to learn how to do that.

Rebecca Lacome: And I never really got real good at it, not nearly like what Betsy could do. But I think seeing to those details was always important. Coaching and encouraging by helping to develop others. Supporting and representing the field. And I want to say that I think was a gift, but it was also a commitment to be a through line. And Katie would be the first one to tell you that one of the things that she most needed me to be was the person who had been all the way back from Interpretive Skills all the way through to the new thinking. She was in the whole second half of that existence of the Interpretive Development Program, so she knows a lot. But pulling that thread all the way along. And as you were saying earlier, Betsy, not leaving, you know, not abandoning what we already know from the past

that works and that we need and that needs to carry forward but rethinking how those skills evolve. I think I've been an important voice for that.

Rebecca Lacome: And just more topically, the climate change interpretation stuff. A lot of people talked about that when I retired that you know, I got to really, it was a gift to really have sort of a leading voice in exploring and experimenting with all of that.

Rebecca Lacome: Working with Betsy has been a true gift because we became this really great partnership for interpretive media. And I learned — [laughs] I can't even tell you how much I learned from Betsy. Thinking that I was this very smart interpreter, and if you just get the interpretive theory, then you get it all. I didn't know diddly squat about design and methodology, how important it is that something, you know, it doesn't just look good, but it functions effectively. And she and I have put our heads together on what that is. The melding of interpretive and communication theory with design theory and sort of amplifying the power of both for media products.

Rebecca Lacome: And then I did some sort of groundbreaking stuff when we started moving to virtual training for how to make webinars, how to practice what we preach, I guess, to make webinars learner-centered. And that's not an easy thing to do on a webinar [laughs]. But with John and Katie's help, we really figured out a lot of great strategies for that. We cut our teeth on multi-[day] virtual classrooms for climate change, interpreting climate change, and interpretive media.

Betsy Ehrlich: And I can attest to the fact that anybody who thinks about the, the idea of signing up for two six-hours online courses sounds like something, you know, I'd rather go to the dentist. [Lacome laughs] But those courses were so dynamic and so engaging that the 87 people or so that signed up stayed online and were active all the way through.

Betsy Ehrlich: And I remember just being awed by that ability to use the technology to connect people to each other and to make it so dynamic. Yeah, that was an exciting last opportunity that we had to work together on that.

Rebecca Lacome: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

Betsy Ehrlich: But I think in my view, and I think you've said it. I just sort of want to touch on this, too. Early on, you talked about your diversity of different jobs early on in the Park Service, and that you tried that in the early '90s of making the changes in peer review and coaching and the whole Module 101 mandatory. And when you had to stop that and this whole training community is something that is optional, it's not mandatory, how do you bring people along when they're across the whole country and they're in all these different jobs and all these different settings and you need to have

somebody who sees and recognizes and understands where people are sitting, what universe they're in to make this relevant to them. It wouldn't be enough to have a great theory. You have to have somebody who can connect it. And so, you were always that person in my view because you knew everybody. Everybody knew you. You were helping people at their most basic level and you didn't isolate it to just one thing. And you didn't push; you welcomed. So, I think that idea of your key role, while not in the top leadership role with the name on the building, it wouldn't have happened without you. Because you were the person who connected the ideas emanating from a few individuals in the Park Service to the rest of the agency. And that's where the energy came from, so therefore it could grow. Otherwise it wouldn't have grown, because it wasn't mandatory. Who's going to sign up for all this change? [laughter]

Rebecca Lacome: Yeah, well, connecting the dots, you know, it's an opportunity and it's a skillset. I mean, connecting the theory to the field and actual work on the ground, and connecting through time from where we started and how we evolved, it's one of the reasons why I hated to retire, because my unique capacity for that, for evolving with the profession, but bringing everything along, isn't going to be there. And I, you know, I hope that things can continue to move forward. I'm hopeful that if and when Katie ever gets the opportunity to fill my position, and we don't know if or when, that she can find somebody who — we want to bring in youthful exuberance and young perspectives on the profession, but I hope it can be somebody who has that passion for connecting the dots and will do the work of digging back in and understanding where we've come from if they weren't a part of that transition so that they can continue to see how it all moves forward.

Betsy Ehrlich: Well, that's why it's all on tape now [laughter]. Because I think all of this really is so important—

Rebecca Lacome: Yes.

Betsy Ehrlich: — to not lose sight of, all the way through. So, thank you. Is there anything else that we might have overlooked here that you might want to touch on before we hit the button?

Rebecca Lacome: No. In retirement you know I'm picking and choosing what I want to do. And one thing that I've, I can tell Katie now, this is what I want to do, and this is what I don't want to do. And she kind of has to honor that, because you don't tell somebody who retired after all these years that no, you can't volunteer unless you do this or that. And she's obviously very gracious about it. But I really burned out on the instructional part of it, kind of, although I always loved that. But I always felt that wasn't what I was the strongest at. So, the coaching element of it and helping to convey the

learning through resources on the CLP and coaching and encouraging folks in forums on the CLP may be, you know, that's what I want to do right now to help the program.

Rebecca Lacome: And then maybe one of these days after Michael and I get settled wherever we're going to move in retirement out west, I'd like for that to be near a national park where I can go and maybe do a little volunteer work. I don't know, I always thought when I volunteered, I'd go out and hit the front lines again, and be a frontline interpreter. But in some ways, it's like I know too much now, [laughter] and I'm really dangerous. And oh my gosh, it's a different world. It's a different world out there. And even though I embrace all these new strategies, audience-centered stuff, and I can do it, I don't know what I would do. Even though I taught how to deal with controversy [laughs]. The first time that somebody gets in my face about climate change or the age of the rocks or something, you know, I'm going to, I'd really have to pull myself up by my bootstraps and see if I could actually apply what I've been teaching all these years [laughter]. So maybe I'll dabble in that down the road or maybe I'll just volunteer to go audit and coach and not have to actually step out in front of the camera myself.

Betsy Ehrlich: Well, don't discount the idea of media projects that are floating around out there. There's not enough people to do great media projects in the field. Personal services have diminished. So, has the park's capacity to do their own in-house media.

Rebecca Lacome: Yes, yes. And that's the other heartbreaking thing is you know, the diminishing of the staff and the expertise from Harpers Ferry Center to help with that. So that's a whole other big conversation that Betsy knows I've definitely felt passionate about over the years. But yeah, you know, I mean, I've already had several offers.

Rebecca Lacome: And I am right now working with Earth to Sky from NASA, who've been partners with us for many years. And we're doing a session on a facilitated dialog for climate change at NAI in New Orleans. So, I'm going to go do that. And the folks at NAI have been revising their interpretive standards, which is going to have a big ripple effect through their training curriculum and their peer certification program. And I'm like the one person in the world who is like uniquely qualified to really help them with that (laughs). So, I've told Emily Jacobs that I'm going to be available, though I don't want to get in over my head, and I don't want to be doing a fulltime job again. But you know, I feel like I've got some things I can help and contribute with there as NAI goes through these growing pains. So, I'm going to keep busy [laughs].

Betsy Ehrlich: I look forward to seeing where you go, Becky.

Lu Ann Jones: Well thank you so much, if this is a good place to—

Rebecca Lacome: Thank you, guys. Fun conversation.

Lu Ann Jones: It's been very instructive. We've had some great conversations with people that you've connected me with. They've really been wonderful. And it's just great to, it's a real privilege to help people kind of make sense of their careers, you know, not that perhaps you haven't done it before, but just to have this opportunity to reflect and share that story.

Rebecca Lacome: It's been a blessing for me. You know, when Betsy first suggested it, it was like, well, I don't have anything to say that's going to help anybody that needs to go down for posterity. But it really was, as you said, it was really nice for me to think about it in terms of sort of putting a little exclamation point behind my retirement. So, thank you [laughs].

Betsy Ehrlich: And we worked together on little things across the spectrum of these different changes and iterations. And I feel like I had a sense of all of this. But I really appreciate having it all just sort of laid out there in the depth that you have. And I know there's a lot of people who don't know much of any of this. And it pained me to think that this might not get captured as fully as we've been able to capture it. So, I'm just thrilled, because I think this is, what do you call it? A learning element. A reusable learning element or something [laughter].

Rebecca Lacome: Oh, there you go!

Betsy Ehrlich: That's the term.

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. Well, I'm going to ask you to go ahead and fill this out. I need your name, signature, address, and email address. And while you're doing that, I was going to say, one of the things that we, this will be transcribed so we have the audio, we'll have the transcript. But we really do need to figure out a way to start getting these materials back into the hands of people who can really, really use them. Because that's, just in terms of our technology, etcetera, etcetera, it's something of a hold up. But assuming that you would say, share it with the training staff, to say, "Lu Ann, send it to them. Let them read this once this is out or let them listen." I would be happy to do that.

Rebecca Lacome: Yeah, I think we've had a little bit of a, there was a history of interpretation written many years ago. Sort of an administrative history. It needs to be done again. John Rudy, still on the staff here at Mather, might hopefully get an opportunity to do that or see that it gets done one of these days, because he knows that's important. But I do carry this institutional

memory of the Interpretive Development Program, where it's been and how it's evolved and sort of what the broader meanings of that to the profession. So, I don't know if there's, and that's not well-documented. Dave Dahlen wrote a couple of articles documenting some of the early phases of that. But particularly how it's evolved into the whole audience-centered realm. And Katie can certainly tell that story. But there might be some usefulness to the chunk of stuff about the evolving profession. And that would just be my take on it, my sort of perspective on this. At this point, what we might say is that there were three big evolutionary phases that the profession and the interpretive program went through. So that might be maybe a useful outtake, I don't know.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes.

Rebecca Lacome: But I'm happy to have it be out there in any way that might be helpful for folks.

Lu Ann Jones: Okay. Great. Thank you.

Rebecca Lacome: Thank you.

END OF FILE 6

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