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Dorothy Huyck's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1942-1987



**Susan J. Helper**  
**July 12, 1978**

Interview conducted by Dorothy B. Huyck  
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[START OF TAPE 1]

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:00 The date is July 12, 1978. I am Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Susan J. Hepler. Spelled S-U-S-A-N J. Hepler, H-E-P-L-E-R. Park ranger and chief of interpretation at Colorado National Monument.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:16 Can I ask you how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:00:25 Well, I lived about 20 miles from Shenandoah National Park and knew it as the Skyline Drive, which was the local people did at that time. I think other than knowing of Yellowstone and Yosemite, as most little kids do from comics or somewhere, didn't really think too much about it or realize that there was anything else until I actually started working. My brother had worked as a seasonal at Shenandoah before I started and suggested I go up and talk to him when I was looking for a job.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:00:58 Does this suggest that you were a native of Virginia?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:00 Oh, yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:01 Where were you born?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:02 I was born in southwestern Virginia, in the mountains outside of Covington.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:06 Near Covington?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:07 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:08 And when?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:09 September 26th, 1942.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:13 You were not an only child. You have a brother?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:14 No. I have two older and one younger brother.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:18 You're the only daughter?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:19 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:26 You grew up near Covington?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:27 No. We moved a couple of times, by the time I was two, we'd moved to just south of Winchester, Virginia and lived there. My parents are still there.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:37 You went to high school in Winchester?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:39 Not in Winchester, in the county.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:40 Which county is that?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:42 Oh, Frederick County.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:46 Your parents still live there?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:47 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:49 Are your parents college graduates?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:51 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01:52 What's your father's occupation in Virginia?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:01:54 Retired right now. He worked for the American Viscose Corporation and I never did understand what that company did.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:03 American?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:02:05 Viscose, which was then taken over by FMC. I never even knew what those stood for. He was an instrument repairman for them.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:15 And your mother?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:02:16 Mom worked off and on. She worked in a store as a clerk but did a lot both for a store and for herself freelance made some covers and draperies.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:30 Where did you attend college?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:02:31 I went to Westhampton College. It's a Baptist girls' school, part of the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:38 When did you graduate?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:02:40 1964.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:02:42 Have you done graduate work anywhere?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:02:44 Well, I have gone back to school as a special student, not towards a graduate degree. I did that at the University of Virginia and Virginia Polytech Institute, and I went back to get the natural sciences for working with the Park Service.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:00 At UVA and VPI?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:03:01 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:05 Your major area of interest in your graduate studies or your special student period was natural history?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:03:12 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:12 What about the undergraduate degree?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:03:13 I did a degree in psychology, which was a switch my senior year from pre-med.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:20 What caused you to switch?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:03:22 I thought I didn't have good enough grades to get into medical school. My next oldest brother ended up with the same grades, and is a doctor.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:32 I wonder if they would have taken a woman with the same grades.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:03:35 I don't think so. Well, he spent an extra year catching up. I think also I got to thinking more and more about all the work and all the hours. It didn't particularly appeal to me. That was a decision I made when I was 14 to be a doctor, so gradually you do grow out of those too.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:03:55 Any regrets?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:03:58 No. No. My brother has more gray and he's only a year older.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:04:04 Who encouraged you during the high school and college process of getting an education? Were your parents

encouraging or teachers or professors or maybe church or community leaders?

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:04:15 I think in my particular case, it was less a case of encouragement than a fear to try to discourage me. I just decided when I was quite young, I wanted to be a doctor. My dad said sign up for home ec and get married and I said I'm taking college prep. Well, when I said I wanted to be a doctor, there was a great flurry interest tests and, surely, you don't want to do this and took the interest test, and those things came out very high. Forestry major came out highest, though. I was always amazed by that. That was completely disregarded at the time. A fluke in the testing system, because women definitely weren't forest rangers in the '60s. Everybody. They just said, "Well, there are not enough professional working women to say that this test is valid for women."
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:05:03 It was teachers or family or counselors? All of these people?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:05:07 Yeah. Well, it didn't occur to me that women could do those things and I don't think at that time they could because that was in the '60s. Well, actually late '50s. Well, okay, the preacher at the church was very much in favor of- -I mean, as far as continuing education, I think everybody was and I think the only reason dad discouraged it was thinking about how he was going to pay for it on his income, but I got scholarships. Of course, there was a lot of support involved in that.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:05:40 The guidance counselor at the school who was also my English and Spanish teacher was just really super. The preacher helped me get into the school and said, "If you want to go to this school", it being a Baptist school, "Then we'll make sure that you're able to go."
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:05:55 From that point of view, and as far as – I guess he was fond of the idea because I wanted to be a missionary doctor, so they could be quite interested in that, and it never occurred to me not to go to school or to do something and it never occurred to me that I couldn't be a doctor if I wanted to or whatever. The only thing that didn't occur to me is that forestry or that kind of a field would have [inaudible 00:06:23].

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:06:25 I don't think – If I recall correctly, probably at that time, if there were any women anywhere in the country in a program like that. It was pretty unique. I had friends who were five or 10 years younger than I, who were fighting to get into forestry programs, and certainly more progressive schools than you'd find in Virginia. I guess everybody got that then.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:06:52 Once you got to Westhampton, who was encouraging you there? Were there people who discouraged you?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:07:01 I don't recall that anybody particularly paid any particular attention to me. Or maybe I just didn't pay attention to them. Let's see, when I decided not to be a doctor and was going through that, since I had told people all those years that's what I was going to do, I was back to the preacher and I was saying, "What am I going to do? I don't want to be a missionary doctor anymore" and he said, "Well, you got to do what's going to be good for you and it doesn't matter what you've told people." He was, if you'll pardon, for a Baptist preacher, a very fine, astute person.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:07:37 Sounds like it. And very supportive at that stage.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:07:40 Yeah. He said, "You do not make other people happy by being miserable yourself. It's not fair to you or to anybody to do something because you feel obligated. Change your mind and do what's going to be best." I think at that particular time – There, again, I took some interest tests because now that I had given up my life's ambition, what was I to do? Once again, forest ranger cropped up on top and, once again, everybody blithely dismissed that and psychology was something I was enjoying in class work so I just switched to that as a major and I think about three weeks before I graduated, I heard that you could take a test for state welfare worker. Everybody also that had majored in psychology was doing that because there's nothing else, or there wasn't then, anything you could do with that degree, except go to school for more.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:08:36 Did you take the test?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:08:39 Mm-hmm (affirmative) and did very well and ended up working welfare in the state of Virginia. Worked for a couple of weeks in a very small, I think it was Franklin County in southeastern Virginia and hated it. Then got a—

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:08:53 When was that?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:08:54 That was in 1964. That was just fresh out of school. Packed up and went down and worked for a couple of weeks. Got a call from Richmond, which was where all the friends, of course, were staying. Talked to my supervisor and she said, "If I were your age and single, I would go to Richmond and take that job up there" so I did that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:09:19 Also working for the welfare?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:09:19 —for the welfare. Mm-hmm (affirmative). In the city of Richmond.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:09:22 How long were you there?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:09:23 I was there about seven months and decided that I could not stand to provide people with an existence, which is what I look upon welfare as. It certainly is not a living. I had some very strong feelings on that, if you ever want to interview people on that. I enjoyed working with the people. I did not like my supervisor and I did not like the idea of pushing those people back in a corner and finding out every tiny personal detail of their lives to give them a few pennies and then tell them how to spend it and criticize them if they didn't do it right. I found that very depressing and decided maybe I'd teach, and if I was going to teach, that I'd want to teach English.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:10:10 I went back to school to take the English and the education courses that were at that time required in the state of Virginia for a teaching certificate, and so I went the spring semester and two summer semesters and got out in August and Stowe, Vermont, did not have any teaching jobs that August.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:10:32 Is this August '65?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:10:33 Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). They didn't have any teaching jobs so I was sitting around the house when my brother came down off the mountain from Shenandoah and said, "Hey, everybody is going back to school to teach or whatever. Why don't you go to Shenandoah and see if they'll take you on because they want to keep their visitor center open a little longer this season."

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:10:50 I went up and applied. Probably – I don't remember the days but a couple of days, they called and said – Well, I talked to them about applying. A couple of days, they called up and said, "We need your papers because we want you to go to work on Monday." It doesn't happen like that anymore. No. That was quite rare. At that time, I think I was quite rare, a college graduate with no other employment in the wintertime. We kind of hit it off there.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:11:21 How long did you end up staying at Shenandoah?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:11:23 I worked five seasons there.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:11:25 Five seasons? What were you doing the rest of the year?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:11:28 That's what all the visitors kept asking me. Nothing. Let's see, in the winter of '65, I did absolutely nothing. The winter of '66, I went to Florida a couple of weeks with my folks. Then, let's see, let me think about this a minute. In '67 is when I went to VPI and I took one quarter there. '68, I took an algae class, if you will, at the University of Virginia and got myself leveled out by flunking it. Because part of the time, I was working and driving back and forth to class and it was a little early in the morning for me to get up. I went back in the winter of '69 and took a geology course.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:12:25 At UVA?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:12:26 At UVA. Mm-hmm (affirmative). Understanding the results of not studying and fooling around a lot with the course, I studied that and did very well. Then '69, in the fall was when I got permanent with the Park Service.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:12:42 At Shenandoah?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:12:44 No. Went for the three-month session at the Grand Canyon and then was assigned to DC as an intake for a year and worked at the Rock Creek Nature Center at National Capital Parks East. Worked with Janet Wolf at Catoctin where she was setting up the cultural thing there. Worked in the environmental education office for about three months out of the regional office with Dave [Kiriko 00:13:17]. Then I was assigned to the C&O Canal for the first permanent assignment. I was in that from the fall of '70 until the – Well, December, really, '73.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:13:34 And then?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:13:37 Then transferred to Ozark National Scenic Riverway and was the assistant chief interpreter there for two and a half years. Then moved here in September of '76.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:14:01 I want to ask you a question about that but I'd like to go back and fill in just a couple of little details. Back in high school, did you study math and science courses to some degree?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:14:13 Let me think. Yeah. At our school, I did two languages. Let's see, algebra, trigonometry, plane geometry, and solid geometry. Does that sound right? It's been a while. Biology and chemistry and the general sciences that you're required to take.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:14:41 Were these courses in either the math or the science field that were more usually taken by boys?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:14:47 No. It was just anybody that was going to college. We either had college prep or we had business or we just had general and it wasn't anything like it is today. It just amazes me to see what they do now.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:00 When you were growing up, did you play with boys?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:15:03 As a matter of necessity. It was that or by myself.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:07 Were you, by chance, considered a tomboy?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:15:10 I would say that that was pretty legit and there were two other girls in the neighborhood, both a half a mile away, and, of course, the girls weren't allowed to walk around like the guys were. The other one of those was definitely a tomboy and she was my best buddy. She was the oldest daughter with no sons so she was the son of the family. The other one was pretty much kept at home so she didn't have that opportunity but when we got out together, we did those kinds of things. Most usually, I was the last chosen on the softball team by the guys and the one you really don't want on your football team by the guys and stuff like that, because I wasn't particularly good at it but that's who there was to play with.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:15:57 But you were on the softball and football team?

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:15:59 Oh, yeah. Well, if they were short some numbers. I spent most of my time – Well, all the guys in the neighborhood – We had big fields where you could play and stuff and a creek through the property and stuff. All the guys in the neighborhood would just come over to our house. We had the little nucleus of three to start with anyway. They were just around all the time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:16:24 As you entered the teenage years, were you expected to become something more of a lady?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:16:30 Not in my family. As my mom told me much later, she's from West Virginia and grew up in a very, very large family on a farm, she said she used to watch and wish that there was something she could do to make me into something like that but she didn't know how because she wasn't herself.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:16:47 I remember in college when I had a blind date and the guy took my elbow to help me across and I didn't – It made me feel very awkward, like I was going to tumble over because he was shoving on me or something. Social graces were definitely – Other than being nice and polite and things like that, but door openings and elbow holdings and in the door first and those things were not a part of our growing up.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:17:15 I would say that we were not unusual, because it was a farm community and beyond the decent things, I don't think anybody made a big to-do about it one way or the other. I was trying to remember if my brothers held doors for their girlfriends but then, on the other hand, there were not that many cars.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:17:38 Did these "social graces" crop up when you got to UVA?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:17:42 Oh no. They never cropped up. Let's see, I don't remember having them in college and I don't remember having them after college. I've never found them to be – I never dated too much so I didn't have to impress anybody. I always figured if you had to impress anybody, they weren't worthwhile anyway. It's just a nice little defense thing.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:18:09 I think by the time that I might have gotten around to being more interested in the social graces, the social graces, the finer ones, were disappearing anyway. Nobody had them. People were starting to fight about, "Don't do this for me"

and, "Don't do that for me." Maybe I have more than I know and they just come naturally but I don't remember it ever being a big deal or something necessary. Maybe I never had any use for them.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:18:38 Were there extracurricular activities that you were involved in during your high school or college career that have been helpful since you've been with the Park Service?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:18:53 Just being out and about. I would say the college things, I was in the university players, which since I was very, very incredibly shy and I think that was helpful in getting – Not necessarily making me less shy but making me capable of hiding it from other people. I always was in a lot of clubs and things, both high school and college, so that kept me on an even keel because being so shy, I could very readily have said nobody liked me. By joining up on these things, I didn't have any excuse not to have company so I couldn't completely isolate myself.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:19:37 Then I joined the outing club when I was in college and I think I did it more socially than any great desire to be in the great outdoors at that time. One of the most impressive things I remember doing was going rock climbing and rappelling off a cliff and that was one of those now I know I can do anything because I have done this thing. There were some people there that were, "Okay, everybody is going to wait until you go. If you don't want to go, that's fine. We'll just sit here and wait" and they did for a half hour until finally I got up the courage to do it, because I knew I was going to fall off and die. It seemed a reasonable thing to do there.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:20:21 You know, I found I really did enjoy those things. I guess I had always taken that kind of stuff for granted. When I was moving to Richmond to take that job, my parents had gone camping with some friends in Shenandoah. Of course, this is way back before I started working there. They wanted me to go with them because I was there for the weekend and I didn't particularly want to go because they were going with a couple that had smaller children, which was pretty obnoxious for a college graduate.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:20:54 I thought that that was the stupidest weekend I had ever spent in my life, lying around in the woods, and they had little shelters with these little bunkish kinds of beds and

they were hard and nasty and [inaudible 00:21:04], and the ultimate insult was the next morning, before I could leave, we had to follow this dumb turkey in a green suit around while he pointed to flowers. I thought that was really the grossest experience I ever had in my life. As you can see, I didn't grow up with this I always wanted to be a park ranger thing and, of course, a forest ranger would appeal to me, riding in the woods and stuff but that was a romantic kind of appeal. I read a lot when I was a child so I knew lots of things.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:21:36 Your early impression of what an interpreter does seems to have been very negative.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:21:40 Well, I have a terrible feeling that some of them were like that and I'm sure a few of them are still around like that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:21:46 Maybe it wasn't just your own attitude. It was really maybe you ran into a turkey [crosstalk 00:21:50].
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:21:51 That could be. I don't recall now. I just was so resenting being there with my folks and those little kids that nothing would have suited me. He may have been a lot better. In fact, he could have been my brother for all I know. One should presume that he was that bad. I used to think--Well, when I was a seasonal and very, very active in that kind of activity, I always thought how wonderful I was and now that I'm here and more looking at seasonals, I think I wonder why they put up with me all of those years. I wonder if maybe sometimes I was like some of the ones – not the ones that work here. Do not mistake me. The ones that I have working for me are excellent.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:22:35 Nowadays, you really can't remember what it was about that first walk with a naturalist, whether it was your own attitude or his performance?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:22:42 I think it was a lot I didn't see any reason for anybody to walk around in the woods and want to know what the names of flowers were. The flowers were there and they were pretty, whether I knew what they were or not. Not caring for the particular situation, wanted to get on my way to be grown up and out in the world. I just didn't want to mess with that stuff.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:23:00 It sounds like somewhere along the line your attitude toward naturalist was changed substantially.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:23:04 Well, that happened I think – I was telling you something sensitive, if you'll pardon me. About a year and a half after I started working at Shenandoah, when it finally occurred to me that a lot of the people coming in there were asking questions about those things and they wanted to know. I thought about that an awful lot and I still didn't understand why they wanted to know but my first appreciation for the naturalist came when I thought those people if you look at them, primarily, at that point, they were primarily middle class and they are the people who work and earn money and pay taxes to make this country run and if they want to know what the names of those flowers are and that makes them feel good, then by gosh, there's some reason for this.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:23:49 I wish I would have felt a [inaudible 00:23:53], you know, what am I doing for anybody in this job? The social work and the teacher thing. That's when I came to think – Then the environmental stuff came along and it started putting lots and lots and lots of things together. I have a very strong appreciation—
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:24:10 But at the same time, I also had an appreciation that in every family there's probably one of me.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:24:17 How do you define that?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:24:18 Somebody who got drug along because the rest of the family was going. They're not particularly interested in what you're doing and they don't want to be bothered and so you have to work a little extra with those people—
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:24:30 You actually saw yourself in various families that came [crosstalk 00:24:33]?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:24:33 Yeah. I think so. You could see – In any group of people, there's always someone who appears to be more disinterested and I would rather suspect that it's a teenager to an early twenties person who didn't come turned on but came because the family is coming and they had to. I think there are a lot of those.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:24:54 Do you suppose you've turned any of them on?

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:24:57 I hope so sometimes. That's what I always told the interpreters when I was in a position to do that is when you've got those people in your group and you can't tell it – Because I'm sure they're there, I'm sure there are lots more than we give credit for. And you can't tell it, then you're doing a good job because you have got them interested too. I think that's pretty important because not only would they disturb the immediate environment, they're people that need to enjoy it too. Maybe they don't need to.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:25:31 Anyway, I think I have probably a little less egotistical perception of my role in this business because I know that some people do not care and they are not interested, so that I am not God to them, and everything I do is not charming and wonderful and lovely because I have on a green suit but some of them need to be convinced and so it behooves me to be charming and lovely and, in addition, to having on a green suit, so that they can be a part of what's happening.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:26:08 You never did teach school?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:26:10 Nope.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:26:11 What do you see as the relationship between teaching and interpretation?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:26:14 Oh, I think it's – Well, I don't know. Let me see. Freeman Tilden probably had some wonderful things to say. I think it's probably the ultimate form of teaching and then if I were to teach, and sometimes when I get fed up, I say, "Well, here's a nice option for me." Not in California anymore but maybe somewhere where they have teachers.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:26:39 If I were to teach, I think I'd do it an awful lot like I interpret.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:26:42 Do you want to spell that out a little bit?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:26:46 Well, the teachers that I remember best, who may influence my style of interpretation too, and the classes that I enjoyed the most and felt that I had learned the most about, which also turned out to be some classes in some very boring subjects, if you just looked at them, in that I knew very little about to start with, they just seemed the thing to take, like a Shakespeare class, I remember in particular. I had that professor for three courses and loved him dearly.

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:27:13 He explained what led up to all of this. He didn't sit there and we read and memorize great quotes from Shakespeare and, of course, I can't remember any of the plays, which particular things from which, because they all mingle together but he would talk in terms of what the customs of the day were and why this man was writing these things and saying these things and how they related to one another and what was happening with the action of the play. That, to me, made sense. He did another literature class that I had him for and he did the same thing.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:27:53 I was able to learn so much more about the writer and so much more about the time, and so much more about why things were written the way they are and what the styles are but also about the material we were reading, that it just became a real pleasure.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:28:10 The other thing I found was that if I paid really close attention is I actually wouldn't have to read some of them because I got it from the class. If I didn't care for the particular writer's style, I didn't have to bore myself, in this particular case that we're talking about, Dickens, because it was a bit wordy sometimes, like me.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:28:33 That class and another class that I took – Well, three. The psychology class was like that. A psychology of religion, which was a different man. They were all building up to reasons and why's and how's and what this means. Then you can understand and appreciate this literature or whatever on your own terms but what we want for you to do is understand enough so that when you give us an answer, we know you understand what your answer is.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:29:06 I think that's probably what interpretation is about is giving people enough of what goes to make up things that they can decide to do things out there somewhere and who am I to say whether it's right or wrong but, at least, they can know why they chose to do those things, instead of because it's politically expedient or somebody else said so or it's going to be this way with [inaudible 00:29:31] taxes but they'll understand systems and how they work. It's probably very idealistic and it would never work but it's a nice thing to think about.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:29:44 If you were to take people out this afternoon here at Colorado National Monument, how would you find your

interpretation to that group of people influenced by the three professors you've been describing, for instance, or the way they handle material? How do you carry over from the educational process into the interpretative field?

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:30:01 I think the same thing of trying, okay, we've got trees and bushes and flowers and rocks and lots of sand and those kinds of things. I see interpreting here at the monument is picking out for a particular group, culling it down enough so you're not trying to tell them everything about everything but of those things that you speak to, to give them an understanding of the relationship between those things and how they work together and what are the consequences of that and then what does that mean to anywhere else?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:30:43 Basically, no matter what your ecosystem or whatever, there's certain relatively valid relationships, you know this depends upon that and that depends upon that and that depends upon that and if you break this out, a lot of times I try to [inaudible 00:31:01] myself to avoid that, which is also very good from the point of view of just technical delivery. If you're conscious, "Okay, I've got this little problem here", you stop to think about what you're saying and ways to cut it down and still get the meat across but not have to have all the other things stuck in there. You are able to eliminate considerable amounts of cultural side notes, which are not – They're entertaining but not necessarily relevant or necessary anyway. The visitors are spared a good deal.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:31:37 I think you're the current chief of interpretation. Is that correct?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:31:39 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:31:41 Do you still take visitors on naturalist walks?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:31:45 Well, the seasonals would tell you no but I do. I do a lot of special groups that come in and fewer in the summertime than during the off-season when there's just two of us here. It ranges anywhere from geology classes to [inaudible 00:32:03] and anything in-between or just old folks that come through on a bus in the fall [inaudible 00:32:10] just want a little talk or something. We do get, like I say, the

different classes from Grand Junction that come up, the ones that can afford to get the bus.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:32:21 Do you ever do evening camp out programs?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:32:25 Not as such. I did them for 12 years and I'm tired of them.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:32:31 I'd like to go back – The subject I wanted to go back to was your indoctrination, so to speak, at Albright, your three months period there. In 1969, is that correct?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:32:41 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:32:42 Was that the first class at Albright that included women?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:32:45 No, because – Let me think. I had met when I was a seasonal or a couple of years before, I had met a couple of women who had been through it and I don't know when they started going, to tell you the truth, I should know that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:33:01 But they had been to Albright?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:33:02 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Ours was the first of two things, the urban intakes and – I don't know if you've run across that before in your travels. The other thing that, to my knowledge, it was the first of was a class of mixed maintenance, park technicians, professional, and everything. I think that until then they pretty well kept it to the professional rangers. This had some of everybody in it. As a matter of fact, there were seven of us who were brand new permanent employees of the Park Service and about five people who had transferred from the Job Corps, who had not worked the rest of the Park Service before, and the rest of them were people who had worked some years and had a really nice wealth of experience to share with us. We were I think very fortunate in that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:04 What grade did you come in at that point?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:34:06 I came in as a seven.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:09 Your current grade?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:34:10 Nine.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:34:11 I'd like to ask about the people who have been your supervisors without asking their names. Have you found that during your Park Service career your supervisors have been encouraging or discouraging or maybe somewhat both?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:34:31 I'm beginning to think maybe I have a problem because I think, once again, I don't know that they've been much of anything. Let's see, in the intake program, we were farmed out to the areas. I think they looked upon us as a combination of flunking anything we don't want to do or a nuisance because we have to put up with these people, provide them a little space or something. One person said "I don't see why you need a desk. You're supposed to be out working."
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:35:00 Is that encouraging?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:35:03 I would say that's not. But then they were – I don't know if you'd look upon them as a supervisor or not because we were extraneous to their usual operation as intakes. I think some have been noncommittal. The first full-time supervisor I worked for was not an interpreter and never had and said he didn't understand it, therefore, it was difficult for him to cope with it. He would pretty much let me do – The other thing was we very seldom were at the same place at the same time. I think we figured out, because of special details and assignments, out of the first year I worked for him, that we had a possibility of having been together 20 days during that year. It would be difficult to say what he'd want.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:35:56 Let's see, I think I've only really worked for one interpreter-interpreter and it was a combination of things. Sometimes good, sometimes not so good. Bob is, certainly, supportive. Since he had to nominate me for the mid-level, I would say that that is a certain amount of encouragement.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:36:20 I don't sense that anybody has ever discouraged me personally, saying, "Well, you don't belong in this", not since organic chemistry lab.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:36:31 Has anybody acted as a mentor for you?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:36:35 Yeah. I would say so and, not necessarily, a supervisor. I've found in DC, it's very difficult to say what anybody is. At

the Ozarks, I found the ranger staff there, the chief and assistant chief, they worked pretty hard to get me into the law enforcement school on the basis that it would be good to have for me in management as opposed to I was going to be a law enforcement officer, and they firmly supported that and pushed for me to get it, which I finally did, which turned out I think because they were looking for some women to have in the class.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:37:14 They were just really – Most of the people that I have worked with have been good, I've enjoyed working with them and I feel [unintelligible] relationships. Lorraine Mintzmyer and I think Lorraine and Sherma Bierhaus over at Timpanogas Cave are two people that--For instance, I went to Harpers Ferry and they are two superintendents and here am I doing what I do and if they were talking about something, they would invite me on in and say, "Here, you sit here and listen to this because I think it will be good for you."

Susan J. Hepler: 00:37:57 Very helpful in terms of here are problems we have run into and here are solutions we've had for those and, of course, Janet Wolf and I don't know if you've met Lou [Sheboygan 00:38:08], that's in the training office in DC, they were my roommates as an intake. They're both very strong people. They have done some really, really nice things.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:38:21 A lot of the men that I've met have been good. Every now and then, you run across one that pushes, that you just as soon not be associated with, and there have been a couple of those. Basically, just an awful lot of people that have given me a lot of their time and given me lots of good helpful suggestions. I think basically a lot of them have put up with me when – I'm not such a nice person sometimes and been very strongly supportive of you can do whatever you choose and also in helping sort out realistic choices, which I think is pretty important. I've always known – I mean, I have no great desire to be the Incredible Hulk and going around pushing people around or doing intensely physical things. I think probably a lot more support and encouragement.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:39:28 Back when I was a seasonal, let's go back to there, talking about encouragement, Bruce McHenry, who is now in Boston, for all Bruce will go one [inaudible 00:39:38], that

may be where I land at. Bruce, boy. Not from a point of view of I will pick you up and put you somewhere further but you've got it, go for it, and don't let anything stand in your way. I remember one incident where I kept telling him we need a sign in this particular place and he said, "Draw up what you need for a sign" and months later, there was no sign. "Bruce, we need a sign." "Well, draw it up." As soon as I drew it up, we got the sign. If you want something, put yourself into it and do it. Not only just verbal encouragement and personal friendliness in that kind of thing but also if you're going to go for it, do it. Don't just let somebody else do it for you.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:40:25 Which is a certainly a form of encouragement.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:40:27 Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. He was just super. He was crying one day because he had never been a chief of interpretation. Three of the people he had raised were chiefs of interpretation and we were trying to tell him, "Bruce, if you had been one, you'd have only been one and here you are with three of us. Plus, whoever you're working on nowadays." He was very good from the way back.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:40:58 I think the people that I have sensed to be discouraging were not maybe so much discouraging as people who had lived in the system an awful long time and knew that the bureaucracy doesn't necessarily permit what's right. Rather than build up your hopes, just take what you can get and sometimes maybe to the point of say settle for less than you could possibly get. I would look upon that as, well, you don't think I can do these things. I think maybe just a little reflection. It looks like that when you're seeing it. And that a lot of guys along the way who were on macho trips, but you don't pay much attention to them and I don't think they count for encouragement/discouragement. They just count to get your dander up.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:41:49 Of course, there are a lot of people who think of the Park Service as a male-oriented organization. Do you?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:41:54 I think one would have to be foolish not to think of it as very male-oriented because it is. I think probably will continue to be for some time, for a lot of reasons. I think that there's some men who are very sincerely and horrifyingly chauvinistic and I think there are some who look upon the woman as nice grabs along the way and I just

got through reading Betty Harrigan's book "Games Your Mother Never Taught You." She talks about that, which gives me a little perspective. It's not unusual.

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:42:33 Then there are some who take this woman who's not so good and say they're all like that but I think maybe they do that with interpreters or administrative officers and women just happen to be another little group that they can do it to.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:42:54 How best to cope with this kind of male within the Park Service?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:43:00 Well, which kind?
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:43:03 The very macho-oriented kind of individual.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:43:06 Well, the one thing that probably is not good is to try to argue them out of what they believe. I think most of those usually end up getting it down to a physical level, which is you are not physically as strong as I am and even will grant that for a given size and everything, men and women are probably equal, however, all men are bigger so it doesn't make any difference.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:43:36 I sense that probably unless you've got somebody that's got a pretty good sense of humor on the other side of you, just ignore them and not pay any attention to it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:43:45 On the assumption that they're not going to change anyhow?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:43:49 On the assumption that your arguing isn't going to convince them of anything so if you're going to be able to do it, you might as well do it and then they can see and say, "Well, yeah. She did that." Whether they're ever fully convinced that, "Well, you're a rare, unique woman so, therefore, it stands to reason you might be able to but this one won't." There are, I believe, in the Park Service, and maybe not in the professional ranks, but in some of the other ranks, where they have influence, women who are probably more damaging to women than men.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:44:23 In what way?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:44:24 The same way the men are – women cannot do this. It's too far away for a woman to be or it requires too much strength

for a woman or whatever. Gosh, if there's a man who's headed in that direction, what better to have a woman that's telling that's true.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:44:40 Would these be wives?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:44:42 No. I sense not. I sense they would be people in the offices, personnel and stuff like that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:44:48 Are there any jobs in the Park Service that you think a woman should not tackle?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:44:54 Probably the mountain man role in the living history program. I think that might not come across, depending upon the woman. I mean, if you're trying to do a reenactment that requires a man, why have a woman?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:45:16 I think that there are a lot of jobs that I would say some men would be better suited for than I would and that the rest of the men and myself wouldn't probably be suited for it at all, because of physical requirements or things like that.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:45:32 In your category of work, are there – Well, has being a woman affected your opportunities as one individual person?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:45:43 That's very difficult because it is a bureaucracy and because I was in DC for four years, which is a strange place, so for whatever the causes, Janet Wolf was in the same class and she's also a historian, which is a nice, safe place for women too. The men, that were in my intake class and that started at the same grade level, are much higher ahead. They got to the nine level faster and most of them are now 11s. Some of them I personally didn't think had as much to offer the world, much less Park Service as myself, but as to whether that's because I'm a woman or because of circumstances, I don't know.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:46:36 I was often in DC tempted to send in my forms in the name of Sam Hepler and see if he could compete a little better than I could, and thought that maybe he could. I know of men rangers who have been in the Park Service a lot longer than I have, who are still nines, who are probably very fine people. I know some that are turkeys, that never deserved

to get that far to start with and that's maybe somebody just nipped them off before they got too much further.

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:47:06 I know that there are men that have the same career frustrations that I do but I've seen an awful lot go past me, and some simply because of the park they went to where they're operating that regional policy, that park policy was to do this, this, and this. Also, at the time that I came in, the intake system was different. Now the intake goes five, seven, nine, year, year, year. Okay? Obviously, in three years, those people are going to be ahead of where I was in four years. That doesn't necessarily make them any worse. It certainly makes them less experienced for grade level than I would be. Who's to say?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:47:53 I would say the most offensive thing that I find in the Park Service, and it's individual, are the men who are grabbers and think that they have a right to maul you around or to make dirty implications or talk to you about your sex life or – The irritating thing is the ones who say "Well, my dear I can understand that you're very emotional and that you're very tired and that you have these problems." Those I don't like at all because that's the concept that's more offensive to me than how far I've gotten ahead, even though, that's frustrating. Because I'd like to be wealthy. Also, as you work a job and you become accustomed to a certain level of responsibilities and you feel like primarily, you can cope with those and once you've learned to cope with them, it's boring to just keep on coping with them.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:48:54 You're not learning anything new [crosstalk 00:48:55].
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:48:55 Yeah. Or, at least, most of them. You know, there's always something new. You can't escape something new but sometimes they're not rewarding enough. I would like to move ahead so that I can always keep enthusiastic about what I'm doing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:10 You would like to be wealthy?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:49:12 Sure. I'd like to be retired and wealthy.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:14 Is the Park Service any way to be wealthy?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:49:16 No. Absolutely not.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:18 You're in the wrong business.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:49:23 Well, the only problem is that I have felt very fortunate that I am able to have a job that I enjoy.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:34 Does that make up for not being wealthy?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:49:34 Yeah. Oh, yeah. I would much rather do this than be making – I don't think I could last very long at something I didn't enjoy. Maybe two, three weeks. Or that wasn't satisfying.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:46 Going back to grabby men for a minute, how best to cope with that problem?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:49:49 I've never figured that out.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:49:52 Really? Not at all?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:49:54 Some of it, I have. I'm very able to give good advice to others. A lot of times, I tend just because of my nature to let myself get sucked in past the point of getting back out and then realize, I shouldn't have three weeks ago let him tell that joke because that led to this one and they expect me to be like this now.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:50:18 I sense that one needs to be aware that it's going to happen and not get sucked in and when they see it coming, it's headed off at that point just by indicating to that particular person – I don't think they necessarily force it on somebody, if they make it clear they don't want it, make it clear to that particular individual that this is not – What I'd say to a seasonal, that they found that very distasteful and they don't particularly wish to be around it and they just leave.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:50:46 Does this originate in joke and storytelling and then go on from there until it gets very personal?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:50:51 I think so a lot of times.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:50:53 Is this particular to the Park Service?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:50:55 Oh, no, no, no. Well, Betty Harrigan's just corporate business. She even cuts out [inaudible 00:51:01] altogether

and she said, "It's a game" where the woman is bound to lose.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:51:09 Is it any different in the Park Service by virtue of being in isolated areas sometimes?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:51:13 I think it's only different by virtue of it's easier to get sucked in because of the high personal relationship between all of the employees in the Park Service. You do tell jokes and do things that you might not in a large impersonal office where you didn't really know the people that well, you just came and went.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:51:30 The Park Service is still that much of a family?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:51:34 Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think so. Yeah. A lot of sibling rivalry in the family and I think mom and dad are up for a divorce and the family's gotten a little out of hand but I sense that for working relationships – Well, I've worked since I was 15 different kinds of jobs and this is the only place where you live with the people you work with and if you go downtown, you don't find that – You may go to the Christmas party and you may bowl with them or stuff like that, but you don't live with them. You don't hang around the office after hours and you don't come in early and stuff like that.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:52:16 I sense it's easier to trap yourself because you want to feel warm and good and I think most Park Service people that are in the people-oriented things that should be there, like people and like to feel warm and good and loved and surrounded by people and sometimes you lower your guard a little bit and something else creeps in there that shouldn't but I think in a similar situation, probably in a commune, you would end up with the same deal eventually, maybe that's why some women don't do so well.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:52:44 Have you been married at any time during your Park Service career? If you were to marry, would you want to combine marriage with working for the Park Service?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:52:51 I think about that a lot, not because of possibilities but just in case. I figure it's best to have that right. I have two friends, one of whose husband switched his job to go with her, and the other one they worked out, it was a compatible kind of thing, where they would be. Other people that I

know that have that situation. I've seen it done every which way.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:53:19 For me, personally, because of my personality, I don't think I could stand to be married anyway. I couldn't put up with a man that long. No, anybody just being around because I've been by myself so long. I don't know if I'd want to make those kinds of adjustments.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:53:34 But if I did it, dreadful as this is, he'd just have to do what I wanted, whether I decided to quit or not, he would have to do whatever I decided. I just have a very large investment in my life and I don't want to give it off to somebody else. I don't think that's necessary. When I think about possibilities it strikes me that a freelance writer or an artist or somebody like that who does not have ties or comes and goes a lot or a bum. A kept man, as it were.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:54:15 Whenever I find somebody that I think would be interesting and start thinking about it, there isn't anybody I know that lives anyplace I want to go and other than going back to school, because I could be educated forever and love it, I can't think of anything else I'd rather do. I can't picture myself sitting around the house all day long. I paint some and I haven't for a long time. I could do that. I have a lot of things I'd like to do. But if I were to do the things I'd like to do, it would involve traveling all over the country and I'd have to be the bum or the freelance writer or artist.

Susan J. Hepler: 00:54:52 To settle down to a normal conventional type marriage where I was the wife and somebody else did the other things in life, I don't think I could do that. I don't know if there are any men out there wanting to be a lifer in that.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:55:13 You had mentioned several women that have made contributions, you say when you were at Harpers Ferry and have taken you into their sessions, problem solving, is there anything growing up by way of a network among women in the Park Service? A support network of encouraging other women?

Susan J. Hepler: 00:55:37 I think that that will come. There's nothing formal or anything that you can really see but I remember talking to Janet about the superintendent's conference where they had some dealings that they were doing, the women superintendents, that they felt was – I can't even remember

the gist of it. We were both tired and talking and hadn't seen each other for quite a long time. I sense that that will come. I think probably it will remain informal because there are a lot of men that belong in that network too. You know, men that have the same attitudes as us women. I don't think that there would ever be a women against men type group.

- Susan J. Hepler: 00:56:24 In fact, I was very charmed. I was talking to a friend of mine that works at Zion and the field rangers have for some years felt very strongly that they have an awful lot of good ideas that are being passed up by management because of the intravening people. They have formed a ranger organization to be able to get this stuff out and to talk about mutual problems in the park areas that they might not otherwise be able to share.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:56:51 The friend that called me and told me about it said we would like for you to join because we would like to be sure that the women are in this thing and this was not from some chauvinistic, macho man but from some very macho men and it was done not we want women because we feel we ought to have women but you guys are involved in this stuff too and we want you to know that it's going and contacting all the people we know, we think would be good people to have and you were up on the list there. I think there are an awful lot of men that have got their stuff together.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:57:29 Have you been given opportunity to take various classes or courses or training courses?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:57:39 I suspect. There was about three exceptions. I am one of the more trained people in the Park Service. It's kind of through support from people saying, "Why don't you go and take this?" When I was at the Canal, I used to – My supervisor and I would talk and I would take the forms and run them over to the superintendent's office and say, "Sign this. It has to be in region by tomorrow" and I would run over there today and get in courses that way. Just all kinds of things. I've had a good share and more than most people.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:58:16 Are you a member of any professional societies?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:58:21 I've never been anywhere where there was something. Then because of being in interpretation, either I was always busy

giving campers at night or then auditing campers at night and with strange schedules, and I don't know--I think maybe they're always encouraging you to be.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:58:44 NAI?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:58:45 But I feel like, well, I belong to that but that's a matter of sending them \$15 you know. I belong to the feds down here in town and the Grand Junction chamber of commerce. I go to the feds meetings. The chamber has a meeting once a year. What's to belong to? I've never been able to get away for the NAI conferences and things. I don't feel like that kind of a member. I mean yeah, Smithsonian, but those are a matter of sending in your money. I put them on the forms because they want you to have things to put on your forms. What does it mean?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:59:21 As far as going and joining groups here, I'm pretty tired of people by the end of the day. I don't want to help them. I don't want to talk to them. I just want to have a good time. Sometimes be off by myself.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:59:33 Have you taken training as a protective ranger?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:59:36 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:59:37 And your field is interpretation. Sometimes these are twains that never meet. Isn't that correct?
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:59:43 I don't see any reason why they should be.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:59:45 I talked to somebody very recently who felt these were two very different fields and wished that they did speak with one another a little more frequently.
- Susan J. Hepler: 00:59:53 Well, if you figure that we're on here to protect the park and it's resources and give visitors an opportunity to have the best, safest possible time, whatever that means, there's no way that an interpreter could or should ignore a wrongdoing. Now, whether they have these certifications to go up and arrest somebody is another matter. There's some very complicated and some very high level criminal activities in the parks and I could see that you need a specialist to take care of those kinds of things. But poor little ladies who don't know they're not supposed to pick flowers, certainly can be informed by just about anybody in

the whole park that, "Hey, did you know you weren't supposed to."

- Dorothy Huyck: 01:00:46 This person felt that the protective rangers looked very much down on interpreter people still, that they were butterfly catchers and that kind of thing. I know this idea was prevalent but apparently it still exists in some areas.
- Susan J. Hepler: 01:01:00 A good friend of mine and I were talking on my vacation and we were talking about that very thing. He wanted to know why are all chiefs of interpretation such wussies. He couldn't define that term any further.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:01:16 How do you spell that?
- Susan J. Hepler: 01:01:17 I think it's W-U-S-S-I-E but I'm not sure.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:01:21 How would you define it?
- Susan J. Hepler: 01:01:23 Well, we were trying to figure out what that was and I think it's like nerd or all those words you make up to lay on people [crosstalk 01:01:32]. Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's a little easier to define I think. A turkey has a certain apparel that's apparently pretty identifiable. We decided that they have no senses of humor.
- Dorothy Huyck: 01:01:47 Who has no sense of humor?
- Susan J. Hepler: 01:01:49 Well, he—
- [END OF TAPE 1]
- [START OF TAPE 2]
- Susan Helper: 00:03 I think the lack of the sense of humor seemed to define the ones we were talking about.
- Dorothy Huyck: 00:08 These are usually chiefs of interpretation?
- Susan Helper: 00:11 Um-hmm. And depending upon how big an area was you could have them at a lower level. And as it turned out the individuals that we were speaking of, who he was claiming was these, were people who definitely didn't appear to have much of a sense of humor and the person you get [inaudible 00:00:29] a sense of humor. And I think - because I remember when I was saying, I don't feel like I'm God's gift

to these people or they should feel that either - these people think that. I have the environmental message. You will listen to the environmental message. You will learn from this message and you will go home and do right. And if you do wrong, you are wrong. And I think they tend to spread that all over, with personal relationships eventually and everything.

- Dorothy Huyck: 00:57 Do they train additional interpreters in this mode of operation?
- Susan Helper: 01:01 Some do. Either they either frustrate them or they train them. Or fire them. Sometimes they do that too. And some people have enough of their own sense of humor that they don't worry about those kinds of things and those kinds of people and do their job and don't worry about others. But it is kind of funny because I've known a lot of people. And whether they just get picky and snotty and you're not just so, and I'm [unintelligible] up. Well, they make such a big deal about the uniforms – And this has to be just so, and that has to be just so, and it has to be so ugly all together. And that's something where these people were big on image.
- Susan Helper: 01:46 And maybe that's back to the thing of, maybe they feel like they're not as manly as the guy who goes out and shoots up and does those things – that's not a drug term – so that they have to be more particular about these important things and that this work is important. I mean, you guys just ride around in the car and maybe it stems from a need to build up a sense of importance that they become, they become inside themselves very important. What they have to say and do is very important. They take themselves so seriously that they lose their humor. And then everybody else says, well, this guy's a woosie because he doesn't have it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:26 Looking at interpretation from the protective person's side, is it still a secondary art still?
- Susan Helper: 02:34 Well, they have to be certified and we don't.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:38 Protective people.
- Susan Helper: 02:40 And they have to have these many hours of training and you can walk off the street anywhere or out of the desert. And if you can get yourself on the list and get yourself

plucked off, you can be an interpreter. And hopefully whoever's there will do a little telling you what it is you're interpreting, and those kinds of things. I think a part of the protective thing at this time is because a lot of those guys see themselves as being every bit as competent as the interpreter and being able to talk to the public. And a lot of them would really like to do that. And a lot of them resent being shoved over into being gun carriers. And so that's their little [inaudible 00:03:29] back, as long as they are as good as, and a lot of them are – both because some of the interpreters aren't very good because some of the protectives are good in all kinds of things.

Susan Helper: 03:39 And I've always been abhorred by the comment of this guy is not a very good protection ranger, but he would make a great interpreter. Cause I don't think so. Or vice versa, he's a little heavy handed, so he makes good protection, because I don't think that's what makes up either one of them. But that probably is going to go on for the rest of time. And it will also change – the reasons for the fighting back and forth is the outside influences change. The fighting reasons will be changed. Or maybe, some people don't have to have a reason for it. It's the way you're supposed to be. If you're one of these, you don't like those.

Susan Helper: 04:32 And probably also the interpreters started as naturalists and the naturalists started as college professors leading summer field trips, that there may be a lot of the interpreters, a very educated person who knows the names of everything but they sure don't know anything else. And they don't even know how to move from here to there without tripping over their laces. And they're not practical people, and some of them aren't. And I think that's more a problem of somebody took a person and said, well, they don't seem suited for anything else, let's put them over here.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:05 In interpretation?

Susan Helper: 05:08 Mmmm-hmmm. Or if the person has an ugly personality, then obviously just put them in law enforcement because they can't talk to people so maybe they can beat up on them. But those are, that's like, have I been discriminated against questions. Some people got good valid reasons for not liking one another because they've had some really poor experiences, and seeing some really inadequate people in their jobs. Some people are jealous because they would

rather have the other job. Some of them have no sense of humor, on either side. And then there's the historical reasons. It's like anything else, a lot of individual stuff involved in that.

- Dorothy Huyck: 05:51 If you were to look down the pike five or 10 years, how do you foresee the opportunities for women within the Park Service?
- Susan Helper: 06:06 Let me think back five years and see what's happened. What year is this? '78. I think just like anywhere they're going to increase, increase and increase. So there's going to be easier for a lot of reasons. One reason is that eventually women are going to be comfortable enough with being women, that they're going to be what they want, not what they ought to be, not something beyond just to prove themselves. And so that will make it easier, because the women you get in to the non traditional jobs will be the women who went into those jobs because they were those jobs. Because they enjoyed doing those things. And because it was a good, comfortable place for them to be.
- Susan Helper: 06:56 And as that happens – and maybe, hopefully, because I always believed that men's liberation ought to do that, if men wanted to babysit and keep the house, they ought to be allowed to – men also will be more comfortable with being those things they wish to be, so that the competition is not going to be man versus woman, but two people having to grab off a good job. Well in five years, there may be no job opportunities for anybody. They're very few now, but I think in another five years, there'll be an awful lot of sorting out going on to where you're getting people altogether better suited. Either that or it will be completely reversed and just totally screwed up and people just grabbing off anything to have it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:35 How could that happen?
- Susan Helper: 07:36 Well, it's happened in the Park Service. Oh, about--it's probably longer ago than I think it was – the hired three whole classes of people at once. They got a lot of people that took jobs because there was nothing, nothing at that time. And they took jobs 'cause they were off of jobs. They didn't know what the Park Service was, and what they'd be doing in this job. They didn't know enough to ask what they'd be doing and the people who were offering to, they

didn't notice it and didn't tell them what they'd be doing. And if they told them they wouldn't have known whether they wanted to do it because they had no exposure to it.

- Susan Helper: 08:09 And there's a possibility that's going to be coming up. But the world situation and the economics in this country would have an awful lot to do with everybody's opportunities. But I think people are beginning to sort themselves out so that you're not trying to force themselves into doing something just because somebody else – Or I guess for a long time, there were a lot of women that wanted to be housewives and mothers that went out and got jobs because they wanted to be liberated and what they really wanted to do is be housewives and mothers. And it took them an awful long time to figure that out.
- Dorothy Huyck: 08:43 By the same token, there were some women who wanted to be forest rangers and no one could swallow that.
- Susan Helper: 08:48 But I wasn't told they couldn't, they just said they never had any, so no reason to think they ever will. And that was none of 'they've got to let me in because I can do it' situation that was a 'who would've believed it.' If you'd have walked around the whole country and polled everybody in the Forest Service or every woman that liked to be out of doors and asked them about it, they would've just laughed not from the point of view of it's a ridiculous thing, but we just don't hire women. Not because they're women, but because we don't hire women.
- Susan Helper: 09:23 And I think that's the same thing is going to happen with the Blacks, with minorities. We have so many cultural things going on inside of our heads that we fight almost every day. And then we fight the other people, who've got their cultural things. And there's a lot of things that are pretty extreme. And I think in the long run that'll settle down. People settle in to what they were looking for instead of what they're being pushed toward. Well, what was it, the time when fairy tales were supposed to be psychologically detrimental to young children? So all the books were wiped off the market and I was raised on them and just as warped as all those thousands of children before. And I don't sense that the fairy tales were as bad as some of the TV things or whatever. And I, I think this women working is not going to end up being as big as fairy tales.

- Dorothy Huyck: 10:25 I've been asking you quite a number of questions. Is there something that we should have commented on that hasn't come up at all?
- Susan Helper: 10:31 I don't know because I don't know all of the things you want to know.
- Dorothy Huyck: 10:43 Well one thing I do like to ask further - as chief of interpretation here, what is your primary responsibility or what are your primary duties?
- Susan Helper: 10:52 Okay. The public programs, working with the visitors and keeping the visitor center operating and those pieces of information to get out, which includes things like the museums and the seasonal programs, the wayside exhibits, the museum collection, artifacts and things that are gathered up, which we don't have very extensive collections here. The library and anything that has to do those informational things. And then sort of as a, this was literally cultural side note, I end up with some environmental assessment work when the historian calls from the region about the buildings or something like that. I get to be the one.
- Dorothy Huyck: 11:44 The one who what?
- Susan Helper: 11:45 The one who works with them. I don't have the expertise to run out here and do historical architect kinds of things, but I worked with those people and getting them set up to find the things they need to know, and making sure that what needs to be done in relation to the historical things in this park somehow gets done. Whether it's something I can do or something I can get on the phone and beg somebody from over there to--
- Dorothy Huyck: 12:13 Can you give me an example of that?
- Susan Helper: 12:14 Well, when I first got here, they had the National Register question was up and I thought I could work out the forms, and I said, there's some very interesting surveying terms and things that I have no idea what are, and then you get into strange architectural terms, and I couldn't. And so then it was go back to the region, talk to their people, say, here's the situation. Here's what I can do. Both from a point of view of time and expertise. And I'm quite willing to learn, but there's some of this I don't think is going to be that

useful for me to learn because it took you 12 years. And here's this pile back and whatever you can do and whatever I can do with you, we'll work that out. And trying to coordinate those things where there isn't the capability here in the monument, but I know where to find it, through the Harpers Ferry Center or Denver Service Center or the regional office, or sometimes just somebody happened to know out there that knows the subject matter and what to do about it. So a lot of coordination. And I ended up with a lot of press releases and PR work for the park and a lot, because about 3/4 of it directs to the interpreting programs.

- Dorothy Huyck: 13:39 You train the seasonal interpreters also. How many seasonals have you this summer?
- Susan Helper: 13:44 Okay. We have four seasonal interpreters, one seasonal communications counselor--
- Dorothy Huyck: 13:49 What does that mean?
- Susan Helper: 13:51 Communications counselor is your non-threatening auditor. I'm the supervisor. I do the evaluation. When I come to your program and I tell you, I don't like the way you put this words together and what you developed out of that and what your message is, you're going to change. Because I'm your supervisor, and if you don't change, you get a bad evaluation. The communications counselor is someone who has, well in this case, a master's degree in some form of communications, journalism, whatever, who can come to that program and say, Hey, no, I was watching these visitors react to these particular things. And I, myself from listening was somewhat puzzled at the flow, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And let's see if we can't work out something and they'll say, well, good old Vicky. She's so nice. And she's helping me. And because she has nothing to do with what happens to them job wise. All she's there for is to help. That's what the communications counselor does here. I don't know what they do other places, but they're just the non-threatening helper units. To me, it's like having an extra arm. So I don't spend all day in the office and then go out every night. You can see what's happening with programs too.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:09 What's the duration of your season here?
- Susan Helper: 15:12 Roughly from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

- Dorothy Huyck: 15:18 And in the remaining months, what occupies you primarily?
- Susan Helper: 15:24 I'm less busy in the summer than I am in the winter. This past winter, we were working on the wayside exhibits, the National Register forms, getting a publication contracted for the cooperating association, which sells the books and things over there. And working to build up the board of the cooperating association. So instead of going, whatever you want, my dear, we could really get some constructive input. I'll put on a series of seminars through the association.
- Dorothy Huyck: 15:55 On what topics?
- Susan Helper: 15:57 We hear two geologies, one flora and one fauna.
- Dorothy Huyck: 16:01 Were these attended publicly?
- Susan Helper: 16:02 Public. And primarily we started out with the thought that in the wintertime when schools are in session there are two people in interpretation, myself and the park technician. Okay. Okay. And there's seven days a week and there's a visitor center and people come up there seven days a week. So you figure there's what four days of overlap and all these other things that have to be done, training and leave and stuff like that. So when teachers want something frequently you're not able to provide it, just from the point of view of not having anybody, it's either that or close down the visitor center, which is a little awkward.
- Susan Helper: 16:38 So what we thought we would do is have a series of seminars for teachers and starting with the basic subjects, so that they could come and experience the monument with people who were highly skilled in that particular field. And they could give the teachers ethics, how to use the monument without taking it home with you, and how to work with your kids, but also the basic understanding of the subject matter. And then they would be able when they're ready to come, they'd be ready to bring those kids up here themselves and know where to go and what to look for. They may not know everything because who does after one session? I don't know so many things after almost two years here that I'm frightened. That's always the questions they ask, the ones you don't know.

- Susan Helper: 17:32 And that worked out real well. We had a lot of people who weren't teachers, but I'd say 50% of the people who came were teachers. And we have gotten letters and comments back from them up to, and including the one who's 'I took my class out right after that. And here's what we were to do because of that.' We hope this fall to be able to build those. And so that helps fill in some activities for the off season too, in addition to hitting some other needs that we have. So I was quite pleased with that. But a lot of it is trying to get things organized and coordinated. This year was zero-based budget. And also I'm in the mid-level management program so I ended up going to extra training, beyond or details and things. So from January until March, I was gone six weeks and it takes up a big chunk of your winter, but just the planning and getting things together and coordinating with the outside people who are doing things where it takes up an awful lot of time.
- Dorothy Huyck: 18:34 Again, is there something we might've overlooked that you'd like to comment on?
- Susan Helper: 18:46 I think just, just as a general thing, this is probably the most elegant and rewarding and fulfilling and satisfying, and at the same time, frustrating, irritating, and boy, as soon as I get this much money, I've got to quit job that I've ever had. And I don't know, I think I could easily quit, but I'm not too sure I could ever work at anything else. And I think that is a lot of why I sit and ponder some of the things I do and don't know what is an answer, because maybe I'll find the answer I don't want to, and then I'll be forced to go do something else. And so what I try to do is figure out why I like it.
- Dorothy Huyck: 19:29 Thank you so much.

[END OF TAPE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]