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



Clare Willis
April 11, 1978

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

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01 The date is April 11th, 1978. And I'm Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Clare Willis at the Southeast Regional Offices in Atlanta.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:14 Would you tell me how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service?

Clare Willis: 00:17 It was through an advertisement, the job announcement.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:22 Here in Atlanta?

Clare Willis: 00:23 Yes. When they moved here, from Richmond.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:26 And when did you join the Park Service?

Clare Willis: 00:27 The day they moved.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:30 Which was?

Clare Willis: 00:32 January, six years ago.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:37 Were there particular factors about the Park Service that made it attractive to you?

Clare Willis: 00:43 No, not really.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:45 And when you first came in, what position did you have?

Clare Willis: 00:48 Accounting clerk.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:52 Did you move from that to a further position?

Clare Willis: 00:55 Yes. The accounting assistant, then I became a program analyst and then a budget analyst.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:01 Are you in some sort of an upward mobility program?

Clare Willis: 01:05 I don't think so.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:11 What grade did you come in at?

Clare Willis: 01:11 For the Park Service?

Dorothy Huyck: 01:11 Yes.

Clare Willis: 01:11 As a four.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:11 And what are you now?

Clare Willis: 01:11 Seven.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:17 Had you worked for other government agencies?

Clare Willis: 01:18 Yes, the Army.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:19 The Army. Here in Atlanta?

Clare Willis: 01:21 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:22 And had you worked for a private industry prior to that?

Clare Willis: 01:25 Yes. Advertising.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:27 An advertising agency? Which one was that?

Clare Willis: 01:31 [inaudible 00:01:31], here in Atlanta.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:38 Would you tell me briefly about your current responsibilities in your current position?

Clare Willis: 01:42 Okay. BJ works strictly with the construction development.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:48 That would be BJ Hall?

Clare Willis: 01:51 Yes. We're responsible for getting the construction program together for this region.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:57 And specifically, what aspect of the construction program are you involved in?

Clare Willis: 02:01 Just the 10-238s. Getting them put into the system, getting the current yield.

Dorothy Huyck: 02:05 I'm ignorant. What's a 10-238?

Clare Willis: 02:10 Oh, it's a form that the superintendent fills out to tell us what type of construction he needs in his park. Then we have dozens of them for each park and then we sit in there and we get a list together and take it to the director to

decide what he wants as his priorities for five years. We try to keep a five-year program all the time. I found out there in Washington there's 80 programs.

- Dorothy Huyck: 02:34 And these are your principal duties, therefore? Or are there others that you want to tell me about?
- Clare Willis: 02:40 No, just like keeping up with the construction money. I have all the moneys allotted to me. The construction money. Val keeps up with operating money and I keep up construction money. Allotting that out when I go to contract.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:51 In the process of moving through these several grades have you attended various training courses?
- Clare Willis: 02:55 No. Only one. Have been at Harpers Ferry for one week.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:58 What did you take at Harpers Ferry?
- Clare Willis: 02:59 It's a budget course. They don't call it budget though. Maintenance, operational maintenance or something it's been several years ago.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:14 Has anybody in this office particularly encouraged or assisted you in the process of these six years?
- Clare Willis: 03:22 I've only been over here almost two years. I was in the finance office before. I really haven't applied for anything since I've been over here.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:32 When you've had problems, was there anybody that you discuss these with in particular?
- Clare Willis: 03:36 Well, BJ of course. We sit right beside each other, so never really had no problem.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:43 There are some people who think that the Park Service is a rather male-oriented organization. Has that been your experience?
- Clare Willis: 03:53 No.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:53 Then is it correct to say that your talents and your background are being well used here?

Clare Willis: 03:59 I think so.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:01 Where were you born and when?

Clare Willis: 04:05 Here in Georgia in 1943.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:06 Where in Georgia?

Clare Willis: 04:06 Blairsville.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:08 Which is where?

Clare Willis: 04:09 North Georgia. Small town in [unintelligible].

Dorothy Huyck: 04:11 Were you an only child?

Clare Willis: 04:13 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:13 No?

Clare Willis: 04:14 Four children.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:15 And were you the first or—

Clare Willis: 04:17 Yeah.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:17 You're the youngest. Were these older brothers and sisters? Both?

Clare Willis: 04:22 Yes, ma'am.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:27 Did you grow up in north Georgia, also?

Clare Willis: 04:30 In North Georgia and North Carolina, which is where it comes together. We had property in both places, and we lived both places.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:37 You graduated from high school, where?

Clare Willis: 04:39 In Blairsville, North Georgia.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:41 Did you have any college?

Clare Willis: 04:42 Just business college. I went to business school for a year.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:47 What was your father's occupation?

Clare Willis: 04:51 I really don't know. He and my mother were divorced when I was real little.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:56 And your mother?

Clare Willis: 04:57 Yes. She just worked at a factory.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:00 When you were in high school, were you encouraged by anybody in particular, your mother, a teacher, some community person? Nobody provided particular encouragement in the educational process?

Clare Willis: 05:14 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:14 It was up to you. Did you take courses that were oriented toward a business curriculum or commercial curriculum or—?

Clare Willis: 05:21 Well, in high school, I must have took bookkeeping and shorthand and this type of thing.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:28 Did you take science and math?

Clare Willis: 05:30 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:30 Were these general science and math courses?

Clare Willis: 05:34 Yes, just general.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:37 I'm curious to know whether or not you might have been a tomboy. Were you a tomboy?

Clare Willis: 05:40 I guess so. I Played basketball and still played softball.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:46 And as you became a teenager, were you expected to be more of a lady?

Clare Willis: 05:52 No. I've been like this all my life.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:59 Were you into any extracurricular activities that maybe have been helpful as an adult?

Clare Willis: 06:06 Well, I'm not sorry I played basketball and those type of things. I had to study harder, just keep up with that type thing and I belong to several clubs you know, in high school which, I think, it helps.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:19 Had you ever traveled to or been in a national park before you came to work for the Park Service?

Clare Willis: 06:25 Yes, but not much. Smokies – you know, something that's close by. No, I didn't even know what the National Park Service was until I come in.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:34 What have you found satisfying about working for the Park Service or maybe you haven't?

Clare Willis: 06:46 No, it's no one particular thing. I like it. It's much more relaxed atmosphere than it is working for the army.

Dorothy Huyck: 06:58 Have there been any frustrating aspects?

Clare Willis: 07:03 Well, at first, because I was used to work strictly by just rules and books and regulations. And at first that was kind of a shock.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:14 Things more relaxing.

Clare Willis: 07:18 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:23 Do you think—

Clare Willis: 07:24 It's smaller too, so much smaller.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:24 Do you think that being a woman has been helpful or not helpful as far as a career at the Park Service is concerned?

Clare Willis: 07:32 I don't think it has either way.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:36 Would you have any thoughts as to where women in future years might be as far as the Park Service is concerned, what the opportunities are like in the future?

Clare Willis: 07:44 Probably look pretty good from things I've been reading.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:50 Are you married?

Clare Willis: 07:52 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:53 Have your children?

Clare Willis: 07:53 Yes, three.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:53 And what ages are they?

Clare Willis: 07:54 18, 15 and eight.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:59 Are they boys or girls?

Clare Willis: 08:00 Both.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:02 Which?

Clare Willis: 08:03 Two girls and a boy.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:04 And which of these is the eldest?

Clare Willis: 08:05 The girl, 18, girl.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:07 And the 15-year-old?

Clare Willis: 08:08 Is a boy. And then a girl.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:11 Did you take time out for being with your children during your career or have you worked fairly consistently?

Clare Willis: 08:17 No. This six years is the longest I've ever worked. When I was with the army, I quit a lot. I would stop and stay home a year or so. And they'd call ask me to come back and I'd go back and work a while. This is longest I've ever worked.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:33 And what's your husband's occupation?

Clare Willis: 08:34 He's a pilot instructor for Delta.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:38 You have daughters. Would you suggest the Park Service might be a career that they'd someday be interested in?

Clare Willis: 08:43 Yes, I would have no objection.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:49 Is your 18-year-old in school?

Clare Willis: 08:51 Just finished two weeks ago.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:53 And what's she going to be doing now?

Clare Willis: 08:55 She wants to get a degree in accounting.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:03 And one other question, have you responsibilities of a financial sort for anybody other than your children? Are there, parents and so forth that you responsible for?

Clare Willis: 09:11 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:15 I've been asking you lots of questions. Maybe you'd like to comment on something about your Park Service experience that I haven't even touched on.

Clare Willis: 09:21 Well, I've really enjoyed it. You know, it's been good, and I feel like I've been given a good opportunity here. I'm sure if I go in higher, I probably have to move from here.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:35 Would the need to be mobile, be a problem as far as you're concerned?

Clare Willis: 09:38 It could be and could not be. See, I could probably go to someplace like San Francisco or any place that Delta flies. I couldn't go to a small, a real place, but some major place.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:53 And as far as you're concerned, you would be willing to be mobile, is that correct?

Clare Willis: 09:58 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:59 Well, I ask that because oftentimes it's assumed that women are not willing to be.

Clare Willis: 10:04 I know when I applied for this job, I was told by personnel that I really was not qualified because I was not mobile. And it's like, I told him, he can't prove that I'm no more mobile than I can prove I am. 'Cause when the time comes, I may be mobile because I might be divorced, or you never know.

Clare Willis: 10:25 So at that point in my life, I may be very well mobile. At that particular day, I was not mobile, but now that my children are getting older, it could be worked out quite well.

Clare Willis: 10:37 My husband could commute, or he could transfer.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:41 And would be willing to do so?

Clare Willis: 10:42 I think so.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:44 Is your husband an encouraging person as far as your work is concerned?

Clare Willis: 10:47 Yeah, he is. He would let me go to Virgin Islands now. He'd like to go down there.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:52 So mobility is not a problem as far as you're concerned?

Clare Willis: 11:01 No, not that much. Of course, he would probably have to take a down grade because they do all their pilot training here in Atlanta or he would either have to commute or I would have to commute or something for a while.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:10 So this long-standing attitude toward mobility and women just isn't a problem as far as you're concerned.

Clare Willis: 11:15 No, it's a lot of opportunity to come by. I would definitely, you know, take it.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:21 Are you hopeful that further opportunities will be provided within the Park Service?

Clare Willis: 11:27 Yes. I think I'm capable of doing more than what I'm doing.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:31 And assuming more responsibility?

Clare Willis: 11:32 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:34 I assume that you have grown in the amount of responsibility that you assumed in these several jobs?

Clare Willis: 11:39 Yes. Well, when this one became a vacant, of course I applied and in the job description, it states that you ought to be mobile on the job announcement. It stated that. And of course, my two years would be up this July. So, I guess I'll know at that time.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:03 Let me say again, there's probably something I haven't touched on or haven't asked anything about that maybe you'd like to comment on?

Clare Willis: 12:10 No, I'm perfectly happy being a woman.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:13 And you're perfectly happy being with the Park Service?

Clare Willis: 12:14 Yeah.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:14 Great.

Clare Willis: 12:14 No intentions of changing.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:18 Good. Thank you.

[END OF TAPE]

[END OF INTERVIEW]