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



Judith Ronscavage
July 7, 1978

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

Dorothy Huyck: 00:01 The date is July 7th, 1978. I am Dorothy Huyck. I will be interviewing Judy Ronscavage, spelled R-O-N-S-C-A-V-A-G-E, who is an interior designer at the Denver Service Center. Let me ask how you first became acquainted with the National Park Service.

Judith Ronscavage: 00:45 I needed a job.

Dorothy Huyck: 00:48 That's a good reason.

Judith Ronscavage: 00:48 Through a friend who was a salesman for United Airlines, who used to call on the chief of the Service Center's secretary. They were going through a reorganization, and I guess that was '65 when they went through a big reorganization, and I was hired as an engineering draftsman under that program.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:15 Where was that?

Judith Ronscavage: 01:16 San Francisco.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:23 How long were you at that position?

Judith Ronscavage: 01:24 A year.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:26 And then?

Judith Ronscavage: 01:28 Then I was changed to an interior designer.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:32 Again in San Francisco?

Judith Ronscavage: 01:33 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:34 How long did you stay in San Francisco as an interior designer?

Judith Ronscavage: 01:37 Until we moved out here.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:39 Until the Service Center was opened?

Judith Ronscavage: 01:42 Here in Denver.

Dorothy Huyck: 01:46 Tell me what an interior designer does for the Park Service.

- Judith Ronscavage: 01:49 The Park Service? Quite a bit of it is color selections, and finish schedules, working with the architect, and then selecting furniture as requested.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:02 Would you give me an example of a location that you worked on in this regard?
- Judith Ronscavage: 02:13 Saratoga, when they remodeled that building.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:16 Which building was that?
- Judith Ronscavage: 02:17 The visitor center. The museum at Morristown, also Jockey Hollow visitor center. The biggest amount of furniture ordering was the brand-new dormitories up at Yellowstone at this point.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:41 Have you gotten into historic houses also?
- Judith Ronscavage: 02:43 No, no. Somebody else does that, and I don't know--I think that's on a contractual basis.
- Dorothy Huyck: 02:48 Then you are more interested in visitor center and public facilities?
- Judith Ronscavage: 02:51 Public facilities, office facilities, wherever they may need help. I helped them with the layout for the Rainier administration building, and in selecting some furniture, and going through the GSA jungle.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:09 Thinking back to the museum at Morristown, was that entire building gutted and then started from scratch again, as far as the interior was concerned?
- Judith Ronscavage: 03:17 No, but we worked with an outside architect and also Harpers Ferry in coming up with a suitable color scheme to be used throughout the building. Basically, the building was cleaned up.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:33 So your concern was the furniture and color schemes, and—
- Judith Ronscavage: 03:39 Finishes in new buildings, and working with the architects and writing up specs.
- Dorothy Huyck: 03:47 What are you working on right now?

Judith Ronscavage: 03:50 Oh, a very quick remedy to the second floor at Fort Mason, so they can move into it prior to really going into complete renovation.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:03 Will this be office space?

Judith Ronscavage: 04:04 It will be office space. Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:07 What at Fort Mason are you currently concerned about? Furniture again?

Judith Ronscavage: 04:13 It would be furniture. Not for the entire park, but just for the superintendent, assistant superintendent. And then just selecting some colors and carpets to clean it up to get an immediate effect to cover up the mess it's in.

Dorothy Huyck: 04:37 Do you use standard kind of equipment throughout the Park Service, or is there a considerable variety from one location to another?

Judith Ronscavage: 04:45 In the public areas there's a variety from one location to the other, because it has to do with what the architecture is. But in office spaces you are somewhat limited because of the standard set by GSA.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:00 Then you have more leeway in the public areas?

Judith Ronscavage: 05:03 I just take more leeway in the public areas, only because they are public areas.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:08 And you're not dealing strictly with the limits of GSA in public areas?

Judith Ronscavage: 05:11 No, I just have not done it. I've gone off schedule by saying that there was nothing on schedule that would be suitable to the architecture in this public area. So far, it hasn't been so much money that GSA would even particularly be bothered with it. I guess if it got into a hundred-thousand-dollar bracket, then they would sort of raise their eyebrows.

Dorothy Huyck: 05:43 What's an example of a park situation where you would use non-GSA furnishings?

Judith Ronscavage: 05:50 The Jockey Hollow visitor center, where there was a--

Dorothy Huyck: 05:54 That's at Morristown?

- Judith Ronscavage: 05:55 At Morristown, where there was an office area which was visible from the public area of the visitor center, a small office area. In which case we used some Noel furniture, one, because the architect liked it, and two, it suited the building as it was designed.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:20 Once the Denver Service Center opened, I take it that you've been here on a regular basis?
- Judith Ronscavage: 06:27 No, I quit when we first moved out here, and then was asked backed by Glen Hendricks to finish—
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:43 Who was then the director?
- Judith Ronscavage: 06:43 Who was then the director to finish the layout of the new building. This was at the time that they were still in the Villa Italian above the department store.
- Dorothy Huyck: 06:57 Were you instrumental in working on a layout of the current building?
- Judith Ronscavage: 07:01 Yes.
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:03 What was that like?
- Judith Ronscavage: 07:06 Changeable.
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:08 In what way?
- Judith Ronscavage: 07:10 Well, just ever-flexible, ever-changing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:15 Do you mean by that, the building—
- Judith Ronscavage: 07:16 The building stays the same, but the organization keeps on changing.
- Dorothy Huyck: 07:22 And that makes a difference in what you have to do as far as the building is concerned?
- Judith Ronscavage: 07:27 Well, when you're designing it and it keeps on changing while you're designing it, and more people are added and some are taken away, and the builder needs to know where you want those walls, it's kind of hard to keep on it. So, a lot of the places were originally designed for something else, and are now used in a different way, and now it's just plainly too crowded.

Dorothy Huyck: 07:57 There is an annex, in fact, is there not?

Judith Ronscavage: 07:59 There is.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:00 Did you work on that?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:03 Only briefly. It is a temporary measure, and it was to get as many people in there as you can.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:14 Let me ask where and when you were born?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:16 I was born in San Rafael, California in January of '39.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:24 Are you an only child?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:26 No. I have an older brother.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:30 Did you grow up in San Rafael?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:33 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:37 Are your parents persons who graduated from college?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:40 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:41 What's your father's occupation?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:43 He's retired now.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:45 And before he retired?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:47 He owned a litho trade shop.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:51 And your mother?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:52 Housewife.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:56 Did you go to high school in San Rafael?

Judith Ronscavage: 08:58 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 08:58 And what about college?

Judith Ronscavage: 09:01 To UCLA.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:04 Did you graduate from UCLA?

Judith Ronscavage: 09:06 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:06 When was that?

Judith Ronscavage: 09:07 1960.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:09 What was your area of specialty or your major?

Judith Ronscavage: 09:11 My major was art.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:13 And then did you go up some graduate work?

Judith Ronscavage: 09:15 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:18 During the education process at Logan High School and at college, were there persons who were particularly encouraging to you? Either family, or teachers, or professors, or community or church leaders, something of that sort? Did anybody provide encouragement?

Judith Ronscavage: 09:41 Hard to say. A lot of people did. One teacher helped me get into UCLA, because I was about a half a percentage point below.

Dorothy Huyck: 09:59 Were your parents at all encouraging during the educational stages?

Judith Ronscavage: 10:06 Neither one nor the other.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:10 In high school, did you take courses in math and science that more normally would've been thought of as boys' courses?

Judith Ronscavage: 10:20 Well, no. They weren't normally thought of as boys' courses. They were all part of the college prep courses.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:26 So you were in that college prep category?

Judith Ronscavage: 10:28 That's right. The boys' courses were mechanical drawing.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:33 I see. Rather than math or science, particularly.

Judith Ronscavage: 10:38 Particularly. The higher mathematics, when they got into calculus, that was considered boys.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:44 Did you take calculus?

Judith Ronscavage: 10:45 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:47 Did you play with boys as a child?

Judith Ronscavage: 10:52 Mostly girls.

Dorothy Huyck: 10:56 Had you traveled in the national parks at all when you were growing up, or [inaudible 00:11:01]?

Judith Ronscavage: 10:59 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:08 Now that you've been working for the Park Service, with regard to encouragement, have you found that you've had supervisors who were encouraging, or discouraging, or possibly some of both?

Judith Ronscavage: 11:20 Some of both.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:26 In what way could your supervisors have been encouraging?

Judith Ronscavage: 11:37 I would say – Encouraging – Only that they got the paperwork done.

Dorothy Huyck: 11:52 Well, that's I suppose a form of encouragement. Was there some way in which you've encountered discouragement?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:02 Not directly, but—

Dorothy Huyck: 12:03 But indirectly?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:06 I think the overall feeling, especially with the old Park Service, is somewhat of a male, chauvinistic—

Dorothy Huyck: 12:13 Well, certainly there are some people who think the Park Service is very male-oriented.

Judith Ronscavage: 12:19 It is.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:21 You still encounter that? It hasn't changed all that much?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:24 I truly don't think it has changed that much.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:27 Is it changing?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:29 Maybe very slowly.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:32 Any idea why it's moving at all?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:36 Sure. Ladies are getting more assertive.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:40 Is that the clue of bringing about some change in attitude?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:44 I think so.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:46 Have you found yourself becoming more assertive?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:49 Oh sure, absolutely.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:51 Does that bring favorable results?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:54 It has.

Dorothy Huyck: 12:56 Both with people you work with and supervisors alike?

Judith Ronscavage: 12:59 Well, I have a somewhat special thing, they said I really – They keep me on because they feel I'm doing a good job. It's not that I must have this job or that somebody else couldn't do it.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:17 But they acknowledge that you're doing a good job?

Judith Ronscavage: 13:19 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:23 Have you been given opportunities to take additional coursework or training center courses by the Park Service?

Judith Ronscavage: 13:27 Some I have, but going away for long periods of time is kind of hard with having a small child at home.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:42 But you've had some?

Judith Ronscavage: 13:43 I've had some, yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 13:48 Could you tell me anything about what sorts of courses you've been able to take?

Judith Ronscavage: 13:53 One was given by the Department of Agriculture about leasing space and office planning.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:03 Was that given here in Denver?

Judith Ronscavage: 14:04 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:04 Are you a member of any professional societies?

Judith Ronscavage: 14:11 No, I'm not.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:13 Do you think that your particular training and your particular talents are being well used by the Park Service?

Judith Ronscavage: 14:21 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:21 You've been given opportunities to use those?

Judith Ronscavage: 14:24 Oh, absolutely. It's far better – I was in retail interiors, and here the profit motive is not the overriding thing.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:34 When were you in the retail interior business?

Judith Ronscavage: 14:37 Well, I didn't start at the Park Service until '65. So, between 1960 and '65.

Dorothy Huyck: 14:44 In San Francisco?

Judith Ronscavage: 14:44 In San Francisco. Sold furniture, worked for an office furniture firm, did some color work for a building products firm, and went into engineering drafting, only because the pay for interior designers is notoriously low, and I could make more money living on my own being a draftsman than I could being a designer.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:12 Where did you get your training for the engineering side?

Judith Ronscavage: 15:14 I just picked it up.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:16 Really? You didn't actually go to school for the courses?

Judith Ronscavage: 15:19 No. I always could draw, so it wasn't that difficult.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:25 During the five years that you were in retail interiors, I take it you found that a contrast to your Park Service experience here?

Judith Ronscavage: 15:33 Absolutely.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:35 In addition to the motive of making money, the profit motive, are there other differences that you particularly observed?

Judith Ronscavage: 15:42 The overriding thing of course is the profit, to sell as much as you can for the most money.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:52 Did you enjoy being a furniture salesperson?

Judith Ronscavage: 15:54 Not particularly.

Dorothy Huyck: 15:57 Was that for a department store?

Judith Ronscavage: 15:59 I worked for not a department store, a specialty store. And then I was in wholesale fabrics dealing with the trade only, which was a lot of fun. And then went into an office furniture firm, and that just wasn't my cup of tea.

Dorothy Huyck: 16:26 And then once you got into Park Service, you found this really quite a different—

Judith Ronscavage: 16:32 Much different. It's a little more idealistic, I would say, and I think a lot of professional men and women find it so.

Dorothy Huyck: 16:39 Do you think that being a woman has affected your opportunities within the Park Service at all?

Judith Ronscavage: 16:45 Not at all.

Dorothy Huyck: 16:47 And you've been given equal opportunities with other persons, whether they were male or female?

Judith Ronscavage: 16:56 Yes, up to a point. Certainly.

Dorothy Huyck: 16:59 What grade did you enter the Park Service as?

Judith Ronscavage: 17:02 As a six.

Dorothy Huyck: 17:04 And what are you now?

Judith Ronscavage: 17:05 An 11.

Dorothy Huyck: 17:10 As you look forward to the coming years, let's say the next five or 10 years, how do you see the picture for women in the Park Service? Do you feel optimistic about it?

Judith Ronscavage: 17:17 Oh, I think it'll have to improve.

Dorothy Huyck: 17:21 Why will it have to?

Judith Ronscavage: 17:24 It's the way the whole country is going now.

Dorothy Huyck: 17:27 In regard to the overall social activity, you mean?

Judith Ronscavage: 17:30 Absolutely.

Dorothy Huyck: 17:32 Do you see this improvement beginning now?

Judith Ronscavage: 17:34 Despite Mrs. Schlafly. I guess there have been some women who I think have been passed over, but maybe there are some men who have been passed over because certain people get certain favorites, and those people always seem to bounce up on top.

Dorothy Huyck: 17:59 May I ask if you're married?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:00 Yes, I am.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:01 And your husband lives here in Denver?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:03 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:04 He's with the Park Service?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:05 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:05 Oh, he is?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:06 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:07 In what capacity?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:08 A landscape architect.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:12 And you have a child?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:14 Yes.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:14 A daughter, is that right?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:14 A son.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:15 Oh, a son. How old is he?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:18 He's seven.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:20 Do you have any other children?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:21 No. Just the one.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:23 Have you found that you've been able to combine the office life of the Park Service and family matters well?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:30 Yes, considering I'm on an intermittent appointment, and I do make my own hours, and they've allowed me the freedom of doing some of the work at home. All my work hinges on getting it done and not hours.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:43 Understandable. Have you responsibilities for anyone other than yourselves?

Judith Ronscavage: 18:51 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 18:54 If you were talking with a young woman contemplating joining the Park Service today, would you encourage her to do so? One just entering or looking for a beginning of her career?

Judith Ronscavage: 19:03 Certainly.

Dorothy Huyck: 19:03 You think it would be a something she could—

Judith Ronscavage: 19:10 Well, now, I like the Park Service, although I think the Service Center has gotten a little bit big and lost some of the personal, well, the esprit de corps that it had when it was a smaller unit, but that happens whether it's Park Service, or AT&T, or General Motors, or anything like that. You reach a point in size where somebody gets lost along the way.

Dorothy Huyck: 19:46 I've been asking you all kinds of questions. Is there something from your experience as a woman employee in the Park Service that you'd like to comment on that maybe I haven't mentioned?

Judith Ronscavage: 19:55 No.

Dorothy Huyck: 19:56 All right, thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]