

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Curt Sauer (CS)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Curt recounts time at Olympic National Park and how he ended up working at Joshua Tree National Park, late 1980s to early 2000s

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TM: Today is Monday, October 26, 2020. This is Part 9 Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Curt Sauer. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning Curt. How are you today?

CS: I'm good, Tom, hope you are too.

TM: Yeah, well thank you. May we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

CS: Yeah.

TM: Last time we were talking about your time in Olympic National Park. I wonder if there were any other issues that you wanted to talk about. One thing I was thinking of was the changes in logging and the concept of, you know, we could just log our forests forever. That was really changing. Did you see that in Olympic? Did you deal with that?

CS: Not so much in Olympic National Park but on the perimeter. That particular timeframe revolved around the spotted owl. At least that's what the logging community thought. What I didn't see when I was there, but I saw the historical photos of the old growth forests that were being logged. Of course the logging trucks were not quite as large and powerful as they were when I was there, but you know, one trunk of one cedar or one Douglas fir would fill up that logging trailer. The train cars were smaller, but one tree trunk would fill up one car. Over time, the concept, I imagine, was this is all bountiful and we can never overharvest. Well, in the 70s Forest Service started to recognize and the environmental groups started to recognize that they were overharvesting. They got to a point where very little old growth outside of the National Park still remained. Forest Service had to change their harvesting tactics/harvesting schedules. Over time, the trucks rolling through Port Angeles would have 20 trees on their trailer because they had cut all the old growth that was accessible. Then in addition to that you had spotted owl, which had been declared an endangered species which meant that the Forest service had to readjust their plans, which directly impacted where and how often and how you could log. Instead of clearcutting they went to, I forget what they called it. It was basically clear cutting but you left five or six "seed trees" on the 180 acres that you just cleared.

TM: So there'd be 180 acres of cleared hillside and five trees on it?

CS: Yeah. It might have been 25 trees on 180 acres. In driving down the road it's like, "Oh, there goes another clear cut." You fly over on a commercial flight and you can just see the peninsula being denuded. But that's, you know, that's Forest Service, that's multiple use. So the loggers were, again,

having their economic feasibility impacted. They were angry about the spotted owl; they were angry at the Forest Service for implementing these new changes. It might come as a surprise for me to say this, but they were an honorable bunch of men, a few women. They were angry, but they were not violent. I think I mentioned at the last interview, maybe I didn't mention it, while I was East District ranger, we got a call that there was a spotted owl nailed to the entrance sign of Olympic National Park, going up to Hurricane Ridge. So I went up and retrieved this dead spotted owl. I guess you could consider that violent. Somebody had killed a spotted owl, or somebody had picked up a roadkill of a spotted owl. I remember one demonstration down in Forks. Chris Fairbanks was the United States Forest Service law enforcement officer out in Forks. She lived in the Forks community and she knew the loggers. Through whatever means, whether they contacted her or she contacted them, instead of having a violent demonstration, they made arrangements to be arrested and made sure that all the news outlets were there, the newspapers and the radio stations, the TV stations. We sent a few rangers out to back her up and Forest Service send a few other law enforcement officers from other areas. So they had their demonstration and made their point and then refused to move. Chris and her team moved in and arrested eight of them or something. That was the agreement that they had made. They got their point across and Chris was able to do her job. It wasn't a bunch of looting and vandalism, as I sit here in current-day America. There were the peaceful protests. And you know, there were some other incidents. I don't recall what they were, but you could consider them to be violent, I guess, but it was basically just working out your frustration. An interesting thing to me, Tom, is maybe folks that listen to this in the future won't realize just how drastically our country has harvested its forests. I read a book in, I don't know, the early 1990s, it's more of a like a magazine format. Can't remember the organization that put it out, but they did an analysis of how much virgin forest was left compared to when this country was founded, including the oaks and the walnuts and the pecans. All the species back east, not just the old growth out west. In the 1990s, they estimated that 85% of the virgin forests had already been harvested. You think about the changes that that has created in the ecosystem and the animal life. It's pretty drastic.

TM: Yeah. Phenomenal.

CS: They were down to the last 15% and much of it was in Olympic National Park and North Cascades National Park, Mount Rainier National Park. So Park Service wasn't real popular with the locals who depended on the forest industry.

TM: And the trouble. I mean, that's for sort of Western hardwoods or Western softwoods even. I'm not sure I have the terms correct there, but I was thinking about the Eastern forests which didn't have large parks, large swaths of federal land set aside to be unimpacted for the enjoyment of future generations, going back to the Organic Act of the Park Service.

CS: Right, well and they had the populations. They had the mining with steam engines to suck water out of the mines, powered by coal at the time but eventually wood. All the railroad ties had to be laid; just the massive industrial revolution. You know, you have all these miners and you have all the loggers and all the transportation surrounding it. That's a lot of personnel that have to be fed, and they're fed warm food by burning trees. A lot of personnel that has to be housed. So there was a lot of consumption of the forests, especially back east in the early times of the country, 'cause that's where the population was. I imagine quite a few nice pieces of furniture created.

TM: Sure, I mean it's housing; it's stick lumber construction. And it seems as though, you know, when the US forests were thinned or heading toward depletion, we went to Canada and started importing a lot of Canadian lumber.

CS: One of the interesting tidbits of living in Port Angeles is a lot of the old growth would be loaded onto tankers...tanker's probably not the right word, large cargo ships in the port of Port Angeles. One would assume that they're going to American mills. Well, a lot of those trees were shipped to Japan. And in Japan, they were put in large ponds on top of each other until they sunk just from the weight of the trees on top of them. Those trees were not being utilized, they were being stored for the time that there would be no old growth available, commercial. At least some companies in Japan recognized the scarcity that was being created. What they ever did with them I don't know. I moved, moved on. When I found that out, it just showed me how valuable this old growth was becoming internationally.

TM: These trees are hundreds of years old, is that right?

CS: Yeah. Four and five hundred years old.

TM: So a climax forest like that takes three/four hundred years to grow like that?

CS: Yeah, and the environment has changed. The rains aren't the same, the winter weathers aren't the same, so the forests that were able to grow then don't have the same climactic conditions. I don't believe that they grow as rapidly as they used to, but I'm not a forester. You look at all the fires that are going on in Colorado right now, what's burning is primarily lodgepole pine, pine that were killed since the 1980s by a pine beetle. Their reproductive cycle... The weather didn't used to allow them to reproduce as much as they have in the areas that they have all the way up through the Rocky Mountains up into Canada. So those hillsides have been standing there naked, especially the lodgepole pine forests because lodgepole needs fire to regenerate, to pop open its pinecones. So, just like Yellowstone in the 1980s, you come back 20 years later and forests look pretty healthy. I would imagine that the forests that are being burned now, 20 or 30 years from now are going to be full of lodgepole pines. Unfortunately, 40/50/60 years from now they'll all want to harvest them.

TM: Right. In the meantime, we're making a lot of grassland.

CS: Yeah, yeah. Desertification, the creation of deserts. Over the last thousand years, the amount of deserts that have been created and enlarged, especially in the African area and in the Middle East. And it's coming here.

TM: I would think that's going to show the value of national parks, and that, again, preservation mandate. But it also puts a huge amount of pressure on the parks for further shrinkage of park size to increase extraction.

CS: Or changing of the rules and regulations to allow extraction inside national parks, not just of trees but oil and those darn grizzly bears.

TM: Well, also as you mentioned, with a loss of a greater ecosystem around the park refuges, the climate change results then put greater threat on the forests in the parks for fire. So it's not necessarily a sustainable refuge in the face of continued, as you mentioned, desertification or global warming, weather changes where things are drying out and susceptible to fire.

CS: Right. Which gets back to carrying capacity which is something I've thought about in our interviews in the past. I thought I'd mention it since it popped into my brain again. It was after I retired from Joshua Tree in the 2010s, I don't know, 2013/2014, I was invited by the chief of resources at Joshua Tree National Park to speak with a college group working on their masters on ecosystem management, something like that. During the conversation I said, "So tell me, what is carrying capacity?" To their

credit, they were able to roll out the definition of carrying capacity as taught by our institutions of higher learning. It reminded me of me back in the 70s, "We know what carrying capacity is, we can define that." But over the years, I sort of developed a different opinion on carrying capacity. We as humans and people that are concerned about preserving national parks like to talk about the human carrying capacity. Of course we know what the carrying capacity of bison or elk, cougar, bear is as far as the land is related. But to me, it's all very short term. I like to think about the carrying capacity of the Earth. Regardless of what we do, eventually the human species will go away and the Earth will still be here. I read a book, called Eocene, I think it was called. It's a book by a futurist, in fact I have it right here. No it was called *Novacene* by James Lovelock. You might want to look it up. In there he mentioned that between five and six billion years from now, the sun will have grown in size that it will have absorbed Mercury, Venus, and Earth before it implodes. So when we talk about carrying capacity, we're talking about how many people here for the next 50 years or the next 100 years and the Earth, Gaia, is this little entity that's more concerned about carrying capacity for the next several billion years. It's just a different way of looking at stuff. We get pretty concerned about that spotted owl nailed to that sign of the entrance station at Olympic National Park. But those are just, like I've mentioned, dogs off-leash in a park. Just one small, tiny spot of dust on everything else that the Earth is dealing with. That's my philosophy for the day, narrative of history here.

TM: It's very fascinating. As the parks, you know, looking a human carrying capacity... Parking lots are full. Is the answer to build more parking lots? Trails and overlooks are full. Is the answer to build more? You know at the South Rim of Grand Canyon, the concept has always been slated out by the state, "Hey, let's just build another South Rim a little further to the West," and you end up paving paradise to put up a parking lot.

CS: Exactly. And where are they going to get the water for that second South Rim?

TM: Pump it up from the river, and, you know, take it from downstream users who are thirsty, and take it from upstream users who have little.

CS: And to hell with Mexico.

TM: Well, exactly. So whether it's a Grand Canyon issue or it's an Olympic National Park issue, human carrying capacity is starting to really look at National Park manager's right in the face. And again, how to do that in a tourist-based economy, where everybody wants more tourism? In your time at the park, including Joshua Tree, did you have resource managers that were looking at this and were visiting with you saying they were really concerned about this and we're going to have to start thinking about this?

CS: That's a conversation that went on every day.

TM: Okay.

CS: Yeah. Went on every day. I would hope that people that support the parks and use the parks would have a concept of carrying capacity; we need to put limits on visitation. And, of course, ones that just cruise through the park because it's the shortest distance between two points, won't really give it much consideration. And the people that never go to the parks, that's the majority of Americans, don't really give it much consideration. I don't think that the American public and the American politicians are anywhere near supporting those concepts, especially when it stares in the face of economics for local communities and commercial operators. So, it's a discussion that goes on very frequently in the National Parks. I think it goes on frequently in the Forest Service and the BLM even though they have different mandates. [pause] So where were we?

TM: Carrying capacities.

CS: So it would be nice to hear some leaders start talking about carrying capacity. I understand it's hard. The population of this country continues to grow and grow and grow, and people need the outdoors. Fortunately for most of the BLM enforcers land, you can still go and not see very many people. Fortunately for the national parks they're so well publicized, it's very difficult even in the off-season. There is no off-season anymore for many of our national parks, they just keep coming. That's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to provide for their enjoyment, but, only in such a way that their children and their children's children can see the same thing. Which even now, they're not vignettes of pre-European man. They're, in my opinion, getting to be more and more like museums.

TM: Well that's another interesting question I'd be interested in your opinion on. Unimpaired, what's the snapshot of unimpairment? Is it what Lewis and Clark saw in the early 1800s? Is it what was happening in 1490? Was it what was happening 13,000 years ago? What's the vision of impairment?

CS: I think it's undefinable.

TM: Okay, interesting.

CS: I don't know that you could ever get a group representing multiple different perspectives to agree on impairment. And that argument goes on, you know, every day, every year. This administration is trying to open up part of an Alaskan National Park for oil exploration. That argument has been going on for decades. It was going on before, well, with the creation of Alaskan national parks. The company says, "Well we can explore for oil and extract oil in a safe manner and the environment will not be at threat." I don't think you'll get any conservation group to agree to that. And, you know, eventually, the infrastructure will corrode, just like all the other infrastructure in this nation, and it won't be kept up to snuff. So eventually there will be a catastrophic environmental problem based on oil exploration/extraction. Maybe eventually we'll get to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf as a prime example. Cadiz oil crisis was another one. So, unimpaired, how do you maintain the homeostasis of an environment when the entire world climate is changing? Is that a natural occurrence? I mean obviously we've been through several ice ages. Those are natural occurrences. The vegetation, animal life that existed prior to the last ice age was greatly impaired. So impairment must come from man's activity/humankind's activity. How do you get all these people to agree on what... I guess the current argument on climate change is a great example. "We're not impairing anything; it's not our fault," versus "We're impairing everything; it's all our fault." Hopefully someplace in the middle there is an answer to that. I think it's further complicated by the masses of humanity in this world that are living in poverty with no hope of any change, ever. They don't really care about impairment. What they care about is finding their next basket of wheat, or their next water container that's not polluted, or where they're going to get their heating sources for their family's health. It makes for interesting discussions at training sessions.

TM: No doubt. Well let's pull this back to Olympic. At one point you ended up leaving Olympic. How did that how happen?

CS: Well, let's see, I was at the Olympic in '88 - East district ranger, acting chief ranger, East district ranger, chief ranger. I think it just got to a point our son was going to be graduating from high school and moving on. I just decided that it was time to go to the next level, which was superintendent. So I put myself, with the support of my superintendent and assistant superintendent, into a... I didn't put myself, I applied for and was accepted into a training program called the Executive Potential Program, the EPP, which was a year-long training session. I just had another fun thought.

TM: What's that?

CS: Over the course of that year, there were I think three times when you went to a designated location, it was usually around Washington DC, and there were probably 50 people in the training session I was in. You also had to do three different shadow assignments, no, three different one month assignments with somebody at a management level higher than you, and it could be anywhere. One of the fellas put in an application to serve all three months in one locale and he applied to go to the Vatican. Which I thought was kind of creative; a good way to get to Italy for three months. I had training assignments with the Forest Service and another Park Service assignment.

TM: Where did you go? So you had to be a month, up to three months, with a level higher than where you were and you were a chief ranger. So what's higher than a chief ranger?

CS: Superintendent, regional office, Washington office.

TM: So in the Forest Service, what would that equate to? Again, a regional office in the Forest Service or a Washington office or BLM or another?

CS: Yeah, superintendent of the park is equivalent to supervisor of the National Forest and they have regional offices and they have the Washington DC office. So I took one of those months, I went to legislative affairs in Washington DC.

TM: What was that like?

CS: It was amazingly interesting. Going to congressional hearings; writing draft legislation for congressmen and senators; working with, again, fellow whose name I don't recall right now, but maybe it will come to me, I can see him, who had been the deputy of chief legislation I think for like 10/15 years as a civil servant and had served all of those departments. The legislative affairs department, all of them are overseen by political appointees. So depending on which party is in power, political appointees are moved around. So, you can write your draft legislation based on enabling acts of the Park Service, enabling acts of the park, or the administrative intent of Congress for formation of National Park Service units. And then you run it up through the channels. It's just incredibly interesting. This fella was able to take what you wrote and edit it in such a way that it was acceptable to both sides of the Congress. Then it went over to career staff people for the various congressmen and senators and their various committees. The senators and the congressmen don't do all the leg work, their staff does. So there's the relationship with the various career professionals. We're now answering to the Speaker of the House or the senate pro tem. Getting these things into a form that can be passed by Congress as law was just amazingly interesting to me; the inner workings of our federal government.

That was one part of it, and then you also had to shadow somebody for a week. So one of my other one month assignments, which was going to be two months, was I was contacted by the regional director, which was John Jarvis at the time, and asked if I would like to go to Joshua Tree National Park for a two month assignment. The reason for that was Ernie Quintana was the superintendent of the park and he was in the Senior Executive Service training program. He had been on a two month training assignment already in Washington DC as an acting deputy director. The region had tried to have Olympic National Park supervised on a rotating basis by the 4 or 5 chiefs of each division: interpretation, maintenance, administration, rangers - I think that's it - oh, resource management, and there was so much animosity between those five chiefs that region decided that they needed to send somebody down there to be the acting superintendent for two months. So they picked me as part of my EPP training program. I went down there for about a month/six weeks and it was time for me to go to Washington DC and shadow

the deputy director, who was Randy Jones. Randy Jones had been my assistant superintendent at Olympic. He had transferred from Olympic as assistant superintendent to deputy director.

TM: And of course, you knew John Jarvis from the past as well.

CS: Right, good old boy club. I like to think some of it was based on my merit, but who knows.

TM: Hang on a second Curt. I'm a little confused. You mentioned these four or five different, resources and protection, you know four or five different groups, and they weren't getting along together. Was that at Olympic they weren't getting along or was that at Joshua Tree they weren't getting along?

CS: That was at Joshua Tree. It's probably not fair to say all five of them weren't getting along; I think two or three of them just couldn't stand each other. So I'd been there about, I don't know, four weeks/six weeks and it was time for me to go shadow Randy Jones in Washington DC. This is part of the story on how I got to Joshua Tree National Park and I find it fascinating. So I'm following Randy Jones around and in his opinion, shadow means shadow. Every meeting that he went to he brought me to. Every meeting that he had in his office, I sat in the office. So one day, one Monday, we're sitting in the office and the chief of the park police comes in unannounced and says, "Randy I have to talk to you. I have to talk to Fran." Fran Manlia was the director of the Park Service at the time. When the chief of police of the Park Service, of the national park police, shows up in your office unannounced, something's up. So Randy said, "Okay, go ahead. I'll meet now." She looked over at me like don't you think he should leave, and he said, "No, go ahead." So the chief of the park police proceeded to inform Randy Jones that the preceding weekend the park police, I'm not sure in what town but it was close to the Statue of Liberty, had attempted to pull over an individual who failed to stop, and drove to his house. They were able to apprehend him on the front stoop; he had to run up several stairs to get to the front porch trying to get into his house. They were in the process of arresting him when his wife came out and got in an altercation with the park police and tried to prevent them from arresting him. Well, that wife happened to be the superintendent of the Statue of Liberty, who was now in an altercation with the park police and obstructing justice, so to speak. She was on the short list for being the Midwest regional director. In fact, the following week she was scheduled to come in and meet with the director of the park service and be selected as the Midwest regional director. Well, she got arrested and released. So you now have a superintendent that's been arrested that you're considering for a regional directorship, and Randy said, "Well, I guess we need to go talk to Fran." So all of us go down to Fran's office. The chief of police waits outside, the chief of Park Police, Randy goes into an existing meeting and I go with him. Fran says, "What's up?" He says, "I need to talk to you." So she said, "All right. I need everybody to leave." I start to get up and leave and Randy reaches over and puts his hand on my forearm and said, "Sit down." I'm going "Okay." So now it's Fran, Randy, and I. Fran looks at me and said, "Did you not hear what I said?" Randy says, "Well this is Curt Sauer. He's my shadow, part of the EPP program and I told him to stay." She looks at Randy says, "I told him to leave." Randy looked at me and nods. I get up, leave. So, they call in the chief of the park police. She briefs the director of the Park Service, as I was told. She's done, she leaves, Fran says to Randy, "Okay, so now what do we do?" Randy said, "Fran, you've got the Midwest regional director sitting three offices down here. He's Ernie Quintana. He's here on a four-month training assignment." So they called Ernie in and offered him the Midwest regional director position, which meant that the superintendent position at Joshua Tree was now vacant, or would be vacant in 30 days. So, Ernie came back; I went back to Olympic National Park for 2 weeks; came back to Joshua Tree, worked with Ernie for a week so that he could brief me on everything that was going on. He left and I continued on in my "two month" training assignment for another eight months until they got around to advertising the job and then offered me the superintendency. And, you know, it had been two/three months I was going home every six to eight weeks for two weeks back in Olympic; then come back. I

decided, you know, I just sort of need to stay here at the park in case they call and went on and on and on. I went, "Well I'm going to go home and see my wife and kid." So I went home, took some leave, and happened to be out on a golf course in Port Angeles with the chief law enforcement officer playing golf and got a phone call. It was the deputy regional director, Art, and said "We'd like to offer you the job at Joshua Tree National Park." I said, "Yep, I'd be more than happy to take that job." Which was interesting because... So that's late 2002, so 28 years of seasonal time and permanent time, and all during that time I had told myself that I would never work in California and I would *never* work in a desert.

TM: I was going to say, all those years in the forest.

CS: So, you know, desert? I'm a Rocky Mountain boy. I worked at Grand Canyon, which is an upside down mountain, although vegetation's different. I worked in North Cascades. I worked in Olympic. They have trees; they have rivers; they have green. So I took this two month training assignment at Joshua Tree, and, you know, on weekends I had plenty of time to go explore the park, get familiar with the park. I remember vividly flying commercially into Palm Springs. You could see the park in the distance, but you flew over San Gregornio and San Bernardino Mountains. In my mountain aesthetic, biased way, I'd look at those and say, "Those aren't mountains. Those are foothills," and "Boy, sure is brown" because it was at the end of a two year drought in California. So I flew in, drove up. Kind of brown, don't like this stuff. Well, I started going hiking and found out how quiet it was, how peaceful the desert is. The third weekend I was out hiking to a historic site, an old mining site. No trail to it, just a place that I was told about. It's actually in a hiking book. I remember sitting down for lunch on a boulder and looking across the valley and seeing nothing but brown. 'Cause I'd come from Olympic. It's kind of vivid green, not just the trees but the moss and the lichen. Everything up there is green. I thought, "Boy, sure is brown." So I'm sitting there eating my sandwich and I look down and I see a little lizard close to my foot and he's eating something. I looked carefully and he was eating a blade of grass and that blade of grass was green, different shade of green. I remember looking up from seeing that lizard and that blade of grass, and that hillside that was brown became green. It was like my brain had rewired and I was able to see green. Then spring came and it actually rained. That desert wasn't one of the record wildflower years, thank goodness, 'cause nobody bothered to rush out to Joshua Tree. Ever since that day with the lizard at lunch, I was able to see green in the desert. Just a different place. I'm sitting here, we're not in the desert where I live right now, but we're right on the edge. The hillsides which used to be totally green, in the Apple fire were pretty well burned up, there's probably 20% of the vegetation left. But when I look up at those hills, my eyes immediately go to the green forests that are still left, and I have to make myself look at the brown and the black of the fire. So, I fell in love with Joshua Tree. Some lady got arrested in New York; Ernie Quintana got assigned as the regional director in Omaha; and 8 months later I was selected as the superintendent of Joshua Tree. And that's how I got there. If that incident in the Statue of Liberty area had not occurred, Ernie would not have been selected as soon as he was, I would have gone back to Olympic, and who knows where I would have ended up.

TM: You know this is really fascinating, the Executive Potential Program and the fact that you had a chance to spend some time in Joshua Tree kind of shadowing, just getting a chance to learn what was going on there, it just seemed like it made for a perfectly soft landing.

CS: Yeah. I think it was pretty soft. A couple of the division chiefs didn't think it was pretty soft, but yeah. I mean the whole way it worked out. Prior to the Executive Potential Program and being in Olympic, I really wasn't paying much attention to the Executive Potential Programs Senior Executive Service program, and that gets me back to... I mentioned the interesting thought I had earlier. When I went to the Executive Potential Program, as far as I knew, the Park Service had maybe, I don't know, 10 Senior Executive Service employees. That number could be entirely wrong, but it wasn't very many. But I'm in

this training program with all these folks from Washington DC primarily, from all the different agencies: Coast Guard, Forest Service, Department of Treasury, Department of State, and every one of them had this phrase which I thought was so interesting, "Well my SES says..." "Well my SES thinks that we should..." meaning their supervisor was a graduate of the Senior Executive Service training program and was a Senior Executive Service employee, which is not a civil service pay grade. So we had, I don't know, 10 superintendents maybe or regional directors that were SES, maybe 20. But back in Washington DC, there are hundreds of them. In the Park Service and probably the Forest Service, I don't know, BLM, we're out here we've got 10 or 20 SESers managing some of the most valuable lands of this nation, and you've got SESers in Washington DC that are managing parts of the budget and parts of the State Department. So, it was a real eye-opener for me that there just weren't that many Senior Executive Service positions in the Park Service. Now, I believe since that time that number has gone up, but back in 2002 it was still pretty rare. You were GS-15 superintendent; you were GS-15 regional director, and that must have been changing because Ernie went into the regional directorship as an SES position. So I imagine all the regional directors were Senior Executive Service. Maybe at that time Yosemite, Yellowstone might have been Senior Executive Service employees.

TM: The SES, those people can move from different places quite a bit can't they?

CS: Yeah, they can move, and they can be moved. "Well, I don't like that decision, John, so you're going to Timbuktu," which would be Africa.

TM: Who does the moving? Is that the director or the Secretary of Interior who says, "I don't like that decision you made. I'm moving you out"?

CS: The superintendents work for the regional director. The regional works for the director. If the director says the person is moving, the regional director might say, "No, no. We don't want to do that," and just like Fran told Randy, "I told him to leave," that superintendent leaves. The Director of the Park Service works for the Secretary of Interior. Secretary of Interior works for the President. So any SES position can be moved any place at any time. Hearsay was that the Statue of Liberty superintendent was moved to an office in the region with no windows and no assignment, so I think she found a different career path. So anyway, Washington DC is a beautiful city to visit; the monuments and museums. It's the center of our government. It's just an amazing place to visit. And the inner workings of it are cutthroat.

TM: So when you moved to Joshua Tree, did you complete the EPP program and become an SES employee?

CS: No, EPP wasn't SES level. SES training, which was 4 months, is the next level up from GS-14/15. I was a GS-13 chief ranger at Olympic, and I took a GS-14 superintendency at Joshua Tree.

TM: So the EPP program was to help Park Service employees move to the next level into the superintendency level.

CS: Yeah, it was basically a superintendent training program in the Park Service. In addition to that, I think the Park Service now has... When you're selected as a superintendent, I think you go to another superintendent training program. They may have gotten rid of it by now because of funding, hopefully not. So now you're working with new superintendents being instructed/taught/exposed to experienced superintendents and regional director personnel and getting a perspective on the politics of being a superintendent and the responsibilities of being a superintendent. At least when I was there until 2010, I think the Park Service evolved greatly. I think a lot of it was because of Director Jarvis, John Jarvis, and his staff. He surrounded himself with excellent employees. So the superintendents received, or at least

in my time, received excellent training, exposure, and experience. That was an interesting time. Then I ended up at Joshua Tree.

TM: I really just want to say how fortunate you were to work for Randy. It sounds like, just a really good individual to shadow.

CS: Randy was phenomenal. And as assistant superintendent, he was responsible for writing the plan, or at least working the politics, that resulted in the removal of the Elwha Dam and the lower dam. Excellent politician, that's the wrong phrase, he was excellent at working with the elected representatives of that. 'Cause he wasn't a politician; he was pretty straightforward. Pretty happy to go lucky when he wasn't working which was about 3 hours a day. You could drive by headquarters at eight/nine o'clock at night and Randy was in his office. When I was shadowing him, I remember one morning walked in and was walking down the corridors of the Department of Interior building, I don't remember which floor, it was probably eight o'clock and Randy was already there but he was walking the other way. I said "Mornin' Randy." "Morning," and just kept walking. I turned around and started walking with him. I said, "What's up?" He said, "I don't think I can do this. I don't think I can do this today." We walked another 10 steps and he stopped, turned around and said, "To hell with it." He walked down the corridor and went back into his office and worked all day. After he was deputy director, I transferred out to Rocky Mountain National Park as superintendent. Died of cancer. I always wondered to myself, was he fighting cancer when he was in DC and he was so sick that day that he just couldn't go on and then forced himself to turn around and go back to work? That's how committed he was to the National Park Service. He was a pretty good racquetball player, too. He used to whip my butt, which irritated me a lot 'cause I was the chief ranger and I was in shape and he was just this assistant superintendent.

TM: And you weren't the competitive kind of guy, so.

CS: I think he'd been playing racquetball since before I was born. That's not true because we were the same age. Yeah, he was a wonderful man.

TM: You got any other Randy stories?

CS: Oh, there's lots of Randy stories I guess. We were travelling someplace, staying at some resort for a meeting/conference and after dinner I guess it was, we're walking down the hallway back to the elevators to go to the rooms. He stops and he looks at this dress that's in this window. I'm, like, looking at the price tag. He said, "You know, I'm going to get that for my wife." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yep. She puts up with a lot." He was married to a fine lady, whose name I don't recall right now. She probably was Mrs. Jones at the time. With everything going on, this dress caught his eye and it was like, "I'm getting that for my wife." So he was in love with her and the Park Service.

TM: That's a hard balance to maintain.

CS: When you think about the number of hours that he worked, and I came to find out that that was true many of the people at the regional and Washington level, they got a salary and they were hired because they got the jobs done. It wasn't an 8 to 5. When I hear people make fun of government employees... My exposure to government employees, they're totally dedicated. The ones that are successful give hundreds of hours of their time. I happen to think that federal employees are pretty fine people. Yeah, there are those that you end up putting in jail for 8 months because they sort of screwed up, but by far and away especially, well, I only know for sure the Park Service, just outstanding employees.

TM: Yeah, yeah. You know we've been talking here a little over an hour, and I wonder if this is a good place to wrap up this Part 9 and we'll pick up with Joshua Tree?

CS: Alright. Sounds like a plan.

TM: Okay. Well with that, this will conclude Part 9 Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Curt Sauer. Today's October 26, 2020. My name is Tom Martin and Curt thank you so very much.

CS: You betcha, Tom.