

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History, Part 10

Interviewee: Nancy Muleady-Mecham (NMM)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor at Grand Canyon National Park

Date of Interview: April 21, 2021

Method of Interview: Phone

Transcriber: Dannie Derryberry

Date of Transcription: July 24, 2022

Transcription Reviewer: Nancy Muleady-Mecham, Tom Martin

Keys: Equal Employment Opportunity, Joan Chacon Blaise, Kim Besom, J. T. Reynolds, Kent Mecham, Chuck Wahler, Dot Reynolds, Dual Careers, Flagstaff Medical Center, Registered Nurse Degree, NCLEX (nursing exam), Dr. James Wurgler, Dr. Tom Myers, Resource Management and the Protection Ranger (Newsletter), Lacey Act, Judge Steve Verkamp

TM: Today is Wednesday, April 21, 2021. This is Part 10 Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Nancy Muleady-Mecham. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Nancy. How are you today?

NMM: I am good, Tom. It's so good to hear your voice again and to talk to you about all this fun stuff from my past.

TM: You, too. I really appreciate your taking the time to do this, Nancy. May we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

NMM: Yes.

TM: Thank you. Picking up the thread from the end of Part 9, you were introducing us to the Equal Employment Opportunity, EEO as it's known, the role that you played in the Park Service starting around 1995. Can you pick that thread up for us, please?

NMM: I can. That was a program that is in, throughout the U.S. Government and in many major I would say businesses now, and it is an avenue for people who feel that they have been wronged to appeal those wrongs based on very specific discriminatory categories, which includes gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, which was added, and it addressed not just direct discrimination against a person, like we're not giving you that job cause you're a woman as an example, but creating a work environment that is considered hostile. So if somebody walks in and everybody's talking, telling all these lewd jokes, for instance, or stories about somebody that, like if they are of Asian descent and telling anti-Asian jokes that would be a hostile

environment. And you do not necessarily have to be in that category, the butt of the aim of those things, but if you are offended by the talk or the presentation or whatever's going on, you have a means to appeal. It's only under those specific categories. If somebody didn't give you a job because they just didn't like you, that's not an EEO thing. If somebody decided to shove you that's an assault or a battery. If somebody actually touches you it's a battery. If somebody threatens you it's an assault. That is a criminal act. EEO is one of those things that fills the gap between things where people were being discriminated against but had no other recourse to appeal.

TM: Okay. Thank you. It's pretty clear.

NMM: So I was sent with Joan Chacon Blaise, (she got married but I don't think she was married at the time). She was at Desert View and I had worked with her at Sequoia National Park and Kim Besom from the South Rim. I think it was the three of us but there could have been a fourth. We were sent to Cheyenne, Wyoming and we flew there, I remember, out of an airport, I think out of the Flagstaff Airport, one of those little puddle jumpers. It took us north and landed there and so we went and had this EEO class and it lasted several days and we learned all about what the categories are, what to do if somebody comes to you, how to deal with all of this and it was a very involved, very in-depth class, and one of the things that we found out, at least that I found out that I took away from this is, number one, unlike being a registered nurse and an ER nurse, I'm often an advocate for my patients. In this case, as an EEO counselor, I am not an advocate for anyone. I am the neutral go-between and I don't want to ever take sides but present the facts so that people can make a determination. So that was a very interesting take on all of this if somebody comes to me and says "I didn't get this job because they said I was a woman," I don't go back and go "Well, that sucks. Let's take care of this." You don't do it that way. I'll go "Well, let's get the facts," and I record what happens and then I say very specifically "What would it take to make you whole," and that is the phrase that they teach us to use, to say "Okay, to make this go away," basically, "so that you don't feel discriminated against, what do you need out of this." And that, it's sort of like don't complain about something unless you can come up with a remedy for it, and I think that's where it comes from. So that when I present, take all the facts, present it to the administration part of things, because I don't present it to the person that did the evil deed, I present it to the person who can do something about it, and when I was the counselor it was J. T. Reynolds, who was the deputy superintendent from 1995 to 1999. Well, he was there, I think, for longer but that is when I was the counselor. And when I would work with this person or interact with that person on any other venue, we never talked about it. J. T. and I were on a softball team together; we would never talk about cases. It was only very specific, it was very private, and a need to know only kind of situation. So if somebody, and that's to protect the

person, almost like a whistle blower kind of thing, I think. So in that period of time I would make, I made plaques that went up in all of the major buildings so people knew who the counselors were. I brought back all the information I had, because there had been no EEO counselors at the Grand Canyon. I don't know if ever, but there certainly wasn't when we were sent to this class. If people had an issue they had to contact a counselor in an entire other park, Yosemite, Yellowstone, some other place. So this was a chance to make that happen here. So I sat down with all the notes that I had and all the papers, and there's a lot of paperwork to it, and I created an EEO Counselors Handbook, which is about three-quarters of an inch thick. But part of that is full of the examples, things that you have to fill out, how to take a complaint, how to treat people, what are all of this stuff, and so it took a lot of time to put it together but then as we recruited more counselors I could give them the handbook and go through it. I was the lead counselor and so oftentimes Kim or Joan would come to me. But one of the things I found out is a lot of people came to me and I'd say "I've got a lot of cases right now, can you go to Kim or can you go to Joan," and it's not that they didn't feel that they were capable, they just didn't know them, and so a lot of people came to me cause they knew me as a person. And one of the things that I always tried to foster as me as a person is integrity, honesty, doing the right thing, don't cut corners and I know, and I hope that I maintain that reputation amongst the community. And so it was good that people came to me but often I would have to refer them to others just because I would have a full plate. And when you did something outside of your job, because I was a GS-9 Protection Ranger with all the duties we've talked about to this point including EMS Coordinator and putting together the resource management protection ranger RMPR that I will talk about later, this was just a lot of work, and when I would get a case it would take supposedly 20% of my work time but often it took a lot more than that... which I would do on off duty time because, as you know, as a Protection Ranger on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon it was go, go, go with call waiting.

TM: You bet. And if you had five cases you, 20% times 5 you can't do your job, which is interesting.

NMM: That's right.

TM: Let's step back for a minute. Three of you went to the training and so three of you then had this title or were able to handle

NMM: We were EEO counselors.

TM: Yeah, were EEO counselors. How busy did you all get and how quickly?

NMM: Immediately, I'd have to say within days of people realizing. It's almost as if people were waiting for us to come back. I tried never to have more than three cases at any one time, and there were times when I had no cases but it took a lot because I would sit down with the complainant, man or woman, whatever it was, and I would go through a whole checklist that I had put in the handbook of what it was and made sure that they fit the criteria. One of my other duties was if it didn't fit in EEO criteria my other job wasn't to say sorry I can't help you, and I was required by law to refer them to what / who could help them. So if they said "My husband at home is beating me up" or whatever it is then I would refer them to the South Rim District Ranger or somebody like that to make that complaint, I wouldn't take the complaint because I was an EEO counselor and I'd refer them to whoever but... And so I would have to do that, to help them find another avenue. But most people knew, because I put on the plaque what it was that we were looking for to help them with. So if somebody didn't get the right days off and they just didn't like the days off or they didn't get their overtime that would not fall into an EEO unless it was a discriminated class of person, or a person that was discriminated against. So I'd have to refer them to their supervisor or the supervisor's supervisor and then I would have to document all of that. Yeah. And so anyway, I documented everything that they said to me and put it in a presentation package and then I would go and make the presentation to the administration.

TM: And it sounds like there were enough kind of gray areas, okay, if I was pushed, if I was assaulted, that's a chief ranger issue, you're going to need to go to law enforcement,

NMM: Right.

TM: but it sounds like there were some gray areas that you would have to figure out where they fit.

NMM: Right, right. And when all else fails I keep it as an EEO counselor and then I would call somebody at Region and bounce it off of them, and they would go "Yep, you're right to keep it; nope, send it on." So I wasn't an island all by myself. I had resources outside the park that I could talk to because there were regional EEO contacts and stuff like that.

TM: Great, great. Wow, all right. I've got a question here all ready to ask you. Maybe we talked about this already, what do you remember about James Reynolds, J.T. Reynolds?

NMM: Oh, J.T. J.T. Reynolds was one of the few Black administrative officers that I've ever met in the National Park Service. I was in the western parks except for the, well, I shouldn't say that, I was in Biscayne Everglades, but in the National Park Service I knew Black Protection Rangers, Black Interpreters, but he was only the second administrator. The other one, I'm afraid his name has escaped me, but he was the deputy superintendent for a while at Sequoia National Park, and it was, I have an idea why that is. I think growing up in America in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, Middle America was Post War American and primarily middle class White people and they got into the national parks and then it was those people that became enamored with the parks and wanted to work with them. And I cannot speak, not being a Black person, as to why that wasn't a part of their culture but I see it changing now as there are more. And then if you go to where the population base has more of a mix of Black people who go to like historical sites and battlefields and stuff, I see many more rangers of color and other represented classes in the National Park Services. So I'm not a demographic specialist but it was kind of striking to see so few there. But J.T. was one of those, and I know he started as a ranger in Yosemite, or don't know if he started as a ranger in Yosemite and other places. So he worked his way up the ranks and I had an immediate rapport with him because he and I understood right away that we were there to do the right thing. We were there not for ourselves, and this is going to sound like blowing my own horn, but it is what I was. I wasn't, if I was on the planet for the pay I would not have been a park ranger. You know, we didn't make very much money, we had to pay for rent and utilities, but to me it was the job, being in nature, and being purposeful for other people as well as nature that made me thrive. And so J.T., I could feel he was not there for himself, he was not there to get promoted as far as he was going to make as much money as he could; he genuinely felt like he wanted to help people. He was always there if I had a need for something. He learned people's names. He reached out to people. There would be a call that you're on and you'd turn around and he would be in the crowd watching. So it was, he was somebody who cared not about you as a, not only about you as a person but as to the operation of the park and to what the park was there for, to protect and preserve and provide for the enjoyment of people and future generations. He was a good softball player too.

TM: Yeah, I was going to say what else do you remember about him as a person. I mean, what you've just said is exactly how I think of him in the few times that I had the privilege of interacting with him at Grand Canyon, but just the ability to do the right thing and to care. Yeah.

NMM: Which I found was unusual, not in the National Park Service, but at Grand Canyon. And I've worked in many national parks and, as I mentioned this earlier, this park is like its own Sipappu, its own birth area in the earth, and I don't know what's

coming out of that hole in the earth but it's a, it is very different and not as positive as other places. Sequoia National Park I felt really good in the 14 total seasons I was there. I received over 20 "Atta Boys," you know, special achievement awards. I had great opportunities. Everglades, it was wonderful. You know, all the different places that I've worked—Death Valley. You get to the Grand Canyon and as, in general and, again, a generalization, the place, the people are like protect yourself over anybody else. Do what you can for you before anybody else, and it was a dog eat dog, and I will diverge to tell something that kind of explains things a little bit, and my husband Kent Mecham was the subdistrict ranger at Death Valley at Furnace Creek, when he put in for the job at Grand Canyon and so he was the structural fire specialist, or chief, fire chief, at Death Valley and had also done that at Lehman Caves which is now Great Basin and had gone to the National Fire Academy, was very experienced. And so the selecting official of all the people that applied selected Kent for the job, but another person who was already at the Grand Canyon who was a person of color who was on the fire brigade at the time also put in for the job, and the person who was the selecting official knew that there could be an issue—it looked like they were bringing a White male in over a Black male—and so she took the cert, which we called the certification and sent it to region and said "Okay, now you guys decide if I'm making the right decision," and they did. So she knew by picking Kent Mecham that it was the most qualified person for the job. Before we got there, and actually I arrived before Kent because after he got the job, we weren't married at the time, I got a seasonal position on the South Rim as a protection ranger beginning in May. He didn't come until sometime after. There was a group of people that wanted this Black male to be the fire chief, and as soon as I showed up these people, a lot of them were on the night shift of South Rim Patrol as well as working for the concession fire brigade, treated me very badly because I was associated with Kent. And it was really sad. And then when Kent showed up he went on a call. I remember I was on this call. We went out to Duck on a Rock for a car fire and he pulled up and the night shift supervisor was there as well as three of the night shift people, and when he pulled up Kent started saying "Okay, you pull the inch and a half" and you do this and you do that, nobody did anything. And the night shift supervisor turned everybody, used some really colorful language and said "He's the fire chief, get over it, do what he says." But that was our introduction to Grand Canyon, immediately a clique, immediately hatred for just showing up and it was...

TM: And yet I think of someone like J.T. who is just, and you as well, who are the exact opposite of that dog-eat-dog mentality. So

NMM: That's right, and so, and this was way before J.T. was there. This is in 1991. And so this was a, this was prevalent and accepted behavior, and I had, I had very little recourse, and I was on a call with this Black man who did not get the job, a full code

where we were doing CPR and all that kind of stuff, and I was asking him to do stuff and he never answered me, and I had to do it myself. It was just awful, and it was, it was people who are not of my cloth, who are not of my thinking, who say "I didn't get this, I'm going to pout, and I'm going to make all my friends hate you as much as I hate you because I didn't get the job." And that's how Grand Canyon worked, and it was very sad.

TM: I'm wondering if you put thought into this to try to trace it back. Has it always been that way since 1919 or is this something that happened in the '40s or '50s or '60s? Did you ever ponder that?

NMM: I never gave it that much thought because I left. Well, I didn't leave, as I prepared to resign my job and to leave it was just such a hostile environment for me and Kent talked me into staying and then later we got married and then I was sort of stuck but he said "It will get better." It got a little bit better as I learned the area. I learned who was not of evilness, and I'm going to use that word evilness, and I already gave an example of who the evil people who changed Kent's days off to force me to change my days off. All I know is that before I showed up, or after I showed up, once people realized that I was a reasonable human being who cared about other people then the complaints came in about, the people who had this bad behavior, how they would wait outside the pub so they could get a DUI, the people like who would take the penny away from somebody who couldn't make bill and could go. There was a clique of people and it, most everybody called the Night Shift Nazis, the Night Shift, and I don't know how long it was. I do know that there was a set of people before then who did some really peculiar things as well. All I know is when I got there it was an awful environment, I didn't want to stay at Grand Canyon. Luckily I finished my six months at South Rim on the protection and because I wasn't a permanent when I first got there then I worked for six months as an interpreter, naturalist/interpreter for Chuck Wahler at Yavapai Museum, and talk about going from the total dark hole of Calcutta to the brightest sun shining, most welcoming person on the planet. Chuck Wahler was the perfect supervisor and the best supervisor I've ever had. And then because they needed my skills they would still call me out for a paramedic or I'd go out as a member of the fire brigade or search and rescue, even as an interpreter, but it was, then when I went back to South Rim for the summer shift on day shift, because back then you only had like three permanents and four seasonals, something like that, by that time I had put my gumption up and I wasn't, I wasn't going to take prisoners anymore. It was going to be leave me alone kind of a thing. So I have to say Grand Canyon changed my personality somewhat to being a harder person than I was before.

TM: Interesting. And yet when I think of you and I think of J.T., he didn't fall for that. I don't know that you did either, at least not to the people that were outside of the Night Shift Club.

NMM: Before J.T. there was a deputy superintendent who had a very poor reputation. And so they did basic, they were there to be part of the SES, the Senior Executive Service, to put in their time so they could be a superintendent somewhere at a crown of Jewel Park and make \$200,000 a year. So there were quite a few people who came and went who were there just to do their time and wanted to be part of the Good Ole Boy Club. The Good Ole Boy Club I was not a part of.

TM: Can you go back to J.T. for a minute? What else do you remember about some of the interesting things that J.T. did or you had a chance to work with him on?

NMM: He cared a lot. I remember we had a ceremony at the cemetery next to the Shrine of Ages, and it was really important for him that everything went well, that everybody was treated with respect, that even though we didn't start on time it's because the people in wheelchairs didn't get there. That was important to him. And as I recall, and I may be wrong in this, I believe he was in the military and that was something that I related to, not that I was in military, but my husband Kent had been in the Marine Corps, and so I really respected what he did. And the thing about J.T. is when you would walk in the office, and this was even before I was a counselor, you walked by the hallway and he goes "Nancy." He'd call out to you. He'd see you walk by his office, "Come in here, talk to me." He would reach out to you, and it wasn't like you walked in you were about to be pummeled for making a vehicle stop or like you usually associate with being called on the carpet kind of thing. He went out of his way to find you to talk to you about things that you didn't get in trouble for. You know what I mean? So you always felt like he was there for you and so you would sit there and talk about all kinds of stuff and it, you could see behind his eyes and I can't describe it any other way, when I would bring certain cases to him as an EEO counselor you could see, and this is my interpretation, him seething behind his eyes. But he would never bring his opinion into it but he would say "We're taking care of this. We're going to do this and we're going to do that," and his whole tone changed with the anger behind his words that this person was treated in that manner or something happened that way. Not that every complaint on an EEO complaint had a valid complaint, and I have to say that but for those that were actually genuinely real, and I still respect everybody's privacy and I will not tell any stories today except for one which will be mine eventually, but I can't comment on any of them, but there were some pretty wrong things done and he, then as a representative to the administration, would say "This is what we're going to do about it." He would meet up with the people who were the supervisors of the person and

say "This is what's going to happen." It wasn't the "Now, let's sit down and talk about this." J.T. didn't do that. He decided this is what is going to happen and this is not going to happen anymore, or if this doesn't, if this continues to happen anymore this person will not have a job here anymore. And I'm not talking about transferring this person. This person will not be with the National Park Service anymore. So when he realized what was going on, and the other thing that happened was I shouldn't just say somebody gave me a complaint and I went to J.T. I did investigations. We were required to do investigations so I would go, I'd check the environment, I would talk to people around there, I would, I just didn't show up and say he said, she said, and I would often go to the person they were complaining against and ask certain questions, not saying "Somebody said this." I'd say "Tell me about this or tell me about that, and what do you do in this situation" or whatever it was. And if he perceived that somebody had been wronged he became a champion.

TM: I can't help but think that J.T. himself, as an African American, must have been discriminated against himself in the Park Service. I can only think about, I mean, it's a White male,

NMM: Oh, I'm sure.

TM: White male dominated place that tons of stories of females slowly trying to work their way in, and Native Americans slowly trying to work their way in. He must have seen it right directed at him. So I can understand that.

NMM: I'm sure. I don't remember her that well but his wife, and I can't remember her name,

TM: Dot.

NMM: Dot, yes. She was a kick, though.

TM: Cool. What do you remember about her?

NMM: All I can remember is she was, when we would go to like parties or potlucks or something like that she was the life. I mean, she was his like, J.T. I would have to say unless you were one on one with him was stalwart. She was like, almost could embarrass him with her enthusiasm and stuff. I mean, it just, it's an impression I have. It's like, you know, how when you go to a movie and you think about it like a month later going "Oh, I couldn't tell you what it's about but I really liked it," you know. We remember our emotions, how we felt about something more than we do the details,

and that's how I think about Dot is I just remember she was a kick, she was fun, she was verbose and fun to just be around and, but I can't give you specific examples other than I can mentally see her at a particular party we were at and just how fun it was to be around her. They retired to Henderson, Nevada, I believe.

TM: Okay. Yeah. All right. Thinking more than about the EEO role, what was it like to, and again I think about jobs and if I'm a house painter I paint houses, if I'm in law enforcement I have to deal with people who need help. I also have to deal with bad guys. As an EEO officer I have to deal with frivolous complaints. I have to deal with serious cases of discrimination. I can't think but that that could be wearing on you. How did you

NMM: In a way it was almost, for me it wasn't wearing. On me it was almost, what is the word for it, not uplifting, it was, it gave me another tool. I couldn't, I might see something and I couldn't do anything about it. Now I was in a position to do something about it.

TM: Empowering?

NMM: That's the word. Thank you. That's the word.

TM: How so?

NMM: Well, you know, in protection if you put your hand out and you look at the fingers and below the fingers is your palm, yes?

TM: Umm hmm.

NMM: When I would go, I can remember specifically going to a fight over in Trailer Village and it was a matter of like three or four people here, and so what are the first things you do is make sure nobody's fighting anymore, nobody's really hurt, but everybody's still hot under the collar. So you separate everybody out and it's you, and in this case if I was the investigative officer, your colleagues have your back, they're watching you, and they're keeping everybody separate. Now, we're getting everybody's statement and so what I do is I hear what everybody has say, and then the way I do it, and I get everybody and I said "This is my perception of what's going on," if they're not under the influence of drugs or alcohol or stuff, and I said "Everybody put your hands here," and I'd make them put their hands out and put it where their fingers overlapped each other, and I said "Notice how nobody's palm is being touched, only the fingers are being touched." This is the commonality of the story. "Well, he shoved me first, he shoved me there." What's the commonality? People got shoved, you know. So what I

would do with all of these things and get enough information to figure out what happened based upon everybody's story and where they overlapped, and so when I have a complaint, like an EEO, I would do the same thing, you know, "Tell me what happened, tell me how this," and based upon these investigative skills that I learned at Santa Rosa, learned at FLETC, developed over time with experience, being an investigator is not for everybody off of the street, but I thrived in figuring out the puzzle. I mean, I remember figuring out a burglary at Victor Hall one time and I was just so tickled at the end when I figured out who did it because I talked to about 13 different people and who was where when and who had what and all that stuff. So it was empowering because I could use these skills that I had in Protection now to help people discriminated against. So it didn't bother me but it was sad in some cases. It made me secretly angry in other cases, and it wasn't so much that it was, made you, dragged on you, the thing that I already had as a skill set was to not talk about people's medical conditions to other people because in 1996 I got my RN and I worked part time as a board certified RN in emergency medicine nurse in the emergency room of Flagstaff Medical Center (FMC) part time. And in a teaching situation I would tell stories about the car accidents and decompressing pneumothorax or something like that, but nobody's name ever showed up. And if somebody asked me "How did that patient do the other day," and they were on a scanner or something, I always said "They did fine," whether they died or not. It's none of their business. So I brought this skill set to EEO that nobody's going to hear from me what happened. If somebody hears about this complaint it's not from me. So I already had that skill set. That being said, though, when you have so many people's confidences it's not so much a juggling act to not let anything leak out because I put up such a firewall that nothing comes out and therefore you don't talk to people about what you do as an EEO counselor. That's why this is an interesting conversation I'm having with you to talk about the nuts and bolts but not giving examples other than off the top of my head.

TM: Yeah, yeah. No, it's very fascinating to know how it works and it's so interesting to know and good to know that you had backup in Region, you had someone

NMM: I had J.T.

TM: Well, you did have J.T.

NMM: He's the only one I could talk to about it other than Region.

TM: Yeah. But above and beyond J.T., outside of the Park, another ear to listen and eyes to look around, very helpful.

NMM: That being said, I have to say that, and this is just my observation, that one in ten people made an EEO complaint that could have, just let it go.

TM: Whoa!

NMM: Oh, yeah, because you'd see stuff and I might say "You okay?" "Yeah, I'm fine," and they'd walk away or whatever. And the Grand Canyon is, was, I hope it's not anymore, for a period of time that I was there, which was 18 years, was a very dysfunctional place in many ways, but I also have to say that once every other week we'd have music night with Marker and a bunch of friends, like, Lori and Jules. and all these other people, and then you'd have potlucks and then you'd have softball games. So I don't want to give the impression that it was an awful place to live and everybody was awful, but if you didn't learn to deal with the people, and its interesting how only six or seven people can make your life miserable, but if they're in a position of power they can. And then you either fight back or you swallow it or you leave, and I did, was ready to leave. I didn't leave. I swallowed some and then I began to fight back.

TM: And why did you submit your resignation to be the EEO officer for the Park?

NMM: I put in the letter that I had, I just read the letter so it's an easy answer, that it's time for other counselors to do it because five years is a long time, and also to concentrate on my other collateral duties because I was a events coordinator, South Rim, I was doing the resource management protection ranger newsletter I invented. I was also on search and rescue and the fire brigade. So I was called out probably four or five days a week from my off time, easily. The summertime was probably every day. But so I remember specifically when I applied for the South Rim supervisor position thinking I was going to go from 110% to 125% of giving to the job. And my husband Kent and I, we talked about how to do it right I think that I had to be present a lot more than I was if already because my philosophy on supervision was you should take care of the people, the operation takes care of itself. If you screw the people to try to make everything work, nothing works. And so I wanted to be there for the people. I wanted to be there to make sure things worked out and that as going to take a lot more time in addition to my job, in addition to the collateral duties that I had. So I believe two things—one, I let it go because it was time enough and I was also ready to apply for this other position.

TM: Okay. That makes sense. And so you also mentioned that in 1996 you became a registered nurse.

NMM: I did. I think it is. I'll walk over and look and my diploma.

TM: How did that happen? Did that just somebody came by and they were selling them on the street? No, it didn't. (Both laugh) You had to work at that. When did you decide you, you're already a commissioned law enforcement officer, when did you decide, and you're very skilled at interpretation, and here's a whole new field. You clearly love emergency medical services.

NMM: Yeah.

TM: How did you decide to do that?

NMM: It was a real simple explanation. Dual careers in the national parks are hard to come by. That means for a husband and wife to transfer to a park it is rare that there's a job for both of them. So I thought if we went somewhere, being the female spouse at the time, I was going to follow Kent and if there wasn't a job for me I was going to have to do something else. I could be a seasonal, but if they didn't have seasonal positions I could be a nurse. And my mom had been a Cadet Nurse during World War II. I already was well into enjoying being a paramedic. In fact, I ended up being a paramedic for over 30 years. And teaching EMS. I was teaching EMT classes almost every year and being the South Rim EMS coordinator, and it was a passion of mine to help people ever since I got my EMT after working at Death Valley. So the impetus was if we were to transfer and go to another national park, and TN was a good tool to have. So already having a Master's Degree and having a lot of the classes that were required like microbiology, I then could take, and being a paramedic for so many years, I then was able to take courses online. Back then there were actually correspondence courses, take the courses like in gerontology and things like that and then you challenge the exams of others things, and I would go to Northern Arizona University where they would have the exams on the weekend, and you'd take these three- or four-hour exams and you passed them or you didn't, and I passed them. And then I did my clinical down at Maricopa Hospital down in the Phoenix area and after several years I got my RN, I got licenses in the State of California in 1997 and Arizona. So okay, I was a student from 1994 to 1996 and then I was, in November of 1996, and I believe it was January of '97 I got my RN. And once that happened I thought, well, I don't want to lose these skills so I was always bringing patients to the Emergency Room of Flagstaff Medical Center, which is a Level 1 Trauma Center. What does it take to be a Level 1 Trauma Center versus Level 2 versus not? Level 1 Trauma Center has a surgeon on duty and in-house 24/7, plus the nurses, plus anesthesiologists, etcetera. Level 2 has them within 15 minutes of the hospital, etcetera. It can't be a trauma center unless you have these criteria. So I went to, my gosh, I can't believe her name just went out of my head, Jen, Jennifer, I'll think of it in a second. Anyway, she was the director of the emergency room and I brought her patients all the time and knew her, and I knew all the nurses there,

and I said “I got my RN and I’m wondering if I could work here part time.” She goes “Oh, we would love to have you here,” and I said “But I have to tell you that I do all the emergency skills but I only put a Foley catheter in one time and I’ve only...” She goes “Nancy, you’re ACLS certified. You already know all the trauma and all the cardiac skills. That’s what I can’t teach new nurses. The new nurses usually have two years in the emergency room and with you have a one-month preceptorship and if you pass that then you’re good.” So I was assigned with Stephanie Wiley, wonderful nurse, and she, I shadowed her for like a shift, and they had 12-hour shifts, and then within a short time I was, she would watch me as I did all the skills and she would help me with the skills that were new to me as an emergency provider that you would do like, like I said, putting a Foley catheter is not something you did very often, assist with chest tubes, and a few other things that you don’t do as a paramedic, and then it was after my third shift that Jen and Steph came to me and said “It’s ridiculous for you to be doing this precepting anymore. You’re cut loose.” So I started working back to back shifts. So I would go on my days off to Flagstaff Medical Center once or twice a month and work back to back 12-hour shifts, and it was incredibly rewarding, really rewarding, and I, it was like the other side of the gurney. I have a better appreciation of how people are packaged, and then you take, and I remember having nurses ride along with me and I knew what Jen was thinking of that a lot of nurses don’t know how to do spinal precautions. You know, they don’t know how to use a backboard because they’re not field trained.

TM: Hang on, hang on. Wait. Back up. So what FMC wanted to do was get their nurses into a patrol car with you?

NMM: No, I’m just saying, no, not at all, they’re just saying that I brought skills that they did not have.

TM: Oh, so when you mentioned ride along they wanted the nurses that they had to hang out with you?

NMM: No, no, no. I don’t know where the word ride along came from. I don’t remember saying that. If I said it out loud I didn’t mean to say it. But anyway, though, she said “You bring a skill set and as an example nurses in a hospital don’t know how to do spinal precautions.

TM: Right.

NMM: They don’t know how to start an IV in the back of a speeding boat on Biscayne Bay at 30 miles an hour, which I did one time. You know, they live in a very clean and well-lit environment and I was under a bridge one time under a car extricating

somebody. So I was already calm, I already was confidence in my skills, and so it wasn't like I was a new nursing student. So other than learning some of the how to get, how to put things in Cerner, which is our computer system, how to get things out of the pharmacy, which is the drug cabinet that's locked and you have to use a computer to open it, other than learning nuts and bolts I pretty much walked in the door, and I worked there for eight years before we left, before we moved to California. So from the time, is that right, eight years? No more than that. No, almost ten years. What does my little thing say? I've got a, they gave me a little award. Let's see. I'm walking around to look at this. Yeah, I think I was there for eight or nine years. Anyway, before I left the Grand Canyon.

TM: Okay. So explain to me how this would work. So you, most of us work five days a week and then we have two days off, and so you would take your two days off and you'd get off work at Grand Canyon, you have to drive to Flagstaff, which is an hour and a half away, and you've got a van.

NMM: A camper van.

TM: A camper van. Okay, yeah. And we'll talk about that in a minute. So you've got a place to stay in your camper van and there's parking out in the parking lot there. So then you would work a Saturday for 12 hours and back that into midnight and then work Sunday from 12 to midnight so...

NMM: Usually it was 7 to 7.

TM: 12 midnight to 12 noon.

NMM: Or 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. or 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and there were other shifts that I worked later on. But, yeah, I started off unfortunately at night shift and then I went to day shift.

TM: And then you would drive back to the Canyon to show up for work on Monday morning?

NMM: Right. Oh, it gets better, it gets better. Yeah. But, and I would only do that once or twice a month. But the other interesting thing is in 2000, when I decided to go back to school to get my PhD, my field work was on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, North Rim, Yellowstone National Park, Everglades, I went to many places, but my field work where I would do, it was fire ecology, and I was looking at the effects, I'm really digressing now, the effects of fire over time on the plants and animals. And so I was, can I go into this for a sec?

TM: No, because we're going to pick that up when we get to 2000.

NMM: Okay. Okay. But the bottom line was I would go out at, in the evening, I'd work a shift at South Rim, I would go out in my camper van, I'd set out the traps for my mammals, I'd pick them up the next morning at 4:30, process and release them; go back, shower and put on my uniform and go back to work at the South Rim. And then twice a month I would go work at Flagstaff Medical Center. So I actually did quite a bit at one time. I am a person who has a lot of energy and I like to describe myself as a doer, d-o-e-r. I'm a rolling stone.

TM: Nice, nice. Okay, so you got your RN in 1996, late '96 or early '97.

NMM: '97. Yeah, '97.

TM: What were your clinicals at Maricopa like?

NMM: Oh, they were just the typical things, everybody telling you what to do. The final exams were, a lot of us thought they were ridiculous. There was a gal who came out in tears and the things that they emphasized, because this is not for emergency room, this is just as a registered nurse, so a woman went in to go take a patient's history and she didn't pull the curtain totally closed and they flunked her because patient privacy was of the utmost, you know. And I had an advantage because there was like a station where you gave injections and stuff and I'd been doing that for like 20 years as a paramedic, and starting IVs and so all of those nuts and bolts things for me were a piece of cake. But it was the things related to in-hospital care which was my least experienced thing that I just had to be anal about. So it wasn't that hard. I have good memory management. I really have a good, am able to remember things well. So for me it was not that difficult and I passed them all. And then you take something called the NCLEX, which is the nursing exam, and you take it on a computer and there are, the way you take it is it gives you a question, you answer it, and then it gives you a harder question and then you answer it, and then it goes to another category, and if it gives you a third question and you don't answer it, then it drops down to an easier question. So the computer decides if you know your stuff or if you're like grasping. So the most you can take is 300 questions or the least you can take is 75. If after 75 questions it's obvious you know what you're doing the computer kicks you out with your RN. If you go to 300 questions, you may still pass but chances are the computer's decided you need to go study some more. So I got kicked out at 75 and I got my RN. So I got my NCLEX, which is my ability to apply for a license then. So I applied for licenses both in Arizona and California because I knew I was going to come back to California eventually someday.

TM: That makes sense. How old were you in 1997?

NMM: Oh, let's see, '96 when I did it and I was 41.

TM: So this is the concept of a mature student, I guess, an older learner. They have wonderful names for people who come back in mid-career to pick up degrees and

NMM: Oh, and after that I got my PhD. So I just love to learn, even if I didn't do anything with it I just love to learn. I took a California Naturalist class during COVID last year online. So keep learning.

TM: Did you use your RN skills at Grand Canyon, because I seem to remember seeing you quite a bit in the clinic,

NMM: Oh, yes.

TM: in the South Rim clinic with Dr. Wurgler and Dr. Tom Myers, and now this all makes way more sense.

NMM: But for the first five years, six years at the Grand Canyon they were all experienced paramedic skills and so I think, well, not 20 years but at that point 10 years, and then when I became a flight nurse basically, flying patients from the Grand Canyon to the Flagstaff Medical Center, Level One Trauma Center wherever it was it didn't really change my skill set because they were still emergencies, field emergencies. But after I finished with the National Park Service and I was waiting for Kent to finish with the National Park Service I did take a job part time as a clinic nurse at the clinic when Tom Myers was there. So, which was okay, but it was boring to me. But it was nursing but not my joy of nursing. I thrive on bring it on tough of stuff. Challenge me, I can do this. I mean, because as a flight nurse, as a paramedic, as an ER nurse, I mean, we're all trained to run codes all by yourself. If the doctor's not there that doesn't matter, we'll start the IV, we'll, I mean, as a paramedic I can intubate patients. Nurses cannot intubate patients. So I was able to bring a double skill set. Yeah.

TM: Great. That's really, I mean, again I just think about an asset, what an asset you were and still are, of course, to the Park Service, to Grand Canyon at the time. It's just amazing, amazing skill sets there. Very neat. What else do you recall about this time? Sort of we're in the 1995 to 2000 timeframe.

NMM: Right. This is also a time I started something, a newsletter called Resource Management and the Protection Ranger, and one of the things that came up in it was driven by finances, of all things, is the south, this is right when all of the talk about stove piping that we talked about before, about protection rangers are really police officers and they didn't want to give Park Rangers any kind of enhanced pay because all they were police officers but if you were a resource manager that's a different set of skills, and right there the fight was on because on South Rim who wanted to be a hundred percent law enforcement did not want to do EMS or fire or anything else of that ilk, didn't want to do just that, and there was actually talk of bringing capitol police officers to the Grand Canyon to be the police force and then the rangers would do everything but law enforcement. And so at that time they didn't want, the Park rangers that were there didn't want that to happen because they wanted to be police officers, too, but they also wanted to have recognition as pay, and already having a Master's degree in biology and having experience in resource management I decided that I was going to educate my colleagues so that they could, that we could justify that we are resource managers, which was supposed to be our number one job. It's not protecting the people but protecting the resource. So I started a hand typed thing and later a computer typed thing that I named RMPR, Resource Management and the Protection Ranger, and every issue would talk about the environment, and ecotone and animals, how the elk were introduced, what about the condors, I would talk about the big horn sheep, I would talk about the ring tailed cats, I would talk about the pinyon juniper forests, I'd talk about Ponderosa pine, I would talk about and educate people and my colleagues on what Grand Canyon was all about. I remember being on horse patrol and riding up to the El Tovar when a person who had been there many years before me, I don't want to embarrass them in person by saying this, and the person came up and said "Why is it called El Tovar," and he immediately said "I don't know." And I said "Well, it was named for Simon El Tovar and they came to the South Rim and (sound effect)," and my colleague just looked at me and went "Whoa," because it was important for me to know about my national parks.

TM: Yeah, the history of what's in the name.

NMM: Sure, natural history and all that kind of stuff.

TM: Yeah. Was this once a quarter or once a month? How often did you put those out?

NMM: Once a month, I believe, and so I put it out for many years. I think I have 37 issues, something like that. But one of the things I used to do is to show what it was broad because I always had a column on a law, like what is the Lacey Act? And the

Lacey Act is possession of migratory animal parts is illegal and that's a federal law and I would put down what it was in the code of federal regulations and what it encompassed and how we enforce it here at Grand Canyon. So, for instance, you'd stop a car and they have ravens' feathers, like a lot of people do, on their dashboard, that's illegal because they're migratory birds. And then I might talk about another act, or I might talk about another law. But every issue I would talk about something in law enforcement that applied to the resources. I would talk about poaching, I'd talk about illegal placement of salt licks, all that kind of stuff. So it was really important. And, of course, I learned by doing it myself and I made sure all of my colleagues had it, that administrative had it, and I gave it to the Judge Magistrate who at the time was Judge Verkamp. What was his first name, Tom?

TM: Steve.

NMM: Steve Verkamp, that's right.

TM: What do you remember about him?

NMM: Oh, Steve Verkamp. Well (laughs), I, let me get back to this.

TM: Okay. I'll put a, we'll go back to him.

NMM: No, no, no. We can do that but I just want say the Verkamp family was historically present in the Grand Canyon and they had a store there. Remind me to come back to the store and the attic because that is a very important story, if you'd write that down, Verkamp's.

TM: Done; Verkamp's, story attic. No, I got it, it's good.

NMM: And the Hopi House. Anyway...

TM: What was your, let's back up a minute because you mentioned stove piping and you mentioned resource management and protection rangers, and when I think of resource management I think of the Science Center and its air quality, its exotic species, its plants, its...

NMM: Fire.

TM: Yeah. It's fire, its caves.

NMM: And I would address every issue. Yeah.

TM: Okay. And then, of course, when I think of protection ranger I don't think of resource management.

NMM: Right, and if you look at our job description that's number one.

TM: Is resource management?

NMM: Resource management.

TM: Well, I think of resource protection, I mean, unimpaired, that's, that

NMM: Nope, we are managers. We are managers. That's our number one job is to protect the resource from people, and secondarily it's protect people from the resource and then the people from the people. I mean, the park was there first kind of an attitude and anyway...

TM: It just seems like so many, well, help me out here because I would assume that some, to be clear, protective rangers may just look at people on people and would sort of...

NMM: That's why we had the issues we had.

TM: Okay.

NMM: People on South Rim and other places in the park did not want to be resource managers, they did not want to be on search and rescue. They didn't even want to be EMTs. They just wanted to be police officers and that's where we had big problems.

TM: Well, can I play the devil's advocate here a little bit, or at least try?

NMM: Sure.

TM: So physical therapist? I know nothing about this but I would think, okay, as a protective ranger I wear a weapon, I'm trained at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy, I know how to take down the bad guys, I know traffic violations, I know the law and the letter of the law, and then you want to add on top of that I need to know about the resource, about how the resource works? That's a whole 'other level of complexity.

NMM: It is. So here you are in the National Park Service. In the National Park Service you might have 10 of the over 400 park areas where the people call are like a city. We're talking about Yellowstone, Yosemite, Gateway, Grand Canyon, Golden Gate, and Lake Mead and on like that. I could go on a list like that. If you go to Death Valley, if you go to Everglades, if you go to Roosevelt, if you go to Badlands, the number of police type calls that you have might be one or two a week or a month, or a month. So your primary job at these places is a resource manager. What we used to keep in the back of our vehicles at Death Valley were rakes because people would drive off-road. We would never catch them and we'd go out and we'd rake the wheel marks so it wouldn't encourage other people to do that. We would manage the resource. At Devil's Tower you would close the Tower to hiking at certain parts of the year so they don't mess with the peregrine falcons up there. The same at Moro Rock at Sequoia National Park. But because every now and then you're going to get a Danny Ray Horning or you're going to get a drunk driver, you're going to get something, you have to have that skill set. In the parks that have not one or two a month, but one or two an hour, that's when you have more protection skills amongst the rangers. So, for instance, at Death Valley National Monument, now Death Valley National Park, we work concurrent jurisdictions. We did law enforcement in Death Valley, but the Inyo County Sheriff's Department also did. They shared it with us, concurrent. On private land like Furnace Creek Ranch, we had no say. We couldn't do anything there. That was private land and the sheriff had to do it. We had a memorandum of understanding that we would go in and assist them but we couldn't do anything else. So places that don't have a lot of protection needs either have proprietary jurisdiction or they can only write a parking ticket. They don't do any investigations, don't do any arrests, or they have concurrent jurisdiction, or if you're at a place like Grand Canyon or Sequoia and Kings Canyon, some of the others, you may have exclusive where now you have rangers who not only have to do the, write the tickets, do the investigations, make the vehicle stop, arrest the people, make their case in court and take them to jail. So within the National Park Service you've got quite a few places which are little cities and that's why the talk went to stove piping in places like this, why the top went to having investigative officers in places, why Grand Canyon ultimately ended up with court officers so that I didn't have to go, like I did in Death Valley, and be my own court officer in a DUI case. And then we have a traveling U.S. Judge Magistrate that showed up, I don't remember the schedule, once or twice a week or something. And then you had, people were so busy that now the resource is left in the dust.

TM: And then there's a fire or then there's some sort of emergency call out.

NMM: Right.

TM: So now these duties, this list of duties are really starting to get overwhelming.

NMM: Which is why there was talk of having police officers coming in and being the police, have private ambulance companies in and being the paramedics and having park rangers just be search and rescue and Andy Taylor's kind of things. And nobody wanted to do that and split up. I didn't want to do that and split it up. I wanted the variety. I could do the variety. There's some people who didn't want to do the resources stuff so there was, it was contentious, and I don't know what the answer was other than eventually we would, we did bring an ambulance company in at the end of my career and they staged at Tusayan and they would often come in and take the patient to the hospital rather than us do it. They often responded to calls, and a lot of this started during Danny Ray Horning, when we brought in the FBI to help with the investigation, when we had over 500 people in law enforcement in there, plus you had ambulance companies from Phoenix coming up and taking the calls because everybody was busy trying to capture this murderer/kidnapper. So that was the idea that you could bring in outsiders. But the majority of National Park areas, there's just not enough calls so you want the ranger to be able to rake the tracks and to collar the animals, to give the evening programs and there's places where this happens. In fact that's what the California state parks still do is their rangers give programs as well as protection, but it's not in places like Pismo Beach where they're too busy. So it's really interesting and I stopped with the National Park Service in 2003 so I can't speak of what happened the last 18 years.

TM: Right, but we'll at least get to 2003, so yeah. Maybe this is a good time to put a comma here in this oral history.

NMM: And I would love to tell you about Steve Verkamp.

RM: Right. I've got him down on my list of things to talk about next time. Okay, well, with that this will conclude Part 10 of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Nancy Muleady-Mecham. Today is Wednesday, April 21, 2021. My name is Tom Martin. Nancy, thank you so very much.

NMM: You're welcome, Tom.

End of interview.