

Transcription: Grand Canyon Oral History

Interviewee: Nikki Newcome (NN)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Life as a Grand Canyon National Park Park Guide

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TM: Good morning today is the 6th of June, 2018. This is a Grand Canyon oral history recording with Nikki Newcome. My name is Tom Martin. Nikki thank you so much for being willing to speak with us today. May I have your permission to record this interview over the phone?

NN: Yes you may.

TM: Thank you very much. We had talked, and you had been to Grand Canyon as an interpretive ranger but you weren't called an interpretive ranger. This was long ago, can you tell me that story?

NN: I was probably a sophomore in college in 1969 and I needed a summer job. I had just become a biology student/major I guess. I think probably my biology professor, Dr. R. Roy Johnson, suggested I apply to the Park Service. So I did, I figured out, I filled out a standard government form applying to the Park Service hoping that I would get a job in Arizona, but I didn't really care. A lady called me back and said they had a new program called the "park guide" which was to get young people in and train them to be ranger naturalists or something. So I applied for that.

TM: So I just want to back up a minute. That's Dr. R. Roy Johnson?

NN: Yes.

TM: Ok. Where were you going to college at the time?

NN: I was going to Prescott College. I was the second class. Prescott College was two years old and I was the second class, their second freshmen class. But by then I was a sophomore, I think, so there would have been another incoming freshman class.

TM: Right.

NN: Yeah that...It was a brand new school.

TM: Had you been up to the Grand Canyon before?

NN: Oh yes. You know just as a tourist. Yes, as a tourist with my parents maybe two or three times. I had never done any hiking or camping in the Canyon, just passing through.

TM: So you knew where the South Rim was, roughly. So how did you know you got the job?

NN: I presume they called me and told me. I think the same lady called me and told me, that had suggested I fill out the application for the park guide position.

TM: At Grand Canyon?

NN: At Grand Canyon. So I guess she was somebody from Grand Canyon and got my application forwarded to them or something. I don't... I'm not sure. [laughing] Young and dumb. I took things as they came.

TM: Well, how old were you then, do you remember?

NN: I would've been 19, maybe 20.

TM: Alright.

NN: Yeah.

TM: Where did you stay? What was your housing like?

NN: Well, there was some sort of bunkhouse, one story, rows of room arrangements that I stayed in. There were probably five little apartments in it. I had a roommate who was, now I'm thinking maybe she worked the toll booth. She worked for the law enforcement rangers and she had some sort of office job, but she might have worked the toll entrance booth as well. Anyway, she wasn't a naturalist. But I had a roommate and I don't remember anybody else. The other rooms must have been full, but I don't remember anybody else. [laughing]

TM: Okay, and as a park guide, what was your job? What did you do?

NN: Well, I did the same things that the ranger naturalists did. There were only three or four ranger naturalists at the time. There was another woman and I can't remember her name. I can see her face clear as day but don't remember her name. This was her second season. She was probably four or five years older than I was. I think she was a masters student, maybe in anthropology somewhere, I don't quite remember. This was her second season. She used to tease me. She said, "Well you know, you do the same things we do but I'm two pay grades higher than you." [laughing]

TM: Wow.

NN: I'm suspecting that I was probably a GS-3 and she might have been a 7 or something like that at the time. I don't know. But, she mentioned that or else I probably wouldn't have even paid any attention. I was just interested in doing my job and making some money for the summer. I needed to buy books and stuff for school.

TM: Yeah. Did you get any kind of training on the talks you were going to do? How did that work out?

NN: Um, I was just encouraged or just told that I needed to do talks. I kind of put them off a little while, at least the campfire talk. I remember I procrastinated on that one. But I had to give geology talks at the, I think it was Yavapai Museum. I think that was what it was called. I couldn't put that one off very long, so I just went to this other woman's... I went to several of her talks, took notes, got a big book out of the library on the geology of the Canyon and kind of just went through it step by step and used the same visual aids that she had used and my little 3x5 notecards and memorized the geology and the terms. Although I understood it pretty well. I mean, it was pretty straight forward at the time. There wasn't a lot of controversy which there is now [laughing] about what was happening. In those days, they thought they knew how the canyon formed.

TM: Yeah. Were you doing walking tours? Would you kind of go out on the rim and sort of walk around and look for people that were looking for a ranger to ask a question?

NN: As I recall, I had two main duties. One was to man the desk a few hours a day in the visitor center and tell people where to go to see whatever it was they wanted to see. Then the rest of the time... My other duty was walking Yavapai Point which was kind of the first place you come in to the Park. At least, if that's not Yavapai Point, it was the first place you come into the Point and everybody kind of parked there, got out, looked at the Canyon. My job was to walk around and talk to people and point out stuff. I also did nature walks. I probably did three or four of those a week, I think. Where I took a group of people and went down below the rim a ways on a trail. I'm thinking maybe it was Kaibab Trail. Didn't go to the bottom, by any means, but went down to some sort of little rest point where there were some benches. I would talk about the flora and fauna mostly 'cause that's what I was interested in, but also the geology of the area on the way down. Then once we'd get to the bottom, I'd visit with people at that rest area and then I'd kind of herd them up the trail. I needed to be the last one up, following the slowest people on the way back up. So I chatted with the slow ones but I didn't do a lecture or anything on the way back up.

TM: Okay, fun. What was your uniform like at the time?

NN: [laughs] Oh that was a joke. It was designed after the hostess uniforms. It was a green/dark green pencil straight skirt with a fairly short jacket, a dark green jacket, with, as I recall, three buttons. Then there was a shawl. A white blouse with a shawl collar. And then we had a, it was kind of like a pillbox hat. Wasn't really pillbox, it kind of, as I recall, had a flat back to it and raised in the front. Then we had a little pin made out of triangles, like two or three, think it was two triangles, and that was the Park Service new logo. And I had a nametag and that was it. They were deciding that an arrowhead insignia wasn't suitable for whatever reason. They wanted to get away from that. So I wore that. So, everybody thought I was an airline hostess in stockings. Yeah, everybody thought I was an airline hostess. They were amazed when I would come up and start pointing out geologic features or a particular bird or a plant or something on the Point there. Nobody ever came up to me. I had to walk up to people, which was hard for me, because... Yeah, they thought I was an airline hostess [laughing] and not a park ranger.

TM: How did you sort that out?

NN: Well actually, I went online this morning for a little bit and I did find a picture of my uniform, a drawing of the uniform online. I also found the little pin that we wore. It was called the 'Park Gate pin'. Then it was used as a tie tack for the male rangers. After a couple weeks of being an airline hostess, as long as I stood behind the counter there was no problem. Standing behind the counter it's obvious. In a green outfit nobody ever questioned me there. But walking around with people was crazy. Either I asked or the other woman asked, this is the first year they had done this. She had had an arrowhead on her outfit the year before and she'd had to take it off. She thought that was really ridiculous. So either she or I somehow got it approved that we could put an arrowhead back on our hat. So then we had our nametags, a little pin/a little tie tack on our lapel and an arrowhead on our hat. That made a big, big, difference. It was like night and day. [laughs]

TM: Wow. What kind of questions would you get when you were out walking around?

NN: The most common one was, "How far is it to Las Vegas?"

TM: Okay.

NN: The next ones had to do with how far is it to the other side. It's very hard from that Point to have any concept of the scope of the Canyon. You're just looking at like a picture, it looks like. Most of the people wanted to know if it was really a mile deep. They wanted to know how far it was to the other side. They couldn't believe that it was, whatever, five miles to the North Rim. I don't remember how far it was.

TM: It's longer than that. It's quite a ways. Yeah.

NN: Yep. They couldn't believe how far it was to the North Rim and they couldn't believe how deep it was. Other than that most of the questions were about/the questions that they approached me about was tourist stuff. Of course I would try and throw in geology and stuff and encourage them to go to the other sites, or the other viewpoints, and encourage them to go to the visitor center and to the – I can't remember the name of the tower on the east end of the Canyon.

TM: Yeah, the Desert Watch Tower.

NN: Yeah, anyway, I encouraged people to go there because I thought that was really cool. Mostly that's what I did, was kind of throw in a little bit of natural stuff. But most of the questions had to do with where are the hotels. Because when you got there, from that vantage point/that parking lot, you couldn't really see anything. The village was about a mile away. So that was a lot of it, was answering those kinds of questions. Yavapai Point duty was not my favorite but I did enjoy the nature walks. I also, now I'm remembering, I did some nature walks from the visitor center, too. Not just down into the canyon, but from the visitor center along that little trail that goes not all the way but towards Yavapai Point. I had a few nature walks that I did from there.

TM: Nice, 'cause that's a nice little trail that goes out past the amphitheater and over to the rim and then you can go east over to Yavapai or west back to El Tovar and Bright Angel.

NN: Yeah. Well I remembered, just after I talked to you the other day, I remembered okay now I did stuff up on the trail. I remember having people hug the ponderosa pines a lot. That was one of my favorite ones.

TM: Did you ask people to smell them?

NN: Yeah. To hug the pines. And I remember trying to be very careful about picking which willows I'd let them peel a little bit of the bark off of. It was my understanding, may or may not have been true, that the native people used that in their diapers.

TM: Oh.

NN: It's some sort of antibacterial properties that kept the native kids from getting diaper rash. This stuff just comes back out of nowhere. [laughing]

TM: Well that's fun.

NN: But I remember trying to pick. I didn't want people just pulling off all the willow bark off of everything. But we did smell the vanilla on the ponderosa pines. That was before 'tree-hugger' was even a term, but I would encourage people to hug the trees.

TM: Oh fun. Fun.

NN: Anyway, that's pretty much what I remember. There's not a lot. This was fifty years ago. Only three months one summer from school there.

TM: Did you work for the Park Service again after that?

NN: No I never did. I worked for the Forest Service, I worked for National Fishery Service. I worked for, I think, another government agency. Oh well, those are just state agencies. But I did work for the Forest Service and National Fishery Service. So I had a couple of other jobs. I think I was nearly always a seasonal. They weren't about to give a woman a permanent job anywhere in the state.

TM: Were you able to save any money that summer as a GS-3?

NN: Well, they paid for my, you know... Actually I believe I was. I didn't go anywhere. I didn't do anything. All I did was save money. I had enough money to... I always had college jobs at the college. I had to buy my books, so I must have had enough money to buy my books. Once I was back at Prescott College, my room and board was paid for. I lived in a dorm and I ate in the cafeteria. So I must have saved enough money. I know I didn't have enough money to pay for the river trip down the Canyon that I wanted to go on. But I thought I would by the end of the summer. [laughs] I don't remember how much money I made. I could probably look it up online. They probably have a pay-scale for back then.

TM: What else do you remember about that summer, 50 years ago at the South Rim?

NN: Well I remember I walked from the... I remember tear gas, oddly enough. Since I've talked to you a few memories have come back. I walked to the visitor's center from my little apartment or room or whatever it was, and I remember one time I walked and I just started coughing and choking. I couldn't really smell anything. I didn't understand what it was. I went stumbling into the visitor center and I said, "Is there something wrong with me? I can barely breathe. There's something..." I didn't know what it was. They told me that they were training, doing tear gas training with the rangers somewhere nearby, the law enforcement rangers. At that time, you know, it was the 60s and time of protests and marches and things. I never did of that, but every time I hear about that I think, well I can't even imagine what it would've been like to actually have been teargassed. Just being in the vicinity was horrible. [laughing] That's a memory I remember. I remember, I believe that was the summer when man walked on the moon. I didn't have a television and I worked that day, so I completely missed that event. [laughs] Having to work, I didn't even know about it until later. People were talking about it at work and stuff.

TM: So fairly isolated. At that time did anybody have a TV? Was there TV signal at the South Rim?

NN: I think there probably was. I mean there were people that lived there that had homes. You know, in the village, there were fulltime people that lived there. I'm sure they did. Again, I was a student. I don't remember ever going to anyone's home. All I remember doing was going work and going back to my little room and walking in the woods. I did enjoy walking in the woods a lot. I still do. It's one of the things I like to do, wander around. I'm sure that there was a signal. I just didn't have it in my little room. You know, I had just what I brought from school and I had my uniform, so I didn't really need clothes.

TM: It's interesting just because the signal would've had to come from Williams. Would have had to been beamed over there somehow. It's curious. That's a good question for me to ask the maintenance people or the... Yeah. Good.

NN: I could've heard about it after it happened. I was, I think, completely unaware of it.

TM: You had mentioned that your uniform didn't fit real well.

NN: [laughing] No and I laughed when I saw the picture of it in the paper. The front of mine, I think, hung down to my waist. I did read something online about how one of the reasons they didn't have the women wearing badges was because they didn't have pockets on their jackets because hostess uniforms didn't have pockets. There was no place to put a badge that it wouldn't hang [laughing] and swing down. My uniform was particularly baggy. They were supposedly custom made for us but... We ordered them and I think we/I might have gotten a uniform allowance. They might have reimbursed me for some of it, I don't think all of it. Before I got there I had to order my two skirts, two shirts and two jackets, or one jacket. I just sent them three measurements, bust, hips and waist. They came back, the top just didn't even fit at all and I remember trying to hold it all together to keep it from just gapping, falling, hanging down with safety pins. Apparently before my year, the women did wear badges at some point. There was a lady that was online who said she pinned her badge to her bra strap to keep it from flopping in the breeze. That wasn't a problem with me; I never had a badge. Apparently before my year, the women who had uniforms, they were mostly office jobs, but they did have badges or some sort of emblem. But my year was the year that they decided not to I guess. [laughing]

TM: What kind of shoes did you use?

NN: I think we were supposed to wear little pumps, with little heels like airline hostesses. But it wasn't clearly written in the policy, so most of the time I wore Kaibab moccasins. Nobody really said anything about it. I remember the other woman wore hiking boots and she was more comfortable with that. In those days I went barefoot. It seems to me, I remember walking barefoot back and forth to the visitor center and then as soon as I'd get there I'd put on... I must've had some sort of little pumps for when I was doing the desk duty. Some sort of little shoes. I remember putting on shoes to go in there and do that part. But when I was leading nature walks and stuff I wore moccasins, Kaibab moccasins, that buttoned up the sides, side of your leg, come up above your calf.

TM: Wow. You don't have any pictures of you in that?

NN: No I don't. I did get a box out of the storage looking to see if maybe there was a picture or a letter. I did find a big pile of letters that my folks kept, but they started in 1979 or something. I didn't find another box in the inventory. If I find any of those letters I will forward them to you.

TM: Oh yeah, that would be fun.

NN: I don't remember anybody taking a picture of me. I didn't own a camera, so I didn't take any pictures.

TM: And did you wear your moccasins down the trail, then?

NN: Oh yeah.

TM: Wow, great!

NN: Oh yeah. No, there was no way I could wear shoes. I do remember wearing stockings. I believe it was policy that you had to wear stockings. And I do remember wearing stockings [laughing] with my moccasins which I just thought was hysterical. Really crazy. Now I remember about it. I remember going,

yeah, I did, I walked barefoot a lot to the visitor center. I remember going into the bathroom there and putting on my stockings and shoes. So, I don't, yeah I think I had some sort of brown pumps or something. I don't think they had heels. I don't remember ever wearing a pair of shoes with heels. So, yeah, I wore some sort of shoes.

TM: What else do you remember about that?

NN: That's about it. I remember other odd memories. When they finally kind of said, "You gotta do campfires." [laughing] Which I really didn't want to do at all. They told me I finally really had to do a campfire talk. I basically just did the same talk that I did, the geology talk that I did at the museum. I remember going to the library. I think that was the first time I had been to the library there in the visitor center. I think it was upstairs. It had tons and tons of slides. They were all in little metal holders. I don't remember putting them in a carousel, I think I put them in rectangular boxes to put in the slide machine.

TM: Yes.

NN: I remember going through all these, trying to pick out. You know, I only needed like thirty pictures or something like that. It was like a half an hour lecture or a twenty minute lecture, probably twenty minutes. I only needed like thirty pictures or something. It was very hard to go through all of those slides and come up with ones for my lecture. But I did. [laughing] I liked the museum. I remember they had a pretty nice study collection. I had just become a biology student. I was just into study collections and doing that sort of stuff. It was the first museum collection, real one I had ever seen.

TM: Ok. Wow.

NN: That was neat.

TM. What do you remember? What was in the study collection, do you remember?

NN: They had drawers of birds, which I was most interested in because I was interested in birds. They had drawers of birds. They had some stuffed other furry animals. I remember quite a lot of cases with archeological specimens, potsherds and things like that. They had in the visitor's center, they had really nice dioramas. They had some nice pottery in those dioramas but it was like the whole pots and things. I just remember opening some drawers and having little boxes of potsherds that at that point weren't interesting me much. I was more interested in the bird skins and how they...[laughing]. I was just learning how to stuff birds, make study skins. I was interested in how they were done. Some of them were really old. They were all boxed and, you know, raggedy looking. It was interesting. I was thinking, "I hope my skins never look like that."

TM: [Laughs] Gosh, it just makes me think, I wonder if Eddie McKee had collected those specimens back in the '30s. So, just kind of wonder. Huh.

NN: Dr. Howdy (R. Roy Johnson) would know. [laughing] He would know.

TM: Interesting. So would you have to build a fire for the evening talks?

NN: No, I don't remember doing that. Think somebody from maintenance probably did it. You said the name this morning of somebody from maintenance and it struck a chord.

TM: Oh yeah. That was Gary, Gary Howe.

NN: That name sounds familiar. I can't put a face with it. But maybe it sounds familiar because maybe he was one of the ones. I think they built the fire. I don't remember ever cutting any wood or ever building a fire. I remember they had a little amphitheater thing with the screen. Then I either stood just below the screen or on a little platform at the level of the screen and the fire was kind of down to one side. Then there were all the little wood benches that the people sat on. I'm trying to think of where the... I can't quite remember where the projector was but I remember handing my box of slides... I didn't run the projector, somebody else did that. I gave my box of slides to somebody who ran the projector. I don't know whether it could've been behind?

TM: It's kind of what I think. It was actually behind the screen. But...

NN: I think it might've been behind. I think there was a little room back there. Hmm. The mind is a funny thing.

TM: Yeah. Well it was only fifty years ago so you're doing pretty good. [laughs]

NN: I don't remember what I did yesterday. [laughing]

TM: What else do you remember that summer?

NN: That's about it. It was pretty regimented. Like I said, I went to work and came home. I remembered, I think I told you, there were two other park guides and they were both Native American. One was named Leo Yazı and I believe he was a Navajo. The other one, I can't quite remember his name, but I think he was Hopi. I remember they were both really nice, but we rarely ever worked together. We all had our... I very rarely worked with anybody. You know, you'd go and do your thing. There wasn't a buddy system or anything. I did nearly everything all by myself. But I remember sitting with Leo somewhere, sitting in the sun, waiting for maybe waiting for a ride out to somewhere or something. He could grab flies out of the sky. I mean just out of the air, without even looking. Never bat an eye. He would be talking and he'd just never bat an eye, he'd grab flies out of the air. I'd laugh and he said, "Well you know there's not a lot to do on the reservation when you're a kid." [laughing]

TM: Oh my gosh.

NN: So that was interesting. I mean, I remember that about him. I didn't spent much time with him. But I remember him being a nice, gentle guy with a twinkle in his eye and a good sense of humor. Then I heard that he had gotten fired apparently for misbehaving in some bar, I don't remember where, somewhere, outside the Park I guess. I couldn't even imagine him being drunk. I was young and dumb and didn't realize that nice people had that kind of drinking problem. Anyway, I was very sorry that it happened to him. I just didn't quite understand. It was very sad. I think we were the only three park guides. It was probably some government program or something to try and train young rangers or something cheaply. [laughs]

TM: Yeah, Yeah. So, were you working a ten days on, four days off schedule?

NN: I don't remember. I don't think I would have had four days off. I just don't remember that much time. I don't remember really going anywhere. I don't remember the schedule. I would suspect that it was like one day off. Six days on and one day off. I don't know that. That one hasn't come back to me yet. And I don't think I went anywhere to speak of on my days off unless it was I could get a ride with somebody to go visit somewhere in the Canyon or somewhere on the rim or something.

TM: Did you have a car?

NN: I don't think I did. I had a car off and on at that time. I had that same truck up until two years ago. Like a 52 year old vehicle. [laughing] But I don't think my mother let me take it. That was one of her weird things. So I don't remember having a car. I don't think I did.

TM: Did you get food, then, from the general store?

NN: I'm pretty sure I did. I'm pretty sure I got food. I don't remember ever going to Williams other than getting there and coming home. Even if I had had my truck there, I probably wouldn't have driven it much because it was exp...well it was expensive. Hey, you know, gas was 25 cents a gallon.

TM: Well, 25 cents was worth an awful lot back then.

NN: [laughs] Yeah, I don't remember that. I was saving money. I must have gotten it at the general store. I just don't remember going anywhere else. I remember that I couldn't cook. I mean, I could cook but my roommate couldn't cook. That was it. My roommate couldn't cook. I used to have an ongoing joke that she burned Jell-O.

TM: [laughing]

NN: She really did so I remember cooking for both of us. I think I remember shopping for both of us, too. And she contributed something to our meal or else we had an account, might have had an account at a store. I don't remember carrying money around. So that's the kind of thing I remember. I do remember that a [inaudible] fell down in the parking lot right outside the visitor's center and she stopped breathing. I had just taken CPR that year, so I gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and they called somebody from the clinic and they took her away. I was later told that she did fine. It was altitude or something. Oh, I also carried, I did have a little tiny pocket in my skirt and I carried ammonia inhalers. People were always getting lightheaded. I never had anybody, I don't think, faint. But people were getting lightheaded on the Point there. They'd get out of their car and they'd go over to the Point and then they'd get lightheaded. I'd have them sit on a bench and I'd wave the inhaler under their noses.

TM: Oh my gosh.

NN: Pretty high altitude for a lot of people.

TM: Yes, 7000 feet. It's right up there.

NN: That was kind of an ongoing... I'd always have two or three little inhalers in my pocket and remember not to wash them. Only having two shirts, there was lots of... Washing in the sink was nearly every day. There must have been a laundromat there but all I remember is washing in the sink. [laughing] Washing the shirts out, because it was hot they got stinky. [laughs]

TM: There indeed was a laundromat, but they clearly didn't know you. Washing in the sink, that's a great idea and took care of that.

NN: Yeah well, I washed my shirts. I might have gone there with the skirts. That would've been hard to wash the skirts in the sink. They probably needed to be dry cleaned. I don't remember.

TM: They had quite the dry cleaning facility there at the South Rim and the rangers brought their uniforms. It was a big deal.

NN: Well, I probably took my skirts, then, to the dry cleaners if there was one. Yeah, I don't remember ever washing them so I probably took them to the dry cleaners. I do remember washing my shirts, a lot. There was always, and my roommate, too, there was always, every night there was a shirt or two hanging in the bathroom. We should've had more shirts. [laughs] Two shirts was not enough.

TM: Yeah, no kidding. Shirts that fitted would've helped, too. [laughs]

NN: Okay, unless you jog my memory, I can't really think of much else. It's coming back to me, right there by the El Tovar was the Kolb Brothers?

TM: Yeah, the Kolb Studio. There were a series of buildings there. To the east of the El Tovar would've been the Hopi House and just further east of that it would've been the Vercamp Studio. To the west, would've been the Bright Angel Lodge and the Lookout Studio and the Bright Angel cabins. Then just west of there would've been the Kolb Studio, west of there would've been the Bright Angel Trail.

NN: Ok, I remember liking the Kolb Studio a lot. All the pictures.

TM: Now, Emery would've been alive then and he would've been doing his talk. Does that ring a bell?

NN: Boy, I probably went to it. I remember liking to go there. That wasn't on my route very much, but sometimes it was. Sometimes I got to go walk there and patrol, walk in front of the hotels and along there. I remember really liking that studio. I don't remember the other places very well. Yeah, I remember liking the studio and the pictures. I must've gone to his talk if there was a talk there. I tried to go to everything that you could go to. I was just excited to be there. I wanted to do everything. Just again, it was kind of a fast and furious very short time. It was pretty overwhelming. I had contact with a lot of people, although there are zillions more now. But at the time, I think they had like two million a year or something was all. But I felt like I talked to every one of them. [laughs]

TM: What did you take away from your summer at Grand Canyon? What skills, is there anything looking back, you know, "I learned to do such and such there"?

NN: [thinking] I don't really... I'd often had jobs, so it wasn't my first job. I'm trying to... I can't think of anything in particular other than it was an exposure to the... Oh, there was a couple of things that I remember, that come back now.

TM: What?

NN: There was somebody there doing a study for designing visitor places in the Park. They were studying distances that people/various people, how much personal space like they need. I was assigned to go out with that person for a couple of days. They would have me walk up to people and talk to them and then find out what nationality they were. They had a whole bunch of pieces of cake and little pebbles and stuff on Yavapai point. They were basically measuring the distance. They'd have me go up and talk to peoples and ask people what countries they are from, if it wasn't obvious. The Japanese people were pretty obvious, but a lot of them.. Europeans, it was hard to tell. They would measure distances. The idea of how big to make spaces for people I guess. Anyway that fun. I enjoyed doing that. At one point they had me wear regular clothes and they measured the differences between me having my uniform on and not having...being a regular person walking up to people and pointing out something or asking a question. I would usually act like I knew what I was talking about. I'd walk up and say, "Do you know that that's x number of distance away," or "That bird you hear is a canyon wren" or something like that.

TM: And did it make a difference? Were they able to see you able to get closer or further away from people with one dress or another?

NN: I never saw the results of the study. I never saw those people again. I worked in a variety of Parks. I never saw 'em again. I don't know whether it made any difference in how national park's visitor areas are designed [laughing] or not. I don't know. But it was fun. I enjoyed doing it. It gave me kind of an excuse to get out of my comfort range. I was comfortable being out of my range. It would've been easier for me to walk up after being told to walk up to people and ask questions and what questions to ask and do that stuff. That was easier for me than just taking a deep breath and sauntering out and starting to talk to people. That was hard for me. Still is. It's not something I do well. But I've had quite a few jobs where I needed to do that, so I overcame it.

TM: Yeah it sounds like it was, at least, good exposure for speaking with strangers.

NN: It was. For speaking with strangers and I've had quite a few jobs in the tourist industry since then. Yeah, I can say that was my first one. So that helped. I did take that away from it. Knowing that I could talk to a lot people, and then I'd need a huge amount of time to myself after. [laughs] Lots of time to myself. But when called upon, I can interact with the public and do okay. That was nice. So the Park Service helped with that. Yeah. It was an interesting time. You got me thinking about all kinds of different things. Like I said, if I come up with any other documents or photos or anything I'll email them to you.

TM: That would be great. I'd really like that.

NN: I don't know whether...Yeah, doesn't matter to me if they do anything with it or not. But you might find them interesting.

TM: Yes. No, certainly the museum collection at the South Rim, they'd be definitely interested in that. Yeah, wonderful.

NN: Okay.

TM: Nikki Newcome, thank you so very, very much for this wonderful Grand Canyon oral history. Today is June 6th, 2018. My name is Tom Martin. Nikki hold the line please, I'm just going to turn the machine off here.