

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History

Interviewee: Richard Hanson (RH)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Richard recounts time in Washington, DC on a training detail for the Anacostia Region of the Capitol Parks, returning to Olympic National Park, and preparing for retirement in 2000

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TM: Today is Sunday, November 22, 2020. This is a Part 8 Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Richard Hanson. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, Richard, how are you?

RH: Hey, good morning. Good.

TM: Good. Richard, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

RH: Yes.

TM: Thank you. Last time we were in 1991 and you'd gone into a facilities management development training at the Albright Training Center at Grand Canyon National Park, a three-month training, which just sounds pretty neat. I guess that part of that training was that they sent you to a different facility somewhere. Can you pick that up?

RH: Yeah. After the three months of bookwork they tried to send you to a place where you didn't have any experience. You didn't get to pick where you went but you could kind of say, well, I think I need training in urban parks. All my parks had been big western parks and Forest Service in Idaho. I was always reading about lack of usage by minorities and how hard it was for them to visit parks. I started reading about urban parks and some of the things that were going on, so basically I asked for an urban park so I was selected for the Anacostia Region of the Capital Parks. Capital Parks are broken into like three different regions and I got Anacostia. It was a real Black part of town and so it fit my needs. It was pretty incredible.

TM: Tell me about it.

RH: Well, the training itself at Albright was, how can I say it... Well, the amount of money that they spent on training us... You know how Albright is the furthest place in the planet to get to from, you know, Washington, DC and from different areas. A lot of it was... I mean, they would bring guys in from DC to teach a 45-minute block, and it was kind of strange. I mean, I learned a lot there and it was good. It was fun being back into the Canyon and meeting some new people. I came away from that training with one good friend that I had met. He was also a trails guy. We were the only two trails guys in it. He was a trail foreman at Sequoia-Kings.

TM: Oh, wow. Who was that?

RH: Steve Griswold. But his training... We had taken a different path to get to trails, that's for sure. He had a Master's degree from UC Berkeley in architecture. But he was another one, you know, that just wanted to be out in the dirt. So we've remained friends for a long time.

TM: What's his first name?

RH: Steve.

TM: Steve, thanks.

RH: So it was real nice being back in the Canyon. I think I told you that... I don't know if I told you or not there was 18 or 19 people in the class. I think there was one woman and one Black and the rest of us were White boys. That kind of struck me. So anyway, I got my urban park and it was gonna be Washington, DC. I think we got out of class maybe in June or July, and they wanted you to go directly to your six-week posting. I think it was, yeah, six weeks it was that we were posted to a different park. Everybody in the class went to a different location and you had a mentor. I was chosen to go to, like I said, Anacostia Region of the Capital. And I went...I took six weeks off and went back to Olympic to finish up a couple of projects and then I flew off to DC. And the lady at Albright, you might have heard the name Ann Baugh in some of your...

TM: No.

RH: She worked at Albright for I don't know how many years. She was a fixture there. The head of Albright was a guy by the name of David Karraker. Good man. Ann was his secretary and pretty much, you know, ran the show. Long time superintendent of Albright. Ann said, "You're going to DC. I know a hotel there that takes per diem and you should really stay there." I said, "Well, shoot, book it for me." I'd never been to DC. It was called the Dutch Harbor Inn and it was right on Q Street in Georgetown. I mean, it was just absolutely a wonderful place to land. Had kind of like a suite and it was a couple of blocks from the train station. And like I say, it was just right in the heart of Georgetown. I don't know if you've ever been to Washington, DC or been through Georgetown and stuff.

TM: I don't know it at all. So the more you tell me the better I'll be.

RH: Well, it still is, and it was back then, the place where the Supreme Court justices live, the senators live. Old, beautiful houses, pretty quiet streets, restaurants everywhere. Georgetown University probably about less than a mile from where I was living, Kennedy Center probably a half a mile the other direction. Basically it was in the heart of Washington, DC's best neighborhood.

TM: Wow.

RH: Yeah, that's what I said. I said, wow, this is gonna be a nice way to see DC, get per diem, meal money. And my mentor—I'm not gonna say his name because pretty negative experience. He's probably dead and I'm not gonna bad mouth the dead—but they got a hold of me. Your mentors came out to Grand Canyon three or four days before the end of the training so you could meet them and they could tell you what to expect and what you were gonna be doing. They told me, "Well, make sure you bring your Class A uniforms." I said, "I don't have any Class A uniforms, man." So they said, "Well, bring a sport coat and a nice pair of paints and shoes." I said, "Okay, I'll have to go buy one when I get home." That initial meeting was fairly positive. So I showed up there I think it must have been in the fall, late

August/September. To get to Anacostia I had to hop on the train and go about half an hour. He came over to the hotel and met up with me and said, "Okay, be ready tomorrow," and told me what train to get and all this other stuff. He said, "Look real dirty when you're on the train and have your clean clothes you can put into when you get to the Park headquarters." He said it's, you know, a bad part of town, it's this and it's that, and it's just safer if you look more like you're homeless than you do like you got money. I thought that was kind of strange but I said okay. I showed up and the offices there were right next to the Park Police head offices. That was a big complex. The Park Police had helicopter landing pads everywhere, lots of people, and our little complex of offices was just right next to them. I got in there and he really wasn't very well prepared for me. He didn't have much lined out. It was about a week in when he first used the N-word.

TM: Ooh.

RH: Yeah. Yeah, ouch. I didn't say anything the first time. I thought maybe it was just a... And he was dealing with personnel matters. I mean, he kept saying, "You get this job... Get a job like this you're just gonna be working personnel, grievances, discipline." In that context he used the N-word and I was taken aback. Anacostia, basically, what it had going for it was a couple of small forts and stuff there, but the congressional softball fields were out there, so those were immaculate, just immaculate. It was a long way from, I think it was Central they called it, with all the monuments, you know, Lincoln, Jefferson, Washington. It was a totally different scene than that. I puddled along there learning a little bit of something but really not a lot cause I'd never been in an urban park so maybe I was learning more than I thought I was about how things worked. My style of personnel and that kind of stuff would be just right out front, you know. If somebody had a problem I said, "Well, let's work it out."

TM: Yeah, but you were sort of, the way I take it, based on this oral history you were on the cutting edge of diversity in a very White world of the Park Service.

RH: Yeah.

TM: You had First Nations people working for you, women, people of color. In a way, what I get out of this interview is you were looking for those people. They worked well and you worked well with them.

RH: Yeah, I think that's accurate. I had had when I first started, the first couple or three years that I worked with the Forest Service is a terrible boss. I had told myself back then, if I ever get friggin' anywhere where I'm bossing people I sure wouldn't do it like this. That was a lesson that I learned the first three years that I was permanent. So probably two weeks into DC I had heard the N-word a few more times and I told him, I said, "Listen, I don't like that word. If I hear you say it again I'm gonna report it." That didn't go over real big. I came in the next day, he said, "Well, are you a self-starter?" I said, "Yeah, I'm a self-starter." He says, "Okay, you're on your own pretty much. You can pretty much do what you want. You don't have to check in here. I'll take you over to the headquarters, Interior Department headquarters, introduce you around there, show you what goes on there, and then you're pretty much on your own." I said, "Well, that sounds okay to me." The last three weeks/four weeks was pretty illuminating.

TM: How so?

RH: Go ahead.

TM: How so, illuminating?

RH: That I actually... I had a government ID, I had a pass that you wore it around your neck at all times. I decided to kind of branch out a little bit. I went to congressional hearings. There was budget stuff going on. Manuel Lujan was the Secretary of the Interior back then, and he was testifying in Congress about the Park Service and about this and about that. I just decided to attend that for a couple/three days to hear what the Secretary of the Interior had to say and just to kind of see what was going on. That was really interesting, and he was a Republican. I guess he would be considered a moderate Republican. I'm thinking, maybe you could research it, but I think that was after James Watt, or Watt might have been coming to the end of his... But I spent a lot of time going to congressional hearings and such and walking around the Capital. I could go downstairs where the train is going from the Raeburn Building to the...from Congress to the Senate. I could ride the train. I could walk everywhere. I had a pass and I was digging it. I'd go back to the headquarters office every once in a while and maybe once a week I would go back out to Anacostia. During that time I called who was gonna be my wife—God, I'm getting off again. I gotta look at some dates again, maybe clarify some things next week—but who was gonna be, shortly be my wife. I said, "Why don't you come on out to DC. This is a good opportunity." So she flew out. Right across the street from the Dutch Harbor Inn was a Park Service site that was called the Old Stone House. Interesting little site. Oldest building in DC, I guess. I hadn't been in there. She shows up and I said, "Let's go check out this place right across the street." We go in there and start reading the interpretive displays and stuff, and there's an interpreter in there. One of the displays goes: this house was owned and built by Cassandra Chew in such and such a year. My wife just kind of froze 'cause her given name is Chew. She looked at the guy and goes, "She's on my family tree." So that was just a... She got real excited and it was really cool. The guy said, "Do you have a copy of your family tree?" She goes, "Yeah, it's all framed" and it's all this and all that. He said, "Could you send me a deal?" So later on when we got back we did. But that was just a nice interesting fact. The next two weeks/three weeks were just spectacular. I had her with me. I slipped out one time in the middle of the night and went down to the Vietnam Memorial, spent a few hours there by myself. I didn't take her with me. Then a couple of days later I was ready to take her with me so we went back and that was real emotional.

TM: Yeah.

RH: Then we traveled a little bit around there. Took the train to New York City and that's where I proposed to her, in New York City. Had a wonderful tour of Civil War battlefields in the area, Gettysburg, Antietam. Learned so much about the Civil War and the same time learning basically what I wanted to learn: how the Park Service interprets these places, how they manage them. I was real impressed. Gettysburg was just an incredible place. They had kind of blown it in the way they designed the Visitors Center. And there was a big, I don't know if it was his Presidential Library, but a big Eisenhower building right next to the Visitors Center. But the city itself hadn't changed in 150 years. So that was a really unbelievable chance to do all that stuff.

TM: When you went to the Old Stone House and you went to Gettysburg and you went to some of these other battlefields and service units, did you seek out maintenance people and say, "Hey, I'm on this detail and can you kind of give me a quick briefing on how your maintenance gigs work here?"

RH: Yeah, to an extent. If I saw somebody working in the field, I would go over and say, "I'm Park Service, too, West Coast, totally different gig," but I never made a point to go meet with the chief of maintenance or superintendent or any of that kind of stuff. But, yeah, it was a great opportunity. I think

we had a little dinner with the director of the Park Service while I was there. There was like eight or nine people there and such. Bob Stanton...?

TM: That rings a bell.

RH: A big, proud Black man. He asked me, he says, "What's the most important thing you've learned from the training?" By that time I was at Albright for three months and DC for six weeks. I said, "Well, I think the most important thing that I learned was I don't want a job like this." He just kind of, you know, just was kind of surprised. I said, "And I'm really glad that I learned this now, that this is not a path that I want to take. I want to stay, there's no way." I'll give the guy that was mentoring me and Anacostia props for looking at how he did his job and what he was doing and what his attitude was and the negativity that came with his job versus the positivity that came with my job. I just said, "I just don't want a job like this." I think a week later we flew back to the Olympics and I felt like I'd arrived home. I never really pursued any jobs after that save one. But it was expected that if they had spent the money to train you and to become this, that you would start applying for jobs after you got back to your home park. And I never did.

I was offered one job in Rocky Mountain cause I knew the superintendent well and he recruited me. Chew and I moved back there and he gave us the big tour of Rocky, wonderful park. This was in October cause the elk were all over town and Estes Park. I think the job was gonna fill in February, somebody was gonna be retiring, and it would have been a really good job. I said, "Well, Randy," Randy Jones was his name, he was Rob Chandler's assistant superintendent at the Olympics. I said, "Randy, let's see how things shake out but, yeah, I'm real interested." And we spent a couple of days hiking around. Chew was kind of moody. We got back on the plane to fly to Seattle from Denver and she's starting to cry. I said, "What's up?" She goes, "Oh, you know, my family, my brother, my mother." Everybody lived in Port Angeles. Their mom was getting old and her brother's a twin. I said, "Oh, okay." Anyway, I got the call. There was a couple of reasons but, basically, it was my wife didn't want to leave. That's, I say, if you marry a local girl, man, you're basically auguring in unless they're something special. And I had just reached a point in the Olympics where I was able to furlough for a couple of months. I think I'd bought my land over here right during that time, bare land. I'd talked to the superintendent there and I was able to bring a guy, kind of mentor him, to show him how to do budget, and I pretty much would lay most of my crew off in the winter, keep a skeleton crew for working the Coastal Strip out Cape Alava and La Push and stuff. I'd plan if I had big jobs for the spring, but when I got the call from Rocky I think Randy... I said, "What's the weather like, Randy?" I talked to him a little bit about being able to furlough for a month or so. Then if you take all your annual leave and furlough for a month so, you'd basically be gone for two and a half months. He said, "Well, let's wait on that. Let's give it a year or two and see if we're able to put something together then, but now I would like just to do a regular gig." So when he called, basically I said I don't think I want it. I've never kicked myself around for that or anything, but it would have been a good opportunity. So that was it, I just continued on at Olympic. I was good at what I did, had a lot of fun, had a nice little house in town, which, after being Grand Canyon and stuff, and drive to Flagstaff to do anything, was pretty nice. The same in Idaho. Very remote in Idaho, and had a nice little place in town.

TM: How was it that you ended up going out to the Islands and getting a place out there?

RH: I had lived here I think in... When I say lived, I came over for like five months one winter back when I was just kind of bouncing around.

TM: Okay, back in the second half of the 70s?

RH: Yeah. Yeah. After we got married we decided to come to Hawaii and spend a week on each island, and we ended up... A friend of mine from high school and such that I had known had moved over here, oh, 10 or 15 years before. I said, "I want to try to hook up with Billy." He was a grower in California and some things had happened and he came over here and bought a piece of ground in South Kona. I got ahold of him and we had lunch and it was fun. He said, "Man, I got a nice piece of property but I gotta sell half of it." I said, "Really? Why?" "Well, getting a divorce and my wife wants her money out of it and stuff." So we came up and looked at it. I mean it was raw, four-wheel drive road to get here, native trees, but nothing done on it. Chew and I had just sold a piece of property that she had bought in a place called Sequim, Washington. We had a little money and said, "Shit, we'll buy it." So, yeah, that's the way it happened. That was, again, the yellow brick road that I keep going back to. If something lays itself out in front of you then do it. If it's something that you even think that you might want to do, you know, you just follow that road, man. So we bought it. A little over five and a half acres.

TM: Cool. So Billy would have been happy cause that got him out of his dilemma and he knew who his new neighbor was and so he'd have been happy with that.

RH: Yep.

TM: Cool.

RH: Yep, that's exactly how it worked out.

TM: I can appreciate that you're being drawn further west and anything that's gonna ask you to go back east, like DC or even Rocky Mountain, is kind of in the wrong direction.

RH: Yeah. Yeah, I agree with that and I was still a long way from retirement. I don't know how, let's see, maybe 45 years old or something. I think that's about right, 43, but I always knew that I wasn't a Tucson guy and I wasn't a Prescott guy. The weather in the Pacific Northwest was... I loved it up there. Chew and I had had a talk, too, and her mother had passed away. I said, "You know, I'm not retiring up here. I'm just not. I gotta be warm and be in the ocean." So when this opened up we just purchased it. Would come back in the winter times and do a little work and cut some trees. Everything that I learned in the Park Service basically went into this house. I mean that in the fact that how to mill lumber, how to fall trees, how to move large objects over rough terrain, how to build a tripod to stand poles up, how to... My house looks more like bridge construction. It's lag bolted in and it's ready and everything was done by hand. We milled all the... Felled all the trees and milled all the wood. The other aspect, though, is learning how to estimate, learning how to budget, learning how to do all those things that I learned by working my jobs. A lot of that went into constructing this house. Yeah, yeah, I mean, I had a free education. It's a beautiful house, man. I mean, it's incredible. This big open air pavilion, perfect for a pandemic, eat outside.

TM: Nice. And you worked on that then over... So this was, you're saying you were roughly 45 when you bought the land, you and Chew, and so over the next 20 years before you retired was this when you were doing the trees and sort of starting to build the house and making that happen? You'd come out and work for a while and then go back?

RH: Yeah, but it turned out that I would only work another five years. I was probably 44 or 45, and that's exactly what we'd do. I told you I worked it so that I could get furloughed for six weeks a year and use my annual leave. I was in the eight-hour category, so I think I had another month and a half or a month of annual leave so we would come over for like three months.

TM: Oh, wow. Okay.

RH: Started to build the house and put a little coffee nursery in. We decided we were gonna grow shade grown coffee that there wasn't a lot of people doing over here. Yeah, did that for four or five years. Then in 1999 the Park Service came out with an early out. There was probably three of them during my time there, two or three. They came out and said anybody that's 50 years old and has 20 years of service can retire if they want, no penalty. I took it 'cause we both wanted to... It was physical, physical, physical work building this place and starting a farm. Again, I went from a packer, which when I started that I knew absolutely nothing about, to a coffee farmer, which (laughs) I was even more dumb about, or whatever word you use. I knew nothing about it. I knew nothing about farming. I knew nothing about growing fruit. Knew nothing about growing coffee. I'd grown pot, that's for sure, but... So it was just another new deal. So I left Olympic in, yeah, 1999/2000, early 2000. So that pretty much wraps that part of it up.

TM: Okay. But there's 20 years left to go.

RH: Yep, there sure is.

TM: We've been yik-yakking about 45 minutes. Do you want to wrap up this section here and we'll bring it up again in 1999 when you arrive at Hawaii for a long haul? Unless there's other things about Olympic, cause we kind of breezed over the last of that.

RH: Well, yeah, it got to be that Olympic started to get kind of routine for me. I did have one grievance filed against me that *really* set me back, Native American. We were packing up a load to go into I think the Gray Wolf, and I really liked this guy. He was an activist and I thought that was great. I remember that I took this rope, and he said, "What are taking this for?" I just tied it on. I think it was a crew of like four going in, and I made the comment, "This is gonna be an Indian come-along that we'll be able to use this to do a lot of different things." I meant no disrespect by it but he took it that way and filed a formal grievance. During that process they asked the grievor, or whatever the person that was wronged, what it would take to make them whole and, by God, he pretty much wanted to be the superintendent. Yeah. So it was kind of a strange deal.

TM: Can you describe how this grievance process works cause it's kind of the first time it's come up for me and I'm just like, well, how does that work, or not work?

RH: Well, they go to the HR Office and they basically say that I want to file a grievance. I'd learned a bit about it from DC, the guy I was working with there. They file a grievance and then it goes to the regional office and they determine whether there's merit. Then they start interviewing the participants and then there's an arbitration kind of deal. I mean, I told the deal, the arbitration board and stuff, yeah, I probably did and that I meant no disrespect. It was just more of a compliment that we were gonna be able to take this rope and do a lot of different things with it. I just said, "Yeah, I said it but, you know, I think it was taken way out of context." He, like I say, asked for a large amount of money—I don't know the exact number so I'm not gonna say anything—and a grade increase up to... He never, ever asked for

me to be disciplined because he knew, we'd worked together for two years and I had hired him. I think he thought that this was gonna be his way to maybe get a little cash and move forward. It was found that there was no wrong doing and yada, yada but still it did teach me to, okay, you know, that's nothing you say. Just say it's gonna be a come-along. The old phrase was a Polish come-along. Everybody's heard of a Polish come-along.

TM: It's interesting because I would assume that misunderstandings like this could be fairly common and so it's kind of nice to know that the grievance system can kind of help to sort that out, though I would imagine that where it wasn't a misunderstanding as with you and your mentor in DC, it could fall the wrong way, meaning somebody could get off who really shouldn't have gotten off.

RH: Yeah, I would agree with that. It definitely hit me pretty hard.

TM: Right. Yeah, in your case especially with someone that you work with that you assume you have an understanding with and you're not trying to cross, you're not trying to belittle. Yeah, but I would... I was talking to someone else the other day and I said something and just as soon as I said it I was like that wasn't the right thing to say.

RH: Yeah, yeah. And, you know, the thing was when I got to arbitration and did all of that... There was records of me outreaching to local tribes. Besides Tony there was... I think at that time I had hired six or seven First Nation people that I still talk to this day. So they could definitely see just from my record that I wasn't a racist.

TM: I mean, I gotta laugh here a little bit because in the White world of the Park Service if they cared to look, which it sounds like they did, you would have been a bright light in a very dark land of diversity.

RH: Yeah, I tried, that's for sure. But, yeah, it just got to be... It did hit me but I got over it and, like I say, I'm still friends. I look back at it... Like Grand Canyon, I had Hopi, Navajo, Supai, Apache working with me. At one time in the Grand Canyon I was told that I couldn't hire this one guy. I was told by my supervisors, two of them, that he was a Babbitt Indian.

TM: A what?

RH: Babbitt, you know, Babbitt's, Arizona Babbitt's?

TM: Yeah.

RH: That store up at Grand Canyon was Babbitt's. Being a Babbitt Indian was a guy that just sat out in front of the store and panhandled money and then got drunk. Would drink friggin' grain alcohol. His name was Don Watahomogie. I don't know how we met, probably just sitting there talking at Babbitt's. I'd see him there and yada, yada, yada. They had a hiring authority at Grand Canyon because housing was so scarce that if you had your own housing stuff and was a resident and yada, yada, you really didn't have to compete for seasonal jobs and a couple other jobs. I was gonna be hiring a couple people so I asked him, "Would you like a job on trail crew? See what we can do." I remember turning his name in and being told, "No, no." I just said, "Well, I think you should give this guy a chance and I'm gonna continue with this hire." They didn't want to make a big deal so I hired him and he worked out real well. I'm not saying anything I did helped him, but the last I heard, oh, eight or nine years ago, he was head of the Supai Tribal Council. I went, "All right, all right." I haven't had any contact with him but that's what I

heard. So, yeah, I'm not blowing my own horn here or anything, but it was kind of a White, I don't want to say redneck cause it wasn't. There was a few rednecks definitely in the Park Service, but there's a few rednecks in any type of organization.

TM: That's right.

RH: But, it was a wonderful time.

TM: Cool.

RH: Okay, so are we wrapping it?

TM: Yeah, and I think we'll maybe revisit Olympic. Otherwise we're going to Hawaii.

RH: Okay. Sounds good.

TM: All right. Well, that will conclude Part 8 of an oral history interview with Richard Hanson. Today is November 22nd, 2020. My name is Tom Martin and, Richard, thank you so very much.

RH: Yeah, it's always a pleasure talking to you, Tom. Like I say, hopefully we'll hook it up one of these days.

TM: That'd be fun. Hang on.