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Interview with Dan Lee and Alice Lee (FA 1098)

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Transcribing Conventions:
Use of square brackets [ ] indicates a note from the transcriber.
Use of parentheses ( ) indicates a conversational aside.
Use of em dash — indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.
Use of ellipses … indicates a discontinued thought.
Use of quotations “ “ indicates dialogue within conversation.
Use of italics indicates emphasis.
Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.
Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.
Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

Note: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.
}[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

[00:00:00]
BRENT BJÖRKMAN: Okay, it’s June 24, 2014. This is Brent Björkman, the director of the Kentucky Folklife Program, and we’re working on our Ranger Lore project here in the Mammoth Cave area. Today we’re in, right outside Cave City, and we are with the Lees. Could you introduce yourselves and maybe talk to me about the last positions that you had before you retired from, from park service?

DANIEL LEE: I’m Daniel Lee. I was born in Mammoth Cave area, just about two and a half miles from the entrance of Mammoth Cave. And what was it you wanted to . . .

BB: And that, that sounds like a deep connection that you have to the park.

DL: Right.

BB: So how were you led into this type of work, I guess, is, is . . .

DL: Well, I, I’ve stayed at Mammoth Cave then until I was ten years old. By that time, the National Park Service had taken over the park. And I was familiar with the rangers then. And at the age of ten, I was, that was on my mind from then on.

BB: Um-hm.

DL: Then, we were moved out of the park in 1936. We moved to Cave City. And we lived in Cave City, and I went to high school here, and then to the military service. And I got out of the service in 1948, and then I met my wife here.

BB: Um-hm.

Alice Lee: Well, you met me long before that. [Laughs]

DL: Well, I’ll let you mention that. Yeah.
BB: Uh-huh.

DL: And what else we need to know?

BB: Yeah. So you, you met here, and, and as far as getting into the, the park service after the military service is . . .

DL: Right.

BB: Did that help? Did having military service—

DL: I had—

BB: Do you think that had a, helped to get in?

DL: It did. I got my first appointment as a park guide in 1948 due to my veteran’s preference. Not necessarily that, but you had to be a veteran to, to qualify at that time. And I, I worked at the, as a park guide for 1948. And then—

BB: Seasonal position?

DL: Sea-, seasonal. That’s right. I’m trying to remember.

AL: What?

BB: And you all were married at that time?

AL: No.
BB: Not married.

DL: No. We were married the, the, let me see.

AL: November.

DL: November of that same year. And then, we both went to Western at that time. I went on the GI Bill, and we lived in the veterans’ village. If you know where the veterans’ village was?

BB: Un-uhn.

DL: Well, it was a, they had the barracks and trailers and apartment buildings down south of the, of the hill there. And then after a while we were at Western, I applied for a seasonal, and I got on seasonal at Shenandoah National Park. And for the next three years, in the summers, I worked at, as a seasonal, in Shenandoah National Park. [ ].

BB: So what did you do, so, what would you do? So you were in Shenandoah. Did you come back here? How did you able, how were you able to sustain yourself during the rest of the year if you were a seasonal employee?

AL: The GI Bill.

DL: GI Bill.

BB: The GI Bill.

AL: It was $90 a month. [Laughter]
BB: Yeah.

DL: Then we had our first, first child. Oh, let’s see, in June of—

AL: Nineteen-fifty.


AL: Then we got a hundred and five a month, after she was born. [Laughs]

DL: Yeah.

BB: She’s a money-maker.

DL: That’s right. Yeah.

BB: Yeah.

DL: Then after I’d been at Shenandoah, let’s see, in 1950-, what was it, ’53?

AL: I don’t know. [Laughs]

DL: I went to work at a parts department at—

AL: Fifty-two.

DL: Fifty-two. That’s right. Because there was no opening, and I didn’t qualify. Well, I did qualify, and I didn’t, no opening in the park service. And I worked in the parts department in a Ford garage in Cave City. Then there was an opening at Abraham Lincoln Birthplace as an information receptionist. And I did qualify for
that, so that was my first permanent, National Park Service job, at the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace in Hodgenville.

AL: When the test was finally given for rangers after the war, there were over 1500 men who took it for about 150 jobs. So—

DL: It was pretty difficult to get in.

AL: It was very difficult to get in.

BB: Sure. People were looking for work, and good solid work.

DL: Oh, yeah.

AL: Well, they just basically wanted to be in the park service, see? You know, and there were only a very limited amount of jobs. So, he took the test. I don’t remember what they called it.

BB: And that’s a rel-, that’s a relatively small park compared to, to Ma-, and always has been.

DL: Oh, it has. Oh, yes.

AL: Yeah.

DL: Well, we were there then nearly three years, and I got transferred to, back to Shenandoah National Park permanently as a park ranger. So, it was, Shenandoah was my first job as a park ranger. And we were there then—

AL: Five years?
DL: Yeah, five years, I believe, and then at, at Shenandoah National Park. And then there was a job opening at Vicks-, at Chickamauga Battlefield in North Georgia. And we were transferred from, from a district ranger in Shenandoah, to a park, to chief ranger at Chickamauga Battlefield. So we were there then—

AL: Five years.

DL: Nearly five years. And I got a job back in Shenandoah. No.

AL: Blue Ridge.

DL: Blue Ridge. As a district ranger. So we were at Blue Ridge Parkway, then as the district ranger for about four years. And then from Blue, Blue Ridge, we went to Custer Battlefield National—well, it’s not called Custer Battlefield now, but—

AL: No. [Laughs]

DL: It’s—what is it? Anyway—

AL: Little Bighorn.

DL: Little Bighorn.

BB: Yeah.

DL: Battlefield. And that was my first job as a superintendent at . . .

AL: Um-hm.
BB: Wow.

DL: In Montana. We were there—

AL: Just two years.

DL: Yeah, two and a half years. And they, I got a call from regional office one day, and asked me if I would be interested in superintendent at Vicksburg, and, and it, I asked them if, when do you need me?

BB: Why, what was your draw to, to Vicksburg?

AL: The Southeast.

DL: Southeast. Well, it was, it was different than, the weather there was, just, you wouldn’t believe in the wintertime. It was—

AL: Forty below.

DL: Yeah. So I told them we couldn’t possibly leave before one o’clock. [Laughter] So—

BB: What year was this, would this have been?

DL: This would have been 1970.

AL: Um-hm.

DL: So we moved into Vicksburg in 1970, and then I stayed there for fourteen years as a superintendent.
BB: Um-hm. So, tell me about that first ranger position. Is it, how, how is that, I guess I’m also interested in the change in working, working in the park system. Was it a, you know, I’ve heard stories, for instance, about interpretation at Mammoth Cave, and some of the old-timers were more about joking around. And it’s maybe not as, maybe, not as historically accurate or something. And, and there was a change over time about transmitting different knowledge about that. And I just was wondering, you’ve had this long career, both of you in different ways, and we do need to talk to you, ma’am. You know, what was, what was a day like when you had that first job in Shenandoah?

DL: Shenandoah?

BB: Yeah.

DL: Well, I had, that’s the first time I’d had the own, own patrol car. Of course, we patrolled the Skyline Drive. And we lived in the park in a park housing. It was a, a converted ranger station—

AL: CCC barracks.

DL: From a CCC barracks. A tar paper type. It wasn’t—

BB: That’s where you and your girls lived? Girl.

DL: Yeah, we had—

AL: We had three by that time.
DL: We had three, three girls by that time. But it was different. But I enjoyed it. I don't know about, about the family [Laughter], but the work was excellent. I just enjoyed it.

BB: What did you like about it? Was it just . . .

DL: Well, we had, had a variation of jobs [0:10:00] to do. Mainly we had to run the boundary and make sure the boundary in that district was, was marked every five years. And that took us through the winter months when you didn’t have many va-, visitors. The Skyline Drive ran through Shenandoah National Park from Fort Oglethorpe to Waynesboro.

AL: No. Front Royal.

DL: I mean Front Royal to Waynesboro, which was a hundred and five miles. And my, my district was the central district from, well, let’s see. Thir-, mile thirty-three to about sixty-five. So it was about a little over thirty miles. And we had two, three campgrounds in, in my district, and that, of course, kept you pretty busy. And two, no, three concession areas, Big Meadows, and the Skyline tourist area, and then—

AL: Otter Creek?

DL: Otter Creek.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: Otter Creek may have been in the north.

BB: Yeah. That was in the north.
AL: He had an interesting experience there, though. He had the President’s son come and camp while he was at Big Meadows.

DL: Big Meadows. Uh-huh. Yeah, he—

BB: The current president?

AL: No.

BB: At the time? No, at the time?

AL: President, President Eisenhower's son.

DL: Eisenhower's son.

BB: Eisenhower’s son.

DL: Uh-huh.

BB: Wow.

DL: And he came to me and asked if, if he could camp there. I really don’t, it wasn’t a question of camping. He didn't want to be known. And so we, we made sure that he was free to camp and not be bothered by visitors.

AL: Not even the other rangers knew he, who he was. [Laughs]

DL: Yeah.
BB: Right.

DL: So that was, it was quite an experience for him.

BB: Right. It was really a question of building your career and climbing the ranks of the, the federal, national park system is what brought you there.

DL: Right.

BB: Right. How did, tell me a little bit about how your job evolved over time. What does, what does it mean to be a ranger, and then to be a, a, a chief, and a—

DL: I, I started out as a, you've familiar with the GS, right? I started out as a 4, as a seasonal. And a 4, GS4, as the information receptionist at Abraham Lincoln, and then from there all permanent rangers were 5 to start out with. So I, I went from a, a 5 to a, a GS6 as a sub-district ranger. And in fact I hit all of them.

AL: Never missed a grade. [Laughs]

DL: I didn't miss any. I, from a, then to 7 as a district ranger, and then, an 8 as a, a chief ranger at, let's see, Chickamauga. And then a, then as a 9 as a district ranger back on the Blue Ridge Parkway. And then a 10 at, let's see, well, in Montana, anyway.

BB: Um-hm. Yeah.

DL: So it, it, it was—

AL: What did you do that was different?
DL: Well, of course the administration from a park ranger to a superintendent was considerably different. I preferred the district ranger over the chief ranger because that’s what I was really interested in. The administrative part, I always had good, good employees to work with. They helped me out a lot. And then—

BB: But what you preferred was to be maybe more, the visitors, is that what you mean, or no?

DL: Pardon.

BB: You, you liked, as you got more administrative, you, you liked, you maybe liked your day-to-day work less, or—

DL: Yeah. Well, I was with the visitors until you get to be superintendent, and then you don’t have much contact with the visitors personally.

BB: Um-hm.

DL: And I, I preferred it the other way. But that, it worked out real well. It, it, the pay was a little better, and so forth.

BB: So Ms. Lee, how did your, how did your life, you know, raising the girls and, and, you know, following, and, and, and being part of it, how did your life evolve into, to doing some of the work over time that we talked about a little bit. And it, how did you start being involved with the park?

AL: Well, if I can go back to how we met?

BB: Sure.
AL: We didn't meet after he came out, back from the Army. [0:15:00] We met when I was twelve, and he was fifteen, out at the wigwams in Cave City. You know where the wigwams is?

BB: Sure. I do.

AL: I was visiting here. My stepfather was from here. And his sister took us to the wigwams to get Cokes one afternoon at that little outside place they called the trading post. And he served us the Cokes. And that’s how we met. Like I say, I was twelve, he was fifteen.

DL: Yeah.

AL: Little did we know. [Laughs] But then we moved here when I was thirteen, my stepdad’s home. And went to high school together. But we never dated until after he came back from the service. And he actually dated my best girlfriend, which was fine, because I got to know him really well as a friend. And then we, he, he got back in 1948, in January, and we were married in November of that year. I was seventeen, he was twenty-one. And here we are, sixty-five years later.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: So, that, being the wife of, of a ranger was kind of hard in some ways, because you were isolated. At least, we were isolated. It, that’s not true so much anymore. But we were very often the only employees who lived within twenty or thirty miles. Like at Big Meadows in Shenandoah, you know, there was nobody anywhere near. And, and that’s hard when you’re a young wife with three children, as I was then. It wasn’t that way, of course, at Abraham Lincoln. We lived in a little cottage right
across the highway from the park for a while. And that’s where I first taught school, at a little town called Buffalo, Kentucky. [Laughs]

DL: Well, you were in that one room school at first.

AL: Well, yes, I was first, called West School. And I, I taught there. They came knocking on my door one day, said, “We’ve heard you have a little college.” And I said, “Well, yes.” I didn’t have my degree yet. And they said, “Well, we really need a teacher out at West School.” There were eighteen students in first through sixth grades. And we had the two little girls then. We found a wonderful African-American lady to keep them, and cook, and clean. She was just fantastic. And I took the job. And I only taught out there a half a year, one semester, and then they moved us into Buffalo, all of us, the, the kids and me. And then I was in a room with sixty-three children and two teachers that had been the school library.

BB: Hm.

AL: People think they have it bad now, you know. [Laughs] It was awful. But I didn’t particularly like teaching after that. I didn’t teach again for eight years, so, but that’s, that was how we got into it. Then we moved, as he said, to Shenandoah. And we did have one neighbor when we first moved to Shenandoah, the Stoddards. There were two of the CCC barracks, the old tarpaper. You could hold a match up to the wall, and the wind from outside would blow it out. [Laughs] But it was okay. We, we were in the park service, and that’s what we wanted, and, so—

BB: Were there other, how did that park service and the children, how did the, you know, having the children, you know, relatively isolated. They went to school and had some kids—

AL: Very isolated.
BB: Did you have other people that were in your situation that had kids, so you, did you have a cohort of, of—

AL: Well, we got together as often as we could, you know, for, like, picnics, and birthday parties, and things like that, but we really didn't see each other very much. We got to be good friends with the district ranger in the North district, and they had a little girl, the same age as our second one, so we got to be good friends with them. The main thing, I guess, was the doctor. We had to go to Front Royal to a doctor when we lived in Shenandoah, which was over thirty miles. And in the winter, you didn’t go on the Skyline Drive. You had to go down into the valley and around. I had our third little girl in March of the year that we moved back up there, 1955, and it was kind of hairy, knowing I had to get thirty-some miles in the winter, you know, with our, but we made it. Everything worked out very well, so, then by the time our fourth one was born, we were in, back in Virginia, but not Shenandoah. We were on the Blue Ridge Parkway. And it was pretty much the same thing. We had one neighbor. This is interesting. Of course, we're the Lees. They were the Grants.

DL: Yeah.

AL: And we were forty miles from Appomattox.

DL: Yeah. [Laughs]

AL: So, one day they put a little blurb in the Blue Ridge Parkway newspaper that they put out once a month. And it said, “Well, it's come to bloodshed with the Lees and the Grants.” And what it was, he and Wilson had gone to give blood together for a blood drive. [0:20:00]

DL: Yeah.
AL: There, forty miles from Appomattox, so, but they were wonderful neighbors. And there were just the two of us there. Then when we got to Custer, there was a little community. We had several—

DL: Four houses.

AL: Four houses.

BB: With family-, like, families?

AL: With families, uh-huh. And we were still seventeen miles from town and school. I think this was the hardest thing for the girls. Like, when we were on the Blue Ridge, we were thirty miles from school. They couldn’t take part in a lot of afterschool activities, because they had to ride the bus home, you know, until they were able to drive and had a car. But—

BB: I bet it was good to have a mother as a teacher though. I was thinking about that too.

DL: Yeah, it was.

AL: Of course, fy mother was a teacher, his mother was a teacher, so it was a natural thing for me to—and we have three daughters who are teachers. [Laughs] So, but, just one has an MBA, she, the youngest one. But it’s, it’s very interesting.

BB: How did that group of that, those four out at the Custer site, that little group of, of four houses, or four families—

AL: Uh-huh.
BB: How, what was, what was the dynamic of that like? How did you, what was your day-to-day like?

AL: It varied.

DL: Yeah.

AL: We, most of the time it was very nice, but at one point, we had a mentally ill wife, seriously. And she would put on a, a uniform like Custer in the morning, and come out and blow her trumpet. And it was not pleasant when she was there. Eventually they were sent someplace else, and he was demoted. But it was, it was a very bad situation.

BB: Yeah.

AL: But other than that, it was a good situation most of the time. We had a seasonal ranger who insulted the Indian employees and all Indians totally. And of course, that, in Montana, that was the majority, you know. And he had to fire him. And when he did, this 220-pound football player picked up his camera, which was on the desk, and threw it at him, and fractured his skull. So we’ve had some interesting times. [Laughs]. They were filming Little Big Man at Custer Battlefield. I don’t know if you knew that or not.

BB: Uh-huh. Dustin Hoffman?

AL: With Dustin Hoffman. They actually filmed it between the, the park battlefields. There’s a space that’s not park. And that’s where it was filmed. And they had set up this beautiful tipi village down on the Little Big Horn, and had all kinds of things going on. And so he had put his telephoto lens on the camera to take pictures of the
Little Big Man set, and that’s what he hit him with. [Laughs] We’ve, we’ve had some interesting experiences.

BB: Yeah. Absolutely.

AL: But I don't know. We, we wouldn't do anything else if we had to do it again, you know. It’s, it’s what he always wanted and—

BB: Right.

AL: He, he reached his goal.

BB: So you retired in ’90?

AL: Nineteen-eighty-four.

DL: Eighty—

BB: Eighty-four.

DL: Eighty-four.

AL: [Laughs] He’s been retired thirty years.

DL: Been thirty years now.

BB: Thirty years retired.

AL: Amazing.
BB: But you kept your, one or both of you have kept your fingers in the, the park, working either in volunteer capacity—

DL: Right.

BB: Tell me, tell me a little bit about what ha-, after you have, you've spent your life, [DL: Laughs] and you came, tell me about the transition back to this, where we are right here.

DL: Well, of course it took us, oh, about eleven months to build a house, because it was pretty slow going. And once we got moved in here, then life became a little more bearable.

BB: Was this in '84?

DL: Eighty—

AL: Eighty-four, '85.

DL: Eight-, eight-, that’s, we moved in '85. Yeah.

AL: Eighty-five. Um-hm.

DL: So I’ve, of course, our life has been together. I mean, it hasn’t been a whole lot different because we, we've kept in touch with our park service retiree friends. And we don't see them very often—

AL: No.

DL: But we do correspond.
AL: One thing, this is just kind of a side thing, before we ever had children, he said, “If we ever have a family, I want them to see this country.” He said, “You know, you can go to Europe, but I want them to see this country.” So, by the time our first daughter graduated from high school, we had gotten the first three girls into all the forty-eight continental states. So I think that’s pretty special. And then we made the other two. We made Hawaii on our fiftieth anniversary. So, but, he’s always been a “See America” person. [0:25:00]

BB: Right. You been to Alaska yet?

DL: Um-hm.

AL: Yep.

DL: We have a daughter up there now.

AL: That’s how our daughter got up there. [Laughs]

DL: Daughter, and grandson, and—

AL: Two great-grandchildren.

DL: Yeah.

BB: So you’re, you’ve been vol-, you’ve been volunteering, or you’ve been connect-, connected to the park a little bit with some—

AL: Well, we did until, as I said, he got sick.
BB: Yeah. Sure.

AL: And after that.

BB: For a few years after, right?

DL: Yeah.

AL: Right. After that, we just, since 2002, we haven’t really done a lot of volunteering—

DL: Volunteering.

AL: In the park.

BB: Yeah.

AL: We’ve done other things. I did adult literacy for several years. And we do a lot of visiting the nursing homes. We do a lot of church work.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: Our church is very small. [Laughs] We do—when we first got back, he did an awful lot of handy work for little old ladies who couldn’t get anybody to fix things for them, you know. I mean, we had one that would call him to come change a light bulb. It’s just, she’s gone now, but they, she and her sister both lived to be a hundred.

DL: In fact, they’re all gone now.
AL: Yeah, they’re all gone now. That’s the sad part. But we’ve always been busy. We’re into genealogy.

BB: Of your own families?

AL: Of our own family. If we could just find his great, great grandfather. Can’t find that man. I don’t know. [Laughs] This, this is Thomas Lee’s grandfather. Of course, we learned a lot about Thomas Lee as we were doing the volunteer work at the cave. We didn’t really know that much about him.

BB: So there were records at the, at the cave in—


BB: What was his, what was, tell me about him.

AL: You want to tell him? Thomas?

DL: Oh, Thomas? Well, go ahead. You’re, [Laughs] you’re the—

AL: Well, he was a guide.

DL: Yeah.

AL: At the cave in the 1870s, 1880s.

DL: Yeah.

AL: And very well known. I mean, he’s written up in Hovey’s books. You’re probably familiar with Hovey. He’s written up in several magazine type articles we have
copies of. And his brother-in-law, not his brother, John L. Lee, was another very well-known guide. The two of them kind of worked together. And we, like I said, we really didn’t know that much about him until we started doing the vertical files. And there was Thomas Lee, Thomas Lee, Thomas Lee. Hm. So, Joy, her office at that point was right next door to the room that we were in, which is all gone now. And she was listening as we would learn things, you know, and, and we all got so excited. So one day, they called us. And Scott Teodorski would like to take us into the cave. They had been looking for a Wild Cave Tour, and went to the Giant’s Coffin, and then down somewhere from there. I don’t know. It’s not on any path. And they said they would like to show us what they found. So we said, “Sure.” So my sister was here from Florida, and our youngest daughter and her husband from Mississippi at that point, and he took all of us into the cave. Had I known that we were going to have to belly crawl as we did, you could not even raise your head. I mean it was scary. I’m scared to death of caves. I don’t like caves. But in order to see what they had to show us, we went. Then we did moonwalking, where you walk on, you know. It was a little bit of everything. Finally got to this place. Now, mind you, there are no lights except what’s on your helmet, the little carbide lights. We get into this space and it is so funny. All the way, Thomas had drawn arrows. He draws arrows. And to, I guess to find his way back out, you know, he would, he would draw the arrows going in. And when we got in, it’s a box canyon. So he turned this way, and then he came back and X’d out the arrows. And then he turned this way, and he came back and X’d out the arrows. You can’t get out either way from this box canyon. But in the left side of it, about this big, in cursive writing, is Thomas E Lee, October 1879. We have a photograph of it right there on the wall. And we just, we were just awestruck. You know, I mean, it’s just amazing to think this was his grandfather who he never knew, of course, because—

BB: Did you know when you were young that he was a cave guide? Or did you not even know that? Did you know he was?
DL: I didn’t know it. My dad didn’t mention anything about it. My dad was a, a guide at New Entrance, and the sea-, seasonal, but he didn’t mention his father hardly at all. I didn’t ask him. [0:30:00] But now, my, my dad was born in what is the park too. And Thomas, I’m not sure where he was born, but that, that is the grandfather.

AL: Somewhere in Edmondson County.

DL: Yeah.

AL: We know that.

BB: What year was your dad born? Father born?

DL: Pardon.

BB: What year was your father born?

DL: Eighteen-ninety-two.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: Yeah.

BB: Wow. So you have some deep roots here in the caves.

DL: Yeah. There were. Uh-huh.

AL: Yes, he does. I’d like to show you—
DL: It goes way back.

AL: Show you some of the photos if we have time.

BB: We’ll have to, we’ll have to definitely do that. What were some of your favorite parts about your, your service and, and working, you know. Did you have some mentors that you wanted to, some mentors or, or people that, that you were helpful to yourself?

DL: Well, I’ve done, I just, I’ve enjoyed every place I’ve been. I really have.

AL: Joe Calisa was one of the first men that he knew. You’re going to talk to his daughter, Mary Jo.

DL: Yeah.

BB: Tell me about Joe Calisa.

DL: Now, Joe was in the CCCs at Mammoth Cave back before the war, and then once the war started, then he went into the, of course, he went into service, but came back and he was a park ranger at Mammoth Cave later on. And he transferred to Shenandoah and, let’s see—

AL: Cumberland Gap?

DL: Yeah, Cumberland Gap and Great Smokies, and then he came back to Mammoth Cave. And he retired—

AL: As superintendent.
DL: As superintendent at Mammoth Cave. Now, that’s a, a, Calisa’s father.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: Mary Jo’s.

DL: Mary Jo.

BB: Um-hm.

DL: So—

AL: But he, he sort of looked up to him. Of course, Joe was already in the CCCs when he was just a little boy.

DL: Yeah, and Joe was a permanent ranger when I was a seasonal guide there, so I—

BB: So he was always a little—

DL: Oh, yeah.

AL: Oh, yeah.

DL: He was several years older than myself.

BB: Yeah.

DL: But I’ve just, I’ve enjoyed every place we’ve been. I’ve, I’ve liked some places a little better, but I can’t, I can’t say that I disliked any, any place we were.
BB: What was your year, how many total years were you in the service, in the park service? How many years?

DL: Thirty-one.

BB: Okay. How did you know it was time to retire?

DL: Well, that's a good question. I guess she wanted to retire. I [Laughter]—

AL: I didn't want to retire.

DL: I—

AL: They were going to get a computer.

DL: Yeah, well, we, com-, computers weren't out yet, a least Vicksburg didn't have a computer. And shortly after, they got computers, and I, I was gone by then.

AL: Actually, it was partly his health. His, his blood pressure just went sky high the last few months and—

DL: Well—

AL: Once he retired, it came back down.

DL: Yeah.

AL: So it was, it was stressful. We'll put it that way.

BB: Smart idea. Um-hm.
DL: At times.

AL: Yeah.

BB: Well, you know, the Ken Burns film recently, America's Greatest Idea. What do you think about that, that, that, I think that, I think—who actually coined that phrase? Stegner, I think.

AL: Or Thoreau.

DL: I'm not, I don't know.

BB: Thoreau? America’s greatest idea. What do you think about that as far as the, the park, the national park system?

DL: Well I guess it’s a, well, it’s okay.

AL: I think it’s wonderful that they’ve been held so that the average person can enjoy them, not just the wealthy. I, I think that’s the main thing about the parks.

BB: Yeah, I was going to ask, what do you, what’s, what do you, what’s your hope for, I mean, it’s about visitors and education and all these kinds of things. What’s it you hope? Has your thought about what visitors take away from it, did that change over time? Or, you know, what—

DL: Not really. I, I think that that’s what I enjoyed about it, being in the park service, the average person can really enjoy it. And we only just assist them in their enjoyment, hopefully. There were, of course, rules and regulations that we had to make sure that they abide by, but that was not a big problem back then. Now, I don’t
know how they do it. All the time that I was a ranger, I never carried a gun. But now, you just, [0:35:00] all the rangers have guns and I, I wouldn't know how to act, probably.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: It’s totally different, I think, now. But one example, my sister was here last month from Georgia. And she brought her granddaughter who was eleven years old. And they, we went out with them. And they went through the cave. We just stayed on top. And they were just blown away, you know. They just, oh, they loved it. They can’t wait to come back again. And I think that’s never changed. That’s always been the way it is. People enjoy the parks so much, just whatever the experience: the mountains, or the beach, or the cave, or whatever.

BB: Um-hm. Was it a top-down kind of thing as far as, you know, you working your way into that system and, I guess I was, wanted to ask you if you saw something that should be changed or it would make a, a system better, did you, did the overseers in Washington or parks, did they, did they listen to you? Did you have some input into that?

DL: Well, as far as the individual was concerned, if we had something, there was a way to do it properly and you, you could sug-, put in suggestions, and most of the time you got a, well, I guess all, all the time, you got an answer back from what, what it was. I, I think it’s well done. I, I have no complaints about it.

BB: So you were able to make changes if you saw them, or suggest changes.


BB: Yeah. It’s a big system, so I was wondering that.
DL: It is.

BB: Yeah.

DL: It really is. Yeah. It’s so much bigger now than what it was when we retired.

AL: Oh, yeah.

DL: They've, they've increased it considerably, which is good.

BB: Um-hm.

AL: When we were in Vicksburg, we had the director of the park service as our guest. The gunboat Cairo, I don’t know if you’re familiar with that or not?

BB: Uh-uhn.

AL: It’s a gunboat that was sunk in the Civil War and was under the Mississippi, well the Yazoo mud.

DL: Yazoo River.

AL: For a hundred years, and then brought up. And—

DL: It’s on display now.

AL: And he was responsible. He was there during all the time that they were getting it restored and on a concrete foundation under an overhang. And he, that was a
really, really big job. But there were things like, for instance, scissors. They used scissors that they found on the gunboat to cut the ribbon for the, that occasion.

DL: Yeah.

AL: I mean, there, needles. There, it’s just amazing. They have the whole museum there now for the artifacts from the Cairo. And so when they had the dedication, the director came, and we had him at our house for lunch, and that was quite an, an undertaking. It took everybody in the park to get that done. [Laughs]

DL: Yeah.

BB: Yeah. Pulled together as a team [ ].

AL: Yes, oh, yes. Black and white. We found Vicksburg to be the most racially mixed place, which absolutely shocked us. You know, I had said to him, I’ll go anywhere with you but Mississippi. Don’t ask me to go to Mississippi. And then, as he said, when they called him from Mississippi, he said, “Well, we couldn’t possibly leave before two o’clock this afternoon.” And we got there and found that it was, it was just amazing. The schools were integrated for the first time the year we got there. No problems. Our girls were all there. That just, of course, I taught in that system for twelve years after I got my degree. And it, it was just the most amazing thing to me, after all the terrible things we had heard about Mississippi, it wasn’t that way at all.

DL: Well, the Corps of Engineers—

AL: Yeah, it was Vicksburg.

DL: Supplied, it was the headquarters there, and it, it was a big place.
AL: They probably had more PhDs per square foot—

DL: Oh, yeah.

AL: Than any other place in Mississippi. And that made a big difference, I’m sure. But it was, it was just wonderful. And we had black and white employees at our house for everything we ever had. We didn’t have, didn’t never segregate, you know. The first thing we had was a fish fry. [Laughs] I had no clue how to have a fish fry. So the, the maintenance people came in and taught me. And after that, we had a fish fry every year. And we always had all the employees, not matter what color, you know. And it was, it was just wonderful. It really was.

BB: So you’ve had a good life.

AL: We did.

DL: Yeah.

AL: It, I was really surprised when I got to Vicksburg and found out it was like that. I, I sort of dreaded it. But it, it was wonderful.

BB: How much you’ve grown from that experience.

AL: Oh, goodness, yes. Yes. Absolutely.

BB: Is there anything else you’d like to tell us before we, you’ve had a nice interview here. [0:40:00] Anything you wanted to, any last thoughts—

AL: I don’t know.
BB: About your career in the park service?

DL: No.

AL: I think we had a really good life. I mean, it, there were times when it was hard, but when we were on top of sh-, of Skyline Drive and I had to try to get the kids to the school bus. Well, looky there—that’s amazing. But all in all, I don’t think we’d do anything different.

DL: No, I can’t think of anything.

AL: I don’t know of anything.

BB: Thanks. Thank you.

AL: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]