7-24-2014

Interview with Phil Veluzat and Mary Veluzat (FA 1098)

Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
Western Kentucky University, mssfa@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist

Part of the Folklore Commons, and the Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_fa_oral_hist/240

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in FA Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

BRENT BJÖRKMAN: Okay, today is June 24, 2014. This is Brent Björkman, director of the Kentucky Folklife Program, and we’re continuing our project on Ranger Lore, about the occupational working lives of park rangers. We’ve been really lucky enough to have a lot of great voices that are connected to Mammoth Cave park. And, and they’ve told so many great stories, and I know that the two of you have some great legacy things, you know, coming back from, from growing up around here and, and some, some traditions from, from family who’ve worked here too. And I understand you met at the park. And so there’s a lot of things we’ll explore. And we’ll, we’ll do it very, very fluidly. And can you just tell me your names and maybe the last thing that you did at, at the park?

MARY JO VELUZAT: Okay. Hi. I’m Mary Jo Veluzat. And I retired as assistant chief of maintenance at Mammoth Cave National Park.

BB: Okay.

PHIL VELUZAT: And I’m Phil Veluzat. I retired as a chief ranger in 2000.

BB: Okay. And so tell me a little bit, Mary Jo, I think that was one of the things that I was really intrigued about how, you know, you have a deep, long connection to Mammoth Cave and, and, and the work that’s been, been done there by observing family members and things.

MJV: Right. And deep connection with the park service. My father, of course, retired as superintendent at Mammoth Cave National Park, but he started his career before Mammoth Cave National Park was actually a park, because he came from Indiana into the Y, the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps camps. He, of course, graduated from high school during the Depression, and jobs were few. And so he and some of
his other buddies from up in Terre Haute, Indiana joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. And they went to a camp in Indiana, and they were there just a brief time, then they were transferred down to, to Mammoth Cave. Dad was actually in Camp Four, which was the camp over, across the river, that, well, a place they called Cade, Kentucky. It, we now, Mammoth Cave has a group campground there on the spot where the, where the CCC camp was.

BB: Huh. What year would this have been? I mean, his, his CCC time?

MJV: Daddy graduated from high school in 1932, so this probably would have been ’33 or, or ’34 when he came to, to Mammoth Cave.

BB: Uh-huh.

MJV: And the purpose of the Civilian Conservation Corps at that time was, number one, Roosevelt was putting people back to work. But the main purpose of the, the boys there at Mammoth Cave was to actually make Mammoth Cave a national park. It had already been accepted through Congress as a national park area, but nothing had been done. There’d been no families moved out, no improvements, no nothing. So the, the Civilian Conservation Corps folks came in, and of course, they were guided by engineers and all the high uppy-uppies that told them what to do. And they planted trees and they actually razed the, the farmhouses that were there. And the landowners were, were moved off their land. And I know I heard my dad talk about it. They, the local landowners didn’t hold the CCC boys responsible at all for doing that, because they were just doing a job. They were just getting paid. But now, the, when the government workers came in, you know, they, they weren’t too, too fond of, of them because they had been told stories that, well, you, you sell the land to the park, and then you can live here until, you know, you pass away. And, but that wasn’t the way it was. They had to, they had to move out.
PV: Beautiful buildings too.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: The CCC.

MJV: Yeah.

BB: That they built.

PV: Yes. Still, still remaining, many of the—

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: Yeah, the spring houses.

PV: Took, yeah, the great rock work of that.

MJV: Well in fact—

PV: Sandstone.

MJV: The house, the place that I retired from, my office was in one of the old CCC warehouses.

BB: In that maintenance area down in [ ]?

MJV: Yes.

PV: Still existing.
MJV: Yeah.

BB: Uh-huh.

MJV: So, they were, they were quite the craftsmen. And then, Mom and Dad were married fifteen, sixteen years before I was ever born. So it was almost like they had a whole life before MJ came along. And really, after they, they passed away, I have come to find out more of their beginnings together. They actually met at, at Mammoth Cave. My mother—

BB: You didn’t know that until later?

MJV: Well, I knew that they had, but I didn’t know—I, I, I found some of my dad’s journals. Daddy was a big [0:05:00] journal keeper. And so I found some of his journals of when he was in the CCCs and when he would, would go out and, and go on a date with mom, you know. And it’s like, really, you know. And, but mother was a telephone operator there at the exchange at, at Mammoth Cave. And they always told the story that my mother butchered Daddy’s last name, which is Caliza, spelled it really bad, and Daddy, being the little cocky thing that he was wanted to see the dumb, stupid woman that couldn’t spell his name right. So that was how they met, which, [Laughs] but I guess it’s—

PV: Which his writing and accounting talent is what he did in the CCs, so.

MJV: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: Okay. So, he was actually one of the boy workers initially.

PV: Administrators, really.
MJV: Well, he was, he was actually I, I read a story from one of the guys who went in the, the camp with Dad when, when he, when they first went into the camp at Indiana. And one of the directors up there at that camp’s name was Dick Kagel. And Dick was in the, in the service, I guess at the time, and he was educated, and—of course, Dad had a high school education, and, but he was, he was a smart man. And the city posted a, a notice on the, on the board, Dick Kagel did, they needed somebody to help with, with filing. And they said this young, new recruit came up and said, “I’d like to apply for that job.” Said, “I noticed that, well, his uniform was all nice, and his shoes were shined.” And he said, “Well, boy, can you type?” And apparently my dad’s response was, “No, sir. But I can sure learn.” And my daddy was an excellent typist. I mean, when I remember Dad, Dad was the one that taught me to type. And I mean he could type like a hundred words a minute on an old manual typewriter.

BB: Wow.

MJV: So he got, he did learn to type. So when the camp moved down here to, to Mammoth Cave, Dad was already in the office doing the office work. But he was still a, a recruit. But he was just doing the office type work.

BB: Um-hm. And then he was with the CCC at, in that capacity and then went into the park service proper, or [ ]?

MJV: I get a little foggy as to what transpired where or when. I know Dad was a fire control aid. That was his first job at the National Park Service and, in fact, I have one of his badges, fire control aide, in some of his stuff. And he was in that capacity for a couple of years. Of course, back then, forest fires were a big deal. And, you know, now, we have controlled burns, where I’m sure my father turns over in his grave every time the park service lights one, because he spent his whole career putting
them out, you know. But they, he prob-, he went from the fire control aide to just being a regular ranger. And in fact, he and Mom lived in the CCC house over across the river, at Maple Springs when they first married. Strangely enough, that’s where Dave and Joy Lyons also lived.

BB: I was just going to ask if that was true. Yeah.

MJV: So, things have a way of—

BB: Small world.

MJV: The paths cross and, yeah. But when, when the war broke out, Dad was in the, Dad was a little bit older, but he, he got called up. And so, he, he went to war. And I’m assuming his service with the park service at that time was, you know, severed while he was in World War II. Daddy was in the European theater. And so he was in Belgium and France, and then when he came back home, why, he got the job back there at Mammoth Cave.

BB: Huh.

MJV: And I was born in 1952. And once I came along, why—and this was really strange too. I always remember my father saying that he never wanted to go West. Never wanted to go west. But yet, when he joined the CCCs, that’s where he wanted to go. So, I guess it changed after he got married and had a family, you know. He didn’t, he didn’t want to go West to these desolate places, at that time, where you were a hundred miles from, from a grocery store.

BB: Hm.
MJV: But it was ’54 or ’55, Daddy accepted a district ranger position at Shenandoah. So he and mom packed me up and, and we moved to Shenandoah. All way back when—

BB: Do you remember that, what that was like to be a— I don’t mean to derail you [0:10:00] but—

MJV: Yeah, that—

BB: Do you remember what, what that was like as a, you were very, I mean, you were just young.

MJV: I was, I was really young.

BB: Yeah. Yeah.

MJV: Yeah. I, I don’t remember moving, but I do remember, because we stayed there at, at the, if I said Shenandoah, I’m wrong. I meant Smoky Mountains. We moved to Oconaluftee. And I remember when we, we were some of the first families to move into the new houses there at Oconaluftee. And I started school there. I went to school with the Native Americans. And I do remember that, you know. And I was in second grade when me moved from there to, to Shenandoah.

PV: She remembers horses from there.

MJV: But I remember horses too. My, that’s where my horse career started. I started on the, on the pony, pony rings. But way back when, you know, I guess they, people applied for jobs, but it wasn’t like it is now. The service was so small that everybody knew everybody. And I mean, Dad was on a first-name basis with Conrad Wirth and
George Hartzog. And when, when they got ready to, to, to move you, they’d just pick up the phone and say, “Well, are you ready to go someplace else?” you know.

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: And, because they always had a mission as to, to why they, they sent you someplace, you know, and—

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: That’s just sort of, sort of the way it was.

BB: Yeah.

MJV: When we were in Shenandoah, while Dad was chief ranger there, and I do remember him fighting terrible fires there, because Shenandoah was established as a park the same time Mammoth Cave was, as was Smokey Mountains. And there was the disgruntled locals at Shenandoah just like there were here at Mammoth Cave because they were moved off their land, and people would start fires. That was their way of sort of getting back. And so, like I said, Daddy, Daddy did have to fight a lot of fires. And while we were at Shenandoah, of course, Daddy was chief ranger there. And that was a little higher position, and way back when, the women, the wives had a part too. My mother was expected to entertain. There was, there was no choice. When the guys came to the park for different training and whatnot, why, you know, Mother was supposed to have a cocktail party for them. You know, that, that was just expected. And I have been told, I’ve never seen the old applications, but some of the old applications actually had a place on there for how the wives would interact, you know, with, they thought, the other wives and whatnot there in the park, you know. The wives were judged just like the—
BB: Wow.

MJV: The main worker was. Which wouldn’t fly now, but.

BB: Right. Right, right, right.

MJV: But that’s, that’s sort of the small community, and neighbor, and family type deal that, that the park service used to be.

BB: Did that, did Shenandoah and the Smokey connection—did they know the Lees at that time then?

MJV: Yes.

BB: Uh-huh.

MJV: Strangely enough, there used to be a little place out at Mammoth Cave before Mammoth Cave was a cave, and it was called the Homelike Inn. And it was a little, sort of a bed and breakfast type place that was run by Dan Lee’s family.

BB: Hm.

MJV: And so, that’s why they always called Dan Pee-Wee. Because I think he was the younger of the, of the, the Lee kids that were out there. So they always called Dan Pee-Wee. Pee-Wee Lee.

BB: Hm.

MJV: So, isn’t that a small world, too?
BB: Yeah, it is a small world.

MJV: Yeah.

BB: So they were out there and—

MJV: Smokey Mountains. Shenandoah.

BB: Shen-, Shenandoah.

MJV: And then Dad came back to Middlesboro, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park as superintendent.

PV: And surprisingly, those, the parks don’t change that much like a city does, because, I guess, what? Five years ago, six years ago, we went to, to Shenandoah to the housing area.

MJV: Oh, yeah.

PV: What, and I mean—

MJV: The houses were still there.

PV: Just, just like—

MJV: They didn’t look near as big as they did when I was a kid, you know, but. [Laughter] And the hills that I rode up on a bicycle didn’t look near as steep as they did when I was a kid either, but everything was pretty much the same.

BB: Hm.
MJV: And, of course, everything with the parks is centrally controlled with the regional offices and the Washington office. So, there’s always that top-down direction coming that sort of keeps everything—but there, there is a difference in philosophy from Eastern parks and Western parks, as far as how, how they're run, and managed, and what not.

BB: So the Eastern parks would be more—

MJV: East of the Mississippi.

BB: Yeah, yeah, no, but the Eastern p—

MJV: They—

BB: How would that, what would that philosophy, tell me about the two philosophies then.

MJV: The, the Western parks, of course they’re closed a lot of the parts of the winter because of the snowfall and whatnot. And so those areas are so large that they don’t control the land and stuff as much as the Eastern parks do. Like the Eastern parks, if you build a trail and somebody’s getting off the trail, you know, you put up sixteen signs to keep people on the trail. You know, the Western park, meh, they don’t worry about it. A grizzly bear will get them or something, you know. They, they just don’t, they’re a little bit more laid back in the Western parks than in the Eastern parks.

BB: Yeah.
PV: Most of the Eastern parks are full, year-round parks.

BB: Yeah.

PV: Which makes for a big difference in the, in the way that staff interacts out West as opposed to in the East. They have a lot more time for training in the winter if they're full-time employees.

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: A lot more time to reorganize.

MJV: Yeah, but like here at, here at Mammoth Cave, you know, when I, when I was in the maintenance division, we were cutting the fire out of the grass in the summertime, and then plowing the heck out of the roads in the wintertime. You know, my staff was busy constantly.

BB: Yeah.

MJV: At the Western parks, they just close them down.

BB: Right.

MJV: Until the snow melts.

BB: Like a tobacco crop, thirteen-month thing.

BB: Wow. So you grew up in this environment.

MJV: Yes.

BB: And, and your first job, or your first connection to working at Mammoth was—

MJV: My first, I said as a kid I’d never work in the National Park Service. Never say never. I’m an animal lover, and when the parks were first established, my father worked for Taylor Hoskins twice as superintendent. And Taylor was vehemently opposed to having pets in park housing. So I couldn’t have a cat, couldn’t have a dog. I said I’d never work for the park service because I always loved cats and dogs. But as it turned out, I’ve got a degree in medical technology from the University of Kentucky, so I had a lot of science background. I worked at T.J. Sampson Community Hospital for about five years and got tired of nights and weekends. And the National Park Service, about ’73 or ’74 kept, made the discovery that the caves had radon in them. No threat to the general public, but the guides—and in fact, the office workers, because the old visitors’ center, when it was built in the ‘60s, the cooling shaft for the air conditioning was actually funneled in cave air. Well, the secretaries were getting more radon exposure than a uranium miner out, out west. So we had to start monitoring radon for the, the workers. And so that was when I got my first job with the National Park Service. They were looking for a seasonal person to, again, keep some records, you know. I learned to type and to keep records. And so, I started working for, for Bobby Carson monitoring radon in the summer. Bob Deskins was the superintendent at that time. And I guess if I have to attribute any part of my career to anybody, Bob was, Bob was a great mentor.

BB: Bob Deskins?

MJV: Bob Deskins. Yeah. He—
BB: What did he, how was he, how was he special for you?

MJV: Bob was special for me in, in a lot of ways. Bob actually came to Mammoth Cave as the director of the job corps center. And Bob was fresh out of, of West Virginia. And I think my dad went to the airport, or somebody, and, or someplace, and, and picked him up. And they became very good friends. And Bob and his wife, Joyce and Zoeda, lived in the house just below where the superintendent’s house is there at Mammoth Cave. And their daughter, Zoeda, loved Phillip too. And Phillip was working at the park at the time. And she was just so tickled that Phillip and I were going to go out on a date. And Joyce used to always tell the story about Zoeda. She just had to keep a hold on her the first night that Phillip drove up to the house to take me out on a date, it was like, “Oh, Phillip’s going to get Mary Jo.” You know, and Zoeda was what, about five or six years old?

PV: She was a tyke, yeah.

MJV: Yeah. And so we, we were just always really good friends because we did live so close together, and you know, my dad ended up hiring Bob as assistant superintendent.

PV: Which was, that was the Department of Labor.

MJV: The job corps was.

PV: Position, the job corps.

BB: Yes.

MJV: Yeah. Yeah.
BB: Huh.

MJV: So, yeah, just connections.

BB: Yeah.

MJV: But Bob was, Bob Deskins was one of those [0:20:00] guys that, Bob grew up hard. Bob grew up in a coal mining town. And he made it out. And anybody that had any work initiative, he would always give them a chance.

PV: Personality plus.

MJV: Yep.

PV: Could talk to anybody, anywhere, anyplace.

MJV: So—

BB: Let you find your own strengths and, and help you along with those.

MJV: Yeah. Yep.

BB: That’s great.

MJV: Yep.

BB: Yeah. So you started working there and—so you were, were you single then when you, I’m trying to—
MJV: No, no.

BB: One of the questions I’ve asked people, and maybe you didn’t have to deal with this because you, I’m trying to think—

MJV: Well see, Phillip and I married—

BB: Seasonal housing, and I’m trying to think about being single in the, in the park and how—

MJV: Phillip lived in seasonal housing.

PV: Yeah, when, when we were dating, I did.

MJV: Phillip was hired as a ranger in, what? Seventy-three?

PV: Seventy-two.

MJV: Seventy-two?

BB: Okay.

MJV: I’ll let him tell the story, but I’ll start it. He just, had just gotten out of the service. And the park service was traditionally non-confrontational. Even when my father was a ranger and would have to go out at, as chief ranger at Shenandoah, and catch poachers and whatnot, they didn’t wear a gun.

BB: Hm.

MJV: They kept the gun in the, in the glove box. And I remember one night—
PV: Not because they wanted to, but because that was the policy.

MJV: That was just the culture. That was the culture and the policy. I remember one night, they, Daddy almost got run down by a, somebody fleeing in a vehicle. Way back when, the poachers would always bring a, a female with them, because it was all male rangers, and they couldn't frisk a female. And so any guns that they hadn't tossed into the woods or something, they'd hand it to the female, and she'd hide it in her dress and whatnot, and they couldn't, they couldn't frisk her. So, I mean it, it was not a non-dangerous situation. But Phillip was hired. Him and Jim Waddle and Billy Cassidy, because poaching had become such an issue out here at, at Mammoth Cave that they were killing deer on the front step of the hotel.

BB: Wow. So that, that precipitated, did that precipitate this, this issue of poaching, was that one of the reasons that—

PV: Really, it, it, it was larger than that. I don't know if you all have ever heard about the Yosemite problems in Yosemite Valley. I can't, I can't remember the, the meadow, but there was a confrontation there that was, I guess sort of brutal and reached the level of Congress, and Congress said, “You must either get out of the law enforcement business, or become professional.” So that's probably the only reason that I was hired is because I just came out of the military as a military policeman. And there was the mandate to the park service to, to hire some people with experience in, and training in that area. So, that's probably the only reason that I came to be hired.

BB: And you'd just come out in '72 or '73 or something?

PV: No, I'd come out in '68 but I'd been in college since and—
MJV: Had a degree in crim-, criminology, and you know, so.

PV: Degree in sociology and area of concentration in criminology.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: And it wasn’t particularly what, you know, was attractive, historically, to the park service.

MJV: To the park service.

PV: And even after I was hired, was not particularly attractive to a lot of managers, because professional law enforcement, you know, would bring confrontation. And they really didn’t like that.

MJV: No, strangely enough, when the superintendent—okay, my dad was superintendent when Phillip and I married, so obviously, there was a little bit of a conflict there. So Daddy went on and retired in ’76, in May of, of ’76.

PV: But—

MJV: In—

PV: I was hired by Bob Burns.

MJV: Bob Burns, yeah.

PV: Yeah. Who was the chief ranger in ’72.

MJV: Yeah.
PV: And Bill Nichols was a, in fact, a law enforcement specialist who, who was my direct supervisor. Great guy, too.

MJV: Right. He was a great mentor to Phillip. But the superintendent that, that followed Dad really forbade the ran-, the law enforcement rangers to wear their, their weapons in public. They had to keep them in the glovebox, again. We’re back in the glovebox.

BB: Hm.

MJV: And I don’t know if you guys initiated it or what, but that, there was a class action suit with the law enforcement rangers that, I guess—

BB: Nationwide or, or, or—

MJV: It went nationwide.

PV: Yeah. Well, really, it was a, it was a classic case of a mandate for professionalism but a resistance on the part, historically, of many managers. So incident after incident, and Congressional involvement, and, and eventually, why, the park service had to decide to either have professional law enforcement or cease to have law enforcement, so I, I think it was the best option to have people that were professional at it.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: And that’s what they’ve chosen.
MJV: And I guess at that time was when you all started having to have a commission. Because when you were hired, you didn't have a commission, right?

PV: Well, yeah, there was a certification.

MJV: But—

PV: But the, the whole growth of professionalism in the park service, in law enforcement, brought about a training regiment much like any other federal agency, DEA—

MJV: Just like secret service, DEA.

PV: DEA—

BB: So, like, when you went to FLETC, is that when that started?

PV: That, right. Everybody but the FBI was at FLETC. And so eventually there came to be the division of law enforcement, basically. Not that we lost those other, those other areas, but they became professionalism, they became professional too. Like the firefighting. The same thing was going on to move the park service away from generalists.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: Simply because of the needs.

BB: Um-hm.
PV: So firefighting, resource protection, the biological part of it, archaeological protection, all those things have become specialized. And so, law enforcement was just another one of those.

BB: Did any of those specializations started, was it in the ‘70s as well when this all kind of—

PV: Yeah. I would say it basically started in most forms during the ‘70s for all those disciplines: resource protection, archaeological protection, firefighting. And then there was the time when managers would realize, like, like I did that, look, you can’t, we can’t have a structural fire department, a wildfire department, a law enforcement department, and an EMS department.

MJV: Because of all the training.

PV: You can’t, you can’t, you can’t survive with that.

BB: Right.

PV: So, that’s when some became professional and some we started contracting out, which makes a lot of sense, you know.

MJV: Like the structural fire at Mammoth Cave, they had a memorandum of understanding with the Park City—

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: To take care of the structural fires here at Mammoth Cave because it just became cost prohibitive to man a, a structural fire truck with it, the equipment and with the training needed.
PV: And—

BB: Right. Right.

PV: Outside the park service, all those areas were becoming very specialized. You know, you didn't throw someone in the back of a station wagon anymore when they were having a heart attack, which was what happened in the park service. I mean, you had, had no other way to get anybody to the hospital. But those—

BB: Huh.

PV: Those areas became specialized in the communities.

BB: Uh-huh.

PV: So, and relationships developed into a less bitter form with the, with local communities, you know, as time passed.

BB: Yeah.

PV: So, we had peers in law enforcement. We had peers in EMS, and we had peers in structural fire. So, it became easier, you know.

BB: Um-hm. Hm.

PV: But I, I don't think there's anything—at the same time this was going on in the park service, this law enforcement thing, it was going, it was going on in BLM and, and all the other, forest service.
BB: Um-hm.

PV: Some of them chose not to have as much, but many of those that chose that didn’t have the number of visitors that the park service did.

BB: Right. Yeah, there’s a real direct need then because of the visitorship. Yeah.

PV: Yeah, we were, in ’72 and ’73, all those fields were full of cars, visitors at, at Mammoth Cave. Around the hotel, we’re talking about wall to wall cars. And I—

MJV: There was no limit on the tours.

PV: I can’t—

MJV: I mean, they didn’t, they took people through the caves just like cattle. Three and 400 people on, on a tour.

PV: I don’t, it seems to me like some days we had 650 cars parked in those fields.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: So it was, it was the hey, it was, as far as visitation was concerned, it was the big time for natural areas in the park service. The hey-day.

BB: Wow.

PV: And down very much now, because of other opportunities for people.

[INTERRUPTION—PAUSE IN RECORDING]
BB: Sorry, just had to restart. So either one of you, [0:30:00] we’ve kind of jumped to introduce Phil—

MJV: [ ]

BB: Phil’s piece on the, in the whole, and the law enforcement piece. So, you know, your job of monitoring and being a, a scientist—

MJV: Yeah.

BB: And doing scientific work, that evolved over time. You continued to do that, and did that for—

MJV: I did that for, ooh, I guess about seven or eight years. Never had a weight problem when I was running through the cave because the, you had to get in and get out to get your samples, you know, read and stuff, because they’ve got a short half-life. But again, you know, I was looking for a little advancement and whatnot, so that was about the time that computers were becoming more and more prevalent, and the National Park Service introduced a, a budget program on computer called AFS3, except then it was AFS2. And—

BB: Early ‘80s?

MJV: Yeah. So they—well, no, it would have been more like the mid- to late ‘80s, because I, I didn’t hire into the park service until about ‘81. So, they had a, a budget position come open in the maintenance division, so I thought, well, I’ll, I’ll apply for it. And I was pretty good with math, you know, and I knew a little bit about computers. And I didn’t get the job. A lady who was a bank vice president up in Munfordville got the job. And it was like, okay, you know, I’ve, I’ve got a job. It’s no
big deal. But she came down, they showed her the job, they showed her the computer, and she said, “I don’t, I don’t do computers.” And they said, “Oh, but you must. We’ve, we’ve moved to a new—” “I don’t do computers. I don’t want this job.” So I always said I got my budget job, by gosh and by golly, I got it by default, you know. It was like, oh, okay, yeah, we’ll hire you. So many tears and many crying trying to try to figure out the National Park Service budget stuff because it’s unlike any other debit and credit budget, budget stuff in the world.

PV: The government basically is—

MJV: The government—

PV: Is reversed from—

MJV: Is reversed from—

PV: Traditional—

MJV: Traditional. Yeah. It, you don’t, you don’t do debits and credits. All you do is spend and track it, and you plan it. And it’s a whole, it’s a whole different ballgame. So, I finally mastered the budget end of it. And so then I started managing some small projects in the maintenance division and whatnot. And finally was able to get the assistant chief of maintenance job. Worked for Steve Kovar for—who is still the chief of maintenance out at Mammoth Cave—worked for him, I guess eight or nine years, didn’t I, Phillip?

PV: Yeah, we went through the, basically that’s probably, if I had to point to something that the whole law enforcement issue was, you know, it was a big deal, nationwide, but probably the biggest change that we went through in our careers was the move to computerized systems.
MJV: Computerized systems. Yeah.

PV: You know, when, when we both started—

MJV: Everything was pen and paper.

PV: You’re talking about a written ledger.

MJV: Yeah. We had, we had the first computer in, when I was doing radon in the park, and it was a teradact, had the big eight inch disks. And it did nothing but crunch numbers and we had a really small computer division up in Washington, DC, that was supposed to be taking all of our radon data and getting it organized so we could use it. Well, that never got done, because teradact was from Scottsdale, Arizona, and they went under, and we lost all that information. It’s probably still in boxes out there in the park someplace.

BB: Wow.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: I re-, I remember our first nationwide law enforcement printout in the National Park Service, I believe was ’74. And it was, you can imagine, it was volumes, the one printout that showed all the parks. And that, in fact, was the first attempt to define what areas had a law enforcement need and where to apply resources. In that particular case, during that time, because of, somewhat because of job corps law enforcement criminal incidents combined with the normal park service criminal incidents, Mammoth Cave was in the top twenty of criminal incidents in the United States—fel-, felonious criminal incidents—which was sort of surprising, you know, because no one ever talked about those kind of problems in the park service.
MJV: But, yeah, when I, when I retired from the National Park Service, of course, it, I was in charge of operations in the maintenance division, [0:35:00] so when the computers were down, my, my guys could still mow, they could still clean the bathrooms and stuff like that, but if, if they asked me a question about anything, I couldn’t answer it because everything was on the computer. If the computers were down, you know, management’s down. That’s just sort of a, sort of the way it was.

BB: Can’t go back to the ledger.

MJV: Had to go back to the ledger. Exactly. And, in fact, we had a very, the maintenance division had a very intense program called maintenance management which was an attempt to standardize the maintenance park-wide, region-, service-wide. And it all got into the cost of ownership and yada, yada, yada, which supposedly, based on the rankings of the buildings and whatnot, the buildings that were least used and whatnot were supposed to have been, you know, not kept up and torn down. But most parks, that hasn’t happened because superintendents just don’t give up buildings that easy. But [Laughs]—

BB: Right.

PV: Well, specialization gets into that because you had a strong historical, cultural connection. They’re specialized.

BB: Huh.

PV: So, it was points of emphasis.

BB: Yeah.
MJV: Right. That’s like, we didn’t have the money to, in our maintenance division, to maintain those old CCC houses out there. But yet, because they’re, the district itself, you know, is a historic district, no superintendent would ever say, “Oh, okay, let’s take pictures and tear them down.” You know, not, not going to happen. Same way with the seasonal housing. The three com-, apartment complexes out there, we don’t, the park didn’t have the money to keep them up like they should be kept up. Rent was pretty minimal. But, yet, everybody said we got to have housing for the, for the seasonals.

BB: Right.

MJV: So, we just kept putting Band-aids on stuff.

PV: That computer error, I, I, Mary Jo will tell you, I frequently would laugh and say, “It’s the only thing that I know that you can, you can ask—the computer system is down. We can’t do anything, but nobody’s at fault.”

MJV: [Laughs] Yeah. Like, huh, computer did it.

PV: Close it down.

BB: Right. Well, just, tell me about some, some stories about working at the parks and something that made you really proud or some, and, and, maybe both separate, personal kind of experiences, whether it’s law enforcement or maintenance or maintaining computers or something that put you over the edge and scared you, or you were, like I said, proud of, or maybe, maybe with law enforcement it was something that you and your colleagues worked together on solving a, solving something, I mean, how much you feel comfortable sharing.
MJV: Sure. I will say one thing about Phillip’s law enforcement. We lived in, when we first married, in one of the first CCC houses out there, and Phillip often got, you know, when he wasn’t working nights, he got calls to go out at night. And that was back before the days of dispatch. So it was just him and whoever other rangers he was meeting. And until somebody has experienced it, you don't understand the fear that you feel when your spouse is putting on their, their weapon belt to go out, because you don't really know what they're going to face.

BB: Yeah.

MJV: That's, that was just all part of it though.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: That, that really is a phenomenon that many people don’t understand. Many of the standards for law enforcement come from inner cities where you might have within a four-block radius, you might have four or five patrol cars. Whereas—

MJV: Fifty-two thousand acres.

PV: In the West, and in parks, generally people are alone, like miles from any help, you know, and [laughs] surprisingly—that's another thing that often came up was the need for the park service night to, not to be in isolation. And they were an isolated agency in the early years that Mary Jo’s talking about. I mean, basically devoid of interaction. And that, with the professional law enforcement came the need to, to start dealing with other law enforcement agencies, not just when you had a terrible incident, call the FBI, and let the FBI deal with the US Attorney. There came the need to be a part of the law enforcement community.

BB: Um-hm. Yeah.
PV: So that was a big change. And park managers had a hard time adjusting to that. But that was necessary because we didn’t, we did not have a [0:40:00] great residential population. The people that could make crimes against the resource basically are usually local people that live in the community, so—

MJV: Right.

PV: If you don’t, if you don’t interact, you, you don’t come to know those, who those people are.

BB: Right. And you got to know many of them, I’m sure.

PV: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

MJV: But you asked about one of the proud moments. When I first started doing radon, I was in what we called the field uniform. I, I didn’t have a badge, and just basically because we were running through the cave all the time, they didn’t want us scuffing up the badges and the Smokey Bear hat and stuff, you know. But when Dave Mulhollock—and Dave Mulhollock was another great mentor, too, to me—but when Dave came to the park as superintendent, he put Bobby Carson and I in Class A uniform. So, got my first Smokey Bear hat, you know. I think I went by Mom and Dad’s one day after I’d just gone in Class A uniform, and my dad looked at me and said, “You look pretty sharp in that uniform.” That was a real proud moment.

BB: Absolutely. I’m sure you felt proud, and he felt proud.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: That and the, the Presidential visit. That’s always a—
MJV: Yeah.

PV: That's always a—

MJV: Yeah, President Reagan came for a visit.

PV: Which that's a—

MJV: In the '80s, right?

PV: Yeah, I guess '82 or something. I don't know if, I can't remember the years.

BB: I think that's right.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: Yeah, I think '82.

MJV: Yeah that was, of course, I love horses. I always got my horse in anyplace I could. And I got to ride—no, that was the fiftieth anniversary.

PV: No, you did both. You were there with, when—

MJV: No, I wasn't on, for the President. But with the fiftieth anniversary, I got to ride my horse as a mounted ranger, just to ride through because we had cars parked everywhere to keep car clouters—at least I could holler on the radio and say, you know, “Hey, Bubba’s over here breaking in.” And, so I got some really neat pictures of kids coming down from Louisville for that big celebration, and it’s like they’d never seen a horse. And my horse just loved it, you know. He’d just put his head
down there. All the kids were gathering around, petting the horse. That was pretty neat too.

BB: Yeah.

PV: But that’s, that’s a, a phenomenon that’s been carried out in all law enforcement agencies. Inner-, you know, cities use equine patrols because—

BB: Yeah.

PV: People, people talk—

MJV: Can interact with them. Yeah.

PV: You know.

BB: Yeah, even in New York City. Yeah.

PV: Yeah.

MJV: Yeah. Yeah.

PV: Most all of the big cities still have their—and the national, I guess the park police still have their unit. I’m, I’m not a hundred percent sure.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: But the park police was, was of course the, you’d call it the professional police agency in the National Park Service. And there was some crossover. We had law enforcement specialists from the park police in every region.
BB: Hm. Um-hm.

PV: And they were a professional force before this whole law enforcement controversy within the parks came about. That’s one of the things that, that Congress and the Department of the Interior did was allow the park police to become—really, they mandated that they become—involved with law enforcement in the park service.

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: And as far as one of the most scared or spooked or whatever, of course, going through the cave monitoring radon, you know, when you’re by yourself, you can talk yourself into a lot of things, you know.

BB: Did you have headlamps and—

MJV: Oh, we had headlamps and stuff, because, yeah, we’d be in parts of the cave that was lit and, and parts that weren’t. And if they had a special trip going, then Bobby or I’d have to go check the radon out for that week. And I know one time, they were going to take some of the seasonals in Crystal Cave, and of course, Crystal Cave was where Floyd Collins’ body was for the longest time, you know. And then you had chains around it, and you could sort of lift it up and peek. But it always sort of spooked me and Bobby going in there anyway, and we had, we’d gone in there, and we’d gone up in the area where the, the masks used to be. Floyd had made some really strange clay masks, and had laid them up there in a, in a passageway. And we were coming back through, and I swear I heard something. And I said, “Bobby, did you hear that?” He said, “Nope, nope, nope.” And we just kept walking. [Laughter]

PV: Well, you were with somebody. That was—
MJV: I was with somebody and it spooked me. Yeah.

PV: When I started in ’72, that was my, hey, there is no question that is my greatest terror, because I had to, late in the afternoon, one or two nights a week, go to Crystal Cave, go in, and I was alone, by myself. It was bad enough because that entrance was, the rock walls were full of copperheads.

MJV: Copperheads. Yeah.

PV: But go into the entrance and go down and check the casket to make sure the remains had not been tampered with. And that, that definitely was, that was trying. [Laughter]

BB: More than busting anybody out in the, on topside, just, you know.

PV: Yeah, it was, what, as far as the issue with enforcement, very seldom did, did I have a great problem with any arrest or, now and again, honestly the, the biggest problem was mentally ill people. They are—

BB: Local ones or people that—or could it be anybody?

PV: Most of those were not local. Most of those were visitors.

MJV: No, most of them were from Texas. No.

PV: They would have a fixation. They would have a fixation with things in the cave. And combine the mental illness with drugs is what occurred many times. Those were without doubt the most dangerous incidents.
MJV: Lord, we had that one incident though, the motorcycle riders from Texas. Phillip and I had just gotten off, and we’d come into town to eat at Hubbard’s Cupboard. We had just gotten our meal. And of course, we lived with a radio. I mean, from the time I was a child, there was always a radio, you know, a walkie-talkie in the house. So we were there, and Phillip had the radio. And it came across the net, you know, that there had been a man shot and bleeding at the post office.

PV: Brad may have even talked about that.

MJV: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: No, he didn’t.

MJV: And, and so Phillip said, “We’re gone.” So we jumped in our car and burned it nine-oh, Phillip did back to the park. And it ended up this big standoff there at the post office, then it used to be a camp store there. You’ll have to go into it because I, there was—

PV: Well.

MJV: There was a trained kill dog and—

PV: There, it was a, two motorcycle gangs that, if, gang members, if you can believe this, just happened, great adversaries, just happened to meet at Denison’s Ferry, which is a back country camp, campsite in the North end of the park. And words and shooting was involved. And it was the Banditos from Texas, I believe, and the, I think maybe the Iron Horsemen. I, I can’t, I can’t remember the second group.

MJV: But they had big Doberman.
PV: And so they ended up carrying their fight over to the, to the visitor's center, the post office. And yes, there was a guy bleeding on the porch there. And Rich Caldwell, a ranger who still lives, a retired ranger who still lives here, and Brad were there before, Brad McDougal was there before we arrived. But [Laughs] the guy on the porch was bleeding, and the guy in the truck had a dog. And I'll never forget Rich saying, “Phil, Phil, he’s an attack dog!” And I said, “Well, Brad, tell that guy he’d best not utter one word.” [Laughter]

MJV: Really. So after they finally got them all rounded up and they, they went to the ranger station to start doing interviews from the guy, the guy’s foot was shot or something, I don’t know. They didn’t have anybody to take notes but me. So here I was, trying to take notes. They were interviewing. I’m wanting to go, “What! No kidding?” You know, I mean, you wouldn’t believe the wild stories they were telling.

PV: That one was of interest to the DEA and the, and the FBI also because—

MJV: Well, yeah. The old girl was wanted for—

PV: Well, two of the people that were surviving witnesses there ended up dead in a short period of time, about six months. So, those kinds of things do happen in the park service, even though they don’t really make headlines in the daily park service bulletin, you know.

BB: Um-hm. Was it hard to keep the local outlaws at bay on different things? I know that the park is used for a lot of different things, and, you know, we talked about poaching a little bit, and—

PV: Well, the, what I would say is that once during the period of when Dick Strange was the chief ranger, who, I was hired and then Dick was hired shortly thereafter.
During that period when law enforcement was, number one, we had some resources. And number two we had the, the skills and the techniques, abilities to, to carry out professional operations. Once the local population figured out that we had no hesitation to arrest them, to track them, to get warrants outside the park to search for things they’d done, archaeological resources, [0:50:00] or whatever. After four or five, ten years, the US Attorneys started, to put it kindly, they started appreciating the professionalism that was, they were seeing from the people in the park service. So they became very involved and then it became obvious to even some hard-headed poaches and people that violate archaeological sites, netters on the river, it became obvious to them that they did not want to go to federal court, because federal court was not like they were accustomed to.

MJV: Not a happy place.


PV: So, after—exactly. So after, after that period of time, those type incidents started to diminish. But it, and it, and they will as long as there’s staff. But when staffing levels drop, why, they recognize that, you know, if you don’t have any, if you don’t have any presence, they know that.

BB: Um-hm. Um-hm.

MJV: Because in your later years, why the marijuana patches were the, were the big deal.

PV: Now, when we had the 650 cars, and I might be wrong about that, but it was a lot.

BB: Yeah.
PV: What’d that parking lot hold.

MJV: I don’t know.

BB: Was it about the same size as the current parking lot? Is it the—

PV: Yeah, and all those fields—

MJV: All the fields, too.

PV: All the way up to the service center would be filled—

MJV: Just filled with cars.

PV: With cars. And there were professionals from even Louisville and Nashville, and most of them was city folks who knew that there were parked, cars parked there with valuables in it, in them.

MJV: Well, the car clouts.

PV: That the people were going to disappear for two hours or more in the cave, and that they couldn’t take valuables with them.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: So, there was a period of years there where the car clouts and thefts were just, it was a, a daily problem. But you can imagine that’s, for a good thief, that was the optimum. People, you didn’t know, I mean, if they were next to a car, and somebody
was, those guys got, they were pretty good at getting in cars. You’d, they didn’t know who was next, who was next to them.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: They might think they were getting in their own car. So that was, that kind of problem existed.

BB: So you had, did you have a parking lot assigned to a parking lot patrol?

PV: Oh yeah. We even used horses there for a while.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: Used horses and, and undercover, we used undercover, those type things, once law enforcement came, became established, well, you, it, you would use those techniques to deal with those problems.

BB: Um-hm. Yeah.

PV: So, probably the biggest, obviously the, I think the biggest event that we dealt with was that Presidential visit because that is, as you can imagine, you know, the Secret Service arrives like a month and a half—

MJV: A month and a half ahead of time.

PV: Before the event. Even, I mean, we’re talking even if it’s a, an appearance and the President says, “Hi.” It’s a big deal. And it, and involved I don’t know how many rangers from other areas. So that, that was a, that was a big event.
MJV: Yeah. Of course, the worst, Murphy reared his ugly head that day. The plane with the President was just getting ready to land. I was there in the parking lot at the visitor’s center, and they had lookouts on all the tops of the buildings and stuff, you know. And there in front of the visitor’s center used to be an old bicycle rack. And there were several bicycles sitting there. Well, just about the time the bird was getting ready to shut, to drop down, we heard, “Ka-pow!”

PV: You can imagine.

MJV: Well, everybody thought, Oh my God, it’s gunshot. And I mean, you, guns came out, and everybody was looking, and they started taking the bird back up. And they very quickly realized it was a bicycle tire—

PV: I think one of the interpreters saw the tire.

MJV: That had gotten hot and blown. [Laughter] It was like, ah.

PV: I believe that President Reagan probably came to the park because, obviously, with his California connections, he recalled the, there was a movie about Floyd Collins in the ’50s.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: And I believe he recalled that movie, which probably made him, even though he had an appearance in Bowling Green, if I recall, I think that probably made him come to the cave.

MJV: But when they handed him his, they gave him a Smokey Bear hat, and when they handed it to him, it was a little bit big. Well, it wasn’t his first rodeo. He took out
his handkerchief, and folded it, and rolled it up in the headband, and it fit perfect. He knew how to make a hat fit.

BB: That's right.

PV: And the park wasn’t new to me. I was, I was born here in Cave City, so, until I became an employee out there, it was, I was another local user. [0:55:00]

BB: Um-hm.

PV: And—

BB: Took a class trip there and all that stuff too?

PV: Yeah. Picnic, family picnics, all those things were big. Fourth of July. But with no insight into what really went about managing the park, you know.

BB: So that, you, we talked about, a little bit about mari-, the marijuana and different things like that. There was some [ ].

PV: Yeah. During these years, I was, I was probably involved operationally with Brad more than, Brad McDougal, more than anyone else. Because he became the law enforcement specialist when I was the chief ranger. And, yeah, marijuana then was a, it went through that period just like the poaching, the river violations. People knew that, number one, unless they were caught in the patch, there was no—

MJV: No way to tie them to it.

PV: No way to tie them to it. But then again, we got very good at that too, with cameras and, I, the biggest field that I remember was 700 and some plants. But it
was a challenge for, for the guys operationally then to use whatever techniques, and cameras mostly. But even in a field that large, we were able to get a photograph of the person in the field. And that turned out, again, I, I talked about the interaction with, with external law enforcement. That turned out to be a part of a much larger sales and growing operation in the nor-, Michigan, Wisconsin, those areas. They had what they called land contracts. And it was a group known as the Mafia, what did they call it?

BB: Cornbread Mafia.

PV: Yeah. Cornbread Mafia. So, in fact, that guy that we identified was affiliated with that group and was part of a much larger operation, obviously with DEA at that particular time, so.

BB: Yeah.

PV: But that was the largest field that I remember. And then, I can’t remember, I can remember maybe some fishhooks as booby traps. Those guys that were living in the field wanted something to make noise, you know. But generally, just a, if you’re professional with people, I never found that it was a, that it was very difficult to, to enforce the law against them, and even take them to jail. I could, right now, I have people that I arrested that are still my friends. And—

MJV: Which is odd. [Laughs]

BB: But kind of strangely understandable.

MJV: Yeah. Yeah.
PV: But professionalism has a lot to do with that, you know. You treat people with respect, they, they will generally respect the brand you’re riding for. And—

MJV: And that’s the deal.

PV: Some—

MJV: That’s what we always said. We rode for the brand. We might have—

PV: Disagreed with a lot of it.

MJV: Might have disagreed with some of it.

PV: But now, like the law enforcement issue, I disagreed with that because it was officer safety. It was ridiculous, you know, given my, I mean, I’d already been to a, at that time, the military police school at Fort Gordon, Georgia, was pretty professional.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: So, I was appalled at some of the policies the park service had at that time. But I believe that deal in the valley out there involved some of the park staff giving axe handles to the, some of the staff, and advising them to go out there and beat the so-called hippies up with, I don’t have to say any more, you can see in the modern society how that, that can not work.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: And that was a time when many, many people were coming to the parks. So, you, you weren’t just dealing with mom and pop on a—
MJV: On a Sunday afternoon.

PV: On a Sunday afternoon. You were dealing with a great diversity of the population, and many of them with very liberal views. And to say, I guess it’d be fair to say that the park service was pretty conservative at that time. [Laughs] So, but all those things worked themselves out.

MJV: Yep.

PV: We both had great careers, you know.

MJV: Had great careers. Wouldn’t have tr-, wouldn’t have traded it for the world. I said, when my mom and dad passed away, I, I know they both still bled green and gray, I—

PV: And what, one of the—I didn’t mean to interrupt.

MJV: Phillip and I tried to maintain interests otherwise, you know.

PV: Well, it was a small enough organization, and it did, that husband and wife teams, which were very, which are very common in the park service. There’s still, there can be those—

[INTERRUPTION—PAUSE IN RECORDING]

BB: Okay. Thanks.

PV: Well, there are some sensitivities when, when two people are [1:00:00] working in a unit that small, and somebody’s always willing to say, “Well, chief ranger took that position because his wife’s in maintenance.” And I, I’ve often said, it’s really
strange that people have asked me before, what my perception of my staff had of me, what, what that was, and I've often, I've often said they, that many times, they were very critical of me because I was a division chief and dealt with four or five other division chiefs, and there's only so much money. And obviously, the other division chiefs' staffs are the same way, they see their entity as being the most important. So, probably, some of the staff's most critical of me because they felt that I was too supportive of other divisions in the park. But that's understandable because—

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: There is, there was—

PV: They were in a directed, they were in more of a directed position.

MJV: Right. But there is, there was, and now is just so much money to go, you know, very little money to go around.

BB: Right. And doing more with less is something I hear.

MJV: Yes.

PV: Well, that's a, I would point to that as being a major problem with the park service. Basic operations is not popular anymore in the park service, whereas in Mary Jo's dad's era, all the—

MJV: That was what there was.

PV: That's what you were judged on. What, how good a job did you do in running the park? As more and more politics became involved, and, how can I say this?
MJV: Resume building and— [Laughs]

PV: Yeah. The selection process became more about what new have you done lately? That turned superintendents into more aggressive pursuers of wanting to say something about a new initiative, rather than saying, “Hey, we had a great year.”

MJV: The bathrooms were clean, and nobody got killed. [Laughs]

PV: And it, it reached the point there, before my retirement, when I, I just thought it was ridiculous the, the money that was taken from basic operations for new initiatives, many of which, I am certain can’t be found in policy or regulation anywhere as a mandate of the National Park Service.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: But they were popular with politicians, and they were popular with the resumes. So you start to see the park resources diminish. When, what I knew as basic operations, which was basically the interpretive, interpretive division, the maintenance division, ranger division, that being law enforcement, wildfire and structural fire, and EMS. So you, you start seeing that diminish, and I suspect that's continuing.

BB: Right. So it’s kind of like a, a, a pork project without any pork. Right, without any—

MJV: Right.

BB: Taking away from the basic—
MJV: Right.

BB: Your basic structure.

MJV: Right. We—

PV: I, I can give you—I’m sorry.

MJV: That’s all right. We could get all kinds of s-, what we call soft money to do projects and stuff, but your basic operations money was just, it was set, and when the cuts were made, every region, and in Washington, that’s where the cuts were made. And it, it, it just hit the heart—

PV: Yeah.

MJV: Of, of the park.

PV: Yeah, I can give a specific example. The, I don’t know whether I was wrong or right, but the park service was big for a while on what they call the DARE program, which was an outreach program to the community for the purpose of keeping youth from, from using drugs. Well, I admit that that’s a, that is a great idea. But there is absolutely no mandate anywhere in the National Park Service to do that.

BB: Right. It’s not really [ ].

PV: There is a mandate to keep people from growing marijuana in the park, to, destroying resources. But those type things pulled those valuable resources that I’m talking about. And it was a great thing. Superintendent gets to go shake hands with the politicians, and the, but the reason that I didn’t like the program is because, as a law enforcement professional, I knew that there were s-, there were study after
study that showed that the program was no, of no value. And I believe now, you very seldom even see the program.

BB: Right.

PV: But it was not effective. And, and quite to the contrary, some studies showed that it was teaching young people to use drugs.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: So you see a lot of those type of things that I, I was just a basic operations kind of guy.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: You know.

BB: Yeah.

PV: Take care of the people, if they’re sick. [1:05:00] Take care of the resources.

BB: Yeah, what, I mean, what do you think the basic, you’ve had good crews. I mean, you, you’ve enjoyed the career. You’ve been proud of the career.

MJV: Yes.

PV: Oh, no questions. It was a great career for us, you know.

MJV: No question. Um-hm.
BB: Yeah.

PV: Now, I did, there was this, this deal that I dealt with. As a park ranger, in the old park service, you basically couldn't advance because they would say, “You don’t have any supervisory experience.” Well, what, ’79?

MJV: Um-hm.

PV: After this initial law enforcement controversy, I had an opportunity to go to one of the youth programs called YCC, very similar to the CCCs that her, that her, her dad was in. And in that program, I was able to get supervisory experience. I was able to get managerial experience. And then I, I had the qualifications by the park service standards to come back to, to a supervisory position, which is what I did. But—

BB: Did you have to go away from the park to do that?

PV: I never, that’s why they say I’m a, [Laughs] I’m unique in that, in that way, because I had some involvement with Cumberland Gap and Abraham Lincoln, but I never, I was always stationed at Mammoth Cave through my entire career. Now, I, that was a, that was a park service cultural tradition, because any analysis would tell you that there is no difference in professional supervision and professional management at one park or another as opposed to any corporation. They’re all the same. So that was one of those park service things like Mary Jo talked about that—

MJV: Yeah.

PV: It was a pick up the phone, you need to move, and I’ll give you a promotion. But I was able to, with the help of people like Bob Deskins and a lot of people still believe that Mary Jo’s dad hired me, but that’s not true. He didn’t. He wasn’t there until after I was already hired. I can’t, was it Benoise who was there?
MJV: Hm.

PV: He was gone when I was hired, already transferred. Who was that? I can’t remember who the superintendent was. At any rate, he was, he had already transferred, and Bob Burns was the chief ranger who hired me.

MJV: Chief Ranger. But one thing the park service, besides the wonderful career, I mean, I was, I was very blessed in the fact, I brought up the computers earlier, that I, I was fairly good with computer programs, and I was able to get in and do a lot of teaching with the maintenance management type programs, and I was able to go to a lot of different parks on the government’s dime, and you know, teach, teach the program.

BB: You trained.

MJV: And trained, yeah. Go to Grand Canyon. I went to San Francisco on a think-tank kind of thing for a week out there. I mean I was very blessed for the travel with that, that I got to do.

PV: Great people.

MJV: Yeah.

PV: In the park service. All those that we worked with.

BB: Great friends today that you’re retired with even and stuff like that, too?

PV: Yeah.
MJV: Yeah.

PV: For sure.

MJV: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. We—

PV: So it was a great career. It, it would have be, those things that I talked about as problems would be no different if I was with a police agency or with an EMS division. Those kind of things happen.

MJV: All right, in fact, the friendship, when we were, my dad was at Shenandoah, there was a fellow up there that was struck with lightening. He was the ranger that was struck more times with lightening than—

PV: Seven times.

MJV: Yeah, than, than any other—and strangely enough—

PV: Supposedly.

MJV: Yeah. A reporter from the Washington Post called, it was last year, wasn’t it?

PV: Um-hm.

MJV: And had gotten my name because my dad had worked with this guy up there. And of course I was a teenager, a young teenager. I didn’t, I knew the incident, but I didn’t really remember anything. But I remembered a young ranger who was this Bill Nichols that Phillip was talking about that he had worked with so closely when, when he first got into the park service. And Bill was retired down in Mississippi. So I got in contact with Bill Nichols, and Bill had actually supervised this guy. But I mean,
you know, you still keep your little contacts, you know. It’s, in fact, that’s, that’s the one thing that I, that I did. I, you know, you hate to pick out those gravestones for your parents, but my mom and dad had a very, very close relationship, and they, they actually passed away within about four months of each other. So, I had, when I picked out the gravestone, I thought, you know, they, they dedicated their life to the National Park Service. So I studied and studied, and I finally came up with a, with a drawing. And the guy who did the stone did beautiful work. It started out at the top with a, [1:10:00] a picture of the Historic Entrance in granite, and moved around to a, to a bear for the Smokey Mountains, and then to the Blue Ridge range for the Shenandoah, and then the Pinnacle area for Cumberland Gap, then back to Mammoth Cave. I said, they made the full circle.

BB: That’s nice.

MJV: So.

PV: You know, in that whole issue that I was talking about with the, the mobility, that too changed because—

MJV: Oh yeah, because—

PV: Someone was smart enough to recognize that it made no sense to take a GS9 park ranger, spend $150,000 to move them to another park for a GS9 position. The only benefactor there was the ranger was getting to ex-, experience a new, new area.

MJV: Right, but when my father got in the park service, the park moved you. That was when park housing was all, you know, the Mission 66 houses and stuff, and you’re moving from park house to park house. Nobody lived out in the community. They paid the moving van for your, your load. You were allotted so much. Anything over that, you had to pay. And so the moves weren’t that expensive.
PV: Maybe $20,000.

MJV: Yeah. But then, in the late ’60s, early ’70s, the park housing started going down. People started moving out in the communities. And then the park service started getting in the pant, the house-buying business. If you couldn’t sell your house within so many months, then the park would have it appraised, and the park would end up buying it. And I mean, that would be part of your move. I remember when we moved John—

PV: Gentry.

MJV: Gentry from California. Why, his move was close to $200,000. I mean it was, it was incredible, because we had to buy, the park service had to buy his house out there.

PV: So that employee was basically doing the same thing at another park, and the park service has spent $200,000, so—

MJV: Yeah, so that’s why [].

PV: Great for the employee, but it was pure business that brought an end to it. Now, it’s not uncommon to see somebody spend eighteen years in one area.

MJV: Yeah, the mobility has—

PV: You know.

MJV: Has ceased as much now because of that high costs.
BB: Do you think that’s the same—you know, I, that’s the story I hear at Mammoth Cave because there are so many things about Mammoth—I think it’s the area, and people love it. Do you think that’s the same at, at all parks, is—

PV: Oh, yeah, there’s no question that that’s—

MJV: Yes.

PV: That’s been a financial issue throughout the park service.

MJV: Yeah.

BB: Kind of people staying in one [ ]?

PV: Anyone, any auditor, any auditor would question why you’re doing this. And there’s some cases where you need to do it, obviously. Those people that, you know, there’s, there’s a level. Now you’ve got that professional level. Chief ranger in law enforcement, unless you’re going to a regional office or the Washington office, most, most people don’t have, they don’t aspire to be superintendents anyway, so.

MJV: Yeah, well, a friend of mine down at Cumberland Gap that I went to high school with, that I didn’t remember until years later, he went in the military, in the air force, came back, moved close to Middlesboro, and ended up as the chief of maintenance there at, at Middlesboro. Park didn’t have to move him, you know.

BB: Um-hm.

MJV: And he came in, I think he was like a colonel in the, in the Air Force, so he was more than qualified to, to do the job.
BB: Um-hm.

PV: So diminishing funds had a, you know, has a lot to do with—

MJV: With the mobility.

PV: With the mobility issue.

BB: Um-hm. These are great thoughts. Do you have any final things you'd like to share with me? We've shared some great stuff today.

PV: Well, some of those, I would like to say, you know, some of those were just sharing experiences that, that I had through my career. But those, the career was great. And I wouldn't trade anything for the opportunity that I had.

MJV: Yeah. And I, I wouldn't have traded, even though, I, I said I never grew up with family. I was an only child and I always lived away from my aunts and my uncles and stuff, but, but still, you know, I, I wouldn't have traded my experiences that I had with, with my mom and dad growing up, and I sure wouldn't have, wouldn't have traded the experience of meeting my husband and having a good life and a good career together with him.

PV: Of course, we were, let's see, from '75 until when'd we—

MJV: Eighty-one.

PV: Til '81? We were in required occupancy. I don't know if anybody's brought up that concept or not.

BB: Uh-uhn. No tell me about it.
PV: Well, it was traditional for the park service to—

MJV: It might have been '83, '84.

PV: Choose positions that they deemed to be too critical to be out of the park. Now, the, the complication of that was, other agencies, if they did that, then they would pay you for it. The park service would simply issue a letter saying, “You are required to be in this residence here in the park.”

MJV: “Here’s your rent bill.”

PV: And you would continue to pay rent. [1:15:00] Well, you know, with other agencies, basically saying, if we want you here, we’re going to pay you to be here. So, again, that turned into being one of those growing pains for the park service, and obviously, in the, in the modern era, that, you, you can imagine that that does not exist, you know.

BB: Um-hm.

PV: We even had, we had an IRS issue with, with that, and the IRS, IRS people basically said, “Well, you know, the park service just doesn’t know what they’re doing, because we, it’s, we deal with this with other agencies, and if you’re required to live there then it’s obviously—”

MJV: Your residence is provided. You don’t pay for it.

PV: Your, no, you don’t pay for it.

BB: Um-hm.
PV: Or if you do, it's deductible. So those type things, you know, it's just growing pains that all agencies have. Poor old IRS, right now, is having their share of—

MJV: Growing pains.

PV: Growing pains.

BB: Absolutely.

MJV: So.

BB: Now, one thing I didn’t ask you about, and I talked a little bit about Jo-, with Joy and with Vicky, and about, and with the time that you were there, and maybe even in, in the maintenance department, the change in women, more, more roles for women in the parks. I mean was it a, was it an issue? Is it, was it a, was it, tell me about your experience of, or—

MJV: I had a very strange experience. When I, when I went to work at monitoring radon, my office was up there in the maintenance yard. And I don’t remember if there were any females on the maintenance crew at that time or not. I wasn’t on the crew, maintenance crew, but I was in the maintenance yard, and I, I guess first, third day on the job, I, I just had a [ ] office with no bathroom. I went to go up to the carpenter shop to go to the bathroom, and was like, there wasn’t a lock on the door. There was two stalls and a urinal, but no lock on the outside door, so I was like, hm, so I hollered and got somebody to watch the door while I went in the bathroom, and so, needless to say, I came back, and I told Bobby, I said, “Bobby, there’s no lock on that bathroom up there.” And it was like, now you know, we’ve never needed it, so, [Laughs] so they had to put a lock on the bathroom.
BB: Right.

MJV: And, of course, when I got in a position to, as I could, you know, I would try to hire females into the, the maintenance division. Maintenance obviously is a, generally a pretty hot and sweaty job. I had one tractor operator, female, that, she also operated the, the ferry and stuff too, and, but, we just—

PV: I think Vicky came, her first job was with YECC with me.

MJV: Her first job was with YECC. Uh-huh. Yeah.

PV: Which was, was the works program.

MJV: Right. Right. But yeah, when, I remember when, at Shenandoah, my dad’s secretary, Ms. Reeves, Dad put her in uniform, and that was like, that was like the Holy Grail, you know, putting a woman in uniform, a secretary, a woman. But, you know, she met the public a lot, because she was there at the, at the desk, and so he put her in uniform. So that was kind of a big deal too.

BB: Um-hm. Probably another evolutionary thing.

MJV: Yeah.

BB: You know, talking about—

PV: Well, it happened in law enforcement. Women are very good in law enforcement.

MJV: Oh, yeah.
PV: The park service sort of became a leader in that in federal agencies. Became much more common for females to, to, to be in law enforcement. They've always been strong in EMS, and they, they do a great job.

BB: Yeah, we've got a new chief ranger that's, now.


PV: Laura was there when we were there. She came back.

BB: Right.

MJV: Fine lady.

BB: That's good.

PV: Really, a lot of situations, females have the, they have ability to not exhibit some of the more, I guess you'd call it the more aggressive nature—

MJV: Well, I—

PV: Of men, with, with, with perpetrators.

MJV: I'm on the Cave City fire department. I don't do fires, but I do EMS. And so, if I make an EMS run, I'm the one that keeps people calm, you know. [Laughs] And that's just, a lot of times, what the, what the females can, can accomplish.

BB: Um-hm. Well, thanks for your time today.

MJV: You're quite welcome. We enjoyed it.
BB: It's been really great.

PV: Brings back some old memories.

MJV: Yeah, boy.

PV: You've already done Brad?

[INTERRUPTION—PAUSE IN RECORDING]

PV: [ ] our issue. Early in my career, the land management agencies were basically protecting the West. Well, as more and more people were determined to have big estates with wooden roofs out West, it became more than the federal government could handle. So now, you see that role somewhat diminishing, and I know you notice on TV those very professional wildfire-fighting units hired by the cities now. So that's diminished some of the pressure that, in the wildfire area, that, that it, that, like through the mid-, late-'70s, early '80s, there was tremendous pressure to send your resources out there.

MJV: Oh, yeah. Send, send your resources out.

BB: Help out with these fires from your park?

PV: Oh, yeah. I mean you, yes.

MJV: Oh, yeah.
BB: Hm.

PV: Not uncommon to have three, four, or five people—

MJV: You’d send red-carded people out, and they’d be gone for a month. Yeah.

PV: So.

BB: So that would leave you short-handed at times?

MJV: And—

PV: Oh, well, yeah, you just learned to deal with those type, type of things back then.

MJV: Certain of the maintenance guys were red carded and fire fighters, so, it would leave maintenance and rangers short.

PV: But, now, you see, through the process that, that has occurred with so much need out West, all these, all these large communities have built their own. There, there’s still the smoke-jumpers and the federal units, but you can readily see that a lot of the, the wildfire now is being handled by the local departments who have specialized in, in wildfire. So those type of things occur. But those draws on your resources were, the same thing with law enforcement events. You might get a, you might get a call from a special event—

MJV: [ ] Yeah.

PV: At another park for four, like a, I think we had forty rangers here for the Presidential visit from other parks. So that, that occurred all the time.
BB: Um-hm.

PV: And I guess they still have the SET teams. I'm not sure. They call them special event teams, not SWAT teams. [Laughs]

BB: All right.

[INTERRUPTION—PAUSE IN RECORDING]

BB: So tell me about that, Phil, we were just talking about—

PV: Well, when I was a, a young ranger in law enforcement, I sort of, I guess I had a reputation of having a long hair, which I still, I still carry that. But it was not uncommon to get called for special events.

BB: Hm.

PV: And on one occasion, at the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, a group of partiers had taken over the campground, and basically expelled all park staff, and decided they were going to take up residence, and sort of have a, a, it was sort of a mixture of drinking, and smoking, and, and just enjoying themselves. But when we got down there, it was one of my first experiences with the park police. There were three of four of us that got there really quick, because we were close. And we were told there’s some Job, empty Job Corps barracks here, make out the best you can, get in there and find you a bunk. Well, the, this was a major event, so the advance people from the park police who had been called, they showed up, and I guess park staff said, “Well, you know, there’s the, there’s the Job Corps, the old Job Corps barracks.” And the advance man for the park police said, “You don’t understand. There are motels in this town. There are rental cars. There are caterers. And when you get those things arranged, our SET team will be here.” So that was one of my first
experiences with the so-called structured law enforcement at, at a SWAT, you know, a SWAT type incident. But to carry the story further, I, with my long hair, I was, I was obviously a good target for the guys to say, "Hey Phil, get your, got, get on your civvies, and we want to send you in there, and you, you, as you go through there, why, you can do some recon for us, tell us what's going on." [Laughs] And well, I did that. And we had, now had a parameter, so I went on the inside and I guess that was like a hundred and f-, it was a big campground, maybe 100, 100 sites, 150, I don't know. Big area, lots of people. So I start down through there, and I hadn't gone probably, maybe 400 feet, and everybody's partying. You can imagine, you see, you can imagine everybody had their, their vans and [1:25:00] their tents, and there's a big party going on, and you could, you could pretty much get high just breathing. And I went around the, a little bend there, and somebody said, "Hey, Phil. What are you doing here?" [Laughs] And it turned out to be a cousin of mine who was there enjoying, enjoying the, the event. [Laughter] But I, I quickly said, "Ken, just be quiet. Go back to doing what you're doing." But as I went through there, I, I guess this terminology is, is not used in the drug world now, but, this guy comes up to me and says, "Hey man, you want a lid?" Which a lid was a, an amount of marijuana, and I, [Laughs] and I said, I gave it my best shot. I said, "Look, buddy, I'm a law enforcement officer, and you're under arrest. Don't yell, and don't run." Well, you can imagine. What am I going to do, you know, there's, there's 500 people in there. He, he both ran and yelled. [Laughter] They said that, they said when he went out the bottom of the campground, he was yelling, "We've been infiltrated." [Laughter] Spies at the campground. But I, that was one of the, one of the interesting stories. We took the campground back. [Laughter]

BB: You took the—

PV: But, but it took the, I believe that was in Virginia, wasn't it Mary Jo that—

MJV: In Virginia, yeah.
PV: It took the Virginia state police the, the, the SWAT team, and, the, and twenty or thirty rangers, and finally, cutting off the water that, to take the campground back. But that’s a, that was one of my more interesting stories. [Laughter] It was sort of fun. Nobody got hurt down there.

BB: That’s good.

PV: That was the good deal.

[RECORDING STOPS—END OF INTERVIEW]