Interviewee: Nancy Eileen Muleady-Mecham (NM)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
Subject: Nancy recounts her work as firefighter in Sierra National Forest, backcountry ranger at Dinkey Lakes, and naturalist at Sequoia National Park, in addition to describing specialization within the Park Service.
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TM: Today is Wednesday, it's February 24th, 2021. This is part six of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Nancy Eileen Muleady-Mecham. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Nancy, how are you today?

NM: I'm well, thank you Tom.

TM: Great to hear it. Nancy, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

NM: Yes. I was going to make a quick clarification in the last date I had talked about 1986, working as a paramedic for Mobile Life Support in California from—for seven months, and I just wanted to clarify that that was in Santa Barbara County. So I worked in Solvang, Los Olivos, and Santa Maria in that area, so Santa Barbara so, I just wanted to say that I worked in many different counties in California as a paramedic.

TM: Alright. Last time we talked about you working at Death Valley, out of Furnace Creek I think from October of 1989 to April of 1990, and what—what happened in April of 1990?

NM: April 1990, that's when the seasons for seasonals, is completed because it's about to get warm. Not that many people go to this cold winter park, so they go down just to their skeletons and staff permanent employee, so I went to teach park medics again at VMC, and I did that for many years. I would go finish in one place and go teach the park medic class before it started—Sequoia National Park, which is where I went in 1990, and again worked there as a park ranger as a paramedic at Sequoia national park, and then when I finished that, I returned that Fall, let me see if I got this correct now. Yeah, so at the end of that, I worked as a seminar instructor—I'm sorry, it should be—hold on, because I'm looking at different things here. Finishing that in the fall and of 1990, and then 91, went back to Death Valley and then I'm a little off on the date here, but that's when the—yep, January of 1991, is when my fiancé, Kent Mecham, he received a job offer at the—the Grand Canyon, so when I was at the

Death Valley, He received an offer to be the structural fire chief at Grand Canyon, so he transferred, and then I also went to the Grand Canyon at that time. His name was Kent Mecham, and so when I went there, I then began to work all year round as a seasonal. If you recall, I got my quote “golden key”, my status by working at Fort Ord as a paramedic for the Department of the Army. When you get that status, as long as you’re working for the government, the three year clock stops. and it also allows you to work year-round without having the problems with being a seasonal from now, beginning in 1991, in January I went to the Grand Canyon and because it was winter time, I worked as a seasonal naturalist for Chuck Wahler, who I think was the finest supervisor I ever had. He was a naturalist.

TM: Tell me about Chuck.

NM: Chuck, I’m still in touch with him now. He and his wife Sally. He was the ranger in charge of interpretation or naturalist at the south rim of the Grand Canyon, working underneath the chief naturalist or in chief of interpretation, and so when I worked for Chuck, he was very open to new ideas. I worked out at the Yavapai museum, which was the geology museum, and so our focus was giving the geology talks, how the Grand Canyon came to be, but he was open to doing anything else and he was inspiring, and just to give you an idea the kind of person he was, and I thought, Kent had asked me to marry him, and I had asked him for some time off, and when I went to ask him for time off, I—I thought "Oh, I'll ask for—you know, oh a week to 10 days off” and cause—you know, during the season, it was April every time, you know, and so I went to him and I said “Chuck, you know, we’re getting married.” and I said, “We would like to have some time off for a honeymoon” and I—I asked him. I said “Could I have a week?” and he goes “Are you sure that’s enough? Don’t you need 2 weeks?” And I said “Oh, I would like to have 2 weeks.” He goes “You take 2 weeks.” And it’s from Chuck Wahler that I learned, when I was later a supervisor, that if you take care of people, the rest is taken care of. If you screw the people, everything messes up. And so to me, I would do anything for Chuck, and I did. I worked every day for work. I was the acting supervisor for a while at Yavapai museum. When the SCAs came in, I trained them. Yeah, that’s a lot of effort to do for no extra pay, but I wanted to do it for Chuck, you know. I wanted to do it for the operation and he—like I said, we are still in touch. His kids were very young at the time, and so when they would go on vacation, they would stay at our house with Kent and I, and I think that Jacob was maybe four at the time and Erin maybe seven, and it was great to have them over and they’d come back and they’d go back to the house and later group up with that—you know, the family group up and when Jacob came over many times. Once I was working on my backyard with my dog and trying to get rid of all these rocks and stuff and I hire Jacob to help me do this. I had also hired him to help me train my dog and so we’re out there picking up rocks and sort of going through the yard, and he—he’s reciting the Torah to me because his Bar Mitzvah coming up, you know, and he goes “How does that sound now?” and I said “Sounds great, Jacob! I have no clue what you’re saying, but it sounds cool.” So, it was just a wonderful thing. Later, I went to his wedding and Erin—Erin and I just sent another card too, so it’s the family that we adopted each other, and that was just so important for me at that time. My life, so many things. So anyway, Chuck and Sally Wahler were wonderful, so I worked there in the wintertime at the Yavapai geology museum, and also then when it came to the end of that season, I had applied for protection and they picked me up quite quickly because I was a paramedic as a south rim protection ranger, and that meant south rim patrol during the day time. The benefit of that is that I also get to be a horse patrol ranger, and I’ve been riding since I was 3 years old. My uncle had a ranch, and we used to ride all the time and I remember my earliest memories. I had pictures of me at three years old, and I—one horse, Sam was getting old, so my uncle said don’t ride Sam double, so my older brother talked us into riding Sam triple …that’s right, three of them did that, that’s not two. We also got to Sam and we were immediately bucked off, and so I learned not to listen to my brother Tom, but I’ve been riding ever since. Even today, I still lead back to country seminars for

the Rock Creek station, so being on horse patrol was really good. You went to the training. It was really, very wonderful. It was much more of a public relations thing, but I could gallop up to a call and I would be there for people, so it was just—and I—you know, situations for me, and when you're on day shift at the Grand Canyon as opposed to night shift, which I later worked as well. When I became a permanent, the day shift is more public relations, people problems, separated parties, emergency medical services, search and rescue, all—all the things that I wanted to do as a ranger. Later on when I became a permanent, I was on the night shift in the winter (and dayshift in the summer), it was more of a law enforcement, more people making problems, not just separated parties. People who've using medication, their drugs, people who are becoming intoxicated in the winter time, it was the worst when I was on night shift in the winter time, because that's when you had a lot of violent situations. Shorter, shorter days, longer nights. People getting in arguments intoxicated, so it—it really was not the best situation, but if I had to pick one, being day shift summer as opposed to day shift winter, was perfect for me. So, in this time from 91 to 92, I was hired as a seasonal position, meaning I had time off, and in the time off, I worked for Chuck at the Yavapai museum because I had status. So, here I worked—it was a little frustrating at first. My supervisor was a man named Mike Meyer. He was a supervisor, and he was a little bit—he was kind of a control guy. He was a good guy but in control, so I just come from Death Valley where all this vehicle accidents, and climbing off cliffs, doing all the stuff, and you wear—you know, your jeans to do all this. He wanted us to wear class day pants all the time on work patrol, and I thought, "We have to get this dry cleaned, they get ripped easily. Blood does not come out well." So, that was something we went around with, but he wanted because he was the supervisor, so when we wore, I said, "We look good, but you know, this is not enough uniform on." Later, we got to wear jeans after we all started making our bills, one for replacement pants, so that worked for a while, but anyway, so I worked a lot, because I was the only paramedic on the day shift. There was another one by the name of Brian Smith, who was on the night shift, and there were some park medics amongst the staff, but not on the day shift. I—as soon as—I should also clarify this time, all the calls that dispatch sent to south rim went to Mike Meyers and he assigned somebody to go to it. That's how it worked when I first started there.

TM: Oh, that's odd. So—so instead of dispatch.

NM: Going to the shift supervisor or the individual ranger, all the calls went to Mike Meyers, and then he assigned people, so for—for quite some time, I got all the medicals and I didn't get to do the investigations and I didn't do this and I didn't—you know, maybe I'll do it. We also did vehicle lockouts, so when people would need lock their keys in the car, there wasn't a locksmith in the early years, so we went to training. We learned how to put tools in the car, wires, kinds of stuff, and so we used to—I guess I can say we used to compete on lockouts…who could open a car door faster. Out the scene, you say "526—526 on scene." And then you'd go and unlock the car, and you'd talk to the people for a little bit. You go back to your car, and you say "526 available." Well, all that took an amount of time. You wanted to show people how good you were at this, so you got 526 on scene, you said "Hi" and you open the car door and you said "I'm available." And then you'd talk to the people so it was a little competition if that happened, you could open a car. I could open all the cars back then, so it was—it was pretty cool to be able to do that. This happened especially if there's somebody with a baby in the car or something like that. But people usually lock their keys in the car, lock them in the trunk or something like that. Another call that was happening often early on—this was the call I told you about—off tape, that I wanted to remember and I'm going out and remembering it now is we have a—a district ranger whose name. Well, I don't know. John Benjamin, and he was not a nice person to women, and he was—you know, wear flat hat all the time, have a sharp uniform, and I had just gotten out of my car at the parking area outside of the ranger operation, which is where our—our headquarters was, and I was reaching in

to get my hat, and he said "Muleady" which was my last name, "get your hat on." You know, I was getting it, but you know, he was the kind of person who would just yell at you and then look real mean and walk away, and it's not a good—good guy in my opinion in terms of caring about me as a person, as a ranger. He took care of the guys a lot better than he took care of me, but this is life. But anyway, one of the things that used to drive him crazy and he wanted us to get on it, was that there were groups of people who came up. Some of them were with a group called Tauck Tours, but they many other people. Usually they were students or kids, teenagers or young adults, and they were not from America. They were from Australia, they were from all over the world, and they desperately wanted to take a license plate from America home and so would steal them off of cars, and so when somebody would take a license plate, the people would report it to the rangers. Not only did we have to take reports, but we have to put it in the national report database, which called for a lot of work in case a bad guy had actually stolen it and could use it to rob a bank. We knew they were being taken for souvenirs, but we couldn't ignore, you know, just in case. So, each one of those was time consuming, lot of paperwork. This was before computers, so we were doing it by hand, typing it on a typewriter, and so it was—it has just—because that spent a whole lot of our time. Not much on the call, but the follow-up. Benjamin just went crazy over it, and so did we. So one day, I am driving through the Bright Angel parking lot and just—just kind of patrolling around, and I see a young man—maybe 18 years of age—at the back of a car with a screwdriver unscrewing a license plate, and I said "I got him." So I put it in the park and I called it in and I said "Stop, what are you doing?" And he looked at me and he took off, and I took off after him and I'm running so fast that I was just within a foot of him, and the alarm bell comes out and you know, report the women was difficulty breathing, so Mike Meyers called me and I didn't catch the guy. I was this close, you know? So anyway, that—that was—I'll never forget running. I mean, running for maybe a quarter mile after this guy and getting closer and closer and you're taught and I did this several times. You should never tackle anybody in a run like you would see it on television. You get close enough to push them. Just get them off center and they fall down into the gravel and all that stuff, then you'd come to a halt and you'd pick up the pieces. So—so the stuff where you tackle people on TV—that's not what we're taught, and that's not what I was taught, and I—I used that technique several times, and it's worked really well for me. I've just about to push him, but anyway, so—

TM: It was interesting thinking about the—just the night and day difference between as you mentioned, Chuck Wahler as your—your interpretive boss, and the district ranger as another boss in a different position, and the main difference was between these people.

NM: Right, and then—and then the day shift supervisor was Mike Meyers, who—who—you know, to me, I believe he was genderblind. I don't think I had any issues with Mike Meyers. He just wanted to assign the person to calls, and I finally went to Mike and you know what, I'm not just a paramedic. I can do investigations, I can do all this stuff, so slowly but surely, I got to do other calls. But that took a long time, and then finally for whatever reason, the—they decided that—because what they would do, we had a lot of people there. They had—I think it was three or four permanent rangers, and they would hire for the season, if it was a—they had a summer season, three of four seasonals to—or maybe three seasonals to go with those. I'm trying to remember, three permanents and three seasonals, I think it was, and so you were—you were really stretched in the summer time and really not enough people in the winter time, but so they decided to take the subject to furlough position and turn it into a full time permanent job, and I had no choice, but I adjusted but I missed my time off to go work for Chuck and to do other things and I would developing and getting everything programmed and stuff, so he—I didn't have any course. You know, I—they changed it to a permanent full-time position. The big drawback to this was now I had 365 days of the year of protection ranger, and the real drawback to this was protection in the summer, and the day shift, and I worked the nights in the winter, instead of working

day shift as a naturalist, so for six months of the year I didn't see my husband practically, and that was really awful. So—but I did that for many years, and but it was—it made me unhappy because when I was at work with either shift, you'd still get called out during the day and night for general alarms and called out for a hostage situation and you get called out for a structural fire, so you—it really needed a young and vigorous work force, and I agree that's what you needed at that time, but it should be on an individual basis and not on age basis. They tell you to retire at 55 from these positions when some people might be able to go further, but I easily worked 70 hours a week because of my skills and what I had done over time is protection is I developed my skills in each one of the broad categories or the categories that had protection rangers. So number one is law enforcement, so eventually I went back to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glencoe, Georgia, once I became a permanent. They sent you back for four months and this is before 9/11, so you went to school five days a week, and then on weekends, I went and explored, you know. I went down to Vero Beach, Florida, and watched Spring training games for the Dodgers, and Charleston, South Carolina. I went to Plains, Georgia and got to meet Jimmy Carter. Got to do all these different things. After 9/11, you went to school six days a week and no time off, and I felt sorry for those people, but it was a really good school to go to. At the time also, I shared it with other management agencies. I should look at the pictures to see to be specific, but this was law enforcement for land management agencies, so it included National Park Service, US Forest Services, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Defense, Tennessee Valley Authority, and maybe quite a few people, and so it was just what you expected the police school to be, you know. You work out at calisthenics and you did mock trials where you would be a prosecutor and you did investigations, you did interrogations, you did fingerprinting, you went to the classes for law. It really was thorough and very good, but because we were kind of diverse, you would see another group of students in another class and they would be Border Patrol officers, and it had been—you know, they'd all be somebody else, so maybe Department of the Treasury, not Secret Service, but anyway, somebody else. We were the most diverse. We had a softball team and we had a really good time, but we were warned that if we twisted our ankles or something like that we would have to go home, and if you don't get your—...go through the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center [FLETC], then you lose your job, because then you don't have your commission anymore, because you didn't finish school. So, when I went to go to FLETC, they had changed the rules so that you had to—the first day you were there, pass the physical equivalency battery, P-E-B, and the first day if you didn't pass the PEB, you were sent home, and there was a Ranger, I don't have to name him, but he was at the FLETC and he didn't pass it, he was sent home, and he didn't get to go back for two years and he never got permanent status for some time. It was just a mess, so you were really on your toes, so what I had done before I went, is I worked out and I ran every day and I did my obstacle courses and I did my lifting, all the things you should have to do to pass the PEB, and so I'm driving across country in my van, and I get to New Orleans in February, and it's only my second hotel on my drive across country to go to Georgia in Glynco, Georgia. So in New Orleans I went to a Motel 6 to get a room, and it was $184. I said "Excuse me." And Mardi Gras was on, so everything was inflated, so I just continued to sleep in my van as I went across, and I remember in New Orleans, running around the parking lot, running, running, running, running, all while driving across country.

TM: To try to keep your fitness up as you went across the country. Wow.

NM: Yeah. Right. So—so we met the first day at FLETC and we went over to the gym. We got all—they supply everything for you, including bras, you know, everything. Your—your socks, your everything, so you don't wear anything—you don't—if they don't supply it, you don't wear it, and so you—you put on your stuff and then you turn it in every day and next day you have fresh stuff, so we got out there and we're doing everything, and I'm running the track and I come up and they told me my time and I had

taken a minute and a half off my time and I thought "Wow! That is really good." But it occurred to me that I trained at 7000 feet at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, and here I've got oxygen rich air at sea level in Georgia.

TM: Oh my gosh, and then you took a minute and a half off your time? Wow.

NM: I did. I think I was also scared to death. So, after that, I did fine. I did very well. There are 3 course categories, physical fitness, marksmanship, and didactic studies. I did get two out of three top of the class recognitions. I was a very good shooter, so had – I got my expert marksman certificate. I was very good at the didactic law work.

TM: That sounds fun, I mean to learn about the law that way. I think it's really important. And everybody should go through that training.

NM: I loved it! And the people who are training you are all top legal. I remember we had an Assistant US Attorney teaching us the law, you know. It was just amazing all the stuff that we learned and then we went to driving school, and you learned to drive around corners while talking on the radio, learned to break and decelerate into curves and accelerate out of curves and I'll never forget when we did driving school as a seasonal at the Bob Bondurant school at Sears point. I got the award for driving faster backwards than I did forwards in the obstacle course. I guess I'm good with reverse or something, but you know, I did all of that and the comradery that you build up with people in that class, is—is really something. It's really neat.

TM: Do you remember any of the people that you went to FLETC with?

NM: Oh yes. Lawrence Olsen was my driving partner and we have several people, you know. They tried to put the ladies together and Lindy was my partner when it came to battering each other, we put a big red suit on, which was full padding, and then you just whale at the other person, you know, and so it's like sumo wrestlers going at each other, but that was where we could hit each other with full force, and several times during this, people would get a cut lip or something like that. I had gloves available and I went to take care of them because they figured out early on I was a paramedic. I remember we were at the jail, the pretend jail that they had there, and they'd just 'arrested somebody' and they take somebody, brought somebody in. We learned to do everything there, and the instructor, she went to open a window and it wouldn't open. It was stuck. She pushed really hard with the heel of her palm, and her hand went through the window and she cut the artery. I mean, it was really bad, so I took the—I kept my gloves on top of my handcuffs, so I put them on and did direct pressure. She goes "Don't call the doctor on campus, I'm fine. " I said "No, I think you're not fine." So—so we—she got stitches, she was fine after that, but anyway, so it was a very positive experience, but a couple of things that I remember most about it was at night time as it got warmer, I would go outside of the building, because we lived in these dorms, and I shared my bathroom with a lady from Bureau of Land Management, I think it was, and then I went—then I would go outside and seek the building side away from the lights that were on the building the best I could and watched the fireflies, because being from California, I'd only seen fireflies one other time in my life that I remember, you know. I lived in Maryland for two years, but I don't remember the fireflies. That was very special, and I—and it was so wet and muggy and it was just very special. It was Georgia, and I got to learn the South a bit and it was really fun and I met with family living in Georgia, so I got to visit them on weekends, so anyway, Kent flew out for graduation and then we drove back together, so he got to be there for my graduation, so that was very good. So, anyway—

TM: What year was that?

NM: That was— I want to say '93, but I don't have it on here, but that's my guess. It took me two years from the time I got my position I think till I went. Oh, here it is. It was '96, wow. Yeah, it was February to May of 1996.

TM: Okay, and that allows you with the—with the graduation from FLETC that allows you to become a commissioned officer, is that right?

NM: Well, a fully commissioned officer. As opposed to a seasonal, and now—now the biggest thing that I can do is serve warrants and do investigations. Seasonals are not trained nor are they allowed to do that. Unbeknownst to me, this also opened a huge door four years later when the Twin Towers were attacked, and after the Twin Towers were attacked, and suddenly there were threats to dams and buildings, you know, like—the Treasury building and all this kind of stuff. They needed a lot more federal law enforcement officers to figure out what's going to be attacked next. You just don't get them out of the woodwork, there's only so many openings at FLETC, so what they did was they took anybody with a full law enforcement commission that worked for the government and put them on Homeland Security detail. We all rotated through. That's—that's when I did some pretty hard core law enforcement when I went to go protect dams and do other things like that. So—but anyway.

TM: We'll get there.

NM: I came back, they—they do a—a full background investigation, which I believe at that time, they have to renew every two to three years.

TM: And they didn't do that before you went?

NM: No they—they did. They might've done it before, but before they can give you the full commission, they have to do it again. Yeah, so they did it for a seasonal one, and then every year you go through 40 hours of continuing education, and I still remember one of the most important things that I learned is one of the 40 hour classes, and it's a case called "Giglio-Henshorn," and the Giglio-Henshorn case was, this was a—and I don't even know if he was a federal law enforcement officer, but he was a law enforcement person and he would go arrest somebody for a DUI and testify against that person or arrest somebody for theft and testify against that person. We all do when we follow up our cases. Some smart lawyer one time, looked at the backgrounds of this person before he testified against his client, found out he got in trouble for—he was cheating on his taxes, running a business without the—the correct contract. He did something illegal, but only got a slap on the wrist, you know, got a fine or something and the guy continued doing that, so when he went on the stand to this case, and I can't remember if the officer's name was Giglio or Henshorn, but anyway, the defense lawyer so destroyed his credibility by saying "Well, since you lied about this, why aren't you lying about my client now?" And it got to the point where it was so bad that he eventually lost his job because he couldn't testify against anybody he arrested because of this background. So, Giglio-Henshorn was something that held law enforcement officers in a particular—we federal law enforcement officers to a much higher standard that if you want to be able to do your job, arrest and testify against people, you must keep yourself very clean. And I was always a good kid before then, but now really I—I didn't want—you know, "Here, you want a free coke?" "No no no, thank you very much." And I didn't want to do anything that would mess

up my job, you know. I'm sure people did but—and didn't get caught, but Giglio-Henshorn changed everything in terms of the ability to be a dual person.

TM: So you couldn't have any felony offences against you clearly, and—

NM: No, not even a misdemeanor.

TM: Misdemeanors, okay.

NM: I should clarify the difference between a misdemeanor and a felony. Both of them are criminal acts. The penalty is what decides which is a misdemeanor and which is a felony. A misdemeanor is and it used to be a no more than a thousand dollar fine and no more than a year in jail. That's what made it a misdemeanor. All felonies are over a thousand dollar fine, and over a year in jail, and that's the only thing that makes—made them different. The misdemeanor changed with the archaeological resources protection act, ARPA, because those were misdemeanors to take those ollas and pots and things from archaeological sites, those are misdemeanors, but if you're taking something that you can then sell for 10,000 dollars, it's worth more than a thousand dollars fine to a lot of people, so that got changed under the code of federal regulations. They can fine people, I guess 100,000 dollars and so that gave ARPA some strength.

TM: Still under a misdemeanor.

NM: It's still a misdemeanor though, because it's the punishment for the crime, so misdemeanor is less than a year, and to give you an idea, and so you probably know that there's criminal law and that there's civil law, and civil law is not against the public entity, but states and counties or the federal government is against another person when you're trying to get redress, but what do you do with something gone wrong and it's not a crime and it's not against another person, so that's what's called a Tort, and that is a wrong, so you're driving through Yosemite National Park. A wind storm is happening and a tree branch breaks off and smashes into your car. Well, it's not a crime, but it's the federal government's tree, what do you do? You file a tort, because it was wrong to get your redress. So anyway, I learned a lot about the law and really enjoyed it.

TM: That's fascinating, because I know that tort claims played a role back in the thirties and forties when the park was trying to figure out how to manage river runners, because they—they came to the decision that if—if someone was on a commercial tour, they couldn't file a tort claim. They would have to sue the commercial operator.

NM: Yeah, because they were under contract to the Park, and one of the other things and it was kind of a big secret for a long time and I don't know when it began or even if it never ended, but if it was big time tort claim, like wrongful death or something and filed or even not that, they would often settle it out of court because the court cost would be so much more expensive, so people began to know to sue the government, let's say for 50,000 dollars but they only wanted 15k, and then they would settle for 15k and people knew that not after the 15k, but ask for so much more so they would get a settlement. So anyway, I became a permanent full time protection ranger, and so the things that I did and I worked very hard. So, law enforcement, I got my full law enforcement commission, and so also—I should also say that I also transitioned between 1991 and 1996. The first sidearm I ever was issued was a 38 revolver. When I went to the Grand Canyon, I would just shoot a 357 magnum revolver with magnum rounds—they have a little more power to them.

TM: What's the weight difference between those 2 weapons?

NM: Oh, huge, huge, and it wasn't the weight difference. One of the—and I was a very good shot—the way that you shoot it is you don't look at the target. The target's out of focus. You line up the front of the side of the pistol with the back side of the pistol, and whatever you're shooting at is kind of out of focus in the back. People look at the target, that's when they miss it, and so the problem with the 357 magnum when you also have to practice shooting it at night times, so we would do our day shooting and we either waited around and came back when it got too dark, and that 357 with the magnum mode, the first shot was so bright it blinded you. I mean, the flames that literally came out of the gun, so then you had to get a—you usually get a double tap or shoot twice and it was really hard because when the gun shot you are strong but not exactly right on target because you had to bring it back on target but here you are a little blind so you kind of learn to squint a little bit, and all.

TM: Oh, because you know the flash is coming, yeah.

NM: Right, right, so the next gun that was issued to it was a Sig Sauer. We had our pick between three different Sig Sauers with large law enforcement load magazines, so normally a gun has—I don't even know what a normal gun has—7, I guess 7 in the magazine, and we would have like 10 or 11 in the magazines, and so—and then one in the chamber, and so you could either get a 9 millimeter, or you could get a 40 millimeter, and you could get a 45, and the 45 pistol, semi-automatic, meaning it's not a revolver anymore, it (the bullet) comes up. If you shoot it and then the—instead of retaining the cartridge, the bullet's gone on its way, the cartridge is now ejected onto the ground, and so—so semi-automatic and that it reloads, puts another one into the chamber, ready for you to shoot.

TM: So it will—it will fire as fast as you can pull the trigger.

NM: Pull the trigger, as opposed to holding the trigger down and having it still fire as an automatic. So, we transitioned to that and so the range master at the time was Mark Law. He was a good guy, and we would go and have to qualify twice a year, and so we all had our new weapons and how to do this, and I had a 9 millimeter, and he had a 45, and he was trying to tell everybody how much more load and firepower is in a 45 and how a 9 is woosy and wimpy. The reason I had a 9 was because my hands were smaller than most guys, and the 9 is smaller, so—so he said—you know, I was the only one with the 9. They all had a 45, and so I challenged him to a pepper popper, and what those are—those are steel plates that are in a circle that if you hit them, they swing around to the other side. If you didn't hit it, it wouldn't swing around to the other side, then there were—we put balloons up and stuff like that, and I beat him, and I said "Mark, it's not the power, it's where you put it."

TM: Right.

NM: Yeah, that's very accurate.

TM: Yeah, and also, you have to carry that weapon on your duty belt along with extra ammunition and—and you know, a whole host of other tools.

NM: You haven't heard the beginning of it. Another female ranger and I, we were in the helibase one day, and you know, we had body armor on with a metal plate. We had our duty belt with our gun, our baton,—well, everything on, a radio. We had our boots on, you name it.

TM: Pepper spray, yeah.

NM: So—oh, everything, and you could not. There was not an empty space on it, and so we took all that off and put it on a scale and for me it was 22 pounds and for her it was 21 pounds.

TM: So what was she doing 1 pound better than you, because that's important. Did you guys work it out?

NM: I don't know.

TM: I would love doing that at the clinic. Would be to get law enforcement officers—

NM: I think it was close, I think it was just, you know, within a couple of ounces.

TM: Yeah, to weight their belts and then they got into it and they were like "well, how come—how come, you know, your belt is 3 pounds lighter than mine?"

NM: Yeah, I don't know.

TM: And they—you know, trying to figure these things out whether it was different.

NM: We were more appalled about what we were carrying and with the—

TM: Yes, absolutely, so there's—there's a 22-pound backpack that you're wearing every day, or every night.

NM: Yeah, on our hips.

TM: Yeah, oh yeah.

NM: And so—so anyway, I had a 9-millimeter. I was very good at pulling it, very good at doing what I needed to do, always qualified, easily one of the best shots out there and sounds like I'm blowing my own, but to me, it was important to be capable in what I did and not just be—you know, like I tell my EMT students, "Do you want somebody working on you who only knew 75% of the material? What about the other 25%?" So, I wanted to be very good at what I did and I was good at investigations and investigating people and fingerprinting and doing crime scene investigations. We also did traffic vehicle accident investigations where, you know, you got out the protractor and you measured stuff and you figured out from the skid marks how fast they were going. If I was going to do this job, I wanted to be good at it. I didn't necessarily want to do law enforcement, but to do the other things, this was what I was going to do and I was going to be good at it, so that was one thing. So that was law enforcement, so the next one is going to be structural fire.

TM: Okay, before we do structural fire, can you tell me a Mark Law story?

NM: Mark Law was married to Barb Horning. I don't even know if I should tell this story, but I remember it was like my first to second day there and I came in and Barb was working for John Benjamin, and I think she was the clerk and I walked in, and the words coming out of that room between Mark and Barb

were just—my god, it would make a sailor blush. Later on when I found out they were married, I was appalled, but then—then you'd see them together and everything was fine, but it was just like I could never have a relationship with somebody like that. Mark was very good at carving bears, and polishing bears. I to this day have 7 of his bears on my window sill. He was very good at that, he was very fair, he was never—he was my boss for a little while when he was acting something or other. He later became the river district ranger I think it was, and but that was—I think he was—my interactions with him were for the most part, positive, and I think he was also one of those genderblind people. If you could do the job, that's fine. Oh, this is the biggest deal is there was a time when we had the Secretary of the Interior, Lujan, and the Director of the National Park Service Ridenour, and a bunch of associate directors who are going to go down the Colorado river, and they were going to go down as far as... What's that place where they send the helicopter in?

TM: Whitmore Wash?

NM: Whitmore Wash, I think it was, or maybe it was Phantom Ranch, I can't remember. But anyway, they started at Lees Ferry, and because—and I guess I can say that now because I think he has passed away, the Secretary of the Interior had had a heart attack in the past, and so they wanted me to go as a paramedic, and I was the only woman on the trip, and so Mark was the coordinator of the trip, and so he was a very good person to work with, and I—and I enjoyed working with him on that. He loaned me some of his river shorts. I remember that, because I didn't have a waterproof kind. I just had hiking shorts, you know, and I wore my first ever Tevas on that trip, and the Secretary of the Interior did in fact injure himself at one point. He dislocated his finger, which I relocated and splinted for him. He was riding a rubber ducky. Which is sitting in a blow-up thing, with a rope towing behind and somehow he got his hand caught in the boat or something and then—before that happens, I remember two things that really stood out. The administration was not positive towards national parks at the time, and so it was very conservative and so I was not conservative. I was—you know, just on my edge, keeping my mouth shut. So I'm carrying one of those great big tables—not the little skinny ones—one of those great tables up the boat all the way up at the landing, up the sand, and he runs up and he tries to take it out of my hand and he goes "That's no job for a girl!" And I said "Oh, but it is for a woman." And I just kept walking up with him.

TM: Oh, good for you.

NM: And there was another time we were going to go up… it wasn't Matkatamiba, but it was a different—no it was Matkatamiba, but we were going to go up there which is my favorites canyon, and—and he's seen enough. He goes "If you've seen one canyon, you've seen them all." So I went "Okay." So anyway, that was neither here nor there, but once they, Dave Deroshier was on the trip. There was another David who later was on, Paul David, I am trying to remember his name. There was also a guy named Dutch, but I can't remember his real name. He was a river guide for the Park Service, and there was another guy, but his name is just not quite...

TM: Doug Deutschlander might've been there?

NM: Doug Deutschlander, yeah. I couldn't even remember his last name, but you did. So anyway, we were on this river trip and then we drop them off and they fly away. It's just like the three of us on this boat. We go through Lava together and everything. We just—I sat on the front of the pontoon and we just had a great time and I remember Dave going up some cliff and jumping into the water and it was just after being so careful and so perfect for the time we had these people, but it was just really not

too... I don't drink alcohol, I never have, and I just—you know, those guys were very good and everybody was very good except for—you know, I don't know. I never saw anybody drunk on the trip, so it was very nice to see their professionalism, but after that then we just—you tell those stories to tell that you would never tell in front of other people, so we can't believe that and all that kind of stuff, and then we went through Lava and we were fine.

TM: Structural fire.

NM: Structural fire.

TM: Unless you have more Mark Law stories.

NM: I can't... I—they might come up later on, but he was a—he was a—he was not the most people of people persons, but he was fair in my opinion, and then let's see, I—in structural fire I got my basic firefighter 1 at Santa Rosa criminal justice training center on a weekend, and then when I went to Death Valley and worked my first season in protection, I got my firefighter 2. Kent was collateral, he was a subdistrict ranger, his collateral duty was to be a structural fire chief at Death Valley, and I believe it was '91. He taught a firefighter 2 class, so firefighter 1 is you learn about everything, you learn about the hoses and valve stuff, but you don't learn about the self-contained breathing apparatus and go to burning building, and you didn't learn how to size things up and all that kind of stuff, so the firefighter 2 classes was really encompassing. Now you can do all this stuff, and—and Kent was a—a national instructor. He went back, he also designed fire engines. He went back to Pennsylvania and brought them back after he designed them for whichever park he was working at. He was quite—quite talented in that, so he would also go to different park areas and teach firefighter 1 and 2 for people as well. He also taught officers classes and pump engineers class, which I later did take, so when I got to the Grand Canyon, I was a firefighter 2, got my turnouts, also known as bunkers, which is the flame-resistant clothing that you wear, and so the procedure would be—there is now at this time at the Grand Canyon, a fire station over by the clinic. The old fire station was over in the maintenance yard across from the collections, and if a fire came out, we drove up. If you were on duty, drove up in your patrol car and took your duty belt off, you put it in the trunk of your car and you locked it because you didn't have any lockable lockers. You went inside, you quick stripped down, put on your bunkers, you jumped in the seat and at that time as a firefighter 2, I would go with one of the SCBA. You would then—you know, put it on, turn on the air, check everything, have your Nomex hood ready, depending on the call, then you would put on your hearing protection, which was also an intercom, and the captain in the front seat would say "Okay, Nancy you—you're going to pull the 5 inch and you're going to wrap the hydrant, or you know, you're going to take the lights, you're going to take the disconnect the 50 foot disconnect and you're going to connect it over here." So you got your assignment as you drove there, so you heard more and more about the call, and so—so that's what I—I did, and then when I believe—I don't remember years of stuff, I can only give you kind of a progression of things, but what I became, I then went to officer school, and so I learned to be a captain and then I was the captain and so now I would sit in the front seat and tell people we're going to do this, we're going to do that. I would assign the FRT, which is the rapid entry team. They always stood outside. If somebody got in trouble, we have two people ready to go and rescue somebody. The thing about Grand Canyon that was different from almost all of the national park areas in the west is that we have thousands of buildings. I mean, I think it was like maybe 1500 buildings, and because at the time, we responded to the town of Tusayan, and so we were the fire department. There was no Tusayan fire department when we first were there, so—so we responded to lots and lots of structural fire as opposed to Sequoia National Park, which would have a structural fire in the park every other year.

TM: Okay, every other year. Right.

NM: Every other year, so we—we not only—so I had a friend of mine. I think I mentioned before the SAR cache, Search and Rescue cache, caught on fire, and their level two firefighters had zero experience, so they did was is called a defensive attack, where they stay outside of the fire and they just hit it with water. When we at the Grand Canyon, we became offensive firefighters, where we could then go inside with the hoses, with the tools, go up, cut the roof, do—you know, we could do all kinds of stuff that you see in the cities, and we did do it because we practiced all the time, and then we got the calls, and probably our most common call was for dumpster fires, and people think "Well dumpster fires, how stupid is that?" People throw away their propane tanks and it can explode at any time. People throw away clothing that when they burn, can give off cyanide gas. Wool gives off cyanide gas, so while it's not an emergency, all dumpster fires are considered urgent because you don't know if something is going to explode, what gases it's going to give off, whatever it is, and most dumpster fires were started by people taking their coals from their grill and throwing them in there rather than not throwing them in the right coal bin. So they would smolder for a while or whatever, we did have some arson later on, but so the thing—the good thing about dumpster fires, which we'd had a couple times a week, they were great practice, because you still put everything on, you still did buddy check with your person, you still have a tool like a pike, you still pull out the 50 foot connect and you'd open the lid and you would shoot the water on the inside of the lid, then it would drip down on what was inside. You just don't open the lid and look inside to get it apart. You—you do all the precautions you need to do and the—the pump operator would give you the amount you needed and then afterwards you stir everything out and pull everything out and it was stinky business, but it's what we did, when you go back and you know, get undone and clean up, put your uniform back together and put your patrol stuff back on and get ready for the next call. Didn't know what it would be.

So we had a—a place in Grand Canyon across from ranger operations building on center street, the library and the pub, and the pub was a sore place for a lot of people, because it's where people went to get drunk. There wasn't much place for off duty concession employees to go to mingle as a group. They either sat in the rooms, sort of stuff, but here they could go—they could play pool, they can relax. The problem is that if you were a protection ranger and they did come out drunk, and they did have fights and they did—you know, do property damage, so it was kind of a sore spot. We didn't want it there in some ways. Others wanted it there because they can make more arrests, but that was the difference between day shift and night shift, so the night shift in the summer time where people more attuned to being law enforcement.

TM: Were you there when that building burned down?

NM: That's the story I am going to tell.

TM: Okay, so what I'm thinking is we've been at this now for almost an hour.

NM: We can—we can do the—the library fire tomorrow.

TM: I want to hear that story, but I think we should—we should bundle it together.

NM: Yes, this is a good idea.

TM: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Was that 1997? When did that burn?

NM: You know, before we come back, I will look it up. I will look it up and tell you when that burned.

TM: Alright, great, and the other question I've got for you, which I'm going to make a note of and you can think about, is you had mentioned in Death Valley, you were seeing Kent, and you were staying with him and there was—that was breaking some rules of, you know, your—

NM: It wasn't—it wasn't against the rules, but it wasn't right, I thought ethically. It wasn't ethical.

TM: Yeah, so being—now you're married, was there any problem with you being on the structural fire team overseen by your husband?

NM: No—no, because he wasn't overseeing me. Remember if it was Mike Meyers in the early days and later on we had shift supervisor, so—so if it was a dumpster fire, it depended on who's available to go onto the dumpster fire. I might've been the captain and engineer on the dumpster fire, versus—and Kent would not go on that fire, so he didn't go on every single fire, but it was a big structural fire then—and then I'll tell you what happened after. A lot changed after the recreation fire for what I did on the structure fire, but—

TM: Alright, just thinking about it.

NM:—It was not a stove pipe. I did not work for Kent. He happened to be the fire chief, and he might've given out assignments on scene, but then that was it, you know, and did the training and stuff, but it wasn't an issue at all thank goodness.

TM: I just—I just want to check on it. Okay, good, well we got some things to talk about next time, and so I think with that we'll conclude part six of Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Nancy Muleady-Mecham. Today is Wednesday, February 24th, 2021. My name is Tom Martin and Nancy, thank you so very much!

NM: You're welcome, Tom, thank you.