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Interviewees: Nancy Muleady-Mecham (NMM)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
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TM: Today is Wednesday, March 31, 2021. This is a Part 8 Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Nancy Muleady-Mecham. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Nancy. How are you today?

NMM: I'm well, Tom. Thanks for asking.

TM: It's great to hear your voice. Nancy, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

NMM: Yes.

TM: Thank you very much. Last time you were telling us about some of the major structural fires that you had to deal with at Grand Canyon, and that got me thinking about housing and just what your housing was like. What do you recall about Park housing?

NMM: Well, the first thing I remember is I arrived at Grand Canyon prior to my fiancé and we were, had an understanding, but we were engaged a little bit later on, and that

was Kent Mecham. So we had a small apartment on Hermit Circle, and the first thing I remember coming into the housing area for the first time in 1991 was, "where am I." There were streets that went here, there, and everywhere and it didn't make any sense to me (laughs) so I was so afraid I would get lost. But after a while, of course, it became second hand, but you would come into Center, came in the main Park road, turn left on Center Street and then as you came in turn right on whatever that street was and left on Sunset.

TM: Was that Park Circle or was it Sunset? Trying to remember.

NMM: I think,

TM: Cause Park Circle kind of was right in there.

NMM: I think it was, it was Park Circle, you're right, and then Sunset came off of Park Circle to your right.

TM: That's right. You turn left on Sunset to Hermit Circle.

NMM: Uh huh, uh huh. And then you would turn right to go on Park Circle, which was where Chuck Wahler and others lived. So when I moved there in 1991 if you went down Sunset you went down to the mule and horse barns. There were a couple of the NPS mules, but the horse stables were there for Horse Patrol and they had the storage for everything you needed for them, and just up the hill from it was the holding facility, which was people euphemistically called the jail, but you can't call it a jail if you have not the facilities to keep somebody there for 24 hours, like a bed and a toilet and all those kinds of things. So it was merely a holding facility where we processed people under arrest before we either released them on their own recognizance, they made bail, or we were ready to transport them to the Coconino County Jail in Flagstaff, Arizona, an hour and a half away. So anyway, so you move up the hill from that and there were the NPS mule barns and big storage units and then there was the housing area, and Hermit Circle was there and they had just gotten a contract to build I think two sets of duplex for a total of, no three sets of duplexes for a total of six houses, I believe it was. And so Kent and I lived in an apartment on Hermit Circle and we called our little place the Red Light District. I think it was 3-B and the reason we called it that is the light on the outside was a red bulb and when you went inside the carpet inside was a bright cherry shag rug. It was amazingly ugly. It was one bedroom, one bathroom, tiny little galley kitchen, and small sitting area. And Kent had come from a full house at Death Valley so a lot of the stuff had to go into storage but the way it worked with the National Park Service is you bid on a house if you were a permanent and you got points depending

upon your years of service, your GS grade, what your pay status was, and Kent had been in the Marine Corps and then he worked Yellowstone, Lehman Caves which is now Great Basin, Death Valley, and with his years of service and his GS level he had enough points to bid on one of these houses. And as we went to work we would watch them being built. It was really fascinating, and one of the things that stood out was that the National Park Service makes bids and then people bid on what they will take for building this, and it turned out that the people that built at least our duplex, I can't speak for the others, were from what we call the Arizona Strip Area, which was north of the North Rim. And it turns out that they were polygamist Mormons and it was really fascinating to watch them take their lunch break and there would be two to three different picnic-like areas on the ground with a woman and a couple of kids at each one and the man would go from woman to woman and have lunch with different ones of them at different time. It was just really fascinating to see that culture, and I'd never seen that before. But they did a good job building it and it was pretty remarkable. So we ended up getting the one closest to the mule barn, so you could hear them braying at nighttime and kicking and if the wind was right you could smell the mules and their droppings from whatever it was, a hundred yards away from our house. But it was nice to move from an apartment to at least a two-bedroom house, one and a half baths, and a nice little back yard that we ended up fencing in for our dog later on. But other people would bid for houses at different places. There was one time when they went to an all-electric houses, maybe 10 years after we'd been there, and a friend of mine, Phyllis Yoyotewa, made a bid successful. She was Hopi Indian and ...

TM: And so she had bid on one of these all-electric houses?

NMM: And she went from Pinyon Park to this new electric house. We had a welcome party for her and everything, and it was a beautiful home. The floors were even heated and all that kind of stuff. She had to leave after two months because her electric bill was probably twice as much as her rent. There was no, like in our house on Sunset we had a wood burning stove which helped with expenses and propane. She didn't have any of that. Everything was electric and so she had to move back to Pinyon Park because they just could not afford it. It was very sad. It was all electric. Yeah. They even had alarm systems in those houses that we had to respond to at the Fire Department after a while.

TM: You know, I remember I was going to meet with the chief ranger back in the mid 1990s and I was sitting somewhere waiting. His door to his office was open and I was just outside waiting and he was talking to someone on the phone in Housing, just talking about this exact same problem of how high the electric bill was for those houses.

NMM: Yes.

TM: Do you know did the Park ever offer some sort of discount or something for that cause it was

NMM: Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge.

TM: You're right, the floor, heating was electric, the lights, I mean, everything, washer, dryer, everything was just all electric and it was expensive. Wow.

NMM: Part of the problem with the housing, and most people don't realize this, is people who live in national parks who were National Park Service employees such as we were, we pay rent and utilities on our housing. It's not free, and then they compare us to the nearest community, and they were comparing us to Flagstaff, Arizona, which is a very expensive community. Then they have what they call a distance differential. They take a little bit off, but it was very expensive just for your basic rent, let alone your utilities because who they compared us to.

TM: Why didn't they compare you to Williams, Arizona or Valley, the other kind of little town?

NMM: If I were in charge of the world, I don't know, I don't know. They may have later on, I don't know, but I just know it was expensive, and no matter where we go, if we're at Sequoia, King's Canyon, you know, it's Fresno or Visalia. If it's Death Valley I believe it's Ridgecrest, or whatever, or Lone Pine, so they have to compare you to what is, and then they give you a discount for being a distance from things. Like it's not free and people think, oh, you get to live there. So early on in the National Park Service in our careers, you know, when you're a GS-3 and you're a seasonal and you don't get benefits and you still are paying rent as a seasonal, we used to say we get paid in sunrises and sunsets because after our paycheck was gone from paying for the government and our food and everything we didn't have anything else (laughs), so in the front of our home at, on Sunset, not Hermit Circle, but there are certainly some at Hermit Circle, we had some pretty neat pinyon pines, and the pinyon pines are *Pinus monophylla* and *Pinus Edulis*, anyway those are the two species of single needle pine and we called it a pinyon-juniper forest on the edge of the Grand Canyon and then once you got to a higher elevation on the plateau then it was the largest ponderosa pine forest. But we had these wonderful pinyon pines that formed these pine cones and then when they opened up they had pinyon nuts, or pine nuts, pinyon with a tilde over the n. Some people spell it pinyon so they don't have to put the tilde. But they are very good to eat. I remember they were \$17 a pound if you went to the store to get shelled pinyon

nuts, and every few years there would be what we call a mast year in biology and we believe it's a strategy to take care of times when there might be a drought or insects or something or there's some sort of chemical signal that all of the pinyon pines that season put out a tremendous number of pine cones and it happens every three to seven years. And whenever that would happen the people at Supai camp and their relatives from the Havasupai Reservation would come into Grand Canyon, and I remember them coming to our house and spreading blankets underneath the tree and with long sticks they would whack the cones. We would talk to them and, of course, it was a known use by these people. They didn't really have to ask permission but I would go out and say "Well, tell me how you roast them, how you cook them," and all this stuff and so they would whack the trees and then the cones would fall on the ground and sometimes the nuts would fall out of the cone and they would show me traditionally that a metate y mano, metate is a flat stone and mano was a round stone, they would put down and very lightly crack, rolling the mano over the metate, the shells. They would shell the maroon shell of the pinyon nut then you'd have this white, almost looked like an insect larvae grub inside. It had a paper sheath on it and you kind of rubbed it between your fingers so you had the pure white little pinyon nut, and you could eat that raw but what they did is they, in modern times, I don't know what they did in old times, but you'd get a flat pan and you'd put them out on the pan and you'd put the oven at 450 and you put it in for I guess 10 or 15 minutes and then you would dry them out and make your pinyon nuts that way, and they're like 16 or 20 calories. There's a lot of protein and a lot of calories and so it's a very important staple for indigenous peoples for a long time, let alone modern times. I love it backpacking. It's a great backpacking food.

TM: Oh, yeah. I want to go back to housing for a minute. The, was there any furnishings in the house when you moved in?

NMM: Yes and no. If you were in seasonal housing, which is what we first were put into, they had what we called the, I hope I have this right, the traditional National Park Service ranch oak, very heavy furniture, chairs, tables, beds, things like that. If you were permanent you usually had your own furniture so when we, we did not have, most of our furniture I recall was in storage. I think we just had a couple things for that little Hermit Circle apartment until our duplex was built and we successfully bid on the one that we wanted. And so, and then our stuff came out of storage and went into that duplex.

TM: Right. The ranch oak chairs and tables, they seem fairly indestructible. Were they, was that throughout the entire National Park Service nationwide or was that just like something that happened in the west?

NMM: I would like, I would guess so because I worked in Sequoia, King's Canyon, Everglades, Hawaiian Islands, but that was private housing, Death Valley. It was definitely in Death Valley and Sequoia and King's and I'm trying to remember, I cannot remember the house, I don't think it was at Everglades but I lived in a trailer. I'm not sure it would be in a trailer, a three-person trailer in the Everglades. But it definitely was at Death Valley, Sequoia, and Grand Canyon for sure.

TM: Ranch oak. Hmm.

NMM: There's a man by the name of William Carlton Tweed, Bill Tweed, and he was a naturalist that I worked for at Sequoia. He later became a park historian and wrote a book on the architecture of the National Park Service and I believe he addresses that. So if anybody wanted to look up William C. Tweed's work on park architecture I bet that would answer that question.

TM: Fun, fun. One of the other things that was going on there was, of course, you mentioned the electric housing and that got me to thinking about electricity in general,

NMM: Oh, yeah. And I was going to...

TM: which came to the Park as three-phase power, a single line. It came from Williams, I believe.

NMM: Well, we called it the grid. I can't tell you the details of how many lines there were. It came from Williams, Arizona and it supplied electricity to a little town called Valle, which had an airport, and then you continue up and then off that main line you have a few places here and there. The longer we were at Grand Canyon the more of these little houses you saw off to the side into the plateau area and then it came into the town of Tusayan and supplied the airport, supplied all the businesses, came into Grand Canyon. And so we called it the grid and, like I said, I couldn't tell you that but there was an Arizona Public Representative, APS, his name was Don Kiel, and I believe his name was spelled K-i-e-l, I think, could be K-e-i-l, but Don Kiel, and

TM: And that's, I'm sorry, it's Arizona Public Service?

NMM: APS, Arizona Public, is that what it, Power Service? Maybe it's Power Service.

TM: Arizona Public Service, yeah, it's

NMM: Oh, DPS is Department of Public Safety so I'm getting, APS is, whatever you say is correct. (laughs)

TM: Well, no, no. It just, but Don Kiel was the guy. He was an APS employee, had an APS truck, is that right?

NMM: Right, and he lived in the Grand Canyon and he had several kids. Katie Kiel I remember, one of his daughters, when she grew up became one of the secretaries for Ranger Operations. He had a son also who worked there. I can't remember their names but I believe I was on a softball team with one of them, and I believe Don was LDS, which is Latter Day Saints or Mormon, not a polygamist, and I think he was a widower or his wife left, I can't remember, but I remember he was a single guy there with these kids. Or I could be wrong on his family. But anyway, whenever there was a fire or a problem or whatever Don was there and he was happy-go-lucky. I've never seen him down, never. You know, if we were there and we needed electricity turned off to that bank of power lines he would be there to do that. And I remember there was one day, it was in the early '90s and, or maybe the mid-'90s come to think of it, and I had just come up from the Grand Canyon in the summertime, it was very hot, on the helicopter on a medical, and it must have been my second or third medical because you became, you were the flight medic for the day and so you just went up and down and up and down. If they needed more then they pulled more people in. So it was, I believe it was midafternoon, and I was just hot and sweaty and tired and no call at all, but then the general alarm went off. And the general alarm went off, I had to describe that before, with the tones, the sirens and everything, the pagers, saying that there was a fire, this time a fire on Boulder alley, but the alleys were in alphabetical order, A, B, C, alley. And then I just didn't want to go to the engine and take off my flight suit and put on my turnout suit, go do that, so I said "Oh, well, I'm an incident commander, I will be the IC on this fire." So that saved me from doing that, but you needed an IC, so I said "I will go direct as the IC." So I went direct in my patrol vehicle and I parked at the end of the street and there is a power pole on fire, and there's a small structure below the power pole that was on fire, and it caught on fire first, some sort of shed, because the alley is the backside of people's homes there. It's a residential area. And it's catching this power pole on fire. So I said "Dispatch, I need Don Kiel APS to come turn off the electricity to this pole," and they page him out, they look for him, and in the meantime the engine is getting its crew together and they're coming up and they're attaching the hydrant and they're all set to do but they can't put any water on the power pole because the water will just be a conduit for the electricity to come down and kill the firefighters. So we cannot do that. And so they come back, Don Kiel is not here. In the meantime the superintendent shows up, and I remember it was an acting superintendent. I can't tell you his name but I know it wasn't Ron Arnberger, it was somebody who was acting

in that capacity at the time, and he comes up and he's, and I'm at the end of the alley standing with my radio and I remember he never stood beside me, he stood behind me (both laugh) like I'm shielding him from the fire, right. Okay. Well, I'm still, you know, 50 yards away, I'm a distance away, and I said "Well, we need to turn off the electricity," and I turned to the superintendent, I said "We need to turn off the electricity" and I explained electrocution and all that. He goes "Absolutely," and I said "Which means I need to turn it off at the source, in Williams, Arizona, because that's the only other way to turn it off," and he goes "Okay." I said "Okay." So I went to Dispatch and said "Dispatch, you need to turn off the grid," and they said "Could you repeat that please?" I said "Dispatch, we need to turn off the grid, the electricity, because there's no other way to turn off the electricity unless you can tell me another way." And there's this big, long pause, and she says "I'm checking with APS, stand by." APS says there's no other way. If there's nobody in the park to turn off that particular power pole, the only way to stop electricity is to stop it at the grid. I said "Shut down the grid." It was like the most powerful moment of my life—shut down the grid. And they did, they shut down the grid. All the electricity from Williams, Arizona to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon was shut down. The airport, everything was shut down, and so if they had a generator it hopefully kicked on. And so they were able to put, by this time the fire was spreading, so they finally were able to put water on the pole. And this is a matter of like maybe five minutes that this decision was made. We're not talking about 30 minutes. So we had to make this decision pretty quickly. So they shut down the grid, they put out the fire, and luckily the two little boys who were in the shed were rescued and they were the little arsonists that started the fire by playing with matches.

TM: And they were still in the shed?

NMM: Well, the word I got was they came out of the shed when the firefighters arrived.

TM: Got it. Okay, that makes sense.

NMM: I don't think they, I think they were very afraid to come out but the fire was at the far wall and they were at the door. I can't remember all the circumstances but they know who did it. They know who did it, and so once the fire was out and everything was safe and secure I said "Dispatch, go ahead and turn the grid back on when everything is safe." And it took I think several hours for the grid to come back on completely.

TM: Yeah, because I would assume that they have to sort of...

NMM: Yeah, and I believe the clinic, oh, this brings up another thing, I believe the clinic had generators.

TM: Right, the clinic had its own...

NMM: Yeah, generators. But what most people don't realize, and I'm going to go to housing here for just a second cause it just occurred to me, most people don't realize when that was built it was a little baby hospital with rooms that the people stayed overnight in, and Lucy Egan, who was a nurse who died on duty there at the clinic, had an actual room named for her in the clinic. If you go down to the other side of where patient care was done when I was there that became National Park Service housing. It used to be patient care rooms that they lived in.

TM: Right, they were the overnight rooms that

NMM: Right. That used to be the hospital. And Lucy used to tell me, and she showed me, we went into a utility room, we went up the ladder, and we went to the roof. She goes "Yeah, we used to come out here and lay on chairs and sunbathe up here."

TM: Okay, wait, let's stop for a minute. What do you remember about Lucy, what was she like, what did she look like? Was she old, was she young?

NMM: When I got there she was retirement age. She looked older than she was. I think she was like 65 but she looked maybe 75. But there was no reason for her to retire. She knew what she was doing. She was a really confident, capable nurse and I just remember that the two physicians who were working there were James Wurgler, or Jim Wurgler. Some people called him Jim, some people called him Dr. Wurgler, and Tom Myers, right out of medical school, didn't go through a residency or an internship because he wanted to be a country family doctor. So he actually did his internship with JW, or Dr. Wurgler. And so Lucy, I think, I may have this wrong, Dr. Wurgler before he came to the Grand Canyon was the physician at the Yosemite Clinic in Yosemite National Park, and I remember him telling me one time that the reason he moved to the Grand Canyon was there were no mosquitoes and no bears. He just went through these litany of things that was all the things that bothered him there. And I think Lucy also came from the Yosemite but I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But anyway, I do know, and I maybe be wrong in that cause she was telling me about where to go sunbathe on the roof and so we could do that, but I remember Tammy Keller lived in those housing units and I remember Juliandra Watt had one of those little rooms as her housing. And, remember, they paid rent and utilities on those little rooms in the clinic that were used to be patient rooms.

TM: Right, and that was called the clinic dorms?

NMM: That's right, that's right, clinic dorms. I want to say there were six, at least six of them, three on each side.

TM: They shared a kitchen and a common bath, I think. Or did each, maybe it was a bath in each room.

NMM: Could be, but that's beyond my ken. I just remember thinking about the clinic for whatever reason and then that there was housing there as well. But, yeah, and so the clinic, and we got there because of the electricity and I believe the clinic had a generator. And we warned them, of course, so that patient care would not be compromised before the grid was shut down.

TM: Right. But Lucy, I hear stories of Lucy and her amazing prowess as a nurse.

NMM: Oh, yeah.

TM: What else do you remember about her?

NMM: Well, she reminded me a lot of my mother because my mom (Eileen Shelley Muleady) was a cadet nurse during World War II and brought this amazing story load. She was a real raconteur. She could really tell stories about nursing school and being a nurse during the war and, you know, doing, and later teaching at St. Joseph's Hospital in San Francisco and working there in hygiene and teaching other nurses and then becoming a mom of six kids and, but very capable. And so when I, Lucy had a very similar background to that. So I really admired her and thought good things of her. I do recall later that she was on duty and I was not there and I remember she got chest pain, and I wish I knew the year, but I believe it was the '90s, like '98 to 2000s. I can't remember exactly the year. And Dr. Wurgler put her in an ambulance and sent her to the hospital but she passed away. And I, in going to her funeral I was driving my husband's pickup truck for whatever reason, it was an old Ford pickup truck which had a low bench seat in the front, and I was driving to the Shrine of Ages and stopped for deer crossing the road and the car behind me plowed right into me, and so my head went back and without a headrest it went all the way back to the window and I got kind of a whiplash thing going on. But I survived, but I got out to exchange info with them, and it was Lucy's family going to the funeral.

TM: Oh, my.

NMM: Yeah, and they were so apologetic and all that stuff, and I said “Don’t worry about it,” and I remember going to Flagstaff and got the bumper fixed and everything else fixed and I submitted the bill to their insurance company cause there was an office in Flagstaff, and the lady said “Yeah, we’re familiar with this claim and this is what you want,” and I said “Yeah,” and she goes “That’s it,” and I said “Yes, just pay for checking to make sure my neck was okay and pay for the bumper that needs to be fixed.” They were just blown away that I wasn’t suing them, you know. I just want my bills paid. We live in a litigious society and, you know, if I was in this planet to make money I wouldn’t have been a park ranger, that’s for sure.

TM: How many people came to Lucy’s service, do you remember?

NMM: Oh, it filled the Shrine [Shrine of the Ages]. Two hundred people? Easily, easily. She was a fixture at Grand Canyon for a long, long, long time and we missed her terribly, cried and cried. Good people. A lot of good nurses there, but Lucy was sort of like the head nurse and all that stuff. We missed her terribly.

TM: It’s funny how that institutional memory fades away. I remember in the late 1990s, early 2000s the clinic underwent a remodel and the whole concept of Lucy’s Room because Dr. Wurgler and Dr. Myers, they identified a room that they called Lucy’s Room for patient care.

NMM: But that was in the clinic.

TM: Yeah.

NMM: Yeah, in the clinic, not in the dorm. I believe it became Resources Management.

TM: Well, no. I ‘m sorry, let me back up a minute. The clinic was remodeled and during that remodeling Dr. Wurgler and Dr. Myers had left and no one had the institutional memory of Lucy and that room was totally changed. It was never called Lucy’s Room again.

NMM: Oh, that’s right.

TM: So I was like just trying to capture some of the history about Lucy Egan just because she was, you know, hearing from you, a well-known fixture of the community. She passed away before I arrived at the clinic and she but, yeah, Tom Myers, Dr. Myers and Dr. Wurgler talked so highly of her as well.

NMM: Oh, yeah, she was great, she was great. And just to put a little bug for future, after I finished with the National Park Service and was still living at Grand Canyon I came back and worked as a nurse at the clinic for Tom Myers and some of the others, too, and when I ran into you a couple of times. I never really pictured myself as a clinic nurse but it was something to do after my career had a very disastrous end.

TM: Yeah. But whenever anybody says Lucy I'm like "Tell me more."

NMM: Yes. No, she was one of, I can see, I can picture her right now and she was just a delightful, she wasn't very tall, white hair, tough as nails, a wonderful person.

TM: Wow. Nice. So let's see, we were talking about housing and the power, Don Kiel.

NMM: And one of the people who lived in the clinic dorms was Juliandra Watt who was a dispatcher, and I can segue to Dispatch if you want.

TM: That'd be great.

NMM: The lead dispatcher at the time was Barbara Brutvan, who lives in Williams still today, and then the other one, Karyn Shinkle, but goes by her maiden name now, Giddon. She's currently a dispatcher in Mesa, Arizona for the Mesa Police Department. And over time there were many more dispatchers that were added to but that, those three were the core from when I first got there.

TM: And did they share a 24-hour duty? So they'd have a day and a swing and a...

NMM: I believe there were more dispatchers than that but, yeah, it was 24-hour, 8-hour shift. Jay, Jay's name has escaped me. There's several other people that were dispatchers at the time but early on they had the permanent dispatchers, Laurie Tuttle was another one. Anyway, it was in the Visitors Center, what was the Visitor Center at the time before the Mather Visitor Center was built. The dispatch center was in the back of the building where the offices of the superintendents and the assistant superintendents, where human resources were. So to get to there you would walk in the front of the building off of, oh, my gosh, what is the name of the road in front of that Visitor Center?

TM: Oh, yeah, it goes down to

NMM: Goes to the Shrine and everything else.

TM: The White House and Shrine.

NMM: (laughs) It just went right out of my head. The most common roads. Oh, well.

TM: It's not south, no, is that South Entrance Road?

NMM: South Entrance Road? No, and then it curves around, but whatever the name of it is, you would walk in past the plaza and then there was the VC. You'd walk in and there was the front desk to the right and then there was a big open area to the left, and then you'd walk through some glass doors to an open kind of plaza which was open, had a roof around the edge of it but the open, the middle part was open to the skies, I believe.

TM: Umm hmm, that's right.

NMM: And underneath the eaves of this plaza were all of the neat old historic boats that were part of the collections, and maybe you can help me, Georgia, what was her name, Georgia?

TM: Georgie White. Her rubber boat was there and the Esmeralda was there, Esmeralda II, tons of boats, yeah.

NMM: Was the Hyde boat, was the Bessie? That was still in Kolb's Studio.

TM: Glen and Bessie Hyde's sweet scow wasn't there but

NMM: Okay, but there were several other kinds of historic boats all the way around. And so I'd walk past them and then I'd go into a door and then the dispatch center was just down the hall, and it had a buzzer you would buzz and they would look through a hole to make sure you were somebody who would be allowed into this dispatch center because it was a very important area of protecting people, protecting the dispatchers. You don't want a bad guy getting in there for any reason. So they would buzz you in, and I remember early on in my career at Grand Canyon all of our reports were done on paper. They were typed on a typewriter, done on paper, no word processing, no computers, and above the dispatch office in the back corner of the room was access to an attic storage space which had boxes and boxes and boxes of all reports that went back decades and decades. I have no idea what happened to them but I remember going up there and having to look at stuff in the past, in particular for Tom Myers who

wanted to look at a case or two we had worked together, and discovering those boxes, I think for his books about the Grand Canyon.

TM: Well, he also went through all those files for his book "Fateful Journey" about the incidents and accidents on the Colorado River in the Park, and those were critical to that study that he did, those boxes.

NMM: Yeah. So you'd walk in and there was a desk and it had teletype kind of computer in front because it wasn't, we weren't in the age of computers yet. It was 1991 and so everything was, they'd call, if they'd hit, I should back up a little bit. So the dispatcher would be in there, usually alone unless it was shift change, and they would get a call that was recorded on tape to tape reel, and say it was a report of a domestic disturbance at the Maswick Lodge or housing, and they would write it down in the book, write it down by hand in a book and then they would type it. They had to do it twice, type it into this screen, which I guess is a word processor sort of not computer, then they would call us and say "523 dispatch," it was 526 when I first got there, 526, later I became number 523, and then later I became Sierra 23. It changed what they decided to call us and it was whoever was the new chief ranger decided to change those, I guess. Anyway, report at the Maswick Lodge" and I'll say "Copy, en route," and they would write that down in their little book that I was en route or whatever it was. But my dispatcher was my backup because there was so little support out there for protection that, I wish I knew this poem by heart... let's see, "if you don't tell your dispatcher where you are and they don't know where you are, we hope that your God knows where you are because only God can help you," or something like that, you know. It's a really good little ditty, you know, you always checked in and said where you were. You never pulled a car over without telling the dispatch. You never, you always, they were your backup, and I have to say that that triumvirate of Barb, Karyn and Jules were excellent, excellent. They were very good and I often, because as a paramedic I got called out in the middle of the night, and they were very nice because they said I was one of the few that did not yell at them at 3:00 in the morning—"Haven't you tried this, haven't you tried something else." I usually just said "Okay, who's coming to get me or where should I go." I was just sort of, I have a gentler nature perhaps, I don't know. So they didn't mind calling me more except for after while I said "No jail runs. I'm not doing jail runs anymore," after I hit the elk. I'm not doing it. So, and there's other people who are paramedics. I get called out enough for paramedic stuff. Anyway... So the dispatch center was in there and I would often go in on night shift and just sit inside and talk with the dispatcher, get to know who they were, because it wasn't always someone I knew. As time progressed and years went by there were other dispatchers and usually the newer people worked the night shift and so you got to know who they were. It was really neat to meet Jay, who was on the softball team with me, or Laurie, or some of

these other people that came in. I wish I could remember all of their names. And then to see how the system worked, why there was a delay in calling, because they have to type all this out and they have to write all this out and, or if they didn't hear something they'd have to go to the reel to reel tape and they'd have to rewind it and tell me exactly what it was the person said for a report or something. And sometimes for, we would go to the hospital for run reviews, which means we do all our paperwork for our medicals and like I, for instance, decompressed a tension pneumothorax in two patients within like a month, which is kind of unusual, and then they have air gradually building up in their chest and if it goes unchecked it'll squish their heart to the other side and compress their heart enough that it kills them. So you put a needle in their chest in the intercostal space, get the air to come out and off you go. Because it was not something that you do every year, let alone twice in one month, they wanted to do a run review of it and so they needed a copy of the tape. So I remember Karyn, she kindly of made a copy of the tape for me so I could play it at run review so they could hear the call and that kind of stuff. And then I might be in there and when you were on night shift either you were by yourself or there might be one other ranger, but there might be other people listening in. So they'd say "Oh, we got a report of chest pain at the Bright Angel, Room 23," and I said "Okay, I'm going out the door, give me 10 seconds and then give me the call" so that other people can hear it

TM: So they know what's going on, yeah.

NMM: so they know what's going on. Just don't tell me here in the room. So I would go out and jog to my vehicle and I'd say, "Copy, en route to the VC" or something like that. So that's how that kind of worked. So I'd always delay them. They "Oh, this one's for you or this one's for somebody else" or whatever it is.

TM: So this, roughly is this like 1995, 1997? I'm just trying to...

NMM: What this? 1991 when I first moved there was when I built up this great rapport with the dispatch center.

TM: Great. If I picked up the phone and called 911 in 1991 would that go to Dispatch?

NMM: It would, it would go to the Dispatch Center if you were in Grand Canyon National Park. There were no cell phones back then so, well, I should take it back. There were the luggage kind of phones and there were car phones but they went to Grand Canyon and I do believe that all the 911 calls from the town of Tusayan went to our dispatch center at that time as well. Later on they were routed to a different, I can't speak to that.

I can't speak where they routed, I just remember Death Valley went to our dispatch center then that all changed, and then any 911 call in Death Valley went to San Bernardino of all places and then San Bernardino would give us our calls moved to the San Bernardino dispatch center. So that was a real cluster that's for sure. But I do believe all 911 calls came into that center. So if you had multiple calls in a row you kind of had call waiting, and a lot of times the dispatchers would call in a second dispatcher if they knew that it was a busy night or there was a fire or a mass casualty incident, or a big search on. When Danny Ray Horning was loose in the park there was always at least two people and, of course, the FBI came and all these other regulatory people came to the Canyon to spend time with us during that period of time.

TM: So there must, I'm just trying to figure it out, there must have been radio set that would go out to park wide, anyone with a radio, and that would be maintenance people, that would be admin people if they were listening in, law enforcement, certainly fire.

NMM: And this was before digital airwaves, at the post analog airwaves. That's why people would go to me "We love listening to you on the radio. It's like Mystery Theater," and I'd have no clue who that person was but a lot of residents of Grand Canyon had scanners. You had to be very careful about what you said on the radio. That's why, for instance, if there was a dead body we didn't say "There's a dead body." We'd say "10-99 or 901." So if you're standing next to somebody they wouldn't hear the word dead body. So we used 10 codes for a lot of stuff and a lot of numbers for a lot of things. And when the way it worked, especially at Grand Canyon, you have line-of-sight radios that can only go so far and so it would have to be repeated, go to a tower, the signal would be enhanced, and then sent or repeated to another tower or to another signal. So these were called repeater stations. So when we talked on the radio you could only talk for 45 seconds at the most, which was always a problem for Ronnie Gibson, but you would talk for 45 seconds then you'd say "Break," and then you'd let go of the key on your radio to give a chance for the repeater to recycle to be able to pick up the next 30 seconds of whatever you're going to say. If you were done with what you're saying you would say "Roger," and they did that 523, you know, (sound effect), break. I'm on scene with a (sound effect), break" and then "If you could send me backup, thank you. Out." I'd say out when I was done talking. If I said break that means I'm going to speak more so don't interrupt me.

TM: Right. And then there would be a problem with open mikes if someone was sitting on the radio or something.

NMM: Yeah, there was a problem with open mike and there was also a problem with people in the shift, and I remember this happened with Dan, oh, I wish I could

remember his last name, it started with a K. It'll come to me, but maybe I don't need to know his last name. So we woke him up one morning and then he just didn't wake up well and I remember going to a call with him and his hair was off towards joneses, he was disheveled and stuff. He was the EMT on the call and I was the paramedic. So we were loading the person in the ambulance and the patient took one look at him and said "He's not driving is he?" (Both laugh) I said "Yeah, he's fine to drive." So he just didn't wake quickly. I remember he was on the aircraft one time, the helicopter. Instead of intership communications or ISC, he pushed the radio and said some pretty bad language expletives over the air and so that, which is a violation of FCC communications rules, so he got in trouble for that. So you just have to be very careful about what you say on the radio, who you say it to. So sometimes if we had a problem, and I remember specifically on the Tonto Platform we had a man who went down the New Hance Trail off of East Rim Drive and they decided partway down the trail, they were going to go to the river and back and they left at 1:00 and they were going to go to the river and back, be back by 3.

TM: Wait... What?

NMM: Yeah. And they had a 16-ounce bottle of water each. This is what their, and so they started down the trail and the friend said

TM: Wait, wait, wait, wait. Let me just make sure I understand this. These people were at the Rim and they were thinking they were going to get to the river and back in two hours?

NMM: In August.

TM: In August with 16 ounces of water?

NMM: Well, one each, yes.

TM: One each? Okay.

NMM: So they started down the trail

TM: This is the Grand Canyon we're talking about and it's a mile deep.

NMM: Yes. This is called job security for the rangers, right. So they're going down the trail and they said "Well, this is going to take us forever. We're going to get off the trail and go straight to the river cross country." So they go off the trail and they're going

straight down to the Tonto Platform and one guy, who seemed to have the only shred of brains in his head, said “I don’t have enough water, I’m going back,” and he called his friend a sort of bad name and the guy went back up to the Rim and waited in the car for a couple of hours and the guy never showed up. Shall I continue with this story? I didn’t mean to...

TM: Yeah. No, this is fine, yeah.

NMM: So we, so of course we knew this was a bad thing that was going on and the guy was waiting in the car,

TM: Well, wait, wait, wait. How did you know this was going on because?

NMM: The guy back in the car drove to a phone.

TM: Oh, he did?

NMM: He drove to the phone I believe at the Yavapai

TM: Observation station there or

NMM: Nope, nope, nope, no, no. Kaibab, South Kaibab Trail.

TM: Oh, okay. Oh, yeah, there’s a phone there, right.

NMM: South Kaibab Trail and said “Hey, we’re over here and “ (sound effect). So we

TM: And goes, that’s another phone that goes to Dispatch.

NMM: Yes. So they knew this was bad. Somebody was sent to the trail head. I can’t remember his name, I can see him, he went on to Virgin Islands but I can’t remember his name, but... And he went there, the reason I’m telling this story, he went to the edge of the Grand Canyon because we were going to work the Tonto Platform and he was going to be a human repeater to talk to the people on the Platform, they would talk to him and then he would talk to Dispatch cause we can’t talk to Dispatch directly. We can’t hit the repeater from the Tonto where we were going. Does that make sense?

TM: Got it. Yes, yes. So he bridged, the people on the Tonto could have line of sight to him on the Rim and then he would pick up the repeater into Dispatch. Got it.

NMM: And that tells you how complex some of these things are. So Craig, I wish I could remember, Craig Litz, do we have a Craig Litz? No, no. Craig Litz was somebody else. Anyway, his wife was the court officer, blond hair. Anyway, so he got in the helicopter with other people and he flew over and he saw in a crack on the Tonto a man lying on a rock, so we knew we had a rescue, and he's down in this crack, this hole, where water has eroded this areaway. So Tammy, Craig, one other person, I think, got on the initial aircraft and went down to this guy who had fallen on his back, probably broke it, super dehydrated, and this is, of course, toward the end of the day, and so they were down in this big, I want to call it a crack but there's another word for it

TM: Chimney?

NMM: Huh?

TM: A chimney kind of thing?

NMM: It's a big, it's a little mini-canyon on the Tonto so we had to rappel down to the bottom.

TM: Like a slot kind of thing?

NMM: Yeah, but it's like maybe 50 feet wide and so

TM: Okay, a little box canyon?

NMM: Yeah. And then you landed on there and so they go down and they start their IVs and they do this stuff and he's in bad shape and so I got slowed down to be the support on the Tonto, not down at the patient but now they can't talk out of their crack so they talk to me on the radio and I talk to whatever his name, the repeater, we're going to just call him Tom on the radio, and then Tom talks to Dispatch on the radio. So we have now two different repeaters and so they're down there, it's a hundred degrees plus in August, they're down in here rehydrating this guy, and Tammy, we're talking to each other on the radio. We had channels where you could just talk basically line of sight. She goes "Nanc, we're getting in a pretty difficult situation ourselves here. We're not going to get out any time soon and we're getting dehydrated," and I said "Okay, what do you need?" She goes "We need like a whole bunch of IV fluids and cubitainers of water," which are containers of fluid. "We're going to start IVs on each other cause we're getting dehydrated." So the last helicopter to come in for the day before pumpkin time, which is where the helicopter can't fly, brought in cubitainers, brought in IV fluids, all this kind of stuff, and it's so hot that they're starting IVs on each other.

TM: Wow.

NMM: And so then I'm worried about them. Now I'm up here on the flat Tonto Platform, basically flat with a few shrubs and stuff, and I have one rock that's about 12 inches high by 2 feet long, and that's my spot for the night and I have my 35-pound med bag which has all my stuff in it to take care of a medical, plus a water container for me, but I had a cubitainer, too, and like a power bar and a poncho. And what do you know starts rolling in but one of our monsoon thunder storms, and it starts rolling in and it is cracking all around and I know I'm going to get hit by lightning so I take my radio and I said "Tammy, and Tom, I'm moving my radio away from me. I'm not talking." I move the radio away, move everything metal away from me, take off my scissors and everything else, and I'm lying on the ground with my back against this rock, lightning is hitting and thundering at the same time. It is, my hair is tingling. It is the most incredible experience but it was also very scary. Later on when I talked to Tammy she said "I was so worried about you getting struck by lightning," cause they're fine in this little canyon. I said "I'm sorry about your guys getting all dehydrated down there." So we were like worried about each other. So they took care of the patient all night long and I lasted the night, and then when the thunderstorm goes past and I'm still relaying stuff and patient care and, you know, information to give to the hospital. So what they decide to do is not short haul him up. I don't know why they didn't do this, but they brought in with sawyers and they cut a path in this canyon, they stayed in this little slot canyon all the way down to the river, except for this one little spot where they had to lift him up and over something. They brought Derosier in, Dave Derosier, and he brought him in to the north side of the Colorado River where he assembled a boat with a motor, and then he put it in the Colorado River. When they brought the patient to the south side of the river they put him in the boat and then Dave was able to take him to an LZ (landing zone) where he could be short hauled out. It cost, for those two guys to go down there on that whim, I think a hundred and thirty thousand dollars or something. But, of course, they were never billed for it. But that gives you an idea of radio limitations and lengths. Later on when we went to digital instead of analog and scrambling signals, a lot of people were upset because now they couldn't hear Mystery Theater and the comment to me was not so much what the calls we were on because we were calling, like if I had a patient I would call them and say "I need to talk to Flagstaff Medical Center Emergency Room," and I'd say "This is Ranger RN/Paramedic Nancy Muleady-Mecham with a 36-year old male," and I'd give a whole report, and they thought it was pretty exciting to hear this whole report or something, but after about 10 years then that ability to listen in went away.

TM: You know, this is interesting, Nancy, because I was there at that time and at one point the ranger log was in the newspaper, was in the Williams-Grand Canyon News that came out once a week, and it seemed like it was kind of a nice deterrent in a way for people thinking about driving while they were intoxicated cause if you got pulled over your name might be in the newspaper for driving under the influence or something, and then that went away and then the analog to digital took away anybody who was monitoring the radio trying to figure out what was going on. So it's an interesting question on the public's kind of right to know, well, not need to know but curiosity as well and the Park's ability to get done what needed to be done. Do you have a take on that or thoughts on that?

NMM: Well, one of the things I do know if you look at any major event in any venue, whether it's the Boston bombing at the Marathon or if it's Danny Ray Horning at the Grand Canyon or if it's this turning off the grid and stuff, communication is very important. Who do you need, how do you get them there, how do you talk to each other about it and, you know, for instance on medicals we don't give patients' names over the air, you know, for patients' privacy, but one of the things that happens if you don't have these advanced systems is in the middle of a call Maintenance is going to say "Hey, can you bring that wrench over here," you know. So we had to develop different channels for that and then after a while if the bad guy had scanners, too, they might hear us coming. So it was also for the protection of them and it was for the protections of the rangers so we weren't getting set up. If they knew we were going to be a specific place, if we said "I'm going to be at home for my lunch, I'm going to be at the Yavapai for my lunch," it protected us from somebody who wanted to get the drop on us, too. So my take on it is the better advanced system you can get for communications to everybody who needs to know I agree that it's really nice to have a scanner and to hear what was that siren, what could it possibly be, that's a small price to pay for people's efficiency, safety, and life, I think.

TM: Right. That's a really good point. Yeah.

NMM: Yeah. So that's my take on it. Even though it's fun to hear people say "How did that guy turn out."

TM: Yeah, yeah.

NMM: I'm sorry. I just got a text. No big deal. From Jacob Wahler. You know Jacob.

TM: Oh, fun, yeah.

NMM: He's leaving the Park Service. He's going to the Forest, oh, I shouldn't tell you this, and we're being recorded. Anyway, Jacob Wahler, he's at the Grand Canyon, he's going to the Forest Service and he's doing great.

TM: He must be, what, he must be in his 20s now? How old is he?

NMM: I think he's 30-something.

TM: Oh, my gosh. Okay. Wonderful. Gosh, time goes by. Well, so Dispatch and how that worked. Did Juliandra and Barb and Karyn, did they ever talk about the stress of the job?

NMM: Yeah, they talked a lot about the stress of the job. In fact, one of the cool things is Jules, before she lived down on Boulder Street, lived over in either Hermit Circle or one of the little apartments on Sunset, and I remember Marker Marshall also worked in interpretation, we would often go to each other's stoops at one of our houses and we would sit down and talk, and Barb Brutvan just lived down on Sunset, too, and we had sort of a doggie co-op there where we would watch each other's dogs. Julie had a dog, Marker had a dog, Barb had a dog, I had a dog, and if anybody went out of town everybody took care of everybody's dog. But we also went over to each other's houses, and I remember sitting on the steps in the back of the house and just lamenting things and they lamenting things and, you know, why is this happening and, you know, now they're changing this and why don't they just leave it alone, the regular growling that you had but also talking about I wish that things were different or this is working really well. And the cool thing about it is these are people that I trusted with my life on a daily basis so I also felt like I could talk to them about almost anything, and often did. And if there was a problem at Dispatch, you know, if there was a new dispatcher doing something a particular way or did something kind of weird or growls about something I felt like I could go to one of these older more experienced ones and going "How can I approach this, how can I talk to this dispatcher to quit doing it this way or not," and inevitably Barb would go "I'm the lead dispatcher and I'll take care of it." And I said "But I want to do it myself. I want to come across as this okay person and stuff," so she would talk about an approach. So we would sit on the stoop and talk about how to deal with something like that. And, so yeah, when, a lot of times at Dispatch it was person, power, equipment, radio communications, and interference by other agencies over their frequencies, etcetera. And plus administration. Never enough money or people.

TM: Right. And you've got to know 1.1 million acres, something like that, somebody calls from the river at mile such and such you've got to be able to capture that information. Somebody calls from the North Rim or up in Marble Canyon or

NMM: I'm glad you brought that up because that's not how it worked on the river. Unless you're with the Secret Service with Al Gore that time, and Al Gore used to be the Vice President, at the time he was the Vice President, he came down with his Secret Service and he got off the raft at Phantom Ranch and hiked up out to the South Kaibab Trailhead and made the mistake of out hiking his Secret Service people. So I caught a call from Dispatch, could I please go to the South Kaibab Trailhead and provide security. I said "What," and that's all they would tell me. So I would provide security because the Vice President was there without his protection, you know, and he got yelled at for doing that. But for the ordinary raft people, and you know this quite well, carry radios that go to airplanes that fly over the Grand Canyon. They don't have radios that go to our dispatch. So if they had an emergency they would wait for an airline at 30,000 feet or whatever it was, AGL above ground level, to fly over and they would transmit something, and they'd say "Mile, River Mile 131 Colorado River, Grand Canyon National Park, head injury, need help." That would go to the FAA that would go to the search and rescue, search and rescue would then go to Grand Canyon. By the time we got it, it was River Mile 133 chipped tooth, who knows what it would come out as. So you went with everything. But that was, that was a very difficult thing for commercial river raft people to try to get help because you truly are in a wilderness area when you're on the river.

TM: Right. This is before sat phones. That's right. I forgot about that cause now there's a phone number that the Park gives out to all the river runners saying "Call this number on your phone, it goes right to Dispatch."

NMM: Right. And before then the only people with satellite phones, or sat phones, was the Secret Service and the Grand Canyon.

TM: Got it, got it.

NMM: When I went down, when the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the National Park Service, we did not have a sat phone. That's why I went because I went with my EKG monitor for the male with the heart problem. So we didn't even have a sat phone. Only, I guess, the Vice President had it at the time. Yeah.

TM: Wow, that's interesting.

NMM: You're right, we didn't tackle a lot of the stuff we were going to tackle.

TM: You know, that's all right because maybe this is a good place to, did we cover Dispatch? I mean, it just, you know, and my sense is it was very stressful job. There could be six different things or more happening at once and were

NMM: And what most people don't realize they also answered the general information number that came into the Park. "Hi, this is So and So, can I talk to So and So?" "Hi, can I have general information?" "Yes, I'll give you the front desk." They were the operators. Not just the 911 operators; they were the operators.

TM: Wow. That's a whole 'nother struggle right there. And then there was a whole 'nother dispatch center for the concessioner, for whoever was operating the Fred Harvey concession.

NMM: Right, and they were usually in the Bright Angel Lodge and you walked in the Lodge, they had a desk to the left-hand side for all of their mule rides going to Phantom Ranch and stuff, and that's where people called to get reservations on those things and hotels eventually became a 1-800 number in Louisiana or something, I don't know.

TM: Wait, no, no, I think the concessioner had actually a dispatch for routing their own extensions, their own phone numbers.

NMM: Oh, at the GO, yeah, the General Office.

TM: At the GO. Well, no, it wasn't at the GO, it was in the Bright Angel, but it was, you'd walk in and you'd turn left, go past the little museum they had there, down the stairs, or at the top of the stairs, only a couple, three or four steps, there was a door there and they had dispatched their own fire and safety and their maintenance people. Who else? That may be it, but clearly there was a connection from Park Service Dispatch to them, Park Service Dispatch to Coconino County, the sheriff's department, clearly connected to a lot of different places there.

NMM: I'll add one other big thing that I thought was very important in radio communications is the first part of my career I had a handi-talky radio which was a, was just what they called it a handi-talky that sat on my belt and any time I wanted to talk to it I turned it upside down on its holster so it would come out. So when it sat on my belt it would not come off if I ran or walked or anything. So I'd turn it upside down, bring it up to my face, and I would talk to it and then put it back on there. One of the most important safety progressions were radios that came out where you could attach a cable to the top of it, usually a coiled cable, go up your back and then attach a microphone to the epaulet on your shirt.

TM: Oh, that's handy.

NMM: And then so you could just turn your head and push a button and talk on it, and I remember this specifically because one of the things that we were taught, and we always had 40 hours of continuing education where we were taught these new things like, how to use the new radio system that was on your shoulder was there was a police officer in Illinois, it might have been Chicago, and he investigated an alarm at a K-Mart or something like that, and he was walking around the outside of the building when the bad guy got the jump on him and put a gun on him and said "We're going off into the woods," and the guy knew that he was going to shoot and kill him. So he put his hands up and he let them slow lower the to the level of his shoulder and he would push the key on his radio, which was on his shoulder now, this little microphone, and say "I know here at K-Mart there's not much to do but you've got that gun at me and I'm afraid you're going to shoot and kill me," then he would let it go. So the whole time the guy's talking to him he's keying the mike, letting everybody know that he needs help by making it sound like that. So that was another safety addition, I think to that.

TM: Yeah. Fascinating.

NMM: I'll think more, if I can think more of Dispatch we can do that next time, I think.

TM: Okay. That sounds great. Well, with that this will then conclude Part 8, Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Nancy Muleady-Mecham. Today is Wednesday, March 31, 2021. My name is Tom Martin and, Nancy, thank you so very much for this.

NMM: You're welcome, Tom.

End of interview.