Interviewee: Nancy Eileen Muleady-Mecham (NM)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
Subject: Nancy recounts her experiences from 1979-84, including seasonal jobs at Sequoia, Death Valley, and Everglades National Parks, as well as college and paramedic work
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TM: Today is Tuesday, December 8th, 2020. This is a Part 3 Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Nancy Eileen Muleady-Mecham. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Nancy. How are you today?

NM: Hi, Tom. I'm doing well, thank you.

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

NM: Yes.

TM: Thank you. At the end of Part 2—well, we kind of got off track a little bit and talked about some interesting things to talk about, but getting back on track—1979, I think you were a GS-4 in Sequoia. Is that right?

NM: That's right. I was a seasonal naturalist. We didn't call ourselves interpreters at the time; we were seasonal naturalists. Interpretation came later on. But I worked there, and then the fall I went back to finish my master's degree in biology at Cal. State University, Fresno, where I was a teaching assistant as well. So I was a TA, as they call them. And I taught anatomy, physiology—I was a lab tech or lab teaching assistant for several classes. And that was very rewarding, and it really showed me how much I really liked to teach.

And then I graduated in May of 1980. And, as it turned out that my thesis—when you get a PhD it's a dissertation; once you get a master's degree it's a thesis. And my thesis, initially, the first year, was going to be on predation of orange orchards by Norway rats, which are imported from Europe. And, as in all

things, you assist each other, so I would go out with some guys who were studying jack rabbits, and then I would set my trap and trap my Norway rats.

And the second year, there were huge floods. And it drowned all my rats, which are burrowing rats. So I thought, oh my goodness gracious. But I had also been working on tar seeps, and so I switched direction for my thesis and really got into the fossils of Maricopa. Everybody's heard of the Rancho La Brea tarpits, but that's not the only tarpit in California. There's some at Carpenteria; there's some at Maricopa; there's some at McKittrick.

And nobody had really studied the ones at Maricopa. It was on private land owned by Mobile Oil. And a really good professor of mine, a really good friend that I knew until he died in his 90s, Dr. Art Staebler, became my—what an interesting person. But he was my mentor, and we had big blocks of bitumen, which is basically dried oil and full of fossils.

TM: Had Mobile Oil cut those out of the ground, or did Dr. Staebler do that?

NM: Oh no. We did that.

TM: Did you do that?

NM: Oh, we did that.

TM: How do you cut big blocks of bitumen?

NM: Shovels.

TM: Wow, okay.

NM: Shovels and bars and hammers and things. So you'd have a one-by-one square block, and then we'd put it in a trailer and bring it back. And then a lot of it is lab stuff. So I listened—I love musicals, so I'd listen to all kinds of musicals from—this is silly stuff to tell you, but *My Fair Lady,* and *Man of La Mancha*. All the time I'm looking under a microscope and getting things out of tar and then identifying each and every one. I identified over 4,000 fossil elements, recreating the Pleistocene environment for that area.

TM: So these would be small mammals, then, small birds, insects?

NM: Oh, some of them are large, but they're bits and pieces of them, bones here and bones there. I later found a very interesting trend which I later published in the *Southern California Academy of Sciences Bulletin*. And basically, if you look at a pyramid of life on earth, then you have the grasses, and then you have the things that eat the grasses, and then you have the things that eat the herbivores, and then you have the carnivores, and then you have the recyclers. So that's kind of a pyramid.

And energy wise, each level is decreased so it's only—grasses can only supply ten percent of herbivores. Herbivores can only supply ten percent of carnivores. So that's why it becomes smaller and smaller. Well, it turns out I had a heck of a lot more carnivores than I did herbivores, and I also had lots more legs and tails than I had backbones and skulls.

TM: Why was that?

NM: Well, after I figured it out, it was really neat. I went to Rancho La Brea. I did work down here; I went other places. Wrote this paper that was very well received, and it's called "Differential Preservation of Fossil Elements in the Maricopa Brea, California." And basically, a herbivore or somebody walks into the tar seep and gets stuck. And it yells and screams, and then a carnivore comes, eats the exposed back and skulls, but the legs are caught in the tar. And then it gets stuck, and a carnivore comes and eats the carnivore that's stuck, and on and on. So you have more carnivores than herbivores because the initial herbivore attracted the carnivores, and they got stuck because their legs were mostly not exposed. Then they differentially ate spinal products. So I was really fun to figure out.

TM: That makes perfect sense. Would you find small mammals, though? Would you find rabbits and mice and things?

NM: Oh yes, and I had bat wing bones.

TM: Oh my gosh. Cool.

NM: I had pieces of bark from juniper trees, which are not found there now. Pollen—I would identify pollen. Palynology is the study of pollen, so I would do that. I was under a microscope for two years.

TM: I bet.

NM: So it was really, really fun. And I worked with chemicals and worked with vibrating machines to isolate everything—

TM: And you got to know mammalian anatomy incredibly well.

NM: Oh yeah. Oh, very well. I could pick up a tooth and say this is a dire wolf. *(TM laughs)* I mean, the saber-toothed cats were easy, but you know, this is the dire wolf, this is a coyote, this is—I could pick up a thing and say, this is a crane, this is a crow, this is this. So I got very good at my morphology.

TM: And so I'm just trying to figure this out. You were basically digging out one foot by one foot by one foot squares of this bitumen. And you would basically hack through everything either side of that. So there'd be this sacrifice zone all the way around this cube. Then you get the cube back to the shop. How would you kind of melt it or soften it up to get the bones out?

NM: Well, you would take a petroleum product—

TM: Like gasoline, or—

NM: —sort of like a lighter fluid, something that wasn't so bad with the colder the winter and the windows closed. *(laughs)*

TM: Oh right. Yeah.

NM: And then it was in a vibrating tray. And then the vibrations plus that would pretty much get everything off. And then it was meticulous, me taking things off. So you've got things as large as teeth and leg bones and stuff, several inches long, down to micro fossils. Which I had individual pieces—I'm trying to think of a common name for them; I can't. Diplopoda is a millipede, and they look like worms with rings. And then when they break apart, those individual rings are like little—like the third of the size

of your fingernail. And I would find thousands of those under the microscope, and thousands of tiny little bat bones and mice tarsi, which are toe bones. And you name it, I found it.

TM: I wonder how the bats got in there. You'd think they'd be smart enough to go, hey, there's the ground right there. I'm not going to fly into that.

NM: Well, that was part of my study—how is it that the herbivores even went in there in the first place—is that water would sit on top of it after rain. And so even the bats have to drink. So they fly down to drink, and maybe the tip of a wing or something else happened. And it really wasn't an inch deep like they thought. Maybe it was a millimeter thick, and then their mouth slammed right into the tar.

TM: Right. Yeah. Fascinating.

NM: Yeah, so that was a lot of fun. So I finished that and had my master's degree. And as a seasonal does nothing for you in terms of increase in pay—if I went out in the real world it would help—but I went back for my second season as a seasonal naturalist at Sequoia National Park. Walks, talks, evening programs. Then in that fall, 1980, was my first season as a seasonal at Death Valley National Park.

And while I was in graduate school I said—I should say my last year—at night school I went to Reedley College, which is in Reedley, south of Fresno, and got my EMT at nighttime. So I was also then at Death Valley, because there were very few people who were EMTs, while as a naturalist I would work as—they would call me out on occasion to do occasional car wrecks or difficulty breathing.

TM: Let's back up a little bit. When you're applying of the next year's seasonal jobs, did you apply at a couple different places, and is that how you ended up at Death Valley? Or did you talk to somebody and they said, "Oh, you apply and come over."

NM: Yeah, no. Remember, to go back to Sequoia was easy at that, because you were highly recommended for rehire. So you got first shot at any openings, once you work there. And then for the winter park jobs, you apply to where you want to go. And I wanted to go to Death Valley. We'd gone there lots as a family; as a kid, I loved Death Valley. And it was a winter park that had hired people in the winter.

And so when they see that you already have seasonal experience as a naturalist with a "highly recommended for rehire" back at Sequoia, they go, "Ooh. I think maybe we'll pick this person." So the more experience you have—so I was fortunate to get picked in 1980, loved it, brought living history—

TM: Who did you work with there? Who'd you meet?

NM: Larry—trying to remember. Boy, the names are just—I'll have to come back them. Larry Norris. Larry Norris I worked with. Because Larry Norris, Rick McIntyre and myself came back in '81. And that year, it was interesting because the seasonals were—there were two permanents. One was the chief naturalist at Furnace Creek. And then there was the district naturalist at Furnace Creek.

And when Larry, Rick and I came back the next year, the district naturalist had transferred to another park, and the chief naturalist had a heart attack. So it turns out, we three seasonals—plus, I think, five more seasonals—we ran the place *(laughs).* It was a lot of fun. And so we made all kinds of programs. I brought in living history; I dressed up as Juliet Brier.

And it was really interesting, because I was going to—Juliet Brier was with the 49ers that came through in 1849. And she was a woman who left a diary behind, so there was a lot to go with. So I had a bonnet. And I had a funny little black book that was supposed to be my little Bible, but it was actually the pocket guide to science, which I always thought was ironic. *(TM laughs)*

And so I would walk out with my long prairie dress. And so the very first time we were going to do it (living history)—and it's never been done in Death Valley before, because I had done living history character at Sequoia National Park—a 1926 camper, which was a lot of fun. And so here I was, and I was going to be in the desert and Larry was going to get them all out in the desert, and then I was going to walk up. And then I would talk to them as if it were 1849.

TM: How would you kind of just walk up? Would you kind of hide behind a rock or something?

NM: Yeah. Well, I was waiting in the visitor's center. And it was just going to be like 20 yards from the visitor's center auditorium. So you can't get rid of everything. So that was the plan. So I thought, you know, 20/30 people. The most I'd ever had at Sequoia was like 60 people, very manageable.

So the people who come to Death Valley are usually retired people. They are very into all of the naturalist stuff, at that time. Some people would come to your program two or three times and take notes, ask you questions. It was a whole different clientele; it was just absolutely wonderful. And so I'm hiding, ready to go out, walk into the desert and Rick comes in and goes, "Larry's putting people in the auditorium." And I said, "No, that'll really take away from the character. At least I have the backdrop of the desert." And he goes, "You don't understand. We have 400 people here."

TM: Holy cow.

NM: "What?" Yeah, so I ended—every time I gave that living history character, we filled the auditorium—

TM: *(laughs)* Wow.

NM: —because it was something new and different and unique. I would give evening programs, and that auditorium would be filled. One program I gave was called "Humble Abodes," about animals in their nests and homes and things. I gave another one about the railroad in Death Valley, which most people don't know about, called "Ties to the Past."

TM: Oh, very clever.

NM: And so I would have people—and I'd be up on the stage looking at this group of people, and then people would be standing along the sides of the walls. I mean, it was a real golden time of being a naturalist. And I was a real ham, I guess; I'm kind of extroverted. And I would talk to people as sort of a pre-program thing, and I usually asked where people are from.

And in a group of 400 and plus people, I'd say, "Oh, you're from Michigan. Oh, you're from Michigan." And I said, "What town in Michigan?" And they'd say "Shelbyville." And the other person would go, "Shelbyville." And I said, "Oh, what street?" And they'd go, "New Hampshire." And the other person would go—and they're like way at the other end—"New Hampshire." And I said, "What?" And they stood up and they looked at each other. And they were neighbors and didn't even know they came to Death Valley.

TM: Oh yes. *(laughs)*

NM: It was like the greatest thing. And then I would ask them—

TM: How much did you pay them? *(laughs)*

NM: I didn't, but every now and then—that was the only time that happened, but we did have people in the same town. But the other really unique thing is, then I'd ask, "Who's ever been to Death Valley before?" And you know, half the people have their hands up, more than half. "Okay, who was here in the 1970s? Who was here in the 1960's?" And I'd go back and back, and hands would go down.

And finally I had this guy with one hand still up. And I said, "When were you here?" And he said, "1908." And I said, "What?" He says, "My dad—we came over in a buggy." And he said, "We were driving across the desert and coming down over here to go to Beatty to the gold mine over there. And I fell out of the back of the buggy, and they"—or the cart that they had—"and they didn't know it for a long time. I walked after them for a long time." But he was like six years old or something. At the time he was there he was like 72, not that old for that time.

TM: But that just makes your interpretive talk so wonderful. Wow.

NM: Oh yeah. So I'd get everybody warmed up, and I would make jokes, kind of spontaneous fun things. I loved it; absolutely loved being a naturalist and giving these programs. And like I said, I feel I was there during the golden period. Then I developed a program called "A Day in Death Valley," which is something that Larry, Rick and I sat down and said, "Yes, we can do this," because we were in charge. *(laughs)*

And Death Valley—you know; you've been there, because I've been there with you and Hazel at the book signing. And Scottys Castle is at the northern end. And I thought if you really wanted to just do Death Valley in a day, you'd meet at Furnace Creek, you'd go all the way up to Scottys Castle and go on a tour. You'd come to Stovepipe Wells and you'd see the sand dunes and the Devil's Cornfield. Then you'd stop and see the pupfish at Salt Creek. Then you'd come down and go all the way down to Badwater. And it's below sea level 280 feet. Then you'd drive back through Artist's Palette, and then I'd wrap up my day.

And that was just—I loved it. And it was a carpool, and every stop I would get in a different car, because we didn't have walkie-talkies or anything like that. And it was a signup thing, so we'd only have like six or seven cars, but I have like 30 people. So once a week I did something called "A Day in Death Valley." And that was a lot of fun.

TM: Wow. So did the superintendent or the district ranger or the chief ranger—did anybody go, "Whoa. These seasonal interp people here, the naturalists, are really doing something pretty neat"?

NM: I'd have to say yes, because you do get special achievement awards with the National Park Service, even as seasonals. And I've gotten them at Death Valley, Sequoia National Park, I've gotten them at Everglades, Death Valley, several times at the Hawaiian Islands. Never at Grand Canyon.

TM: Interesting.

NM: Well, I should take it back. There was a real clique and schism in protection at Grand Canyon. And so other people would get special achievement awards and things like that, but only if you knew certain people.

TM: Interesting.

NM: Like, I risked my life on many a rescue, and somebody who brought out somebody with a broken ankle got a big award.

TM: Fascinating, because I would be (?) and paying attention, if I was anybody in management, when 400 people are showing up—

NM: No, in fact, Death Valley even gave me cash awards.

TM: Wow. Great.

NM: No, they were very good at saying, “Good job, Nancy.” I have them in a drawer somewhere. They’re called special achievement awards, and it was very nice. I also got a director of the National Park Service commendation, but that was later in the ’80s when I rescued some people’s lives. So Death Valley was very good at saying you did a good job.

TM: Nice. I just think that's important for morale. It’s important for people who are doing creative stuff like this to continue to think to be creative.

NM: Yes. They did, they did good job. And I was there for those two seasons; I came back in ’85/’86. And then I came back in ‘88/’89, but that was as a protection ranger. But anyway, to move back into—

TM: ’81?

NM: When I worked at Death Valley those two years, those two seasons—and I would go back to Sequoia in the summertime—and as an EMT as well as a naturalist at Death Valley, they called me out for a car crashes. And this one person was really injured badly, and she was what we call decorticate, meaning she had spinal injuries. And she later died; she was from Trona. And then I’d have other calls for patients—a lot of elderly people, because they had strokes and heart attacks.

And it’s two and half hours one way to the hospital in Los Vegas—we used to call it Lost Wages. So we were meet a paramedic ambulance halfway. Flight for Life was just starting out, and you were lucky to get an occasional helicopter. And so here you’re doing CPR for like two hours and going, this is really stupid, and we’re not even defibrillating people. There were no AEDs at the time.

So that is when I said enough’s enough. And so from August of ’82 to ’83, I was a paramedic student at Stanford University. And that season before of ’82, while a naturalist at Sequoia National Park, that’s when my boss Bill Tweed let me alter my schedule in August—because I really didn’t finish there until September—to have certain days off so I could go to school. Because it was an accelerated class, I’d have eight hours of classroom, and then you go to hospitals and do your clinical, and then you go in the field, and then you do ride-along stuff.

So then right after that I got a job working from February to June, before I went to Sequoia National Park—I worked in Modesto Ceres area, as a paramedic for Modesto Ceres ambulance. And the cool

thing about working as a city paramedic is, we'll get 5 to 12 calls a shift; it depends upon everything. As a rule of thumb back then, we used to say you'd get a call for every 10,000 people in population; and that's how they knew how many to staff their rigs, as we called them.

And some days you'd have call waiting; you'd go, go, go. And other days you'd have maybe three calls, not get waken up. But still I would get 1,000 calls in 6 months or something, whereas I might, working in a national park, get 30 calls a summer. So what that did for me is, it gave me the call volume and the experience, that when I did work in national parks, I was on top of my game. I was very experienced and knew what I was doing because I worked seasonally in the city. And I did that for many, many seasons.

TM: So I just kind of want to try to make sure I understand this timeline. So in August of '82 into 1983—so I'm assuming that's like a 6 month course—

NM: Yes.

TM: So it would have been like January of '83?

NM: Yeah, January of '83 when I graduated. And so February I started as a paramedic for Modesto Ceres Ambulance, which is now—it's changed its name. It went to 911, and then it went to—I can't remember the name of it now. AMR?.

TM: No worries. Okay, that's helpful. And you put yourself through the Stanford Paramedic course, right?

NM: I did.

TM: You paid for that.

NM: I did.

TM: Okay. So it's like you really had a keen desire to get on top of this.

NM: Yes. Oh yeah.

TM: And so thinking, "Alright, I'm going to go back to Sequoia in the summer. So this spring I'm going to work as a paramedic for an ambulance company." Okay. Just trying to get that straight.

NM: Right. So in the wintertime I could work in the city and, you know, or work at a winter park. So basically what I did is, I worked as a paramedic in the winter of '83, and then that summer I worked as a naturalist at Sequoia in the fall of—I worked till October. So the fall of '83 I worked as a paramedic for Modesto Ceres until my season started at Everglades National Park in '83.

TM: Okay.

NM: But in each of these places in the national park, I did what it took to become certified as a paramedic. So I got my national registry paramedic, I got my certification in Stanislaus County, I got my certification in Florida, so that as a naturalist at these places they could still call me out as needed.

TM: Right. And I bet they would—

NM: And they did.

TM: —because you had such a great skill set.

NM: I did. And they did, yeah. So then the winter of ’83 to ’84, I worked at Everglades National Park in Florida. And I just loved it, and it was—

TM: So wait, wait, wait.

NM: Sorry.

TM: Can we back up a little bit to Death Valley?

NM: Sure. Yeah.

TM: Besides doing your interpretive tours, on your days off, did you go exploring and…

NM: *(laughs)* I'm glad you said that, because my good friend Mary Anne, who’s my friend to this day, she worked up at Scottys Castle those two seasons, and I worked at Furnace Creek. And we requested and received the same days off. So being best buds, we always went exploring.

And the reason I laughed is because, when she would go back to work at Scottys Castle, and I would go back to Furnace Creek, people were just enthralled. “Where’d you go? What did you do? What did you see?” *(TM laughs)* So we would go everywhere. We would go up to Johnson Canyon. We’d go up to Old Ryan. We’d go to Rhyolite. We went *(laughs)*—later on the ’80s we went to a bordello. But we didn’t work there. We stopped and knocked on the door, and the lady opened the door and we bought tee-shirts. *(laughs)*

TM: Cool.

NM: Let’s see. “Cotton Tail Ranch—you’ll like our spread,” was one of the tee-shirts that it said. In fact, at the time I had a Datsun Wagon, which my dad called the Yellow Peril. And I said it was naturalized, because I ended up replacing every part on it, because it kept breaking down. But it wasn’t four-wheel drive, but we took it on four-wheel drive canyons all the time. And we’d get out and make roads and move rocks and go up a little bit more. And we’d go up to Ballarat—went everywhere, absolutely everywhere.

We went up to Lida Summit. We went on the east side of Sierra Nevada, and we went cross country skiing in the wintertime. There’s a story in my second book called “Dogarea”, which happened when I was at Death Valley with my friend Mary Anne. And we drove one long weekend around the east side—from Death Valley to the west side—to visit friends at Sequoia National Park and go cross country skiing in the wintertime. And it was a lot of fun.

TM: And I'm assuming Bishop—you got to know maybe up to Telescope Peak and…

NM: Oh yes. We drove up to Wild Rose Canyon, hiked up to Roger’s Peak and across to Telescope Peak. And up there it was snowing, while it was 93 degrees down on the floor of Death Valley.

TM: Wow.

NM: Yeah. No, we went everywhere. Went absolutely everywhere.

TM: And I would think that would really help your interpretive understanding as well.

NM: Oh yeah. Up to Beatty. Gee, Bonneville Flats—not Bonneville Flats. What was that called? Bonnie Flats. And then explore—at her end, went up to Texas Spring, explored Christmas Canyon. Just went everywhere, absolutely everywhere. Never sat around.

TM: Yeah, no. It just sounds like there's a lot of country out there to explore.

NM: Oh, there is. Absolutely. And the other thing to keep in mind—I met a friend there as well. And his name was Kent Mecham. I met him in '80/'81. And he was the subdistrict ranger there. And he was in charge of the backcountry and the fire department and everything like that. And he was dating someone else, or with someone else. And so we were friends. And we would get called out, and he would call me out as an EMT and stuff like that. But this was the Kent I married many, many years later on. So I actually met him when we were friends off and on for years.

TM: Cool.

NM: That helped a lot, I think, with our almost 30 years of marriage next April, because there was a friendship that developed underneath the falling in love that happened later on.

TM: Yeah. I was like, "Who did you meet there," because I'm learning in these oral histories, early on in people's careers, they meet people that they will work for or work with or live with later in life.

NM: Yes. No, I met my husband there eight years before I fell in love with him.

TM: Cool.

NM: Yes. So that was a lot of fun.

TM: So what were your first recollection of the guy named Kent?

NM: Oh, well, he was lean, mustache, stood like he'd been in the Marine Corps. And it turned out he'd been in the Marine Corps. Very straight, very quiet, but a ready smile if—and just a very nice person. And one of the reasons that made me think of him is, back in the early '80s, when I was at Death Valley, there was no television. There was no internet. There was no satellite. There was no radio. There was nothing. We didn't even have a radio antenna that would catch anything because of the Funeral Mountains and everything. All of this came later on.

So we had volleyball, basketball, softball team, potlucks—we did everything together as a community. It was absolutely phenomenal. There was a reservoir above the housing area. On a map it says reservoir; you go up there and it's a pool with a diving board on it.

TM: *(laughs)* Cool.

NM: But they call it reservoir on the map. So we would go swimming. I remember one time later on '88 when I was with Kent, that we would go up the swimming pool at midnight when it cooled down to 95.

But no, that was such a wonderful time. And I made friends, and we did stuff together. And we would go over and play guitar and sing with each other.

When we got our first radio antenna, that wasn't as big of an interruption. Then people began to get big satellite dishes. And then something called Betamax came out, and people would record stuff or get videotapes. And slowly but surely, this community eroded into individual households.

TM: Interesting.

NM: And it was really sad to see this over the years.

TM: It just reminds me so much of Godfrey Sykes. In his book *The Westerly Trend*, he writes about all this technology—the automobile and the airplane and all this stuff—that came into his world. And the thing he thought was the worst about it all was the radio, because everybody stopped singing and socializing together.

NM: Yep. Even a player piano would make—somebody had to pump it, and somebody'd be around to sing it.

TM: Yeah. But people would have to entertain themselves as a group, versus isolating.

NM: Yeah, and in the early '80s before this technology came out, we were hundreds of years behind everyone else because of lack of access because of geography.

TM: Right.

NM: So we had a little library there. And it was interesting—this is an interesting story. I think Kent could probably tell it better than I. But in the '70's when Kent was there, I think it was, right before I got there, there were a lot of people who came and filmed things in Death Valley. And they always had to have a ranger there.

In the late '80s, for instance, there was a ketchup company that came and did a commercial. And they were lassoing these giant bottles of ketchup. And you had to make sure they didn't drive off road, and they didn't do this, and they didn't do that. So they always had to have somebody there. And Kent had to go work this film that had come in.

And they brought elephants, and they brought all this stuff. They went up to Golden Canyon, and they hired the kids from the Death Valley Elementary School, one of which became my friend later on in Grand Canyon, Crystal Palmer. And she was a little girl at Death Valley, so I'd known her a long time. And they went up this canyon, and they put these costumes on the elephants. Then they went to the sand dunes. But the kids ran around with these little monk outfits in Golden Canyon. It turns out it was *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg. Yeah, so she was one of the little characters that ran around in little brown outfits.

TM: Oh my gosh. How cool is that?

NM: I know. But at the time, who knew it was going to be so big.

TM: Yeah, absolutely.

NM: And I was really lucky. My mom came to visit me the first or second year—I can't remember—at Death Valley. My parents—and my mom, I think, came with my sister—but it was at a time when they were doing a reenactment of the Beale party that brought the camels across the South Rim.

TM: Right.

NM: And so they had brought camels into Death Valley in this reenactment. So I have pictures of camels and Death Valley. And it was a lot of fun.

TM: Wow. Very nice. Anything else about Death Valley that time, '82-ish, that comes to mind?

NM: Other than our nearest grocery store was Las Vegas, which was 5 hours round trip.

TM: And would you take coolers and fill them with ice so that your stuff didn't freeze? (?)

NM: Oh, yes. Absolutely, absolutely. And anybody going to Las Vegas usually took everybody else's cooler, if they could, to bring back fresh vegetables. "Could you get me some this? Can you get me some of that?" You can buy all kinds of dried goods for months. So we probably only went once a month, once every six weeks, to get groceries.

But I had this reputation—because I'm not a gambler at all, and I don't like smoky places—but I would put my change—and this is before I'd had a credit card, so you pay with cash and stuff. So I'd put some of my change in the slot machines, which were in every grocery store. And inevitably I'd pay for my groceries with $50/$60 at a time. And I thought, "Woohoo!" That was fun.

TM: Nice.

NM: Yeah. And it was long drive and a beautiful drive, and I loved it. I loved Death Valley.

TM: I bet you'd really be careful with your produce, because you'd run out of that fairly quickly if you were only shopping once a month.

NM: Yes. So you'd get canned beans or canned corn. Frozen this, frozen that. So cans, canned stuff. I'm not that picky. I'll eat canned vegetables. But there was another unique thing. She's not there anymore, because she's passed away, but her name was Marta Becket. And she lived at Death Valley Junction, an old train station there. And her husband—she was quite the artist, and she was a ballerina.

And on certain weekends she would sell tickets, and she would do modern dance and ballerina stuff. And she was in the 50s/60s/70s/80s—I forget how old she was. Marta Becket. And I went to see her several times, and I realize now how special and unique. But she painted the walls of the inside of the adobe room as if it was full of an audience.

TM: Oh, wow.

NM: Yeah, so that was a unique experience for the couple years that I was there. Marta Becket. Yeah, I remember her. Oh, and later on in Death Valley when I was a protection ranger, I went up to Ryan, which is a borax mine, and went to MESA training, which is Mine Environmental Safety Act training, in case—as a paramedic—in case they had a mine collapse or some issue and I had to go in the mine. I

knew how to wear the respirator; I knew how to go through the escape hatches and all that kind of stuff. So we did a lot of mutual aid outside of Death Valley as well at the time.

The kids would go to—there was an elementary school in Death Valley. They'd go up to Beatty for middle school, and then down to Shoshone for high school. So the kids were bused every day for hours on end. So I'm glad I didn't go to school there. But no, it was a beautiful area. I loved it.

TM: Cool. And so finishing up with Death Valley in the spring of ’83, if I'm getting this timeline correct, were you thinking about Everglades? It’s like, “Yeah, I'm going to go over there just because it’s different.” Or how did that come about?

NM: I went back—after being a paramedic and stuff, I just think I wanted something different. I loved Death Valley. I was there from ’80/’81 and ’81 to ’82. And then I worked at Sequoia National Park, and then as a paramedic, and then back to Sequoia. And then I decided I want to do something different. So from December of ’83 to April of ’84, I worked in Everglades National Park, having worked from October till that time as a naturalist at—where was that? At Sequoia National Park. I mean as a paramedic at Modesto Ceres, again.

TM: Okay. So from October ’83 to December ’83, you were working as a paramedic.

NM: Yes.

TM: Okay. And I'm assuming that you didn’t work as a paramedic and do interpretation at Sequoia at the same time?

NM: Yes. When I came back that year, there were no paramedics when I went to Sequoia National Park. They loved the idea that I was a paramedic. Oh, and this is the story that I was going to tell you about. I just remember of why it wasn’t a good thing to be a naturalist and a paramedic sometimes.

The district ranger, Tom Tschohl, loved the idea that I was a paramedic, to the point where he actually put a phone in my little old cabin. It was a black phone made from Bakelite—you know one of those little phones—

TM: Yeah.

NM: So dispatch could call me out. And so I was really young, fine, vibrant, didn’t need any sleep. Call me out at nighttime. A couple of times they would call me out. And I remember one time specifically, I was giving a walk up to Tokopah Falls, almost at the falls, and one of the other naturalists came running up and said, “Somebody’s having a heart attack. They need you.” So I said okay. So she took over the rest of the walk, and I ran back out and took care of the guy having the heart attack.

And then there was another time I had an evening program, and there was somebody who was really, really, sick, hurt, wasn’t clear, up the Twin Lakes Trail about two miles. And they asked if I would go up. And I was supposed to have the evening program. So I checked with my boss, and he said, “Yes, we will cover it.” So I put on my pack, and I ran two miles uphill. I mean, back then I could do that. And I remember the ranger on scene saying, “Boy, you got here fast.” Turns out he (the patient) had a ruptured appendix; it was a good thing I got there…called the helicopter, did all the things that we’re supposed to do.

So the person who was doing the scheduling was a gal—and I won't tell you her name because of the rest of what I'm going to tell you. And she said, "I don't think this is working out. I don't think you should be a paramedic and do this stuff. You should just be a naturalist." And Bill Tweed, the district naturalist at the time—was it Bill Tweed? Yeah. I can't remember the district (?)—he goes, "Well, we should wait and see. She's helping them out." She goes, "But I have to find people to cover her shifts…"

So I said, "Okay. Then I just want to be a naturalist," thinking I can be a paramedic in the wintertime. And not four days later I get a call, early in the morning, five/six o'clock, to go up to this person's place. And she was so much—

TM: To the same scheduler person.

NM: The scheduler person. She was in incredible abdominal pain. And so, I had a lot of experience and all this kind of stuff. She didn't have a positive McBurney, she didn't have a fever, all this stuff. And I said, "You started your period?" She goes yes. And I said, "I think this is just endometrial cramps, and you might have some …"

And I said, "One thing. Not to get too technical, but you release a chemical—women release a chemical called prostaglandin, which is what is supposed to contract the uterus to help expel the blood doing your menses. And some women release too much—have too much prostaglandin—and it causes a great deal of pain." There's an over the counter medicine, naproxen sodium, which is called Aleve today, which is an anti-prostaglandin. And I said, "Take two of these, and let's go get you in the tub and soak." And within 45 minutes she was so much better and so much fine.

And so I went back home and went and did my thing, giving walks and talks and evening programs. And she called me in office, and she goes, "You ever have to go anywhere, I will cover whatever you need to do. They can call you out as a paramedic. I can see that you do good things for people." She goes, "It wasn't so much that it turned out to be not that big a deal that I wasn't dying or anything, but I didn't know that." And she goes, "Just having you there made me so much calmer." *(laughs)*

And so by her having experienced what advanced life support can do made her realize that I could make a difference. And I did. It wasn't like a week later that a kid got a—little three-year-old—got into her mom's overnight kit and took her Valium, her bottle of Valium, and I took care of her. And then we had a young man die in the night. He was 34; turns out he was HIV-positive. I knew the protocol to take care of that person and—do we do CPR, do we not do CPR, that kind of stuff.

So there was a time and a place for it, and that's when they were bringing in the Parkmedic Program. And I became a Parkmedic instructor. So now I was teaching protection rangers how to become advanced life support providers. The hardest part about being an advanced life support provider, to be beyond an EMT, is to be a cardiac person.

The first park medics were exclusively cardiac, and that started in Sequoia National Park when people were struck by lightning on Moro Rock. And if they had a defibrillator there—lightning strikes are oftentimes easily reversed by defibrillation. And so they decided that they were going to go to Valley Medical Center in Fresno, which is now University Medical Center. A Parkmedic program was set up, and even Kent became a park medic. He came over from Death Valley. And he was a cardiac advanced life support provider.

They later changed that, really realizing that being able to start IVs, being able to stop bleeding, being able to give medications for asthma attacks, anaphylaxis, is more important that the occasional cardiac thing. They were trying to figure out how—because right now, to do both, well, you'd be a paramedic. And paramedic school is now a year long; people weren't doing the accelerated stuff like I had, and they couldn't spare anybody.

So the Parkmedic program started, first for cardiac, and then it went into what we call advanced life support, non-cardiac. And so I was actually one the instructors for that. And so we got more and more people with those skills into the national parks. And that's what you have at Grand Canyon—you have park medics, people like Chuck Sypher. Who else? Did Bryan Wisher become one? I don't know; people who could start IVs on the trails for dehydration victims and things like that, who were not paramedics but were park medics.

TM: So, kind of going back to the scheduler, I could see her point, which is: I've got a seven o'clock program, there's a bunch of people that have shown up, and I kind of have to be there for the park visitors. Well, you can make the argument, saying, yeah, but one of them's dying over there in the corner. You got to do something for them. And that takes a little more precedence, but…

NM: This is the thing that started to slide me into protection. If I wanted to do this, rather than that—naturalist stuff—what was I going to do? So it was sort of the—I would get flown into the backcountry for people who had amputations of their legs, or who had died, and maybe they thought they weren't dead, or something like that. So I was very good at triaging whether they needed me or not. After hours, no problem; you can take me.

But there was a woman who was pre-eclamptic and was going into seizures while she was in labor. And that is a paramedic-level call. I put her in the helicopter, delivered the baby, and stopped her seizures, all that kind of stuff. So there was a time and a place for me to be there. But there was also, in training the park medics—and I also held the EMT classes, the EMT refreshers, and taught them advanced skills in Sequoia National Park and other places that taught, so they wouldn't need me as much.

And so I could still—as I use the word, "play," to describe what I did—I could still be a naturalist. And so even when I went to Grand Canyon the first season, I was a seasonal. And I worked six months as a protection ranger and six months for Chuck Wahler in interpretation at Yavapai Museum.

TM: Still trying to balance that out.

NM: Absolutely, because I thought it was important to do that. But I realized it was really taking away from my ability to do that, so eventually I had to decide, what did I want to do?

TM: Well, and before we get there, let's go to Everglades, because I think we've talked quite a bit about Death Valley.

NM: Everglades was wonderful. Drove across the country—

TM: So hang on.

NM: —drove across the—oh, sorry.

TM: So you're going to be a seasonal again; this is going to be like a 6-month or 180-day duty. And you filled out the paperwork and just sent it Everglades, and didn't send it anywhere else?

NM: Right. Back then you could apply to two parks. And so you applied to the regional office that that park was a part of. So for that region—which I think it was the southeast region—you had Biscayne, Everglades, St. Augustine—you had all of these different parks in there. And so you sent your application to the regional office and said, "I want to be considered for Everglades, not anybody else."

Fort Jefferson was a part of that, the Dry Tortugas. Things like that. It all changed later on with *USA Jobs*. And then I did well at Everglades and had a really, really good time. And then I thought, well, that was a neat experience. So the next winter I decide I was going to go to Hawaii. So I went at worked at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. So I was a bouncing ball at that time.

TM: Yeah. So you must have gotten a letter back, saying, yep, you've been accepted at Everglades.

NM: No, you don't get a letter. You get a phone call—

TM: Oh.

NM: —and they interview you.

TM: Who'd you get a phone call from?

NM: What was her name? Can't remember her name. I got a phone call from the person, the hiring official. And she said, "I'm interviewing people for opening here." And it was for a place called Flamingo, and as a naturalist. "And I see you've done this and this, and we have living history. And you've done living history, and we want to bring a living history program in, and you've done that." So actually, my living history character in Everglades was a lady pirate.

TM: Cool.

NM: I dressed up as a pirate. But she wanted to bring that program, and I'd done living history at Sequoia as my 1926 camper, and at Death Valley at Juliet Brier. And she goes, "I'd like to do that." And I was also a biologist, and she needed somebody who could do birds and all that stuff too. And so I said, "Yes I'd love to come, yes… I don't mind living in a shared trailer."

They paint a picture, and do you want to be a part of this, and do they want you to be a part of this. So it's this sort of—this mutual feeling-out period. And then they decide after their interviews if they want you or not. And sometimes at the end of the phone call they'll say, "Yes, can you start December 2nd?" or something like that. "You'll have to work Christmas." They tell you what you have to do. And I go—I say, "I do want to be there. I'll need time to drive across."

TM: And so you drove the Yellow Peril out there?

NM: I drove the Yellow Peril out there, and I drove with my friend Mary Anne, who did not have a job. And so we left with enough time—we took like three weeks to go across, and we visited Organ Pipe Cactus and Big Bend National Park. At Marfa, Texas, she called home, and her mom told her—she goes, "Everglades called. They want to offer you a job at the other end of the park."

TM: Oh my gosh.

NM: And so she accepts. And so we went to Vicksburg, and we went to Cape Canaveral. So we went to all these different places. When we got to Florida, I took her to the airport. She flew back, got her uniform and stuff, and then flew back a couple days later. I went back and picked her up. But she worked in a different area of the park; she worked at a place called Royal Palm. But she didn't have a car, so we managed to get, again, the same days off. And so I would go up and pick her up with Yellow Peril, or I'd leave it with her as she needed the car, and she would take me down—I actually called the car Lemonade, because when life hands you a lemon, you make lemonade.

TM: *(laughs)* That's right.

NM: The car was having so much problems that when I went on a toll road—Florida has, and many states have, toll booths to drive on the road. And I put money in the thing, and the ticket came out, and the ticket flew out of my hand, but I couldn't stop the car because it would die, and then I'd have to be towed. So I had to like move. So I said they'll believe me at the other end, and at the other end they didn't believe me and I had to pay the whole amount.

TM: Oh my gosh.

NM: Anyway, so it was lot of fun. And so I forget—

TM: So that was a 6—a 180-day assignment?

NM: No, no. Let me see what it was. Everglades—5-month appointment. So I worked from the beginning of December to the end of April. And then April I went right back to Sequoia National Park early on, and then worked at—

TM: Wait, wait, wait.

NM: What?

TM: We're still at Everglades.

NM: Oh, sorry. I'm in Everglades.

TM: So you drove out there. Got to get Mary Anne back to get her uniform. She flies back to get her set. And so I'm assuming that on days off you guys explored?

NM: We did. But let me tell you what it was like to work as a seasonal at Everglades. I lived in a trailer. I shared with two other ladies. One was a researcher, so in the living room was this great big basin, maybe four feet in diameter, full of water. And it was full of crabs. So the crabs would click-click-click all the time. I had a bedroom at one end, and the other person—she was a veterinarian that decided she didn't want to be a veterinarian anymore, wanted to be a naturalist. So she was there too.

So I had a veterinarian seasonal naturalist, the researcher, and then myself. So the three of us shared the—when you turned on the water of the tap, it came out brown. The rats came in my room and would eat the bindings off my guidebooks and the other books that I brought, for the glue. And so I told my

mom that one time, and wouldn't you know it, in the mail came a dart gun, you know, with the little rubber darts—

TM: Yeah.

NM: —so I could have it next to my bed. So I didn't want to kill them, but I would shoot them off my books so they would flop to the floor. And then the cockroaches there were so big. They were really big, and they were everywhere. But if you weren't squeamish it didn't bother you. I did naturalist activities like 'going in seine,' where we would go out into Florida Bay with the big, long net. And the visitors would walk with me, and we'd get seahorses and bat fishes and all kinds of things to identify. So that was a fun one.

TM: Cool. I want to go back to the crabs in the tank.

NM: Oh yeah.

TM: Did you get to eat, occasionally, some crabs there, or they were—

NM: Oh, no.

TM: No.

NM: Oh, no. They were her study things. And I don't eat seafood anymore. I used to eat seafood and shellfish and all kinds of stuff. In fact, when I was a teenager, I was just about the best abalone hunter and preparer you could ask for.

TM: Oh my gosh.

NM: But on a scuba dive, I dove with a guy who was from the country of India. And he brought up some raw scallops and told me I should eat them. And I got deathly sick, truly sick. And even the smell of fish today is abhorrent to me. So I didn't eat fish or any seafood anymore. I'll eat shrimp on occasion—breaded shrimp—but it's got to have a lot tartar sauce. But no, didn't eat her study stuff.

TM: Okay.

NM: And so we all lived in rows in trailers. And so you'd have the maintenance people next door, or you'd have some more naturalists next door, or you'd have somebody else. So these rows—and it was very flat. There was a sign in Everglades, which you drove from the south, where I was at Florida Bay, at Flamingo, up to Royal Palm, which is the entrance to the park—trying to remember; that's like 40 miles or something. And there was sign for the highest point on the road. It said, "Rock Reef Pass. Elevation 3 feet."

TM: Oh boy. *(laughs)*

NM: And then my mom, in a big box, sent me an inflatable raft. So I would go out in Florida Bay with a couple of people, and we'd noodle around in the raft. There were southern bald eagles. I'd give bird walks at Eco Pond. I'd give bird walks every—I gave them along the walkway at the Flamingo Inn, where their specialty was key lime pie. And this story's in my book also, but once, at the end of a bird walk this man literally came running up—huge guy, broad shoulders, and silvery black hair.

And he said, “Am I too late?” And I said, “I just ended, but you know, I've got free time right now. Do you want to just sort of go through the birds again?” He goes, “Oh that would be great.” So he and I walked around, and boy, he was—back of my mind he was familiar, but I didn’t know who he was. And everybody started to gather around, mostly guys. And it was Ted Williams, the baseball player—

TM: Oh my gosh.

NM: —who was a very famous baseball player, last man to hit over 400 - .406. And he lived down at Marathon Key, which was not very far from Everglades, and so he came bird walking all the time. So we corresponded, and I sent stuff from Sequoia, and I have some nice letters from him. And he very much appreciated having this bird walk afterwards. And that was nice.

TM: Cool. Oh, very fun. Yeah.

NM: Yeah. And let’s see; what else? The visitor’s center—little museum, and then our offices were in the back. We had a copy machine. We used to keep the paper in square or rectangular Tupperware-type plastic, because if you left the paper out for any length of time, it warped from the humidity. So you would take it out when you wanted to copy things.

I do artwork, so I’d cut out silhouettes and put them on all the windows so the birds would quit flying into them. Let’s see. I did some art for several brochures for the park—some of the wading birds and some of the snails. I helped on a study … I was like a go-fer—on a study with alligators and what they ate. And you’d go out with the researchers, and you would learn a lot. And my job was to help hold the alligator. So they grab an alligator, and they would take a big PVC pipe—

TM: Wait.

NM: —and they shoved—

TM: How do you just grab an alligator?

NM: They go along in the boat, and they shine a light until they see the red eye. And they would put a snare around its neck, and they would haul it up on the land.

TM: Okay. Alright. That makes sense, because I'm like, you don’t just tap it on the shoulder and say, “Hey, you know, hang on a second.”

NM: No, no, no. These people—guys and gals—knew what they were doing. And those of us who wanted to learn and just be a part of it—and so they would take a big PVC pipe and put it down their throat. Now the best way to find out what an alligator eats is to kill it, slice it open, and do the stomach content analysis. But you don’t want to do that in a national park.

TM: Right.

NM: So they put this PVC pipe down, and then they would pour all of this saline solution down—neutral saline, 0.9%, so it wouldn’t be too hypertonic or hypotonic and upset them. They'd pour this down, then they would put a cap on this PVC pipe. And this is where me—myself—and others who volunteered came in. We would lift up this anywhere from 8-foot to 12-foot alligator and tip it down headfirst, tip it tail up, like with big shaker, to mix it all up. And then they would hold it upside down, they'd take the

top off, and all the stomach contents would come out. And so you'd have raccoons, occasionally part of a poodle—that's why pets were not allowed on the boardwalks. But mostly they ate apple snails.

TM: What's an apple snail?

NM: It's a snail.

TM: Okay. Like—

NM: A snail about the size of a—about the palm of your hand or smaller.

TM: Okay. That's fairly large. Yeah.

NM: Smaller than that. The size of a giant sequoia cone—trying to think. What would it be 2-3" in diameter.

TM: Size of your thumbnail? Bigger than your thumbnail.

NM: No, no, no. They were big. If you put your thumb and first finger together and then 2-3 inches apart, that's what it is.

TM: Like, bigger than a golf ball.

NM: Yeah, bigger than a golf ball.

TM: Okay.

NM: Bigger than a golf ball.

TM: Kind of palm size.

NM: Yeah. And then on my days off I would go—I went down the Keys, flew to the Dry Tortugas, went to Key West, went to Fort Jefferson, and went to— there was this ad: "The Bahamas; $55 round trip and two nights in a hotel." $55! Did that out of Miami. They still allowed people to smoke everywhere then, so I remember going to Miami with a friend and going to a movie theater and walking right back out because they allowed smoking in the theaters.

There was a place called Homestead where we went grocery shopping. And there was a market called Publix. And it was the very first indication of the area I lived in was suspect; it was required that the baggers walk you out to your vehicle, because of so many assaults.

TM: Oh, wow.

NM: And so they walked you out to your car, made sure you locked your doors, and then you drove away. And as we drove in the park there's a place called Dead Body Road because that's where they found a lot of the drug-deal-gone-bad dead bodies. And one time I was up in the middle of the Everglades as an airplane flew overhead like—I felt like I could reach up and touch it, but I really couldn't; it was probably like 50 feet above me, 100 feet above me. And right behind it was a Coast Guard helicopter.

TM: Whoa.

NM: And it was a druggie, you know, intervention stuff. If you took care of yourself you were fine, but it also was kind of an unsafe place. And several years later—in ’94, I guess it was, after Hurricane Andrew—because of my experience at Everglades, I was on the response team that went there. But that's another story. So yeah, I gave walks, talks, programs. I gave a program called “El Lagarto,” which is Spanish—means “the lizard.” And *el lagarto* is where we get the word alligator from.

TM: How did it go as a lady pirate?

NM: I was a lot of fun. People loved it. I dressed up in velveteen kind of pants that went to my knees and had knee socks. And I had these old bowling shoes, and I had my hair in braids in the back. And I went to a store—a kid’s store—and I got a sword and stuff. And I wore a patch over my eye. And it was just great; I loved it.

TM: Fun.

NM: Because at the time there were several lady pirates in history—Bonny and a few others. And both of them were condemned to death—I'm trying to remember the name of the other one—but both of them were spared because they both were pregnant. So they were not executed. But there's several female pirates in history. They loved it—the evening program.

We used to get called for—people knew I did taxidermy, too. I did museum preparation, so people would bring me things. At Sequoia National Park, for instance, they would bring me stuff and leave it on my doorstep, which was not appreciated, because it would attract things. I said, “Put it in your freezer, and I will go do the museum prep later on.” But I got like a five-foot-long eastern diamondback rattlesnake skin at Everglades that I skinned and fried up the meat—which was really good; rattlesnake is very good in butter—and then salted the skin to use for interpretation. So I took a little piece and just put it in the collection there for them to have.

Let’s see. Oh, one of the interesting things is, there’s grass everywhere, and there's mosquitos everywhere. When I first arrived, at nighttime, by the time I got from my car to inside of my little trailer, I had 66 bites from the mosquitos. They’re many species including saltmarsh mosquitos; they don’t need fresh water. I swear they land mouth-first on you. You’d never know they’re there when you get the bite, which is why Everglades is the only place that allows you to ride bicycle on a hiking trail, because if you walk, you'll get eaten to death. So I used to ride my bike from the housing area on the trail over to work and back.

TM: Was Mary Anne’s housing as exciting as yours?

NM: Yes, but I have one more story to tell you.

TM: Okay, good.

NM: And this was when we would get an all-call to the campground. And the campground was grass, and you didn’t want to sit on the grass because you got chiggers. I learned about chiggers. Chiggers are awful because you don’t know you get them until they start to hatch later on, and it itches like heck.

But anyway, the campers camp there. And the alligators would go from Eco Pond to Florida Bay, and back and forth. And to do that they'd have to go through the campground. And alligators are ancient creatures; they go in one direction and it doesn't matter what's in their way. So more than once an alligator would walk through the campground, walk through an open tent, and keep walking, dragging the tent and its contents with it into Florida Bay. So we'd have to go grab the tail of the alligator, try to pull stuff out of the tent, catch up in the stuff. And that was always a lot of fun *(TM laughs)*, intercepting alligators while they were dragging the camper's stuff into Florida Bay.

TM: Right. And the distraught campers are trying to poke it and make it madder and get it out of their tents.

NM: Oh no, they would never—no, no, no. I don't know of anybody, other than staff, who would come close to an alligator. We used to ride our bikes up at Taylor Slough, which is up at Shark Valley. And we'd get off our bikes, and we would grab and pull an alligator tail. And then we'd get our bikes and ride off. I mean, we'd find the biggest one we could do it to. *(laughs)* We were stupid.

TM: And what would the alligator do? It would try to do this 180-degree mouth thing?

NM: Yes. It would curl back toward its tail. And the point is—it would do a U-turn and come back to you, and so the whole point was to get away before it could get you, and get on your bike and take off, because then it would shamble after you.

TM: Oh, it would actually shamble along and try to get you.

NM: Some of them, yeah.

TM: And how fast can they shamble?

NM: Pretty fast. If you tripped, you're done for. On a run, they probably can't get you—a human being in good shape—but you have to be able to run. You can't walk fast away from them.

TM: Okay. And if they can eat poodles and raccoons, I imagine they can eat small people.

NM: Oh yes. It's happened, unfortunately. Not in Everglades, but I've heard it in other places. And of course, the number one cause of death in Africa are the Nile crocodiles.

TM: Right.

NM: Yeah, they take them all the time. And Mary Anne, she was up at Royal Palm. She did programs. She had the boardwalk up there, so she had a whole different ecosystem. She had hammocks up there, which were higher pieces of land that had hardwoods there.

And she told me this story about these people from England who were out in the hardwoods looking for the barred owl. And he imitated it so well that one came down and whacked him right in the head. And he came into the visitor's center just bleeding from this barred owl attack.

TM: Oh my gosh.

NM: And his wife was going, “It was marvelous! It came out nowhere! *(TM laughs)* It just whacks him in the head. Oh, and we never dreamed we could get this close!” And he's just dripping blood and all that stuff.

TM: Oh my gosh.

NM: It was a lot of fun.

TM: Great.

NM: Yeah, so she was in a different ecosystem, had a—Dave Dahlen, I remember, was her boss. And I guess the reason I don’t remember mine is because my—I went to two or three different ones as people transfer out and out.

TM: Right. Okay. Alright, cool.

NM: And I worked as a paramedic there. Went on a couple calls. I think you know the one—the story called “Laceration” in one of my books, where a man had to have his leg amputated by me.

TM: Right. Yeah.

NM: But not too many calls.

TM: Yeah, and sort of the same ratio again: very few calls, good to know the skills, but nowhere near like being a paramedic working on an ambulance.

NM: Oh no. And in some of my days off I’d canoe. Mary Anne and I would grab a canoe, and we would go down through the canals and go out to Cape Sable on the coast, where there was nobody for a hundred miles. It was fun. Do something fun and adventurous.

TM: Nice. Yeah. Okay, let’s see. Where are we at? We have been going for—

NM: We have. An hour and 15 minutes.

TM: Yeah, good. Maybe—

NM: Here I thought you were going to talk to me once, maybe twice. But this is actually kind of fun for me *(laughs)* to go through this.

TM: Yeah, no. I mean, I'm learning some interesting things too I haven’t a clue about *(laughs)*. So it’s like, don’t pull an alligator’s tail. Just don’t do it. Alright, I'm not that good of a runner, okay. *(NM and TM laugh)* Yeah. Not going to be good.

NM: Well, one of the tales that they had there is that they think the origin of the phrase “bull’s eye” came from the Everglades area, because they would shine their lights at nighttime—because you shoot them in the body, they’re not going to die. You have to shoot them in the brain. The brain is right behind the eye. So you wanted the big male alligator, so you would shine a red light and shoot for the bull’s eye of the alligator.

TM: Got it. That makes sense.

NM: But I don’t know. It was also apocryphal, because later on when I did some of my PhD work in Everglades that they thought that perhaps people in the past who had whiskey had left their bottles out there—said that's how the fires in the Everglades started, was the old magnifying glass thing. But no. They’re lightning fires.

TM: That makes more and more sense, yeah.

NM: But there were a lot of stories. Who knows if they were true or not.

TM: Well, cool. Maybe this is a good place to put a comma—

NM: Okay.

TM: —in this oral history series, as we kind of wrap up the Everglades. And we will head to new points on the next interview. Does that sound like a plan?

NM: Sounds like a plan.

TM: Alright. Well, then, this will conclude oral history interview with Nancy Eileen Muleady-Mecham. Today is Tuesday, December 8th, 2020. This will conclude Part 3 of this interview series. My name is Tom Martin. And Nancy, thank you so very much.

NM: Thank you so much, Tom. Take care.