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The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project

Anne Rockwell:
East Bay Park District Parkland Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Shanna Farrell
in 2018

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Interview sponsored by the East Bay Regional Park District

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Anne Rockwell, 1980
Photo by Walter Knight



Anne Rockwell, 2019
Photo by Laura Heywood

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Anne Rockwell was a longtime East Bay Regional Park District employee. In this interview, she discusses her early life, family, education, moving to California, attending UC Berkeley in the 1970s, getting hired by the district in the 1970s, rising through the ranks and becoming a manager, working as a women in the district, balancing family and a career, specific sites and projects that she worked on, the evolution of the department, her retirement in 2013, volunteering with the district's archives, and reflections on her career.

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The East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) is a special regional district that stretches across both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. First established in 1934 by Alameda County voters, the EBRPD slowly expanded to Contra Costa in 1964 and has continued to grow and preserve the East Bay's most scenic and historically significant parklands. The EBRPD's core mission is to acquire, develop, and maintain diverse and interconnected parklands in order to provide the public with usable natural spaces and to preserve the region's natural and cultural resources.

This oral history project—The East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project—records and preserves the voices and experiences of formative, retired EBRPD field staff, individuals associated with land use of EBRPD parklands prior to district acquisition, and individuals who continue to use parklands for agriculture and ranching.

The Oral History Center (OHC) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley first engaged in conversations with the EBRPD in the fall of 2016 about the possibility of restarting an oral history project on the parklands. The OHC, previously the Regional Oral History Office, had conducted interviews with EBRPD board members, supervisors and individuals historically associated with the parklands throughout the 1970s and early 2000s. After the completion of a successful pilot project in late 2016, the EBRPD and OHC began a more robust partnership in early 2017 that has resulted in an expansive collection of interviews.

The interviews in this collection reflect the diverse yet interconnected ecology of individuals and places that have helped shape and define the East Bay Regional Park District and East Bay local history.

Interview 1: November 7, 2018

01-00:00:02

Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Anne Rockwell, on Wednesday, November 7, 2018, and we are in Berkeley, California. Anne, can you start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:18

Rockwell: I was born in Ohio, in January of 1955. My dad worked for the government. He was an FBI agent, so we moved quite a bit. We lived in a couple of places in Ohio. I should say that I'm the last child, and the only girl, in a family with four boys, so there was five children. We moved around quite a bit. We moved to Southern California. Let's see, I was there for third and fourth grade, and we moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where we stayed the longest. I was in fifth grade through tenth grade there.

01-00:01:10

Farrell: What was the reason for moving around a bit when you were growing up?

01-00:01:15

Rockwell: My dad was transferred as was needed, I guess, by his employer. At the time, during the '50s and '60s, when we were still afraid of Russia and the Cold War. There was a big concern about the Communist party, so the FBI seemed to follow a lot of Communist party activity, and that could be found, or thought to be found, in many of the unions, so coal mining in Ohio. In Southern California, he took on a different role, worked on some celebrity cases. One was the Frank Sinatra, Jr. kidnapping. When we went to Idaho, I don't think I was aware of this at the time, but there was a large John Birch Society up there, so there was keeping track of them, the far right, as well as perceived threat, still, from Communists from the various unions. There was silver mining and other unions that I can't think of right now.

01-00:02:42

Farrell: He worked for the FBI?

01-00:02:43

Rockwell: Yeah, he was a special agent for the FBI.

01-00:02:46

Farrell: Can you tell me what his name was, and some of your early memories of him?

01-00:02:50

Rockwell: His name is Robert Rockwell. Well, he was a really fun guy, very much family-oriented. He did travel for work a lot. We did take family vacations. We'd go out to Southern California, because both my mom's parents and my dad's parents lived in Southern California. So that was always exciting, to have seven people in a car driving from Ohio to Southern California. I'm sure that my parents were pretty happy when those road trips were done. He was really great. He always was encouraging for me to reach a little higher. I think that he was very traditional in many ways, in his outlook on women, but in my

case, he always felt like I should push a little higher. If I said I wanted to be a nurse, he said, “Why don’t you want to be a doctor?” or if I said I wanted to fly an airplane, he said, “Why don’t you want to be an astronaut?” We were a pretty close family. There’s ten years between me and my oldest brother. One by one, they started going off to college. When we lived in Southern California, my brothers Jim and Tom were still living at home. John was at college, and Randy, my oldest brother, was at college, at UCLA [University of California Los Angeles]. Then when we moved to Coeur d’Alene, Jim went into the Navy. By the time we moved back to California, to the Bay Area, when he left the government and came to work for a private—he was an executive for a private security firm—I was like an only child. We were very close as a family, and still are.

01-00:05:06

Farrell:

Can you tell me your mother’s name and a little bit about her?

01-00:05:09

Rockwell:

Yeah, Jeanne Rockwell, Jeanne {Schmittroth?} Rockwell. I’m trying to learn a little bit more about her through genealogy, because I really know very little about my mother’s side. She was an only child. She left college after two years. She met my father at USC [University of Southern California], and they dated and got married. It was during the war, World War II. My dad was a Marine. They moved around a lot. When she had their first child, she and my oldest brother, Randy, moved back to her parents’ house in Santa Monica, and then my brother John was born, and he also lived in Santa Monica with my grandparents, before my dad got out and then started working as an FBI agent. He had studied accounting at USC, and so that’s what they were looking for in the FBI. She was pretty much a stay-at-home mom. She worked really diligently and hard in the community, though. She was always involved in all the PTA, and did a lot of volunteer work, and was always available for helping neighbors. She had been a model, I think, at one point when she was in high school and early college years, so very attractive. Always kept herself very well—always had the right hats and gloves. She was also very active with our family, and when grandchildren came along, she was very excited, and was helpful with all of us in raising our own kids.

01-00:07:15

Farrell:

When you moved from Southern California to Coeur d’Alene, you had mentioned when we talked on the phone that it was the first place you felt like you had put down roots.

01-00:07:29

Rockwell:

Right.

01-00:07:32

Farrell:

Southern coast versus kind of inland, a little bit different. Can you tell me about some of your memories about fifth to tenth grade, growing up in Idaho?

01-00:07:41

Rockwell:

Sure. Coeur d'Alene was a logging town. It was a small town. It's forty miles east of Spokane, Washington. That's the biggest city. It was a great place to grow up. There are a lot of lakes, there's the hills. Literally, my mom would tell us to be home by dinner, but she really didn't want us hanging around the house, and there wasn't much to do hanging around the house. There was lots of places to go hiking and camping. As I got a little older, could get into some mischief. We camped out a lot, my friends and I. I don't even think they were in campgrounds, just in the forest. I remember great times going to Girl Scout camp, and learning junior lifeguard skills, and swimming. I was very active in Girl Scouts. My mom was a Girl Scout leader. For me, at the time, not knowing the politics and not caring about the politics, and just growing up, just being a kid, it was heaven. It was just really a great place. Shortly after we left—well, even at the time when we were there—the mills started to close, and the property was so prime on the lake that hotels were starting to be built, and now it's primarily a service economy. But I went to school with boys that knew that they were going to work in the mills, just as their grandfathers and fathers had. They were all union jobs, so they were good jobs. They were dangerous jobs, of course. There were ranches around. There was good skiing not far away. We learned to ski. One of the best memories, my dad came home one day. There were three of us kids at home at that point, my brothers Jim, Tom, and me. He'd gone to a ski swap meet. We had never skied. He said that he'd signed us up for six weeks of lessons at Schweitzer Basin, which is in Sandpoint, Idaho, now infamous because of the detective from the OJ Simpson.

01-00:10:29

Farrell:

Oh, that's right. Yeah.

01-00:10:34

Rockwell:

But it wasn't far away. It was forty-five minutes or so, and we would get up in the morning, be on the bus at 6:00 a.m., and go up to Schweitzer, and we learned to ski, which is a lifelong thing for me. It was just a great place to grow up. It was a lot of fun, and we were there for the longest I'd really lived in any place until we moved back to California.

01-00:10:59

Farrell:

Did living there give you an appreciation for being outside and nature?

01-00:11:04

Rockwell:

Oh, I think absolutely. Going to camp there, and being on the lake. There were several lakes right around the area. You could ride your bike all over the place to other small communities. Like I say, I was a kid, so I wasn't aware of the political movement that I've learned some of the history of now, with the Aryan Brotherhood. It never really occurred to me that it wasn't that diverse of an area until I moved back here, until we moved down here to the Bay Area, and I was a junior in high school. It was quite different, though I didn't

feel out of place, but it was just completely different, because it was very much all white people that lived in Coeur d'Alene area.

01-00:12:03

Farrell:

What was that like for you when you then moved to Walnut Creek in eleventh grade, and kind of realizing that there wasn't a lot of diversity there, as you had just mentioned?

01-00:12:16

Rockwell:

When I went to high school, I was enrolled at Ygnacio Valley High School, which is in Concord, not far from where we were, and it was such a big school. I think that's when it occurred to me that I was in a very different place. I liked it. I liked the different food. I liked the different cultures. I learned a lot about different histories. That was a time when education was changing quite a bit, and we had pods in our classrooms. You'd not necessarily move from place to place, but you'd have discussions in certain areas. It was more of an open classroom learning, more student-driven. That was a lot of fun. I felt like I really was learning a lot about people, and coming to Berkeley was always a lot of fun. We'd see hippies, and people openly smoking pot, and that was all very different, but it was exciting, and it was fun. I think, all in all, it made me feel like I'd missed out on quite a bit in living in Coeur d'Alene. I don't even really remember, in Southern California, a lot of diversity, but it was never a focus of mine, or of my parents. I had some friends that lived in the neighborhood. I ran with a different group of people. I played sports. We had a closed campus, but I still hung out on the field at lunchtime with all the sort of bad kids. I did well in school. I think I got a little lost on the question.

01-00:14:57

Farrell:

No, that's okay.

01-00:14:58

Rockwell:

I'm rambling now.

01-00:14:59

Farrell:

No, no. Did you continue to spend time outside when you moved to Walnut Creek and you were going to high school in Concord?

01-00:15:06

Rockwell:

Oh, sure, yeah. We would go up on Mount Diablo and hike around there. I lived very close to the base of Mount Diablo. It might have been a state park then, but there was no kiosk at the bottom, so you could just drive up to the top and not have to pay or anything. We camped there with my friends. I spent a lot of time outdoors. I felt like Walnut Creek was the center of the world for boring places, so if I could get out of there—and I had a driver's license at that point, and access to my mom's car, so I would just drive around to Oakland, come through the Caldecott Tunnel, just to see what was on this side. I only went to San Francisco, I think, with my parents, though. I don't

think I was really into the idea of doing much driving there. That seemed a little overwhelming.

01-00:16:09

Farrell: It's a far drive, too.

01-00:16:11

Rockwell: Yeah.

01-00:16:13

Farrell: Maybe it feels longer now with the traffic. What kind of sports did you play?

01-00:16:19

Rockwell: I played softball. I can't remember even when I started playing softball. I know I played in leagues, recreation leagues, all the time in Coeur d'Alene, and when I came to Walnut Creek, it seemed like there was a lack of sports at Ygnacio Valley High School. It seemed like we had a lot of sports for women. At Coeur d'Alene High, we had volleyball and basketball, but I don't think we had a school softball team. But I did play some basketball and volleyball there. Down here, there didn't seem to be as many sports. At the school, they had more club sports. Swimming was a club sport. I think track and field was a club sport. They had softball, and I never even really thought about trying out. I think I probably tried out in my senior year and was really surprised that I made it. I played that, and then I played here, actually, at Cal, and once again, I waited until about my senior year before I tried out, just because I thought I wouldn't make the team, but I did. It was just for one year, though, but it was still fun.

01-00:17:41

Farrell: Speaking of Cal, you came here in 1973 as an undergraduate. What made you decide to go to Cal, and what was it like for you to stay in the Bay Area?

01-00:17:56

Rockwell: My parents were thrilled with the idea of going to Cal. I wanted to go to the University of Washington, because we had been up in the Pacific Northwest and I really loved it. With all there is to love down here, when I first moved down here, I wasn't all that happy and thought all I could do is just get back up to the Pacific Northwest and that would be great. I'm trying to remember if I visited very many colleges. I probably applied to a couple other places, but offhand I can't remember where they would have been. My dad said, "We're not going to pay an out-of-state tuition for you to go to Washington when we have one of the greatest universities right here." I was very happy that I got in here. My parents were delighted. At that time, it cost \$212.50 a quarter to go to school here. I came in as a journalism—that's what I thought I would be—as a journalism major. I really enjoyed writing a lot. I don't remember exactly why I changed my mind, but then I thought I'd go pre-med, which was quite a different way to go. After dropping organic chemistry a couple of times, because it was so difficult, I got to a point where I had to establish a major, and PE [physical education] was a good fit for me. At that point, there were

three ways you could go. You could be a PE teacher, physical therapy, or—what was the other? Probably research. I was headed towards physical therapy, because I'd already completed some of those classes in pre-med, so I ended up graduating in PE. Oh, recreation was the third. I could have gone into recreation. That's what it was. It was not research.

01-00:20:16

Farrell:

Did that, at the time, also feel like a pathway to a career?

01-00:20:22

Rockwell:

Yeah. I thought I would pursue physical therapy. I knew I would have to go to graduate school for that.

01-00:20:31

Farrell:

Then, at one point, you took a semester off to go to World Campus Afloat, a semester at sea. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

01-00:20:40

Rockwell:

I had wanted to go study abroad. I'm not sure where I came across that program of the World Campus Afloat, but it seemed like it covered a lot of territory. At that time, it was run through a private college in Southern California, Chapman College. I still donate as an alumni, but I can't remember who the university is. It's been handed off a couple of times. The cruise that I went on—and let me just say there were several levels to the cruise. I went on about the least expensive one that I could find, because it was money that I had saved, and my parents, of course, supplemented. I probably felt like, at the time, that I had paid for the whole thing. We left from Florida and sailed to Morocco, went around the coast of Africa, stopping in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Capetown, which was really eye-opening. That's when apartheid was still happening. This was in 1975, so it was fascinating to go to all these cultures. At each stop, we'd have different speakers come onboard, plus we had college professors that were teaching from various places, and they would tailor the curricula to where we were headed. But when we went to Ghana, we had the ambassador. Shirley Temple Black came onboard, so that was very exciting. When we went to South Africa, a few of the teachers wouldn't leave the ship, in protest.

01-00:22:42

Farrell:

In protest of apartheid?

01-00:22:43

Rockwell:

Of apartheid. I had never been to a place where things were labeled so clearly. Riding in a taxicab, you could ride in a for-white-only, coloreds, or blacks, and it was quite a system to determine who was colored versus who was black. I believe it was Chinese that were considered black, and Japanese considered colored. It seemed to me to be quite arbitrary. I could have that wrong. Indians were colored. There was diversity on that ship, though. Not surprisingly, they were probably mostly made up of rich white kids. Some just went and stayed in hotels. Some of us kind of went places that, as I look back

on, could have been dangerous, but we went in enough groups and around enough nice people that we were okay. We would go into the restaurants that were for blacks only, or we would drink from a drinking fountain that was for coloreds only. Though the place was beautiful—we were in Capetown—it reminded me a lot of San Francisco—it really made a huge impression on me for the way people were treated. From there, we went to Kenya, and once again, I saw this really large gap in the economies. One percent of the population held 99 percent of the wealth, so you had abject poverty, and you had seemingly not much of a middle class. That was obvious even to a young person as I went around. Everything that made up my frames of reference in the world was turned upside down by that trip, going to Africa.

From there, we went to India. We went to Sri Lanka and India. Once again, I had never seen that kind of poverty, and the lengths that people will go to to survive, that it's acceptable to maim your child. Begging is a way of life. At one point, we were told, "Don't give money to beggars," and we had a lot of coins left, and the coins are no good when you're leaving, so we gave some to some kids, and by the time we were trying to get back to wherever it was we were going, we were mobbed. It was scary, but it was eye-opening. Then we went to Taipei, and—let's see, where else?—to the Philippines. Oh, we went to Indonesia—well, Malaysia. Beautiful countries, all these places. Oh, when I was in Kenya, I did get to go on safari, but I didn't stay at a big safari lodge. Well, I did, but we stayed where the drivers stayed, and the guides, so we were amongst the workers. It was a lot cheaper, but it was very exciting. Went to Olduvai Gorge. The Leakeys were still there, and got to hear them speak—Richard Leakey. When you'd go to the markets to trade, we brought jeans, or just cosmetics, and you could trade with people for fabric, so I got batiks and different things along the way, or little trinkets here and there, or pieces of jewelry. It was really the trip of a lifetime.

01-00:27:00

Farrell: How long were you gone for?

01-00:27:04

Rockwell: February to May. It was a semester, three or four months.

01-00:27:13

Farrell: Did you know before you signed up that you would be traveling that part of the world? Did you have other options?

01-00:27:18

Rockwell: I knew the itinerary, yeah. No. I could have waited to go at a different time, but it seemed like a good time to go.

01-00:27:28

Farrell: Definitely sounds like a trip of a lifetime.

01-00:27:29

Rockwell:

When I was on the ship, we got the word of the fall of Phnom Penh. It was an historic time to be out in the world, and as I look back on it, I feel like I was pretty lucky to be out then. We didn't see any war or anything. We didn't go to Vietnam. Watergate had happened, all sorts of things. People would ask us in other countries about our president. I don't think I was really thinking about politics as much before I started on that trip, though we'd talked about it in high school, and the Vietnam War. I think I became a lot more political after seeing how the rest of the world was living and how we were living.

01-00:28:28

Farrell:

Yeah, even seeing apartheid in South Africa, that's a big deal.

01-00:28:34

Rockwell:

That was huge, and seeing the way people were treated in India. We went to Hong Kong, and you'd see this just total wealth everywhere. That was an amazing place, and it was exciting, with all the lights. I hadn't been to New York to see anything like Times Square, and this was like Times Square on steroids. It was quite a place. We went to the Philippines, where, for some reason, I thought because it was probably so Americanized in Manila that I could just travel by myself and I wouldn't even be noticed, but I was a five-foot-ten blonde woman in a place that was quite different, so I stood out a lot.

01-00:29:24

Farrell:

How did things change for you when you finished that trip? How did that impact the way that you saw the world moving forward?

01-00:29:32

Rockwell:

I think I became a lot more aware of people's needs, that people's needs weren't being met, that people on the street that were panhandling shouldn't be thought of as non-people. I guess I'd spent most of my time just ignoring people. I was listening a lot more. The Free Speech Movement was a big deal here. Going to school here was also pretty challenging at that time, because the war was going on. Instructors graded on a curve, and it was important to have good grades, because you were competing with people who could get drafted if they couldn't keep their school deferment. It was rigorous. I think there were so many things happening in the world—women's liberation. In 1973, we had Title IX. It started to come into effect here. I think in California, it was of course taken much more seriously. Like I mentioned before, at Ygnacio Valley, I felt like there wasn't that many things for girls. Things opened up here at Cal. We had a water polo team for women. That had never happened. There weren't very many schools to compete against, but all the same. Okay, you asked me how did that trip impact me—I think I was much more mindful of economy, of lifestyle, and people's needs either being met or not being met.

01-00:31:28

Farrell:

So you come back. You have this experience that impacts your life. Did that change your career aspirations at all?

01-00:31:49

Rockwell:

Boy, that's a good question. When I came back, it was my second year working for the East Bay Regional Parks, and there was a strike going on. That was pretty important, because, well, A, I was worried that I wasn't going to have a job, but when I came back and saw that people were on a picket line, we lifeguards joined that picket line. It was going to be a summer that the lakes wouldn't be staffed by lifeguards. The chief of operations ended up firing all the head lifeguards. He told them they needed to return to work immediately, and if they didn't—and they actually got a telegram. [laughter]

01-00:32:46

Farrell:

Oh, interesting.

01-00:32:48

Rockwell:

So funny. But that didn't last, because the lifeguards ended up being taken over by the public safety department, and we were brought back that way, and the strike was settled shortly after. I think it was settled before Memorial Day, which would have been a really big deal. Essentially, my first political movement was to be part of this strike. I think coming back with all this energy of, I really want to do something in the world, and then we got to help with that. Interestingly, the subject, or one of the sticking points for the strike, was the park district wanted to take supervisors out of the bargaining unit, and that didn't happen. So it was through the power of the employees staying together and unified on this strike that kept the supervisors in the union. It wasn't necessarily a money issue. I thought that was interesting.

01-00:34:14

Farrell:

Yeah, that is interesting. I guess on that note, can you tell me a little bit about how you first started working for the district?

01-00:34:23

Rockwell:

I was hired as a lifeguard. One of my sorority sisters here at Cal saw that I was swimming. I never swam on a swim team or anything, but I would go work out at the pool all the time, and she and I talked about that. She was a swimmer. She was an active swimmer. She might have even swam for Cal, I don't know. {Karla Nisley?}. She said, "They're always looking for more people to work as lifeguards, especially girls. There aren't very many." I got the information and I called the guy. Honestly, I probably filled out an application, but I didn't take the physical test the first year. I was just sent to Contra Loma because my parents' address was Walnut Creek, and that was close enough, even though I was living here in Berkeley. But it seemed like a good job, and it had good pay. I think we got \$6.50 an hour or something back then. It was pretty good money. It was enough for me to pay for my tuition. But at \$212.50 a quarter, that wasn't very much money to have to pay, honestly.

So yeah, I worked as a lifeguard, and that usually went from probably May to September. As I said, I worked a couple of years. I came back the second year

and the strike was going on. Then the next year—that would have been '76, I guess—I went for the job as the assistant head lifeguard. Oh, there were only two women that were working at Contra Loma at that time. I think there was a staff of seven. We were way out. Antioch was way off the beaten path. But there had been so many problems in what's now called Bay Point—it used to be called West Pittsburg. There had been a lot of riots at schools. There had been all sorts of issues. There weren't enough recreational opportunities, it was felt, so Contra Loma was fast-tracked to be opened. I think it actually opened in 1972 or something. Now you can't swim in the lake, but at the time it was a pretty good-sized lake to swim in. It's a reservoir for Contra Costa Water District. There was just one other girl and I. There were a couple of years I might have been the only female that was working out there.

01-00:37:29

Farrell:

What was that like for you, to be the only female working, or one of the few?

01-00:37:39

Rockwell:

In many ways, I wasn't unfamiliar with that, having grown up in a household with boys and being somewhat of a tomboy my whole life. They were all good guys. It could be a little stressful when I was the one in the chair, because I felt like I had to do twice as much work. When I was in the chair, watching the water, I really felt responsible, and I felt like, as a woman, I really didn't want to mess this up. It could be stressful, so I trained harder. I worked harder at it. I think that was kind of what happened a lot. When I ended up being in places that were mostly male-dominated, I felt like I had to double my efforts.

01-00:38:39

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about what Antioch looked like at that point of time, in the early '70s?

01-00:38:46

Rockwell:

Well, you drove a long way out of Walnut Creek to east, of course, and you'd get past Concord, and then there was really not much. There were some smokestacks off in Pittsburg, and lots of areas that didn't appear to have very much at all. I'd get off at Lone Tree Way—or actually go to A Street, I guess—and drive past a convenience mart, and then there was nothing. No houses, nothing. You'd drive out to this reservoir, Contra Loma Reservoir, another couple of miles, and then down a long gravel road. It wasn't even paved at that time. It was incredibly hot. It just felt so remote. It felt very remote. Then, through the years—I was there for five years—you'd see little housing things start up, and pretty soon there was more houses as you'd go. But even driving out through Pittsburg, that didn't seem to change too much. At the time, the Concord Naval Weapon Station still took up a huge area, like it still does, but it didn't seem like there were very many homes or businesses out that direction. Now, of course, it's jam-packed.

01-00:40:25

Farrell: How long would it usually take you to get out there?

01-00:40:31

Rockwell: I probably waited until the last possible minute to get to work. Probably forty minutes from my parents' house, and I would stay there during the summer.

01-00:40:47

Farrell: Did you ever, at any point, want to move to a different location as a lifeguard?

01-00:40:51

Rockwell: Yeah, I sure did. My final year, I was living in Berkeley. It made more sense to just work at Lake Temescal or Lake Anza, but there was still a shortage of people. At that point, we'd opened another facility in a really far away place called Del Valle, out in Livermore, so it was difficult to staff those two lakes, so my boss said, "No, you'll be the head lifeguard at Contra Loma."

01-00:41:26

Farrell: You just had no choice.

01-00:41:28

Rockwell: Well, or not work, and that was that.

01-00:41:32

Farrell: You also had mentioned, when we had talked before, that you did extra work in maintenance because you didn't get overtime.

01-00:41:39

Rockwell: Right, seasonal workers didn't get paid overtime. I worked longer in the off-season, when I could, or I worked extra days when I had days off from lifeguarding. I became friends with the park staff, and they let me go work on the Lafayette-Moraga Trail that was within the zone. We did crack sealing, which was definitely way out of my job specs, but it was fun. I learned a lot there. Later, I found out, of course, the union wasn't too happy about that. Of course it wasn't me specifically, but just the fact that somebody was doing that work that should have gone to another ranger to do that kind of work. It was a staffing issue. It was kind of a wilder time in the park district back then. The farther you were away from the central main office area, Oakland area, the more supervisors sort of relied upon their own judgment. My supervisor, park supervisor, out there was named Bill Vierra, and a lot of people didn't get along with him. He was kind of difficult to deal with, calling us college kids and things like that. He was kind of a cowboy. But he and I got along really well, and that's why I think I got to do these extra jobs. But I also was working a ridiculous amount of hours. I'd work well over a hundred hours in any pay period. I think my highest, I think I told you, was 150 hours, and I got such a big, fat paycheck, and I thought that was so great. When I compared that with one of the park rangers and saw that was about the same amount of money he got, but he had only worked eighty hours, it didn't take me too long to figure out that that was the better route, to not have to work so many hours and get paid more money.

01-00:44:01

Farrell:

Were you seeing a lot of other female rangers at that point?

01-00:44:04

Rockwell:

Maybe one or two

01-00:44:06

Farrell:

So did you think it would be possible for you to become a ranger?

01-00:44:10

Rockwell:

Well, I was encouraged quite a bit by the park supervisor to put in for it, as well as the zone manager at that time. His name was Walter Knight. There were a couple of positions then that don't exist now. There was a three-month park ranger, and there was a six-month park ranger. The six-month park ranger was considered a permanent position. The three-month wasn't, but you got to come back during the summer every year. So I put in for it, not really caring one way or the other if I got it, but I was delighted when I got into the interview. It was the first panel interview I'd ever been on, and the person that was in charge of it was Walter Knight, was the zone manager, somebody I knew, so I felt very comfortable. We took a tool test and had an interview. I made it into the first hiring pool. One of the people that I had met when I had been a lifeguard, who had come out to guest-guard, was Anne Scheer, who's a very close friend of mine. At the time, she had called me after I had made that hiring pool and asked me if I would like to come and work at Crown Beach. I think I was living in Oakland. I was finished with school at that point. I'd already graduated. I was having to go back and retake some classes, because I wanted to pursue physical therapy still. It seemed like it would be fun to try, so I did. I became a six-month park ranger at Crown Beach in 1979.

01-00:45:59

Farrell:

When you were working those crazy amount of hours, had you graduated at that point, or were you still in school?

01-00:46:07

Rockwell:

Oh, I was still in school.

01-00:46:09

Farrell:

How were you balancing your classwork and your workload?

01-00:0046:17

Rockwell:

During the fall, I think, because it was quarters—

01-00:46:23

Farrell:

You would go back late September?

01-00:0046:25

Rockwell:

Yeah, so I probably worked then. In 1977, I guess it was—well, maybe even in '76—the aquatic supervisor would also have extra work, administrative work, and it was in Oakland, so I could go over and work some hours in the afternoons, putting together statistics to help for him to put together his annual

report. There was another woman that also did that. A couple of us did that to help out, and get a little extra money.

01-00:47:05

Farrell: Did you work for the district while you were taking classes?

01-00:47:17

Rockwell: Probably, in the capacity as a temporary, not as a permanent, no. No.

01-00:47:23

Farrell: But it wasn't ever anything that you really had to work to figure out hours and schoolwork?

01-00:47:30

Rockwell: No, I don't think so. I don't have a recollection of that anyway. Or I probably just let my schoolwork go, because I pursued the money.

01-00:47:42

Farrell: Then can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to start at Crown Beach? Were you working with Anne at that point?

01-00:47:49

Rockwell: Yes, but before I do that, I just want to mention one thing. The park district started to realize it was time to focus a little bit more on women. It was in 1976—and I think I had mentioned this—well, '77, I guess it was—the aquatic supervisor had appointed—Lucy DeLacey was her name at the time—now it's {Woolschlager?}. She and I became the first female head lifeguards. There had been assistant head lifeguards—not too many—that were women, but that was kind of a big moment. It took kind of a long time to get around to that, but change was happening, and it seemed, as you look around, the park district was very progressive in that way, I guess.

01-00:48:43

Farrell: There was also a consent decree that happened as well, that made them hire more women because they were being mandated to.

01-00:48:50

Rockwell: Sure. Yeah. Then I went to Crown Beach, and yes, Anne Scheer was there. She was a twelve-month park ranger. She had been a lifeguard for only a couple of years, and then had gone on to become a ranger at several places. I saw her, but I didn't really necessarily keep in touch with her that much. We became very close friends, especially after working at Crown. There was another woman, who I'm still close friends with, that was working at Crown at the same time. So we had a lot of fun. Our boss's boss had a great line. I don't know if this maybe shouldn't necessarily go into the oral history, so look at it later. I was walking with him, and one of my coworkers, a man who had a prosthetic arm, he had a hook. Very capable at everything. He was a really good mechanic. In fact, he still works for the park district today, Paul Golling. Our manager told us that he—as we were walking and looking at this job that we were supposed to work on, a project—the district told him that he

had to hire more cripples and girls. So there was still clearly a lot of work to be done.

01-00:50:27

Farrell: Yeah. Yeah.

01-00:50:30

Rockwell: We both laughed at it, but I mean, it was a remark that kind of stuck—I'm sure it stuck with both of us. He may have heard things like that throughout the years, I don't know, but with me, that was the first time I'd ever heard someone actually articulate such a sentiment. But I learned so much. I really didn't know that much about anything. I learned to operate equipment, and chainsaws, and small equipment, and lawnmowers, and tractors. It was all very exciting. At Crown Beach, it was us two, and then in the following years, Anne left. Anne was actually probably really more the supervisor, though her job title was park ranger. The man that was in charge was kind of spread out over several parks. We really kind of took our daily routine from her.

01-00:51:36

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about her and what you liked about her, what you learned from her?

01-00:51:43

Rockwell: Well, I'm going to sound like I'm gushing, but the fact is I learned a lot of things from her. She was a very good leader, natural leader. She's got a great sense of humor. I've never seen her get overly excited or shook up. She seems to be able to control a situation. She's helped me throughout my whole life with many different jobs and issues, as best friends do. She also worked for *Bill Graham Presents*, in concert security, and so she helped get me hired to do that, so I did that for about ten years with her. So I spent a lot of time with her. She's always been very organized, efficient. Expects a lot from people. Is able to call you on it if you don't deliver, but in a way that's constructive. I'd say she's a very efficient and kind person, and a leader. She made a great impression on me, and still does.

01-00:53:03

Farrell: What were some of the projects that you were working on during those two seasons that you were at Crown Beach?

01-00:53:09

Rockwell: Well, Crown Beach was a constructed beach, and consequently, what that means is it needs maintenance all the time. There was a lot of erosion that was occurring, and one of the other things that happened is, on the eastern end of the beach—which you'd think it would run north-south, but it's kind of the east-west—a lot of seaweed grasses and whatnot would collect, and they would pool there and put off a really bad smell, like rotten eggs. We used to pick it up and bury it, the seaweed, but it was a huge job. The beach is a mile-and-a-half long. There were areas where it was more concentrated, but it was definitely down there by the Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary. People would call

and complain because their silver services would turn black from the hydrogen sulfide smell. But I don't know, we don't get that many calls, I'm sure, these days. Not many people have silver services. They stay on top of it better, too. We would rake the seaweed in an open tractor.

We helped build the parking lots. We put in irrigation there. We planted lawns and put in picnic areas, planted trees. We also did the routine work of cleaning up public restrooms, which I had done already at Contra Loma, so I wasn't really offended by that. Emptying garbage cans. There were a lot of garbage cans to empty. It was a very popular park. We'd spend a lot of time cleaning that up. Now, the beach was reconstructed after I left there, in 1983 and '84, but when I was there, the Fourth of July would take about a solid week to clean up after. People would set off fireworks on the beach, because the beach along Shoreline Drive was beginning to erode underneath the roadway, and so it was literally about ten feet below the roadway. People were setting off fireworks there. It was kind of knee-deep in garbage. A lot of people came there. That being said, the state part of the beach, Crab Cove area and all that, was also really impacted, because there was—I don't remember there actually being a visitor's center. There is the visitor's center now, because it was the exhibit lab. They made all the exhibits there. Anyway, there was always a lot of people that came there. It was a very popular place. There aren't very many swimmable beaches on the San Francisco Bay, and that, today, is the biggest one.

01-00:56:32

Farrell:

At that point, you were still interested in grad school for physical therapy. At what point did you decide that that wasn't for you?

01-00:56:43

Rockwell:

Well, that actually came a little later, because I was still working on that. Because I was a six-month ranger, I had six months that I would take classes that I needed to improve my grades so I could get in. I was really shooting to go to a specific school, and my grades weren't really up to that, so I was trying for that. Then in—I guess it was '81—is that when it was? I think. I applied and got hired as a nine-month ranger on the roads and trails crew, and I was able to work a little longer, and so school just kind of started to take a backseat to working. Then I was able to join the fire department, and that was pretty exciting. My energy for pursuing grad school started to drop off, and then I met someone, and I decided that I didn't necessarily want to move away. I think that was probably about 1982 that I kind of dropped that idea of being a physical therapist.

01-00:58:15

Farrell:

You had mentioned that, in '81, you were hired as a nine-month ranger on the roads and trails crew, and you had also taught CPR, which worked, because you had been a lifeguard. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to transition, A, from being a ranger to being part of a crew, but also from six-month to nine-month?

01-00:58:41

Rockwell:

It was actually very different. Well, and plus, though I was still in operations, I wasn't in a park anymore, in one specific park, because the roads and trails crew is in the maintenance division, and we would travel all over the district. I got to see parks that I never had been to before. I'd seen them on the maps. Some of them I'd gone to on my own, but I would never have probably driven out to Del Valle and Livermore and seen what a great place that was, or to Sunol, and drive up on the ridges. We were actually still putting in trails in those days. Not to say they don't do trails now, but mostly it's trails maintenance, and a lot more asphalt work. We did that, too, and I had never done anything like asphalt work. At first it seemed really not cool, because it didn't seem like it was a very green thing to do, but later on I realized my work is still out there, and it gave people more access to the parks, so I feel pretty proud that I was part of that.

Being on a crew, I was the only female on that crew. That was a crew made up of quite a diverse group. We had equipment operators. We had people with little to no education. We had people with a lot of education. Our supervisor, Stephen Gehrett, was able to juggle all those people, I felt, pretty well. I generally worked with one of the other rangers. We did support, kind of, for the equipment operators, which meant brushing trails. I learned a lot about trail construction. We got to go to great training classes. At that time, the trails, and where trails were built and how they were built, were sort of more mandated—mandated might not be the right word—directed by equestrians, because equestrians were some of the greatest trail users at that time. We'd go to conferences, and it involved a lot of equestrians. Single-track trails weren't necessarily what we were working on, but we would make them wide enough and high enough. Then we'd do actual trail construction, and learn about erosion and water bars, and good stewardship, and going through. So it was pretty exciting. I really enjoyed that time. Plus, getting to drive all over the park district was amazing.

01-01:01:29

Farrell:

And you didn't have to just drive to Contra Loma anymore.

01-01:01:33

Rockwell:

But when I went back to Contra Loma, I thought, wow, this place is really far away.

01-01:01:39

Farrell:

That's funny. So you did that until 1984, at which point you transferred to Tilden as a nine-month ranger. Can you tell me a little bit about why you transferred?

01-01:01:55

Rockwell:

Yeah. At that point, Stephen and I—I think we became engaged in 1983, and rather than wait and have a big—it's just never really a good idea to have a couple on the same crew, especially when one's the supervisor. I think we

were trying to keep our relationship somewhat secret, but I don't think we were really doing all that great a job of it. So it was just better if I left there, because there were more opportunities for me to leave, and he could stay there and still be the supervisor. There were openings. I don't think I'd actually worked at Tilden before, but our offices were so close. They were in the same building, all up at the Tilden Corporation Yard, so I knew a lot of the people on the crew. I'm trying to remember who my supervisor was at that time. So that worked out really well. I stayed there. We got married in 1985, and that was in January. I got pregnant, and we had our first child in June of 1986. Before I went off on maternity leave, I took an acting position back in the maintenance division, because Anne Scheer was working in the maintenance division, and she went off on maternity leave, so I backfilled her position while she was gone. I acted in it. Every position I ever took, I learned so much. I learned about contracts, and more the administrative work, and checking on insurance, and checking on contractors' licenses, and permits, and all sorts of things. I did that, then I took off for maternity leave.

01-01:04:21

Farrell:

When you were pregnant and needing to go on maternity leave—because at one point, you said, when we had talked on the phone, that you had kept it secret to a certain point—how was that received? Was it supported?

01-01:04:36

Rockwell:

It was. With our first child—that actually happened with our second child—I did tell my supervisor. I was still in the fire department. I still had many of the same jobs to do, and I worked. Yeah, I didn't feel like there was any real issues with that. It was a little weird getting so I couldn't wear my uniforms, and just getting so big. I think people generally were pretty supportive of all of that. I did another acting stint, and I couldn't remember in my timeline that I did why I did this second acting position. It was in the maintenance division. My job at Tilden, through a reorganization, was given up, so I wasn't going to have a placement. I would still have a job with the park district, but I didn't know where I was going to be. A supervisor position was open at Don Castro Park. There might have been a couple of others. I put in for the position, and I didn't tell anybody that I was pregnant, because I knew that, if I did make it, that if I told them I was pregnant, I probably wouldn't get the job. So it was a secret. I started that job in—

01-01:06:29

Farrell:

Was that 1988?

01-01:06:30

Rockwell:

Yeah, that was in 1988. My daughter was born in the end of September. I started in that job, it seems to me—it must have been February or March. So when I got hired and I did tell my new boss, he was not very happy about the fact. He said he wished he'd known that.

01-01:06:57

Farrell:

How did that affect things for you moving forward in that position?

01-01:07:02

Rockwell:

I'm sorry, do you mean being told that he'd wished he'd known that?

01-01:07:05

Farrell:

Yeah.

01-01:07:06

Rockwell:

That was never truly a surprise. It was kind of like that was the expectation. The culture was very different then. It was still a very male-dominated group, whether the park district had been told to hire a certain number of women or not. How many women came there, how many women wanted that kind of job. There were the kind of things that went on then that we learned, through training, were entirely unacceptable. Laborers often carried—they'd pick up porn and have it in the trucks, or the mechanics had pictures in the garage. All those things had to change, but it was slow. It wasn't something that people just grabbed onto right away. Some of it took some pretty militant women that really spoke up, and went in and literally tore posters down. It took a while for all of this to happen. As a new supervisor, I went from being a nine-month park ranger to a supervisor. There were no women on that crew. It was all men. There was still a world that I had to fit into, so it wasn't entirely unexpected to have my boss say that. I took off on maternity leave September—I worked pretty close up to when she was born, my daughter, and I returned way too soon, in my mind, about six months—I went back part-time, which was really hard, because I remember having to go pump breast milk. There wasn't any place really to go. I didn't have an office with a closed door, so I'd have to go into the public restroom and sit in the stalls. It was pretty comical compared to today, but it was a good learning experience.

I was there at Don Castro in Hayward for a couple of years, and that was a pretty exciting place to work, too. There was actually quite a bit of gang activity that was there. We did some great projects. We built some new picnic areas and poured concrete pads. We were still in charge of lifeguards. I felt like I was always involved with the lifeguards. At Tilden, I was kind of in charge of the lifeguards at Lake Anza. Not just the lifeguards, but the complex, in terms of the maintenance. So that was always a consistent thing for me.

01-01:10:05

Farrell:

Before we get more into that, there's a couple questions that I want to back up and ask you. How long was maternity leave?

01-01:10:13

Rockwell:

Well, as a nine-month ranger, it worked out pretty well. I believe we were entitled to the twelve weeks or whatever it was. But then I had an emergency cesarean with my son, so I got a little extra time. FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act], I don't believe, was [happening yet].

01-01:10:33

Farrell:

Yeah, it wasn't. I think that came around much later.

01-01:10:34

Rockwell:

No, that wasn't happening yet. But I had accrued vacation, and we were allowed to use that. Plus, I had my three-month furlough, so I didn't even need to use—and I could still collect unemployment during that time period. When I went on disability, we could integrate that money. I'd sign it over to the district, and then I would get my full pay, and I was still accruing more sick leave. The park district's maternity leave program, I thought, was pretty good for us, and my medical was covered that whole time, so it was all good.

01-01:11:15

Farrell:

And that's important, too.

01-01:11:16

Rockwell:

Oh, huge.

01-01:11:21

Farrell:

Also, we haven't talked about the fire department, and I'm curious about when you joined, and what your impetus for working with the department was.

01-01:11:32

Rockwell:

Because I wanted to fight fire. It seemed pretty exciting. I had been teaching these first aid classes and CPR classes. I'm not sure exactly who oversaw all that, but I worked a lot with the fire department guys. They seemed like really good guys. There were only three permanent people at that point that worked for the fire department. The rest of us were industrials. Anne Scheer was in the fire department. Laura Comstock, another woman who had been a lifeguard. A lot of people. My friends were in the fire department. It seemed like it would be kind of a fun thing to do, to go out and drive four-wheel-drive trucks and put out fire in the wild lands, and it really was. I was working, at that point, at the roads and trails. Our office was at the Tilden Corporation Yard, which is where the fire station was, so I had a lot of involvement with the fire department. We'd see them all the time and talk to them. When there was an opportunity to join, I went ahead and joined. The trainings were fun. In the beginning, I went to a lot of fires, and then it really tapered off for me as I became a supervisor and a mom. I took some time off. I don't remember when Stephen joined. He might have joined before me. He continued to be in the fire department, and we earned a little extra money for doing that as well.

01-01:13:15

Farrell:

Do you remember what year you joined?

01-01:13:17

Rockwell:

I think I joined in 1982.

01-01:13:23

Farrell:

Getting back to Don Castro, you worked with Jerry Kent at that point, too, is that correct?

01-01:13:31

Rockwell:

Well, Jerry Kent was the AGM of operations. I think I might have mentioned him more in there, because when I worked at Don Castro, there was a man who had worked for the park district for many years, named Jim Howland, and he had been a park supervisor, and he had been involved in a horrific wreck, a head-on on Crow Canyon Road, and he was severely injured. He had some brain damage, and yet he'd been a longtime employee, and Jerry wanted to make sure that he and his family were okay, and so he allowed him to come back to work as a park ranger. Now, he was already there when I arrived at Don Castro, but about a year in—and mind you, I had taken some time off for maternity leave—there was another employee, a longtime employee, who had a horrific injury. His name was Dave Lewton, and he had been in charge of Ardenwood, and really bringing that into play as a working farm out in Fremont. He had been injured in a bicycle accident. He was hit by a car, and he was severely brain-damaged as well, and Jerry wanted to make sure that he and his family were taken care of. I think it was just he and his wife. I don't remember there being any children. He let them move into the park residence, and whereas I don't think Dave was an employee at that time, they wanted me to have work for him to do. So he was a volunteer, and so I worked with him.

I had two pretty challenging people to deal with, as well as a regular staff of—I guess there were three other men that worked there at that time. A couple of them joined the fire department as well, because I supported that, and I was in the fire department. It was just kind of an interesting time to have these two men who had specific issues that had to be—I had to kind of keep them away from the public in many ways, because both of them could be inappropriate with things that they'd say. Nothing really horrific, but they just seemed a little odd. I had met Jerry Kent through teaching these CPR classes. I knew who he was, and he was such a nice fellow, and he always seemed to know people's names. He struck me as a guy that really wanted to take care of people, but at the same time, I felt like it was quite a challenge to have added to everything else that needed to be done.

01-01:16:52

Farrell:

How did you handle that?

01-01:16:56

Rockwell:

Probably not that well. I mean, I tried to. A lot of things happened with Jim. I learned that people with brain injuries, sometimes their personality becomes a little less filtered. They'll say things that are on their mind, and if they're angry about something, they will let people know. One of the guys was really angry about our boss, the zone manager, and so he would do things to try and vandalize his entry into the park. But on the other hand, this boss would park on 580. It was easier to get into the park if you parked on 580, on the freeway,

pulled off to the shoulder, and you could climb up and go right through a little opening in a fence. He could look down on us, the boss, with binoculars, spying on us, and it was just weird. Jim knew this, and he was really angry with this man, and so he would weave poison oak into—he would just spend an inordinate amount of time doing odd things. So I had to chase around a lot. It meant that I had to start calling my boss's boss, Steve Jones, who was the chief of parks at that time, and talk to him about how to deal with these things. I felt like I finally got some help.

Now, Dave Lewton lived in the park residence, and I had moved my office up to another location in the park, so I was right near him, and he would just come in and hang out, and it seemed like a lot. We'd go out, and he couldn't operate any power equipment, but we'd go out and trim trees, and he had all these kind of odd stories to tell about Narnia, and having to do with religion and genetic purity. That just didn't go over very well with me. I think they ended up moving him out of the residence. I think he was still there when I left.

01-01:19:27

Farrell:

Did you feel like you had support from your supervisors or your boss's boss when you would talk to them about these things?

01-01:19:40

Rockwell:

Not really. It was a new avenue for all of us. I probably was able to demonstrate more compassion. For them, it was kind of a problem that—they wanted to take care of people, but they didn't really want to deal with the day-to-day details of doing that. I mean, I commend them for wanting to take care of people. I don't think you could do that today. Now there's risk managers and things like that. So it was kind of a kinder and gentler park district in some ways, but on the other hand, I didn't feel totally prepared for that. But once again, I felt like I learned a lot of things. I probably didn't do things well with that. I tried to. I tried to be compassionate and have some empathy, but at the same time, there was work that had to get done. It was kind of a big time-suck and drain in many ways.

01-01:20:57

Farrell:

You were in that position for two years before you were transferred to Shadow Cliffs as a supervisor, and it was a direct transfer. Can you tell me a little bit about Shadow Cliffs and what it was like for you to transfer over there?

01-01:21:13

Rockwell:

Yeah. I wanted to go to Shadow Cliffs, because we had a rating system for the parks. Shadow Cliffs, I believe, at that time, was considered a park three. Crown Beach was also considered a three. Don Castro was a two. I really wanted to get back to Crown Beach. I knew that's where I wanted to work. I loved it there. It's right on the bay. Instead, I took this job at Shadow Cliffs, which was a former rock quarry out in Pleasanton, another place you had to

drive that you had to go through a lot of—you went through an urban area into quite an open area. It was industrial. It had a swim beach. It got incredibly hot out in Pleasanton. We seemed to be pretty far away from the city of Pleasanton, though, now. Livermore and Pleasanton have grown right up around it. We got a lot of people that came from Santa Clara County, because there were no real swim facilities there, open water, or they cost a lot of money. We'd get largely Hispanic families that would come. Huge groups of people, extended families. It was really fun, it was festive, but it was crazy, because there would just be so many people crammed into this small space. It's a former rock quarry, so it's a big hole, and you can only accommodate so many people. At one point, the police moved a police substation out there. They of course had substations. We had a new police chief and he thought substations were a good way to go, so the same officers were in the same place. But it was really helpful to have them, just for crowd control and traffic.

People were allowed to drink at all the parks at that point. I don't think we had any areas that were dry. I take that back. Redwood, I think, might have been made dry at that point, because of motorcycle gangs that would go out there. So it had been done, but the alcohol just fueled so many fights and problems that we decided that it would be safer to limit alcohol. There was a lot of discussion about it. I felt that we should have just made the park dry, but instead, we tried an experiment at Shadow Cliffs, and that was there was an asphalt trail that runs through it, and you could have alcohol on one side of the path, and you couldn't have any on the other side of the path. So that meant people could sit and drink on one side, and do all the cat-calling and whistling and, well, general harassment sort of stuff to all the women that were on the beach, or people that were on the beach in general. If you got really drunk, you'd just walk across this path and you could still go out there and swim. It was a safety issue all the way around. That was really a very trying year. I think we only did that experiment for a year, but it sure felt like a lot longer to me.

01-01:24:41

Farrell:

I bet.

01-01:24:43

Rockwell:

Then, eventually, they changed the ordinance so that no alcohol is allowed. I think you can buy a permit for a picnic reservation, but that really controls it much better.

01-01:25:00

Farrell:

So you kind of had a bit of a plan, right, when you had transferred there? You knew that you needed to stay there for six months, but you wanted to go back to Don Castro?

01-01:25:13
Rockwell:

No, I wanted to go back to—the directed transfer, that was the deal. I don't know that I requested that, but I think that's what Steve Jones, the chief of parks—I don't know if I requested it or he gave me that option, because if it didn't work out for me at Shadow Cliffs, I could return to Don Castro. Otherwise, you had to stay put. I ended up staying put for about five years, but my plan it was to be able to transfer to Crown Beach, though there was no opening there for quite some time, so I was working on that. It was a trying time. At Shadow, I had a boss that was in the same park with me, so it was a bit more like having someone keep a really close watch on all my work, and made a lot of judgments on how things got done. But I will say, he was very good about my childcare situation, because we lived in Alameda. Our childcare was in Oakland, or Berkeley, so I would have to drive the kids there, and I could get them there no earlier than seven or seven-thirty. He was okay with my coming into work after the rest of the staff had already started. I think I had to get there by eight or something, out in Pleasanton from Berkeley. Not everybody would have done that, so I will hand it to him for that. We had some headbutting, for sure, through the years. Going to fires, I don't think I reported to a single fire when I worked at Shadow Cliffs until 1991. I went to fire training, but I didn't go to fires that would impact my work at all until I went to the Oakland fire, and even then, that was on a Sunday, and I waited for a lot of tone outs to happen before I finally went.

01-01:27:39
Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about what your experience was at the Oakland fire?

01-01:27:43
Rockwell:

Yes. One of my most memorable experiences was driving in from Pleasanton. I was in my personal vehicle. The roads had been closed, for the most part, on Highway 13. I was driving to Temescal. That's where I was told to go to meet some other firefighters, and that we would go up to the command post at Grizzly Peak. I had my equipment on the seat so I could show the highway patrol, and they let me go through. As I was driving, I remember seeing the wind blowing these embers across the freeway, across Highway 13, and I saw a pine tree just explode, and I thought, wow, what am I doing? I got off and went to the south entrance at Temescal, where I met another firefighter, and I gave my car, and the keys to the car, to the park supervisor there, Frances Heath. Vince Green and I drove up to the command post. We must have been in a fire engine at that point, because I don't think we could have gotten through. I don't think we were in a private vehicle. I was assigned to work with Jack Kenny, and we called it the Jack Attack. We were defending the KPFA radio towers, and though we liked to say it—I don't know that it was necessarily true—we say that we kept the fire from going into Orinda. Now, if the wind had really kept up, it probably could have, but we stopped it at Fish Ranch Road, or else it could have continued to burn all the way through Tilden Park. Oh, it's the first Wednesday? (siren in background)

01-01:29:41

Farrell: Yeah.

01-01:29:42

Rockwell: From there, I went to Broadway Terrace, and I was with Anne Scheer, who was a lieutenant, and I was also with Jeff Wilson, who was one of the people who was at ground zero on this whole thing, and he told the story. He must have told this story a million times, of how this thing just blew up. He was right there when it happened. It was an amazing experience. It was scary, but I think what I remember in the morning, when the sun came up, to see that level of destruction was really, really something. There were houses that were still in place. There were houses that were completely gone. But it wasn't just that the house was gone; the cars were melted. There was nothing. There was nothing left, just maybe some bricks, if they had a fireplace or something.

01-01:30:51

Farrell: Like the images that we saw of the Sonoma and the Napa fires.

01-01:30:55

Rockwell: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It burned so hot. I guess we were overnight, maybe two days. I don't think I was two nights on that fire. Was really fortunate my mom was able to take our kids. Of course, she was really worried. I was happy that Stephen and I were both—he was driving a water tender, and I didn't see him much, but I knew he was out there, so I knew where he was, and he knew where I was. So we knew that we were okay. That was before cell phones and everything. Yeah, that was an experience for sure.

01-01:31:40

Farrell: Did you fight many fires after that?

01-01:31:44

Rockwell: I went to more fires, I think, after that, I guess because it had been brought to my attention that I hadn't gone to any fires when I was at Shadow Cliffs. I think I hadn't gone to a fire for an entire year when I was there. At least one year, maybe even more. And so after that, I did start to go more. We get call-outs in the middle of the night, and so I would go to some of those. I went to fires before I went to Shadow Cliffs. I remember fighting fires at Point Pinole. I remember fighting fires a lot more. Then, at Shadow, my boss, I think, felt that I should spend more of my time as a supervisor.

01-01:32:35

Farrell: So you were in that position for five years, and then you transferred to Crown Beach. Did you wait for five years so you could go back to Crown Beach? Were you waiting for something to open up?

01-01:32:47

Rockwell: Well, I kept waiting for something to open up, but it didn't look like anything was going to happen. Then, through a series of events, not all necessarily good—in my case, I was having a problem with my supervisor—somebody else was having a problem with their supervisor, and there were four people

that got transferred, direct transferred, and it was quite a choreographed scene that was crazy. It all worked out, because all four of us that got transferred got moved closer to our homes, so we got to work easier. I think everybody was happy with their transfers. The guy that was the supervisor at Crown Beach didn't have to make that move. He wasn't having problems with anybody. He was sort of the lynchpin of the whole thing, David Yoas, and he moved to Point Pinole. He lived in El Sobrante, and I lived in Alameda, and I got to go to Crown Beach, and another guy left. The guy that had been at Pinole went to Kennedy Grove, and I think he lived near there, like in Richmond area. I could be wrong about that. Al went to Shadow Cliffs, which is where he wanted to be, and as I recall, he might have lived in Livermore or Pleasanton. It worked out for everybody.

01-01:34:26

Farrell: Yeah, sounds like it.

01-01:34:29

Rockwell: I got to hand it to Steve Jones and all those guys that put it together, because we were all very happy, and I stayed there for thirteen years.

01-01:34:40

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit what it was like for you to go back there, and to now be a supervisor there?

01-01:34:49

Rockwell: Yeah. I was so happy to be back there. The staff had been there for quite a while. There were some hurt feelings, because, in order to make this transfer happen, everything was done in secrecy. I think there was some resentment from the staff at Crown Beach, even though there were people I've known. We were all union members together, and friends for the most part. I'd known all of them. There was some resentment that I came there that way, and I think the fact that they hadn't been told about it made some people a little unhappy, but we worked through that. I'd say that was the most politically active group of people that I'd ever worked with, and so we had some great discussions. I had to look at myself as a supervisor a lot differently, because I was used to just giving a job assignment and not really having a lot of questions about it, and now I had to not only explain what exactly, in detail, I wanted, which was probably really good, but why I had selected that person to do that job. In many ways, it was pretty draining. Then the staff changed, of course, through the years, because we were all kind of in the same age group. Some people retired. A couple people were a bit older. A couple people retired, and I brought in new people. Being able to work in my community was just fabulous. I met so many people. I was active in the city government. My kids were in school, so I was able to coordinate with their school teachers to do things in the park, or I was also able to go volunteer in the school. I could take some time off to go do that. We did lots of special events. It was great.

01-01:37:11

Farrell: Sounds like your quality of life improved.

01-01:37:13

Rockwell: It did. My kids were older, so I didn't have to deal with the daycare issue. They could get themselves to school. They were more active in the park. They could see things that went on in the park. Of course, they grew up listening to Stephen and I talk about the park, and our changing jobs for some time.

01-01:37:36

Farrell: In the mid-nineties, you start to become interested in applying for manager positions. You applied a few times. Can you tell me a little bit about what the application process was like, and why you wanted to be a manager?

01-01:37:49

Rockwell: I felt like, at that point, I hadn't been at Crown all that long, but an opportunity came up, and they didn't come up very often, because retirements kind of didn't seem to be happening. I know there was always a random one here or there, but now we were seeing a few people leave at a time. This opportunity arose. I believe there were two openings. In fact, I know there were two openings. I applied, and I felt like I really did a good job. I made it in the first hiring pool. I got a second interview. Jack Kenny got hired as one of the managers, and they went to the outside for the other guy. So I was really disappointed. A few years later, there was another opportunity to apply. I don't remember where the openings were at that point. I think I really flopped on that interview. I think that one, I really flopped on. One of them, I really did poorly. I made first hiring pool all but one time, I believe. Yes. I believe it was five times that I applied. It might have been four. Anyway, the second to the last time that I applied, I thought I was a shoo-in for the Shoreline unit, because I had been in the unit, I knew everybody, I knew all about the Shoreline, and yet the position went to a guy that had worked in the main office, in revenue. Now, he had also been a lifeguard, and he was a good friend of mine. I was really disappointed, but at the same time I couldn't be mad, because he's a good friend of mine, so what are you going to do? I probably wasn't the best employee right at the beginning for him, but he was really good. He was really good, and he did lots of great things for the park district—Mark Ragatz. He became the chief of parks, and just recently retired. As I say, he had been a fellow lifeguard when I was a lifeguard, albeit I was quite a bit older than him. He really took a different approach, a more measured approach. I think I learned a lot from him as well.

Now, meanwhile, Anne Scheer was still in the maintenance division, and she was still helping me and encouraging me to go forward. I could call her directly when I had projects I needed help with, and she was really a good resource with all this. She's always been kind of right there in my career, as well as Stephen, as encouraging me to move on, and never saying, "Oh, they don't want you." There was always that tendency to give up, that "They don't

want you for this position, don't you get it?" kind of thing. And maybe they didn't, but as the administrations changed, then it worked out.

01-01:41:01

Farrell:

You, finally, in 2008, become the regional trails manager.

01-01:41:06

Rockwell:

Yeah, and that was a big surprise.

01-01:41:08

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about what was surprising about that?

01-01:41:14

Rockwell:

They always gave the opportunity to the five or six—I guess six—unit managers. Once there was an opening, they could transfer, they could go somewhere else. I thought maybe, I don't know, Mark would go somewhere else. But the regional trails was open, and I can't remember what the other position—might have been recreation—and I thought for sure I was going to get the recreation, but they put me at regional trails. When I got that call, I thought, well, that's weird. Why would they do that? I went into it with a smaller group of people, but a really wide swath of property to cover and be in charge of, and I was so fortunate to have some really good supervisors in that unit, who were really patient with me. One of them had gone for the position and didn't get it, so it was kind of my same thing that I had with Mark. I think he was disappointed he didn't get it, but he was still wonderful at teaching me—Louie Guzman, who's since passed away. I just learned so much, and it was just like this great adventure. I was able to use a lot of the things that I had learned in the past, when I was on roads and trails, and even back to when I had been a lifeguard, doing crack sealing on the Lafayette-Moraga Trail. It just felt like my greatest adventure, and I really enjoyed it.

A couple years after that, now more retirements were happening, and people were moving around. Jack asked me—Jack Kenny was then the chief of parks—if I would go to the Shoreline unit, and I said, "Well, yeah." It was such a shocking thing, though, when it actually happened and we did this move. I did miss being in the regional trails unit. I enjoyed advocating for them, and I felt like I really learned a lot more. Like I say, I felt like it was an opportunity to use so many things that I had learned through the years. I had already left the fire department. They don't let managers be in the fire department, but I had actually left the fire department before I became a unit manager anyway. I still worked with people in the fire department. Then I went back to the Shoreline unit, which really felt very comfortable. I was back in the same building, in a different office. New challenges. Oil spills were really the focus for a lot of things. We worked with a lot of agencies. I was feeling a bit like a political junkie at one point, because I was working with so many different agencies and learning about emergency preparedness. It was always exciting. There were always many things to learn.

01-01:44:38

Farrell:

You were doing that for, I guess, two and a half years before you were asked to be acting chief of recreation in the interpretive unit, is that correct?

01-01:44:50

Rockwell:

Yeah. What happened was, I think, Stephen, at that point, had been retired for a couple of years. He had been working pretty steadily, though, even though he was retired. He came back as a consultant, and then there was a big fire at Tilden Corp Yard, and so he worked on that. He was ready to start doing some traveling, and so he was encouraging me to retire. I went to my boss at that time, John Escobar. Jack had since retired, and Jeff Wilson was now the chief of parks, and I told them that I was thinking of retiring. That was probably in 2012 that I told them, that I was starting to do the math and figure out how I could do it. Then Anne Scheer became the chief of parks. She left her chief of maintenance job, and it was a great and wonderful thing that she did that. She asked me if I would be willing to do this last four months. The guy that was in charge of the interpretive and recreation unit was leaving the district. He'd worked with the state, and I guess he was going to go, I don't know, back to the state or whatever.. I'm not really sure all the ins and outs of it. There were two women that were the managers, one for recreation and one for the interpretive unit. I think Anne felt that it might be helpful to have a woman in that position to help sort of calm things down, whatever. We also had a new AGM at that point. John Escobar had left, and a new guy had come on. So Jim O'Conner came and asked me if I would do the job for the four months, or just part of the year. I think I had told them what my timeline was. I thought about it, and I thought, well, I'm totally out of my element here. I haven't worked in the interpretive unit. I've worked with naturalists all these years. I had not worked in the recreation department, but I'd worked with the recreation departments all these years, and I'd worked in high-use recreation parks. But I felt like it was an opportunity—and I think Anne pointed this out—it was a really good opportunity for me to have a say in who my replacement was going to be.

01-01:47:39

Farrell:

Oh, I see.

01-01:47:41

Rockwell:

So I got to appoint Kevin, who is a really good guy, as the acting in my place.

01-01:47:49

Farrell:

What's his last name?

01-01:47:50

Rockwell:

Takei, T-A-K-E-I. I hope that you actually talk to him, too, at some point. He's a really good guy. He had worked in the Shoreline unit for his entire career, I believe, whether at Miller, Knox Park or whatever. It wasn't my intent to completely throw him into the fire, though, but this was a big job, and it took a lot of time. Even though I was able to coach him, I didn't feel like I did a lot of coaching. I feel like I put him in a position where he had to

learn, like, right now what the position is. He actually commented on that to me later, so I didn't feel so bad about it. He had to do board presentations. These were all things that you weren't necessarily prepared for when you came in as the unit manager, or as a manager. Even though John Escobar did do some great trainings, and I had had these opportunities to have acting positions—all these things sort of culminated, and I worked on another project—once again, I felt like I was kind of a fish out of water. I think it was worthwhile to do. I don't feel like that was my proudest time. I don't know that I did as good a job as I could have. I did get the main assignments done that I was supposed to do when I was there, and handling the biggest contract I ever wrote my name on for a purchase order. It was all pretty exciting.

01-01:49:42

Farrell:

Yeah, and it also doesn't seem like a necessarily easy way to retire.

01-01:49:47

Rockwell:

No, and it was the farthest I felt from being away, farthest away from actually being in the parks. All my time had been in the parks, and the more I was immersed in the parks, the happier I was. Being there felt like you were in a constant meetings and notes and emails, and my time management skills were really being tested. Anne seemed to be a master at this. Her office was always calm and clean, and she was right down the way from me, and I felt like I had stacks of things all over the place. She was always really good to talk to, and there to help with issues and to explain some of the office politics that I didn't really have the knowledge of.

01-01:50:45

Farrell:

Then you ended up retiring in spring of 2013?

01-01:50:49

Rockwell:

Yeah, my official end date was in July, but I left in May. I think it was the end of May.

01-01:50:58

Farrell:

What was it like for you to retire?

01-01:51:01

Rockwell:

It was a process. I thought it was going to be a lot easier than it was, but it took a while. We also had some really big changes in our personal life at that time. We went and got my mother-in-law, who was having beginnings of Alzheimer's. We moved her up here with us, so that was challenging. My son was back from San Diego, where he'd just gone through some personal upheavals and was kind of starting all over again up here. I think my daughter was not—she must have been out of college by then. No, she was probably still in. Anyway, it was quite a change. At first, it just kept feeling like I was on vacation and then I was going to be going back to work, and I realized I needed to do something more structured with my time. Now, Stephen was a really good role model for this, because when he retired, he decided that he needed to have some structure. He didn't know he was going to be doing all

the work that he ended up doing. He likes to bake bread, so he signed up for classes at Laney. As it turned out, both my kids—because my son had come back up, and he'd already graduated from UC Santa Cruz, but he had gone to San Diego and moved back up, and he wasn't really sure what he wanted to do. He knew he wanted to cook, but he didn't really have experience and didn't know what he was going to do. My daughter was finished with school, and she was really into food, too, so they all three ended up in the culinary program at Laney. For the first time, I'd come home from work and I had nobody to talk to about work, and they were just yakking about what was going on in their program, because they were all three in the same program. So it was really kind of a funny thing.

I saw that, and I realized I needed to do something. I've always tried to volunteer some of my time, whether it's different projects. I was really taken by Brenda Montano, who is our archivist. She runs the archives, and I really liked a program that she gave when I was at one of the board meetings about it. I told her, "I want to come and do that when I retire," and I'm sure she thought, pfft, whatever. People say that all the time, right? I knew that really the main person that was in the archives was Jerry Kent. I thought, what a great opportunity to be able to hang out with this guy. So I went, and it was a real working archives. At first, we were getting a lot of boxes. I was the only other park employee, or former park employee. The other people that were there were volunteers that came with different interests. One is an inventor, Bill Vidor. He's even got a patent on something he invented while at the archives. Another guy was writing a book, and so just to get this information—anyway, we were getting boxes and boxes of pictures. Jerry was there to work a lot on fire and getting rid of eucalyptus trees and whatnot. We would get all these boxes that had pictures, and so for a while, it was just going through box after box and writing who the people were on the back. Some of these were people that had long ago retired. It actually was pretty cool, because it was kind of like scrapbooking in the beginning, and then filing and figuring out where we were going to put all these things. Now I've done it for a few years. I really enjoy it, and the people that I've met. Now there's also a lot more retirees that have come there, so it's even more fun to see people and kind of keep in touch that way.

01-01:55:22

Farrell:

Yeah, it seems like a big hub for retired employees.

01-01:55:26

Rockwell:

Well, it's getting to be that way, but it kind of wasn't. Now we're like, if everybody is there, there's like fourteen people.

01-01:55:33

Farrell:

Cool.

01-01:55:33

Rockwell:

Yeah. It's a lot of people to fit into a very small area.

01-01:55:39

Farrell:

Can you tell me about what it meant for you to work with the district for so long, for so many years?

01-01:55:46

Rockwell:

The park district was more than a job for me. I literally grew up with them. I started there working when I was nineteen, and I ended working there when I was fifty-eight. Though I had a personal life that was away from the district, almost everything seemed to be connected with it. I remember my children saying, when we'd go on vacation, "Why can't we just look at normal things, like the trees, instead of the construction of the trails, or the garbage cans, or how they've constructed the bathrooms?" But it gave my kids an eye for that kind of thing. I love the outdoors. Even though I didn't embrace it as a career until probably in my thirties, I look back and I think, I was pretty lucky to have the job that I had. I got to, for the most part, work outdoors. I got to work on incredibly important projects. I met some people who influenced me throughout my whole life, and therefore have influenced probably the way I brought up my children. The park district was more than just a job or a career for me. I've made some of my closest friends. I'm still very close friends with Anne Scheer. She's probably one of my best friends. One of the other women that worked at Crown Beach way back there, Susie Whitcomb I see her a lot still. We're very close, and Jack Kenny and Annie Kenny, and all those. So there's still a lot of people that I see from the park district. A lot of my friendships are there. Both my children worked for the park district at one point. It was a very big part of all of our lives, I think.

01-01:58:04

Farrell:

How do you feel that the district enriches life in the Bay Area?

01-01:58:13

Rockwell:

Well, the fact that all the land that has been set aside—when you fly into the Bay Area and you look out—I mean, to see the green belt that we have. One of the things in the Shoreline unit that we would often do, especially if there were any bigwigs that came into town and we were doing some kind of tour, is to take them out to the Crockett Hills, and you stand on the shoreline overlooking the Carquinez Strait, and say, "Look over there. That's Benicia. It's just covered with just condos and homes and all this stuff." Say, "That's what this would have looked like if it hadn't been for the East Bay Regional Park District." That being said, as someone who was maintaining that property—and I have to laugh, because even working in the archives, I see, forever, there's been this push-pull. How much more land can we buy if we can't take care of what we have? It's always an issue.

01-01:59:18

Farrell:

On that note, what are your hopes for the future of the district?

01-01:59:24

Rockwell:

Well, I hope that the district endures, and I think it will. I know that the people of the Bay Area embrace it. I'm pretty sure that the Measure FF probably

passed. I don't know what the final numbers were on that. You need sixty-six and two-thirds on this one. The funding, I think, is very modest, or what people are asked to pay in their tax bill is very modest compared to what you get. I hope that the park district is able to continue to get people who see themselves working in a bigger arena than just scrubbing toilets or picking up trash, and understand that the green movement, whatever it's called throughout the years, continues, and that people need to have spaces, open spaces. They need to use that property, whether it's for high-use recreation, whether it's an opportunity to be able to swim in a lake instead of a pool all the time, or to swim in the bay. That there are safe places for people to go. I just don't think people can be well-rounded without having an outdoor experience as part of their living.

01-02:00:59

Farrell:

Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

01-02:01:04

Rockwell:

No, I feel like this went for a long time. That's a lot of talking. But I thank you. It was fun, and I don't feel quite as—let's see if I went over everything. I know I was very nervous to begin with, and thank you for being good.

01-02:01:21

Farrell:

Hopefully it wasn't so bad. If there's anything, we can always add it later, too. All right, thank you.

01-02:01:29

Rockwell:

Thank you.

[End of Interview]