ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

**KATHERINE CUSHINBERRY HARKER’S ISLAND, NORTH CAROLINA MAY 6, 2020**

INTERVIEWED BY DEBORAH HARVEY

AUDIO FILE #BRVB050620 – KATHERINE CUSHINBERRY

# EDITORIAL NOTE

This document is a rendering of the oral history interview as transcribed by the interviewer from the audio recording. Although effort was made to provide a verbatim transcription, for easier reading of the transcript, verbal pauses, repetitions of words, and encouraging words from the interviewer were omitted. The resulting oral history interview transcript was provided to the informant for review and, if necessary, correction. Ms. Cushinberry made some modifications to the draft transcript. For the original interview, please refer to the audio file.

# ABSTRACT

Ms. Katherine Cushinberry discusses her work for the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas, which was her first assignment in the National Park Service. She describes how she became the Administrative Officer there. Ms. Cushinberry’s second assignment was at Cape Lookout National Seashore, where she currently is. She describes her impressions of the future park at Monroe School when she was a child in Topeka. Ms. Cushinberry details her duties as the Administrative Clerk when she was first hired at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. She describes how individual parks put together their budget for each year. Ms. Cushinberry describes the activities of the 1998 “Grand Opening” and the preparations for the Dedication/Grand Opening in 2004, especially those involving the participation of the President of the United States. She also briefly discusses the construction of a parking garage near the site for storage of park equipment and vehicles. Ms.

Cushinberry offers her views on how the surrounding neighborhood viewed the introduction of a National Historic Site into their neighborhood. In discussing the rehabilitation of the building, she describes some of the changes that she felt were inappropriate. Ms. Cushinberry discusses how her work intersected with the Brown Foundation, including an aside on her earlier association with Linda Brown. She also talked about the Brown Foundation’s involvement in the educational bookstore, as well as the later OIG investigation of the park administration and the Brown Foundation. Ms. Cushinberry also shares a variety of vignettes of things that happened at the park involving visiting dignitaries, her children, and others.

# PERSONS MENTIONED

Grant Cushinberry, Teri Gage, Alicia Bullocks, Dave [Smith?], Joe Randall, Amy [Angela Wetz], Cheryl Brown Henderson, Superintendent Bess Sherman, Treva Gordon [Sykes], Tarona Armstrong, Tyrone Brandyburg, Steve Adams, Tom Rosenblum, Linda Brown, Ray Harper, Dorothy Dandridge, Deborah Dandridge, Senator Bob Dole, Katrina, John Brown, Stan Austin, Randy Standingwater.

# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

**KATHERINE CUSHINBERRY**

Interviewer: This oral history interview is for the Administrative History of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. The interviewer is Deborah Harvey, with Outside The Box, on behalf of the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. Interviewed today is Katherine Cushinberry, former administrative officer at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. The date is May 6, 2020. This interview takes place online.

So, Ms. Cushinberry, as I’m sure you know, the purpose of an Administrative History is to document the development of a unit of the National Park Service, physically and administratively. Oral histories are one way to get information that might not otherwise be available from documentary evidence. We try to get as much information as we can from as many different perspectives as possible in order to craft a robust narrative of the developmental history of the park. This will be used for – by future park administrators to inform their decisions as they navigate future developments. I do want to say that we appreciate that you are giving your time to share your experiences of the development of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site to further this project.

So, to start with, I’m going to ask you to repeat your name and spell your last name, for the transcriber, please.

Cushinberry: Okay. My first – my name is Katherine Cushinberry. My last name is spelled C-U-S-H-I-N- B as in boy, E-R-R-Y.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have a park named after you, in Topeka?

Cushinberry: It’s – I’m – I married into the family, the Cushinberry family, but there is a park that was named after Grant Cushinberry. He’s - was a noted philanthropist in the community.

Interviewer: Ok, okay. So, we’ll start with your work, in general, with the National Park Service, and then move on to the specifics of your work with Brown v. Board.

Cushinberry: Okay.

Interviewer: When did you start with the National Park Service, and what was your position? Cushinberry: I started May 12th of 1998.

Interviewer: Oh, wow! That’s specific! And what was your position?

Cushinberry: I first started at Brown v. Board as an administrative clerk, I believe it was. Interviewer: Okay, so your very first job with the Park Service was at Brown v. Board?

Cushinberry: Yes, ma’am. It was before it opened. Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah! Well, 1998, so, yeah. Let’s just – how long were you there? Cushinberry: Fifteen years.

Interviewer: Okay, and, during that time, you started as an administrative clerk, and you were promoted several times, I guess, to other positions?

Cushinberry: Yeah, to the administrative officer. It was a really quick promotion because the – you know, we were – we hadn’t opened yet, but we were at, you know, temporary, kind of, quarters at the Post Office. And the AO that was there, she left, and so, by me being in the Student Career Experience Program, which is now something (unintelligible) –

Interviewer: Oh, SCEP, yeah.

Cushinberry: Yeah, they don’t have that anymore. It’s just the – it’s the student program now. They were able to put me in an upward mobility position, and so that’s how I managed to become the administrative officer.

Interviewer: So, you went straight from administrative clerk to administrative officer? Cushinberry: I went from administrative clerk to administrative assistant to administrative officer. Interviewer: Oh, okay. And so, when did you start being the administrative officer?

Cushinberry: In 2000 – oh, I want to say, 2001? ‘02? I’d have to – I can get back with you with that, if that’s – you need that as factual.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, you were a student when you started. What was – what do you think – what prompted you to apply for that position? How did you get to be the – in that program?

Cushinberry: I was recruited out of college. Yeah, with that – yeah. I was in college at the time, and they did a –

Interviewer: What was your major?

Cushinberry: Business Administration. And so, I was, at the time, in school, and they had came out and did a career thing – you know, a career program, and then –

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay. Career Day?

Cushinberry: And so – yeah. And so, I had brought my resume, you know, and got a call, and Red – which, her name is Teri – I can’t think of her now. She got married again. She was the Acting AO, and then there was Alicia – there was Alicia Bullocks –

Interviewer: Oh, Teri Gage?

Cushinberry: Teri Gage. But she’s something else now. I can’t think of her new name. Did she go back to Teri Gage? I don’t –

Interviewer: No. It was Teri Perry. It was Teri Perry at the time.

Cushinberry: It was Teri Perry, and now she’s Teri Gage. That’s right. And then Alicia Bullocks. She was the AO. Because she was also – just had been converted to a student position, too. And so, I had two people that hired me. So, I had Teri, and then I had Alicia. And that’s where my career started. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Okay. And did you – so, let’s just skip forward to cover your career, and then we’ll go back to your work at Brown v. Board.

Cushinberry: Okay.

Interviewer: After you left in 2000 and – what? Where did you go?

Cushinberry: 2013, I went to Cape Lookout National Seashore, and I’ve been here – I’ve been here since.

Interviewer: Oh! And you’ve been there ever since? And that’s where you are now?

Cushinberry: Yeah – (unintelligible) I don’t - yeah. I like it here. I came here – just like Brown v. Board, I love it here. The weather’s great all the time. I don’t have to deal with the snow that often, and so – (laughs).

Interviewer: You can always go to the beach. It’s easy. Cushinberry: Yeah. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so, you’ve worked at two parks in your entire career with the National Park Service? So, when you started –

Cushinberry: Right. I worked at – I was – I physically have been at two parks, but I serviced some other parks. Like, when I was at Brown v. Board, I serviced Tallgrass Prairie because they had lost their AO. So, we were – I worked with them for a few years to – as an AO for them. And then, I also – you know, we were attached to Nicodemus at one time. Like – that was right toward the end. As I was leaving, we were assigned Nicodemus.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, Brown v. Board was the mentoring park for Nicodemus, as I understand it? Cushinberry: Yeah, it – kind of – I guess that’s what it was, yeah. Because they –

Interviewer: So, you – so, you worked on their administrative –?

Cushinberry: Yeah, we worked on administrative stuff for them, but they had staff. We kind of just assisted, you know. And then I left, and then I don’t know who took over after myself, because I left in 2013. That was something fairly new that had – you know, Dave had accepted the responsibilities for, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, I wondered about whether or not you did that during a time when there was no staff at Nicodemus or there was already – there was staff there, and you were just assisting them, correct?

Cushinberry: Yeah, they had an AO. His name was Joe Randall, and he was leaving, I believe, and that’s one of the reasons. And then, they had a maintenance worker there, and a

student interp – yeah, a student interp staff, I think. I’m not for sure. And then, you know, they also had a Foundation that, kind of, managed their day-to-day stuff there.

Interviewer: Right. So, was the superintendent at Nicodemus stationed at Brown v. Board at the time?

Cushinberry: Not at the time. There was no superintendent. And that’s why Dave managed the site until he was able to hire – what was her name? Amy? I can’t remember what her name was, but then she left shortly after that, too, so yeah. Pretty busy.

Interviewer: Okay. So, when you first started at Brown v. Board, you really had nothing to compare it to. So, what was your first impression of the park, let’s say?

Cushinberry: Well, it was amazing to me because I had never heard of the National Park Service when I first – honestly! I never even thought about – I knew about Yellowstone, and I knew about, you know, some of the bigger parks, but I just never attributed, you know, all these parks and they were part of the government. You know, I just didn’t put the – all the ones together and make it as a whole, the National Park Service. So, that was a great experience for me, coming in. Also, when I started, I think, shortly, like, the year afterwards, we had that (unintelligible) litigation, so that was a little different, because then, we had no computers. We had no internet. We couldn’t do anything but fax and talk on the phone, at the time, you know, because we were shut down. And then, of course, 9-1-1 happened in 2001. You know, that was another, you know, big experience for us because, where we were at, we were stationed, you know, in the federal Post Office, downtown, and we had just, I believe, had a shooting at that federal – the federal courts, which was right directly across the street from us, so, you know, I – there was some experiences there, but we just – like I said, we had a small office up there. We all were on the fifth floor, I believe, of the postal building, so it was different. It was quite an experience, but it was a great experience, and I wouldn’t change a thing. I really learned something. I’m still with the Park Service. I love the people. I love the Midwest Region. I still do. (Laughs) They were a great region, so.

Interviewer: Okay, so, when you first came in, did you get a – I assume you got a chance to go over and see Monroe School, the actual – where the actual park was?

Cushinberry: I did.

Interviewer: Had you seen it before?

Cushinberry: Yeah, because I grew up in Topeka. But it wasn’t – it didn’t look nothing compared to what it looks like now. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Yeah. So, let me ask you this: when you grew up in Topeka, were you aware of the role of Sumner School and Monroe School in the –?

Cushinberry: Yes. And that was due to – yeah, and that was just due to, you know, knowledge in school, you know. Growing up in school, you know, you, you know, are taught Brown v. Board because it happened in Topeka – you know, Topeka, so I was aware of that.

Interviewer: Right. And had you – had you seen – you know, as a school child, did – were you given a tour or sent over there to look at it, or –?

Cushinberry: Well, no, because, you know, the big – when I was a kid, it was boarded up. You know, it was –

Interviewer: It was empty?

Cushinberry: You know, it was all – yeah, it wasn’t really active or anything at the time when I was growing up in Topeka, you know. Plus, when I was a kid, you really didn’t think about some of those things, but we did talk about it in our history books and stuff, so.

Interviewer: Okay. So, when you – when you (chuckles) “discovered” the National Park Service, and you discovered that they were in charge of a park in Topeka, and you applied for a job, what was the – what were your – what were your duties when you first started?

Cushinberry: Just the daily administrative stuff: payroll, you know, property – Interviewer: So, you processed payroll?

Cushinberry: Payroll, property, just a lot of the – Interviewer: What kind of things did you do with property?

Cushinberry: You know, tracking it. You know, at the time, there – you know, there was property. I did some IT work, because, you know, we had our IT system set up there in the postal building. Pretty much – when you think about administration, we pretty much did a lot, but I mainly was in charge of, like, property, payroll. I’m just trying to think of all the duties that I had. Some budget stuff. I mean, you know, I had some budget stuff.

Interviewer: Did you help assemble the budget, or did you just do the typing and filing?

Cushinberry: At the time – I did all that, too. At the time, on the budget side of it, I just assisted Alicia with a lot of the budget stuff, you know, like –

Interviewer: Okay. So, how – this is just an idle question, but, in a single park, how is the budget assembled? Does each Division say how much money they need for the year? How does that work?

Cushinberry: Well, usually, we start off with what’s appropriated to us down from Washington office, through your Regional office, and, you know, what’s allocated to the park, and then – the parks that I’ve, kind of, been with, like, you know, at Brown v. Board, Cape Lookout – you know, even Nicodemus and Tallgrass Prairie, you, kind of, look at what their history was. I came in – you know, you look at what their previous history was for each Division, and then that’s the money that was allocated to each one. But, usually, the Chiefs, they are supposed to submit, you know, a budget to the superintendent.

Interviewer: A proposal?

Cushinberry: Yeah. And, if the superintendent, you know, supports or approves what their needs are, he does that, and that’s what they’re allocated out of what’s allocated to the park by

the Green Book. You know, the Green Book is the one that decides what kind of money you’re going to get each year, minus – you know, we have assessments, too, that’s taken out of it, and then that’s pushed down to the park from the Regions and from Washington, so.

Interviewer: Okay. So, when Congress allocates funds to the National Park – well, to the Department of Interior, which allocates them to the National Park Service, then the National Park Service allocates those funds to each individual park?

Cushinberry: Yes.

Interviewer: And, at that time, that’s when you know what your budget for the year is?

Cushinberry: Not until the Regions – we won’t know what our – usually, what our budgets are until the Regions have done theirs, because, you know, we get assessed a lot. And then, a lot of it depends on your legislative mandates, too, that, you know, you’re required to do – or, you know, there may be special circumstances that have been put into your budget. Like, take Brown v. Board, for instance. We had the Brown Foundation that had additional –

Interviewer: Right. As part of the legislation?

Cushinberry: Right. And so, we had additional funding that was allocated to the park just for them. It was like a line item that was issued for us to manage as, you know –

Interviewer: Okay. And then, at the end of the budget year, before – when you went along – went to get another budget, did you do some kind of assessment of how the budget you had was spent?

Cushinberry: Yeah. Usually, at the beginning of the fiscal year – you know, we close out in February, and then, at the beginning of the fiscal year, you know, we go back and, you know, run all our reports and see what was spent and, you know, making sure that everything, you know, was done legally. And then, that following year, usually, we always start off with Continuing Resolutions. There’s only been, I think, one time in my time that we actually had a budget that we started off with. But we work a percentage off. Whatever the percentage that the Region tells us that we can work off of our previous year allocated funding, and we, kind of, set that, and you can’t go over – you’re not supposed to go over that percentage amount until we get a new Continuing Resolution, which is in – you know, December, they usually sign off on another one, but that’s just kind of how it kind of works. But, usually, we know what our funding – around an estimate of funding – what we’re going to receive, because the Green Book tells us. So, like, right now, we’re in ’20, we already know what the Green Book says in ’21. We just have to wait to see what Congress – or, what – anything happens. You know, anything, possibly – like

COVID-19, this year could have a big factor on next year’s budget, so that’s kind of how – it’s a big circle.

Interviewer: So, for instance, if you – if a park wanted to, say, increase their budget because there was a specific – perhaps they want to add some FTE, or personnel, to their budget that are not currently in their budget, how do they do that?

Cushinberry: We have to submit a request to increase our base. So, that – Interviewer: Okay, and is that before –?

Cushinberry: It’s before – it takes a few years. It takes a few years before you get approved for that, so it’s not like it can happen overnight unless there’s some additional special funding. So, you can get –

Interviewer: So, it even – it even can’t happen the next year, right?

Cushinberry: Not that quick, if it’s going to be a base increase – a permanent base increase But, if it’s for something like projects – like, we use the PMIS, which is the Project Management Information System – we may get cyclic money or repair/rehab. The park that I’m at now, you know, we have (unintelligible). There’s all kind of special money, where you can get those to hire temporary or term employees if you want to have certain funding just for some employees, like YCC, which is a youth program where we can hire youth for the year. Volunteer – there’s VIP money – there’s all kinds of money sources out there. It’s just how you use it. But, if you’re asking for us to hire permanent, it doesn’t – it’s not approved right away. That’s something that has to go all the way up to the Congress – Washington office and – before we get approval on that, so sometimes it takes a few years. But, right now, no one has gotten base increase since 2000 – I think it’s 2012, I think, is the last base increase. Well, we went through sequestration in 2013, and so, you know, that’s pretty much probably been since the last time any park has had a bases increase unless there was some special money, Congressionally, that says, “Okay, this park is going to get this for this.” But, other than that, no. And then, there’s another factor. You know, we keep adding new parks. And so, there’s not enough money to keep going around. You know, we still have to share that money, and then they have to fund those parks, you know, with their base operating funds, so.

Interviewer: Right. And then, there’s – the start-up costs for any park are pretty substantial – are pretty heavy, I guess you could say.

Cushinberry: Right. Yeah. Because usually it’s staffing. You know, it’s your payroll, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, the first five years it’s (chuckles) studies! Lots and lots of studies! (Laughs) Those are expensive.

Cushinberry: Yep. That’s true. That’s true. Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. I kind of digressed into how the budgets work because I have talked to several administrative officers, and they’ve told me, you know, things about budget, and I never really got a good grip on how getting a budget for a park was done. You know, how it worked. So, thank you very much for clarifying that. So, when you worked – when you first started, and you worked in the – your office was in the Post Office, did that pose any problems for administration of the park in your opinion or in your knowledge?

Cushinberry: At the time, because of our – because the site wasn’t ready for any kind of staffing to be housed there, it was ideal, because it was just right up the road, you know, I think, about two miles at the max. But, you know, we could actually – on a good day, you could walk to the Post Office from the – from the site, but the site was – you know, wasn’t even – it was not – it was under construction at the time when I first got there.

Interviewer: Okay. But, while you were there, they did do the rehabilitation plan and the several construction phases. Were you at all involved in those activities?

Cushinberry: Yes. All of – all of that, you know. Interviewer: Okay. What did you do?

Cushinberry: And the Grand Opening in 2004.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, let’s start with this. They had the Grand – they actually had a Grand Opening in – I think it was 1998.

Cushinberry: Soft opening. Interviewer: 2004 was the Dedication.

Cushinberry: Yeah. 2003 was when we had a soft opening.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, in – the park actually held a Grand Opening in 1998.

Cushinberry: Well, that was – we did that right outside. And it was – it wasn’t, as I recall it, grand, but it was right outside, because, you know, the fences were there. We did it right in front of the building. And that’s what I recall.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well, you’re the only person I can remember – who I’ve talked to, so far, that can remember their actual – that actual event, so, tell me about that. The fences were still up. Did you have it outside the fences?

Cushinberry: Yes. And there’s pictures of all of this stuff, too.

Interviewer: Okay, but I like to get people’s remembrances – memories of what went on.

Cushinberry: Yeah. It was – if I’m remembering correctly, it was, like I said, outside. They did it outside, like, in the little field area. And stuff we did, like –

Interviewer: Did they set up a stage?

Cushinberry: Cheryl Brown Henderson – we did do – I think they did some walk-throughs, you know, but there were certain areas – because there was some things – just so they could see it, what it looks like, compared to what it looks like now. And that, I believe, was for, like, Bess Sherman – I believe she was the superintendent at the time. It was for, like, the dignitaries that were there.

Interviewer: What was the purpose of having a Grand Opening if you couldn’t actually open the park?

Cushinberry: I believe it was – the Foundation had pushed us, but it was on an anniversary date, you know, like – I can’t remember which date it was, you know. I probably could add it up and tell you, but –

Interviewer: Okay. So, you went to it, I assume?

Cushinberry: Yes. And all staff that we had were there (laughs). Interviewer: And how many staff did you have? Five?

Cushinberry: Let’s see. At the time, you know, I would say, two – maybe five or six. Maybe five or six, at the time, if that, you know. I know it was Bess Sherman, Alicia Bullocks, myself, Treva Gordon, and we had Tarona – was Tarona Armstrong there at the time? I’m just trying to think. Tyrone Brandyburg, and we had one more interp person – oh, I can’t think of her name! I can picture her. Not Katrina – what is – I can’t think of her name right now! Well, she left the Park Service, but those were the – because she was there when I first got there, so.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, this Grand Opening was basically just a – it was actually marking a civil rights anniversary more than the grand opening of the park, basically?

Cushinberry: Yeah. I think, you know, they were trying to push it to –

Interviewer: Okay. Well, it had been about five years since the park had been established. Maybe –

Cushinberry: And that’s why: because it was that – you know, that long, and they just wanted to do something so we could show for what we’ve been doing, you know. And then, you know, it’s a popular – it was a political thing. The Foundation there was very powerful, at the time, so.

Interviewer: Okay. And how do you think, when you first got there and up until the Grand Opening, maybe beyond, the general public in Topeka, since you grew up there – how did they think of the park, once it was established? How did they perceive it?

Cushinberry: Well, none of the political figures in that town – you know, they were – some of them were, like, “I’ll see it when I see it,” you know, kind of thing, but they were very impressed.

Interviewer: “I’ll believe it when I see it?”

Cushinberry: Yeah. They were very impressed by it because of the tourist thing, you know. through the documentation, where they said, you know, all the tourists would – that would be coming through, you know. They predicted, you know, in all the documents, how much tourism it would bring to Topeka, and so forth. But I don’t know if – know if we ever hit that mark, but – (laughs).

Interviewer: Sooner or later? Cushinberry: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you’d say the public, in general, was pleased with the fact that the park was there and supportive of the park?

Cushinberry: Yeah.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the neighborhood surrounding – immediately surrounding the park? How did they – how do you think they felt about it? I know that, you know, when a park gets established in the middle of an area, there’s concerns about parking and traffic and so forth. Do you – did you catch any of that?

Cushinberry: I don’t – I don’t think the community, at that time, it was a big deal, because – I don’t know if you’ve been there to see the community. I don’t think that was on their mind, at the time, because some of the tenants and housing – people who owned housing there – either they were the older population, or they were renters. We were concerned, ourselves, as employees, you know – parking, how it would be done, because there’s not much of it, you know, and being on that one-way street, you know. So, that’s – that was a concern for, you know, the National Park Service as a whole, so.

Interviewer: Okay. When you first started working for the park, did you have any particular expectations for your job as to, maybe, what you would be doing and what you – what it might lead to?

Cushinberry: I didn’t. I didn’t know. (Laughter) You know, I had a lot of training, but quick training, and, you know, I had a good AO at the time. And then, I had a lot of, you know, like, Red – I mean, I shouldn’t call her Red – Teri. You could call them if you needed anything, and, you know, they were all very supportive. The Region was very supportive. So.

Interviewer: Did you get training from the Park Service on how to do their – on how to do their programs? Like, how to enter things into PMIS, or –

Cushinberry: (Laughs) My training came from my –

Interviewer: No, they just said, “Here’s your office. Here’s your desk?” (Laughs)

Cushinberry: Yeah. My training came from my supervisor, and, you know, every now and then, you know, you’d go to, you know, little trainings and stuff, but, as far as the meat and the logistics, and, you know, the gist of the – of the duties, it was kind of, like, hands on. You learned as you went along.

Interviewer: Okay. (Laughs) On the job training, huh? Cushinberry: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, once you were the administrative officer, you were in charge of the administration side of things. Did you –?

Cushinberry: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you remember any changes that you made to it that you felt improved the – that part of the administration of the park?

Cushinberry: Well, we did quite a bit, because I was – we were still in our temporary offices at the time. You know, we managed to, through GSA, you know, we were able to get the garage to storage –

Interviewer: I’m sorry, what –?

Cushinberry: You know, there’s a garage – I don’t know if you know where the parking garage is at Brown v. Board?

Interviewer: No, I don’t.

Cushinberry: Okay, so, diagonally, kind of, let me see, west of the building, but on – okay, so, do you know where the Williams Magnet School is?

Interviewer: I – sort of. I don’t think I’ve ever actually been to it, but I have a general notion of where it is.

Cushinberry: Okay. Well, that was one of our first tasks, was trying to get storage and, you know, parking for our government vehicles and all that – equipment and all that. So, we were able to retain that site, and had it built there.

Interviewer: Oh! Is the magnet school – is the magnet school the one with the painting on the side?

With the mural?

Cushinberry: I don’t know. There may be a painting now, but there wasn’t a painting on the side when I was there. But no, the garage is kind of set – you could walk down the alley and just look – you know, look west – northwest, and you would see the parking garage.

That was a thing that we did – trying to get that. When I first started there, I did quite a bit. You know, I used to have to go down to the building, while it was still under construction, you know. We had to do, you know, property, you know, inventory. We’d have to go – you know, like, if Treva wasn’t available, I’d have – we’d have to go down there to – on heavy rain days to check the sump pumps because the basement would flood. And everybody knows that I didn’t like that because there would always be frogs and stuff down there, so – and the water would be, you know, pretty deep and (unintelligible), if you didn’t go down there and do that, so (laughter) it does look different to see that building – to be in it now. But I was just involved in pretty much everything that it entails of opening that site, you know. Contracting, budget, talking to all the - you know, the political people that have – that have a, you know, investment into that site. We managed, you know, like I said, the Brown Foundation. The superintendent had, you know, the overall part of the Foundation, but, as far as the paperwork and stuff and managing that, I did that. We bought all the stuff – you know, the – all the furniture, and a lot of the design that was set up was done through – I think – was it the Denver Service Center? I can’t remember who-all was in charge of that, but they did all that. But we just made sure that we had every input in there. You know, we did the – a lot of labor-work for, you know, the Grand Opening itself, you know. We had a soft opening first, and then we had the one in 2004, where all the dignitaries, you know, showed up.

Interviewer: And the president?

Cushinberry: Yes. And the president. That was one hot day, that day. And we couldn’t even access our own building that day, so.

Interviewer: What do you recall about getting ready for 2004, for the – for the Dedication?

Cushinberry: Oh, it was – every day was something new, and we were still actually under construction at the time, but we did –

Interviewer: When you had the Dedication?

Cushinberry: Yeah, we were still – they were still having – we still had construction people there.

There were still things that, you know – they were still on their task order list that they hadn’t completed. But we did our best, and it turned out very well. And very well- attended, too.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. How many people do you think came? Did you take numbers – take a count?

Cushinberry: I can’t remember what were the numbers, but it was big. Because, you know, we also had an evening banquet, too, after that. And it was – It was a very long day.

Interviewer: Did you have any involvement with the Secret Service that was there to protect the president? I understand they had to have a house, and they had to have –

Cushinberry: No, we didn’t do any of that. Once we found out that the president was coming, all of our duties just kind of just stopped. And it was – the Washington office took over. The Public Affairs Office, they came and took over it, and they also paid for it, because, if not, we would have had to pay for a lot of that, so. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Yeah. So, did they send law enforcement officers and all that kind of –?

Cushinberry: There was probably every law enforcement around, between, you know, the local law enforcement, the Secret Service, the FBI, whoever, you know, there was, we had them all. And what was kind of neat about that – it was, kind of, almost a unique experience to see all these people – they were on our – the roof of the site, you know. And they had – and how they had staged these buses so that there was, you know, coverage, so, I guess, you couldn’t see, you know, the president or no one could just easily come in there, you know. So, it was neat to see how they set up a place for when a president shows up. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, we mostly just see it on tape on television, but you got to see the back behind the scenes workings, I guess, of what’s done to –?

Cushinberry: Yes. Yeah. Right, and they blacked all the windows out. They came and put all these black curtains, so you couldn’t see inside from the street, any of that, so.

Interviewer: Why was that? Why did they do that?

Cushinberry: Because, when he first arrived, he came in the back of the building.

Interviewer: Oh, he was in the building?

Cushinberry: And he was inside the building, and he got a tour.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So, he got his own special tour, and – but they put – they put curtains up so he couldn’t see out. (Laughs) Or people –

Cushinberry: Right. Or people couldn’t see in, you know – make sure he wasn’t a target for anything, so.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. And so, then he went outside to do the – I assume he –

Cushinberry: Well, he stayed in the building until it was time for him to come up and do his speech, and he came out, he sat – I believe he sat down, and then Cheryl Brown Henderson – I think she did the introduction for it, and then Steve Adams, you know, he talked, too. He was the superintendent at the time. And then, he came out, and then, after he did his speech, he went back the same way, and he was – he was gone. (Laughs) We did see the airplane fly over when he arrived, but then, when he left, you know, we were still there. We saw that, too. So.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. Did you feel like that was well-received by the community and everybody who attended?

Cushinberry: Oh, yes! It was a lot, you know. The - and it was a free event, you know, and so, you know, it was, you know, people rushing to try to get tickets, you know. Because you had to have a ticket to be able to attend, because it was so many could attend. But I can’t remember how many we gave out, because it was – it was a big event. Because we even had back-up plan in case the weather was bad. We were going to hold it at the Expo Center and –

Interviewer: (Laughs) But you all did some heavy-duty praying, right, to not have bad weather? Cushinberry: Right. So – but it was a hot, hot day! (Laughs) And we were in our Class A. (Laughs) Interviewer: Oh, your uniforms? Your Class A uniforms? Oh, that’s hot. That sounds very hot.

Cushinberry: Yeah. Yes, it was.

Interviewer: (Laughs) And so, before that, when they were doing the restoration, what was your – what was your involvement with the restoration? You didn’t have any involvement with the design, I assume?

Cushinberry: No, that was, you know, pretty much done by the superintendent and the, you know, Denver Service Center, as far as the exhibits and all that. Part of our tasks were – because Treva and myself, we worked a lot together, you know. Like, if things weren’t working or, you know, just making sure most of the things were installed, you know, and received – and make sure that what we were supposed to get, we received it. You know, that –

Interviewer: Was what you got?

Cushinberry: Yeah, so.

Interviewer: (Laughs) So, did you do a lot of inventories during that time, to make sure that, for instance, tools and things weren’t walking offsite, or –?

Cushinberry: Yeah. When we first moved in there, which was – that did happen, you know. We had a problem with theft there, with – we thought, maybe, it was probably the construction people who they had running in and out. But, you know, we had – one of the bottom floors, which was finished first, we had all kinds of equipment just stored. Computers, we – you know, as we was receiving stuff, that was the only big facility that we could put it, but we kept it locked up. But we just don’t know how the stuff was –

Interviewer: How it went away? Cushinberry: Yeah. So, it was –

Interviewer: So, was it some of the, like, audio-video equipment for the – for the –?

Cushinberry: There were – it was computer stuff. Computer stuff. That stuff, kind of – it wasn’t – none of the exhibit. Nobody wants that kind of stuff. It was just, more or less, the computer stuff that we had. But they brought in all the exhibits.

Interviewer: They stored everything in there?

Cushinberry: Everything was stored in that building, and we were involved with putting it where it belonged, moving it. Our poor elevator and our stairs (laughs). But we got it done.

Interviewer: Yeah. And so, the exhibits were – were the exhibits mainly in there when you did the Dedication, 2004?

Cushinberry: Yeah, we had got all that – made sure all that was done, so – because we knew that there would be a tour, and we made sure that they were working at the time. But then, they stopped working.

Interviewer: Okay. Now, at that time – at that time, they – go ahead. Cushinberry: We had one exhibit that – go ahead. I’m sorry.

Interviewer: They – you said you had one exhibit that –?

Cushinberry: After the event, it didn’t work anymore, and I think we ended up (unintelligible). And I can’t remember which exhibit it was, but it did not work. (Laughs) It worked (unintelligible) –

Interviewer: And so, you had to replace it? Did you replace it, or did you repair it?

Cushinberry: Well, we kept trying to repair. So, Harper’s Ferry – you know, they were a big factor in the design and all that, and, you know, they would send out the contractor that put it in. I can’t remember the contractor’s name, but they were in D.C., too. I remember going there, you know, and proof – previewing all the stuff that – the videos, and the, you know, the – I don’t know if you’ve been through all the exhibits. We looked at those and

gave our opinions on them. And they were in Georgetown. That’s where they were located. I can’t think of the name of the company, but we did it.

Interviewer: Okay, but, at the time of the Dedication, the school – as I understand it, the kindergarten school – or the kindergarten room wasn’t set up?

Cushinberry: It wasn’t set up like it was – Interviewer: Like it is now? Okay.

Cushinberry: Yeah. It – that happened – I think they set that room up in, like, 2014. Interviewer: Oh, is that right? Okay, so, you left before then?

Cushinberry: Right. But it still had – yeah, but it still had the character stuff in there. It had, you know, the fireplace, the bookshelves. That was all in there, but we did not – it was not set up like now, like a classroom they were using. Yeah, it was just an open room at the time, where you could just have chairs – you could sit around in them, and then – and then, eventually, there were some exhibits that were put in there. And then, I’m – you know, after I left, I believe – I’ve been back since – they removed all those types of – quilts. We had a quilt exhibit in there, I believe. They removed that type of stuff and then put – actually made it into a classroom. I think Tom Rosenblum was behind that, to – the historian, at the time – that room setup.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, after the Dedication, then did you get to move all your offices into the building, or were you still – did you have to stay in the Post Office for a while?

Cushinberry: Well, we had our offices in there. It was just, you know, kind of temporary. We moved in there all at the same time because our lease was expiring with the Post Office.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. And so, that was before the Dedication that you all moved in there? Cushinberry: Before the – yeah, we moved in before that. It was – it was a mess. (Laughs) Interviewer: Well, I was going to say, it wasn’t completely completed –

Cushinberry: No, it wasn’t.

Interviewer: So, I bet that was entertaining.

Cushinberry: It was. Because, like I said, we were still under construction when we moved in. And they kind of worked around, you know, stuff. The only sad part of the construction – you know, the construction and the site is, they removed – well, they didn’t remove it, they painted over all of the wood that was part of the history of the building. So, like, if it was a door that was – all the doors were historic, you know. We kept those. You know, Treva kept those and she stored them and restored them. They painted over a lot of that. And, to see all that gone – and then, like, the floors they had put down – the ones that they had to replace – they were beautiful. They were, like, bamboo floors. They put carpet on top. Somebody in the office, they –

Interviewer: Oh, yes! Somebody else mentioned that they carpeted the wonderful floors.

Cushinberry: Yeah. So – but the main floors that – like, the hallways and stuff, those were nice. Those were restored. Those were original – which, they’re still beautiful. If you go and walk in there, they’re gorgeous. So you have to see them.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. It’s a beautiful building.

Cushinberry: It is. Very historic. And that’s – a lot of that is due to Treva because, you know, she maintained it and, you know, she made sure that it stays – like the terrazzo floors that are in there, she put that wax – and I don’t know what – over top of them, so they stay shiny all the time. And, you know, if there was a little crack in there, you know, she made sure it got filled in, you know. So, she was a big part of the beautification of that building, so. (Laughter) She stayed on the contractors. She did, so.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you moved in. They were still doing some work. Was there any way in which the restoration work that they were still doing impacted or interfered with your work?

Cushinberry: Yeah, all the time. You know, it was – Interviewer: As far as? How did it –?

Cushinberry: The noise. The people coming in and out. At one – and, at the time, I was pregnant. So, I was – I had – I had my baby in March, and so I got out of the hospital in March and had to come into the park. Come in, after having a baby in five days. So, I had to come in, you know, to take care of some things, but, while I was there, someone had got in my office, and they had taken, like, some – they had taken my – stuff out of my purse, like my credit cards. They took my government checks, you know. We had that. So, that – we went through all of that. And we looked – we thought – we – never was proven, but we thought it was, you know, contractors that were coming in and out because there was no locks on the doors. There weren’t even doorknobs, at the time – when we were in our offices. And so that was –

Interviewer: So, anybody could go in your offices? You didn’t have any – so, you didn’t have any means of controlling access to your actual office spaces at the time?

Cushinberry: Nope, not at that time. Yep. Interviewer: Well, that’s a shame.

Cushinberry: Yeah, it was. The only way I found out was because I – you know, I came in, and then I got a call that was saying, you know, “There was some fraudulent use on your government card,” and I’m like, “I didn’t make that. I just got out of the hospital,” you know. So that’s how we found out that, you know, several of our items and stuff were missing, but there was nothing you could do about that kind of stuff, so.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, the staff was pretty small when you started, and it sounded to me like you sometimes had to take on some of somebody else’s duties when they weren’t there. Other than Treva, was there anybody else that you were filling in for?

Cushinberry: We worked – you know, when we were in the temporary offices, you know, we greeted – you know, administrative staff, we did the – if the interp wasn’t there, we greeted

visitors, we, you know, did the – showed the films. You know, we were just kind of jack- of-all-trades. You know, that’s what we always say with the admin, you know – they – if no one else does it, admin will, kind of thing. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay. And so, then, when you moved into the building, did anything change, or were you still a small staff sharing responsibilities?

Cushinberry: We were still a small staff, and we – you know, we all pitched in and did what we needed to do at the time, you know. If we needed to go out and sweep the sidewalks off, you know, we’d – you know, we’d do that. Yeah.

Interviewer: When you were there, did they increase the staff at all?

Cushinberry: Yeah, we did. We got quite a few staff that came in and out. We got our interp staff. We hired that. We hired an IT staff person. We hired an education specialist. We had a historian. Well, we didn’t get the education specialist. I take that back. We had a historian, and then we had interp staff, but now – before I left, we had an education specialist, but then, I think she’s gone now. But then, they had a lot of – education specialist now, but, originally, our thought process was interpretive rangers that first started out. And then they brought in the education specialist, so – we had a Chief of Interp, you know, which we always have had. So, it was quite a bit now, then compared – because I can remember, you know, superintendent, you know – at one time, myself, a couple of interp staff, a museum tech – we had a museum tech, at one time – and that was pretty – and Treva. And then Treva got a couple of maintenance workers, and I believe she still has them, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think she does. I did interview Treva. Cushinberry: Oh, you did?

Interviewer: Yeah, that was fun! (Laughs) Cushinberry: Yeah, she would know it all. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Well, that’s one of the reasons I wanted to interview her, was that she’d been there from, like, practically the – Day One.

Cushinberry: 1994. I think she worked – 1994, she was hired.

Interviewer: Started, mmm-hmm. But you’re closing in on being one of the most – earliest employees. So, while you were there – let’s talk about the relationship with the Brown Foundation. How did your work intersect with the work of the Brown Foundation?

Cushinberry: Well, at first, when I got there – you know, when I first started, I had nothing to do with the – even though, you know, you knew it was political because, just by – you know, just the relationship with the superintendent and the Foundation. You know, you knew it was – you know, you didn’t really talk to the Foundation unless, you know, through the superintendent – you know, sort of thing. But –

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Was Bessie the superintendent? Sherman?

Cushinberry: Bessie was when I got there, yes. There was a temporary – who did I? – there was a temporary one after her, and I think we got a couple – then we got Steve Adams. We had some Actings, I should just say. But I had known – as a kid, I knew Linda Brown, on a personal thing. I did – never – you know, as a kid, you just didn’t connect it. Linda Brown – when I was a teenager, she worked for a relative of mine, and that’s how I met Linda in the first place. So, when she would, like, come up – and, you know, we – and she would call me by my nickname that no one else knew. And they – people were, like, “Well, how does she know you?” you know. But I knew her through a relative of mine because she worked for them, you know. And so, I knew them more on another level than on a business level for the National Park Service. So, I did know them outside of that, so.

Interviewer: Okay. But, as your work – as the administrative officer, your work, at first, didn’t involve the Brown Foundation, right?

Cushinberry: Right. Because it – just my title and duties. I didn’t really have – except, you know, you said, “Hi,” when they showed up, you know. You did – when they did, because –

Interviewer: Right. So, later on, did that change, after you became the administrative officer?

Cushinberry: Oh, yes, I was always – I was more involved in everything, you know. Especially by the time we had, you know, moved down to the site, you know – which, their offices were right across from our office. They were on the second floor and, you know, a lot of the people knew where the superintendent’s office was, but they were right across from the admin office. And then, you know, Cheryl became our superintendent at one time.

Interviewer: Yeah, I did know that. She was superintendent for about six months, seven months, something like that, in 2010?

Cushinberry: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And did that affect your – did your personal relationship and your professional relationship – were they compatible?

Cushinberry: Well, I wasn’t on a personal side with Cheryl. I was with Linda Brown. That’s her sister. Yeah, it – you know, because things got tense there, for a little while, you know. And especially when we had – you know, we had a – the OIG came in there, you know, at one time, and, you know, it just – I – we – I dealt with Cheryl from the National Park Service through the Brown Foundation relationship as a partner, and then I dealt with her as my boss – as superintendent. So, I had a – I had her both ways.

Interviewer: (Chuckles) Okay. So, when she was superintendent, though, she wasn’t part of the – she wasn’t the president of the Brown Foundation. So, at that time –

Cushinberry: She wasn’t the president. She wasn’t the president, but she was really involved. And I – you can read the case on it. It’s a public – I believe it’s a public record, you know. And that was another thing in the community that really affected the people in the community and the staff at our site, you know. But there is a document – the OIG

investigation. It’s a public document that you can look at. And I won’t repeat a lot of that. (Laughs)

Interviewer: When they – when they came – when they did their audit, were you – did they – how did they do that? Were you supposed to produce documents for them? Did they come in and say –?

Cushinberry: We had to give whatever – we had to give them whatever they want. A lot of the documents, though, came from our Regional Office, you know, because they had to go through the Regional Office to get a lot of stuff. And then, whatever we had in the park level, they asked for, so we had – we – one hundred percent cooperation. Whatever they wanted, we did. So.

Interviewer: So, did they ask the Regional Office for what they wanted, and the Regional Office asked you to send it to them?

Cushinberry: If we had it. Or, if they had it, they – Interviewer: They sent it?

Cushinberry: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. And did that event have any impact on you work? I mean, did it disrupt your work, or did it make it more complicated?

Cushinberry: It made – during the timeframe of the audit, it was, you know, a difficult time for all of the staff because, you know, no – we didn’t know what it was going to be about, you know. Until you’ve had an OIG investigation kind of come in, you don’t know what it feels like.

Interviewer: And it’s kind of a scary thing?

Cushinberry: It is. Because you don’t know what they’re looking for or what they wanted. We just answered their questions. And you know, they interviewed you – you know, everybody. You know, it wasn’t just certain ones like myself and the superintendent. They interviewed a lot of people in the park, and so – and then, to sit in an interview, when they’re asking us questions, with a few people in the room – you know, that sort of stuff, but it was –

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what – when they were doing – when they were doing this investigation, you didn’t really know why they were doing it?

Cushinberry: Yeah, we knew why. Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. But you said you didn’t know what they were looking for.

Cushinberry: Well, at the time, when they first came, we didn’t know, but as we went on, we knew what they were – yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay. Did you have anything to do with the Cooperative Agreement between Brown v. Board and the Brown Foundation? No, you didn’t?

Cushinberry: Not the original one. It – the original one, I believe, Ray – there was another superintendent, Ray Something, before, even, Bess – I think they established the Cooperative Agreement.

Interviewer: Ray Harper?

Cushinberry: Right. But I was in the process, when they renewed it, you know. Because it was, like – they were, like, five years, and every year, you had to submit reports on it, and so, when it came time to expire, I was in the process of – when we did a new Cooperative Agreement with them.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what was your function? What was your function, as far as the Cooperative Agreement?

Cushinberry: Just to make sure that, you know, we were – like, me, I made sure that, like, invoices, you know, were paid. You know, we had – there was kind of like steps that you had to set up. So, she would present an invoice. The superintendent would approve it. I would submit it to, like, the Regional Office for payment – into Contracting – and so forth, you know. It all kind of went through that way. I never was on any of the approval side of it. I couldn’t approve stuff. But we just kind of maintained that. I maintained that. You know, they kind of followed some of the rules, even though they, you know, sometimes chose not to, you know – and tried to make sure that they were doing stuff right, you know. We kept files and – of stuff that we sent, but, mainly, the Contracting Officer, which was Theora McVay, at the time – between her and the Regional Director – they managed, you know, all of the payments and all that stuff to the Foundation, so.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, because your – you were the administrative officer, your involvement is in practically everything. So, I’m going to ask you, what about the bookstore? That was – was the bookstore –?

Cushinberry: Well, the bookstore was Western National.

Interviewer: Western National. Right. Was it always Western National? Was the Brown Foundation never involved in that process?

Cushinberry: Yes. Right. They were involved in, like – she – if there was a book that Western National put in there that she didn’t like or she didn’t approve, then we would take it out, or we would justify it, that sort of stuff. She, kind of, overseen some of that stuff that went in there. Like, there was one time, if I remember, there was – I can’t remember the name of the book that she didn’t want to be in there, and we weren’t going to not – we were going to keep it, so she went and bought all the books out. You know, that kind of (unintelligible) stuff.

Interviewer: (Laughs) Oh! Okay. So, Western National was always the cooperative partner for educational materials?

Cushinberry: Yes.

Interviewer: But the Brown Foundation had oversight over what was in the bookstore?

Cushinberry: Yeah. Right.

Interviewer: Was that a – was that a formal relationship or just kind of ad hoc?

Cushinberry: It was – it just – the superintendent – you know, he was very – at the time, you know, he was very – (long pause) he listened to her and her wants and her needs, and – but there were some things that, you know, he would be, like, “Well, there’s nothing wrong with this,” you know. And so – but, I do remember one time, there was – I can’t remember the book, but she didn’t like that we had it in there, so she went and bought every single one of them in there, so that we didn’t have it in the bookstore.

Interviewer: (Laughs) So, you didn’t have it in the bookstore. Yeah, but, you know, inventory-wise, it makes it look like it’s a very popular book, and you should order more! (Laughs)

Cushinberry: Right. Yep. So, that’s just how, kind of, things went. Usually, whatever Cheryl wanted, the majority of the time, she got it. This was as of when she was the Brown Foundation Board Chair – the president. Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. And she was the president, also, after she was – she went back to being president after she finished being superintendent?

Cushinberry: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, was the – was it the same? I mean, what did the relationship –?

Cushinberry: Well, we – she cut us off. We had not relationship with her. She didn’t really talk to us at all. She would send – if there was something, she would send, like – what was the lady’s name? – I can’t think of the other lady’s name. She did the – kind of like, the communication between – Dorothy Dandridge.

Interviewer: Oh, yes! We talked to her. Deborah Dandridge?

Cushinberry: Yeah, so. Deborah Dandridge. Yeah. Dorothy Dandridge is an actor – actress, so that’s why – that’s how I remember the name. (Laughter) Yeah, Deborah Dandridge. Boy. She was a KU – professor at KU at the time, and she was always – you know, her and Cheryl were – they were best friends, anyway. But she was on the Board of Directors for the Brown Foundation, so.

Interviewer: Okay. So, she would send – so Cheryl would send things through Deborah to Brown –?

Cushinberry: Yeah, Deborah would – they would send emails, you know, back and forth, or she would make sure – you know, Deborah was the president while Cheryl was the superintendent at our park. Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. (Pause) Well, one of the questions that I have here is, were there times when you had to navigate through difficult or delicate situations related to park development and administration? Can you – can you address that?

Cushinberry: Well, the only difficulty that we had during the time was if something the Brown Foundation didn’t agree on, that was pretty –

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So, if they didn’t agree, then did you have to negotiate, or did you just say, “Okay, fine?”

Cushinberry: Well, a lot of times, the superintendent – you know, he tried to appease them with whatever their needs were, and then, other times, he just went on ahead and did it, you know – whatever needed to get done. Because the problem was the private sector not understanding the government side of things and how things are done. And, you know, with her having a political background, it wasn’t nothing for her to pick up the phone and call the Regional Office – you know, the Director there, or the – Bob Dole’s office, all that sort of stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah, Congressman Dole?

Cushinberry: Yeah. But nine times out of ten, that usually was what our problems was, is just something that, you know, the Foundation didn’t agree on what we were doing.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, when that happened, you either adjusted or said – or didn’t? Cushinberry: We did – I did what my – I did what my supervisor asked us to do. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Okay. Alright, then! (Laughter) And so – that sounds like a good strategy. So, regarding the work that you’ve done with Brown Foundation – I’m sorry, with Brown v. Board, what would you say is the thing you are most proud of doing? All the – all the years you were there, what was the thing that –?

Cushinberry: Accepting the job at the – back in 1998. (Laughs) Interviewer: (Laughs) That was your best thing to do?

Cushinberry: (Laughs) Yeah! Changed – it changed my life for the good! You know, working with the Park Service is – you know, I haven’t worked in any other agencies, but I have – you know, I love working for the Park Service. You know, if it wasn’t for the Park Service, I think there are places in this – in the United States that I probably would have never, ever had the opportunity to visit if it wasn’t for them, you know. And I’m really proud of, you know, the Brown v. Board building, just knowing that I had an input and played a role – integral role – in developing the site to what it is today, you know. I’m sure they’ve done a lot more since I’ve left. But just being able to say I was a part of that, because it’s an iconic place in history, and it’ll be in history from now until forever. It’s always going to be in the story. And, you know, sometimes, you could be looking at TV, and you’ll hear “Brown v. Board of Education,” and you’re, “Oh, yeah!” All my children, you know – they were young – I have two older children, so they kind of grew up working there, too, you know. They volunteered. They helped do stuff, too. Matter of fact, they were in one of the early onset videos that was made for the park, and they were just students that were on a bus, because they didn’t want to – they didn’t have time to go out and sign all the release paperwork to get students to be on this bus. And so, I happened to have young kids. Alicia, at the time, had young kids. And so, we just brought our kids so that they could get this video done.

Interviewer: (Laughs) So they could be students on the bus?

Cushinberry: Yeah. Get this video done. And so that was fantastic. And they haven’t forgot that. And so –

Interviewer: (Laughs) They were in movies!

Cushinberry: Yes, they were! And that’s what they think of, too, because they see it – because it’s in one of the – well, I don’t know if it’s still there. It’s in one of the exhibits, you know, that they had. And it’s just a quick flick of these kids riding on a bus, you know.

Interviewer: And they were the kids riding on the bus? Cushinberry: Yes, they were the kids.

Interviewer: Well, that’s very cool.

Cushinberry: So, yeah. So, they played a part in history! (Laughs) So, that was quite an experience. Interviewer: Alright. And they’ll be forever – be forever young.

Cushinberry: Yes. And, you know, working at Brown, and what I did at the time, afforded me the opportunity to have the job that I have currently, which, you know, I’m – I love working at Cape Lookout National Seashore, so.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. I was looking forward to seeing it. (Laughs) Cushinberry: I wish you could have. Yeah. You can always come back.

Interviewer: So, the final question – yes, I plan to, first opportunity. The last question I usually ask people during these kind of interviews is, we’ve talked about a lot of different things, but was there anything that I haven’t asked you about that you’d like to talk about? That, maybe, you thought, “Oh, I hope she asks me about this, because I want to talk about it.”

Cushinberry: I can’t think of anything. I – you know, I really thought this interview was going to be about, you know, kind of, the staff and how the staff evolved, you know – evolved there, and, you know – because I was sitting there trying to think, “Who was all the staff there?” you know. But it really wasn’t. I guess you would know some of that, but, you know, like Tyrone Brandyburg. I hope you have the opportunity to talk to him. Yeah, so he –

Interviewer: Right. I have. But I knew him before from Tuskegee.

Cushinberry: Oh, okay. Yeah. So, I have – I actually – one – when I first started working at Cape Lookout, I went to the GOAL Program, and I actually ran into Tyrone in the Atlantic office. And we hadn’t seen each other since he left. You know, he’d left Brown v. Board back in 2003, maybe? No, 2001 or 2002. He had got a job, and he went to either – he went to Moores Creek, I believe – or one – I think it was Moores Creek, and then he went to somewhere else. But he’s pretty big now. He’s got a good job, I think in –

Interviewer: Uh-huh, he’s at Harpers Ferry.

Cushinberry: Oh, at Harpers Ferry Center, yeah. Oh, not the Center, the park, so – yeah. That’s what I thought it was. I thought we were going to go and think – I had to think about all the staff that I knew that worked there. But there’s one staff – I can’t remember her name. And I want to say her name was Katrina, but she was one of – she was, like, a third generation of Park Service that worked there. And, you know, then she left, and she left the Park Service altogether when she left. But I can’t think of her name. But – no, I just – I’m very proud of that building. You know, I know we don’t get – they don’t get the – like, the visitation, like I said, they thought was going to come through there. They thought it was going to be, like – thousands of people come through there. Yeah, at one time. I don’t know all the stats on that, but that didn’t happen. But it is still a nice story and a nice place to come visit. So.

Interviewer: Well, I think it’s on the Civil Rights Trail, now, so that probably helps it a lot. Cushinberry: Yeah. And it’s on the trail – the Topeka History one, too, which is connected to the John

Brown – which is up the street.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, I had one guy who said, “Well, the only thing I want to say is that was the funnest job I ever had!” (Laughter)

Cushinberry: I can remember one story – one of the times, it was real hot there. And we had the Director of the National Park Service – we had Stan Austin and a whole bunch of dignitaries and, you know, SCS-ers that came to that park. Bess Sherman had brought them there, and it was a hot day. And we were trying to – we had – trying to figure out how to move them from our temporary office to the site and then to the evening event that was set up. And so, I remember Mr. Austin saying – because, we said, “We need to – can just get buses,” you know. And the buses didn’t have air conditioner on it. He was, like, “Well, as a kid, I didn’t – we didn’t have air conditioner.” And I – he just loved that bus ride – to ride the bus!

Interviewer: (Laughs) Just like when he was a kid?

Cushinberry: Yep. And we took him to – from – they rode from Brown – from the site, and they went to Sumner Elementary – because, you know, that’s a part of the story, too, Sumner Elementary School – and I remember Stan – he was – even though he was sweaty and everything else, he was so happy that he had done that, you know. And he thought that a really important part –

Interviewer: He got to ride the bus!

Cushinberry: And me, to be able to meet the Director of the Park Service, you know, at that time in my career. You know, it was the early time in my career. I’ve met a few since then, but that was, like, really an awesome time because – to do that, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright. Well, I think that’s – that concludes all of my questions. We can talk about staff, if you’d like to.

Cushinberry: Let me – if – you pretty much probably already have that because they probably provided that to you.

Interviewer: Yeah, but – and, as we’ve gone along, you have told me a lot about the staff, about who was there at the beginning, who was added, that sort of thing. So, I think we’ve probably covered the evolution of the staff. I guess I could say, how many staff did you have when you left? You had five when you – you were one of five when you were first there.

Cushinberry: Yes. When I left – let’s see, we had – I couldn’t even think. We had about – oh, we’ve had some come and go. Oh, was it about fourteen or fifteen? Of the – you know?

Interviewer: Wow! That’s quite an increase!

Cushinberry: Yeah. I believe so. I can’t remember. But we had got an increase in money, too. That was a big – another factor. And then, we never – and then the Foundation’s funding – it was no longer statutory aid, it was actually money that was allocated to us each year, so. Because we –

Interviewer: So, it became part of your base?

Cushinberry: Yeah, it was – I don’t know if it’s still that way. I don’t know how they did that, because, you know, I haven’t been there in, you know, seven years, but we – it was their statutory aid, so – that we had got. And that helped a lot, so we, you know –

Interviewer: Okay. Well, I did have – I think it was Tyrone – told me that there was never – as far as he was concerned, there wasn’t ever a budget problem?

Cushinberry: No, we never had problems with money – funding or money. We were able always to be self-supportive. It was just we didn’t have, like, some of the – how do I say it? – like, the events and stuff that we probably would have been doing, that sort of stuff. But, yeah, we’ve always had a good, you know, plethora of money because, you know, it was Congressionally put to the – you know, sent to the park because of Cheryl Brown Henderson. Now, that’s one thing about Cheryl Brown Henderson. If some people – you could say good things; some people could say bad things, but one of the positive things about her was she was always able to, you know, get money to come to the park to get things done. And that was one of her good things, that she could always do good fundraisings for stuff like that, so. Even at all the events, she paid for a lot of that stuff. So, every year, they had an anniversary, and they did stuff, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, they had symposia – the Brown Foundation had symposia. They had one every year, I guess. Were you involved, at all, in that, or did you just go to them?

Cushinberry: No, we never were involved. We just were a part of it because we showed up as National Park Service employees. We – you knowl, she didn’t want us to do a lot of that unless she asked us for certain things, like we stand at the door and hand out stuff, or something (laughs), you know. But the superintendent was always involved because he always represented the park and, you know, gave speeches and, you know, informative stuff, so.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, you were support staff?

Cushinberry: Yes. And we always attended. We had our table, you know, we paid for. And attended. We did the – we actually did it as training, you know. Because it gave us opportunity – because she brought in, like, great speakers all the time that you could learn and get some, you know, history and data and stuff from – for all that. So, we did it as training for the staff.

Interviewer: Did – you were recruited out of college. Did you ever – were you ever involved in recruiting, yourself?

Cushinberry: Was I involved with recruiting myself?

Interviewer: Were you ever involved, yourself, with recruiting others to work for –?

Cushinberry: Oh, yes! Oh, yeah, I did that, too. I actually – like, the administrative assistant, I went to Washburn. We brought Randy Standingwater on when she was a out at Tuskegee, but we – admin was in charge of doing the HR, anyway. But yeah. And, usually, I would sit on – we did a team kind of approach when hiring people anyway.

Interviewer: Okay. So, did you go to colleges on Career Day and stuff like that?

Cushinberry: Well, we mainly kind of targeted, you know, the local college, which was Washburn University, Kansas University, and Manhattan, which was K State. You know, we used those to try to do that, but we also did a lot from the HBCUs, you know. We’d go up and try to – we never traveled to the HBCUs, but we would reach out to some of those programs to bring in different summer students, and stuff like that. (Phone rings) Oh, I’m sorry. It’s a text message. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

Interviewer: That’s okay. That’s alright. No problem. I think I’ll turn off the recording here. Cushinberry: Okay.

Interviewer: I think we’ve gone quite over our hour, so let me just turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW