

## ***Oral History Cover Sheet***

**Name:** Lisa Mandell

**Date of Interview:** May 30, 2004

**Location of Interview:** Minnesota

**Interviewer:** Dorothe Norton

**Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:** 21 years (Spring of 1980 - June 2001)

**Offices and Field Stations Worked:** Division of Endangered Species; Sea Lamprey at Marquette Biological Station

**Positions Held:** Physical science technician; secretary; clerk typist; librarian; ecosystem biologist

**Most Important Projects:** sea lamprey chemical treatments; endangered species permits; ecosystem grant writing; Ozark Plateau karst topography grant writing;

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Dick Toltzman; Nita Fuller; John Blankenship; T.J. Miller; Bob Adair; Mamie Parker; Rick Schultz; Dorothe Norton; Gary Steinbach; John Murphy; Jim Engle; Don Hultman; Bob Braem;

**Key Words:** Refuges; Law enforcement; Director; Ecosystems; Invasive species; Research

Lisa Mandell: *Hi Dorothe, how are you?*

Dorothe Norton: *Good. It's been a long time since I've seen you where we could really visit, but this will be kind of an informal interview. You can answer as many questions as you remember or if you want to or if you don't want to say anything you just say, "I don't remember" or "let's go onto something else. Okay?"*

Lisa Mandell: *Okay, sure.*

Dorothe Norton: First of all, I just want to know where and when you were born.

Lisa Mandell: I was born in Heidelberg, Germany March 19, 1957.

Dorothe Norton: Who were your parents? What were their names?

Lisa Mandell: My mother's name is Leona Sours Lauck and my father is Robert Gerald Lauck. He was working for the Department of Justice at the time, and so he was overseas for a couple of years and that was when I was born.

Dorothe Norton: I see, okay. Did your mother work too then?

Lisa Mandell: At that time she didn't, she had quit working when they were ready to move overseas. She had previously worked for the government as well and I think it was with the CIA, but she still won't tell me what, it's a big secret!

Dorothe Norton: Where did you spend your early years? How long were you in Germany?

Lisa Mandell: I was only in Germany as an infant, so I don't remember that. Then my parents moved to Paris, and I don't remember that either, and then when I was 3 years old they moved to Arlington, Virginia. We lived there for a little bit and then moved to Minnesota when I was about 4- or 5 years old. We lived here (Minnesota) until the summer before my sixth grade year, and then we moved to Florida for a year or two and then to Northern Virginia, which is where I finished out high school and went to college in Virginia.

Dorothe Norton: What did you do during your early years, with all of these moves and all, just make new friends and play?

Lisa Mandell: Yes, made new friends. The period of time in Florida I think was a hard age to move, I didn't have many friends during that couple of years. But then when we moved to Northern Virginia I remember making more friends and, you know, having invitations to parties and all of the things that young teens like to have, so that was a good move.

Dorothe Norton: Did you have any hobbies or books that you used a lot to help spend the time?

Lisa Mandell: I don't remember a lot about hobbies during that time. My grandfather started me stamp collecting, and I still have a whole bunch of that kind of stuff, I don't really spend much time with it. When I was in junior high, when we lived back in Northern Virginia, that was near my grandparents, who lived in Arlington, and my grandmother actually was the one who started me sewing. So that was kind of when I started sewing, when I was in junior high.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever have a job before high school was over?

Lisa Mandell: Oh yeah, I worked at a shoe store and I worked at a department store up at Tyson's Corner and those kinds of things, retail type stuff. Then the first year out of college was when I first started working for the Department of Interior, so I worked as a typist then.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever hunt or fish when you were a kid?

Lisa Mandell: I fished, yeah, I was my dad's fishing buddy. But he was not a hunter, so I never learned how to hunt.

Dorothe Norton: What high school did you go to and when did you graduate?

Lisa Mandell: I went to Langley High School in McLean, Virginia, and I graduated in the dark ages, 1975!

Dorothe Norton: What university did you attend?

Lisa Mandell: I went for my first two years to Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and then I transferred to William and Mary, and that was where I got my degree in 1979.

Dorothe Norton: What was your degree?

Lisa Mandell: Biology and Spanish, I had a double major.

Dorothe Norton: You didn't go for a masters or a PhD?

Lisa Mandell: I took some additional course work at American University, I took some toxicology classes. By then I was working for the Fish and Wildlife Service, so then when I was up in Marquette I took a couple of other classes, a fisheries management class and dabbled in other things like the wildlife classes, as I needed those kinds of credits to progress in my career. But I didn't get a masters degree, no.

Dorothe Norton: Did you have any mentors or courses that you especially liked and they stuck with you?

Lisa Mandell: I enjoyed the wildlife management class at the University of Minnesota a lot, and I think part of the reason for that was that I could already relate it to what I was working

with at the Fish and Wildlife Service. I really liked that one. In college I was thinking I was going to go to veterinary school, so I was focused more on internal stuff with the animal sciences and that kind of stuff. I remember a couple of those classes very fondly too.

Dorothe Norton: You were never in the military were you?

Lisa Mandell: No, never in the military.

Dorothe Norton: How, when, and where you met your husband?

Lisa Mandell: In May of 1979, right after I got out of college, I was working at the Department of Interior in the Congressional Liaison Office and he was working there too. I did controlled correspondence stuff, you know, pushing the letters around for the Secretary [of Interior], and he did phone calls, contract calls to the Hill when contracts were awarded from the Department of Interior. So that's when I met him.

Dorothe Norton: When and where did you get married?

Lisa Mandell: We got married a couple of years later, 1982, in Georgetown, Maryland at Holy Trinity.

Dorothe Norton: Oh, by Washington, D.C., how cool!

Lisa Mandell: Yes, and we had our reception over at Georgetown University.

Dorothe Norton: You have three children?

Lisa Mandell: I have three kids, yes. Jenny is 18, Christy is 16, and Bobby is 14.

Dorothe Norton: Jenny just graduated from high school, so she will be starting college?

Lisa Mandell: Yes, Jenny will be starting college in the fall. Christy is just finishing up 10th grade, and Bobby is just finishing up 8th grade.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever feel that your career with the Service affected your family in any way?

Lisa Mandell: Well, yes. One of the things that I think related was that for a long time I was a girl scout leader, and because I had connection with like Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, my girl scout troop could do some additional things like, you know, overnights at the refuge or stuff that maybe some girls didn't get to experience in scouting. So yeah, in a good way.

I'd say there were sometimes too, especially when my kids were little, when it was difficult to travel. That would probably be the only negative thing, is that I really did struggle emotionally with feeling like I needed to be at the meetings or at the events that were important to make

things happen with the Fish and Wildlife Service. But at the same time, I was missing out on the concerts or the cub scout meetings or that kind of stuff. So, it was not always easy.

Dorothe Norton: What was your first professional job then with the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Lisa Mandell: I guess the first would have been as a biologist for Dick Toltzman.

Dorothe Norton: In Fish and Wildlife Service here in Minnesota?

Lisa Mandell: Yeah, yeah. I had other jobs like the library job or the technical job up at Marquette, killing sea lamprey, you know, that required some of the degree.

Dorothe Norton: Do you remember what date you started with Fish and Wildlife?

Lisa Mandell: Well, I know my service comp date was September of 1978. But I really started working for the government in, well I can't even remember now, I got out of college in 1979, but I had had some summer work for other offices. But Fish and Wildlife would have been the spring of 1980. I worked for about a year with another office before I got into the Service, I worked with [Division of] Endangered Species, actually.

Dorothe Norton: You started, though, with Dick Toltzman?

Lisa Mandell: Well that was the first professional serious job, yes. But in 1980, it was with the Division of Endangered Species in Arlington, working as not a secretary, I think it was called an information management technician, a secretarial type of a job administrative.

Dorothe Norton: Where did you go from there?

Lisa Mandell: From which place, the Endangered Species or from working with Dick?

Dorothe Norton: Well, you started with Dick Toltzman, and then you went?

Lisa Mandell: That was after I worked in Law Enforcement and had the different administrative technical jobs. I thought you were talking about the professional series, when you actually...

Dorothe Norton: Just your job? Okay, well then consider that a professional job. So you started in?

Lisa Mandell: In 1980, actually, was my first job with the Fish and Wildlife Service. I held several administrative type jobs and technical jobs.

Dorothe Norton: Which jobs they were, where you started, where you went from there?

Lisa Mandell: In 1980, I worked for Division of Endangered Species for about a year, and that was a clerical job. Then I went to Marquette, Michigan and I worked for a couple of years on the sea lamprey crew [at Marquette Biological Station], the chemical treatment crew and physical science technician was my position there. After that, I worked as a secretary in Law Enforcement and that was for a couple of years.

Dorothe Norton: Back in the Twin Cities.

Lisa Mandell: Back in the Twin Cities now, that was 1983, the summer of 1983, we moved here. After a couple of years of doing that, then I worked in refuges for a little while as a clerk typist. Then I got the library job, and I don't remember the exact dates of that, but I think the library job was around 1988. Then in the late '80s, about 1988-89, was when I got the job in refuges as a biologist. From there, it was various refuge jobs and endangered species jobs, kind of progressing up the ladder as a biologist until...

Dorothe Norton: You had promotion opportunities then after you started?

Lisa Mandell: Yes, I did, I did.

Dorothe Norton: You started out as a clerk typist?

Lisa Mandell: Right, right.

Dorothe Norton: A GS3?

Lisa Mandell: Yes.

Dorothe Norton: What was your title and your grade when you retired?

Lisa Mandell: My title was ecosystem biologist and I was at a GS13.

Dorothe Norton: Very, very good. When you started with the Service, what did you think the pay and benefits were like?

Lisa Mandell: Well, I thought the benefits were really good, I thought the pay was quite good too.

Dorothe Norton: Plus you were pretty young when you first started.

Lisa Mandell: Yes, I was 19 years old and I could not make the kind of money that I made as a clerk typist for the government anywhere in the Washington, D.C. area. That was the best money around, so I was very happy with that.

Dorothe Norton: Good, okay. Did you socialize with people that you worked with?

Lisa Mandell: Yes, I did.

Dorothe Norton: What did you do for recreation with those people?

Lisa Mandell: Oh, I guess the same things other young 20s do, go to parties or out for dinner, pizza, that kind of stuff.

Dorothe Norton: Why did you leave the Service?

Lisa Mandell: I left the Fish and Wildlife Service because I had an opportunity to purchase a business that was sort of near and dear to my heart. I had been kind of hoping that some day I would be able to own a business doing something relative to my sewing, which I love, and the opportunity was there and I just sort of went for it. It felt like the right thing to do.

Dorothe Norton: How many years did you have when you retired?

Lisa Mandell: Almost 23 years.

Dorothe Norton: That's very good. So what kind of training did you receive for the various jobs that you had?

Lisa Mandell: The Fish and Wildlife Service paid for some of my course work along the way at universities, like Northern Michigan University or University of Minnesota. I also went to several training classes through the NCTC [National Conservation Training Center]. I can't remember any other specific classes, but I never felt like I wasn't given an opportunity to learn what I needed to learn to progress. I always felt like I had that offered to me.

Dorothe Norton: So a lot then you learned too on the job, working with other people.

Lisa Mandell: Oh definitely, lots of on the job training, definitely.

Dorothe Norton: Did you just always work the regular office hours, or did you work overtime or any assignments?

Lisa Mandell: Mostly regular office hours. The Michigan job, the sea lamprey crew, during the summer hours would often have evening hours and so forth because of the nature of that job, with the way the river systems ran and so forth. When they did treatments, they needed to have 24-hour day monitoring of it, so yeah.

Dorothe Norton: What were your day-to-day duties in your jobs after you were no longer a secretary or typist?

Lisa Mandell: Oh man, it was so variable for awhile. I was the endangered species permits person, so I wrote terms and conditions on endangered species permits, did research about the particular animals and so forth so that they would be appropriate. As an ecosystem coordinator, I did a lot of meeting stuff, grant writing. I don't know, it was just sort of all over the map.

Dorothe Norton: Well that's good. Did you ever witness any new Service inventions or innovations that related to the work that you were doing?

Lisa Mandell: I don't remember anything in particular, no.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever actually work with animals? Like if you went out onto a refuge or anything, did you ever have an occasion where there were animals?

Lisa Mandell: A little bit, but not a lot, not a lot. Maybe helping to band a goose or something like that, but not a lot, no.

Dorothe Norton: How did you feel toward the animals?

Lisa Mandell: How I felt towards the animals? I don't know, I suppose I felt compassion for the animals. But I felt like the Fish and Wildlife Service was always doing the right thing in terms of the biological community and so forth. So even if we were handling a goose and whatever, it was sort of the right thing.

Dorothe Norton: How did you feel the support was that you received, like locally and regionally and federally? I mean, as far as the projects that you were working on, did you feel that assistance?

Lisa Mandell: I always felt like there was a fair amount of support for the projects from the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think the harder part was the financial end of it. That even though we might all think we're doing the right thing and whatever, that there wasn't always enough money to do everything that needed to be done.

Dorothe Norton: How do you think the Service was perceived by people outside of the Fish and Wildlife Service? Like here on refuges or special projects and did they put it in the papers in little towns as to what you were trying to do or that type of thing?

Lisa Mandell: I think most of the time people perceived the Fish and Wildlife Service as doing good things. I think there was an awful lot of confusion, at least in Minnesota, there was a lot of confusion between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the DNR [Division of Natural Resources]. Lots of discussions about fishing regulations or whatever, which really we didn't do.

I think that the confusion by the public about what part of the Fish and Wildlife Service, I mean what function was the Fish and Wildlife Service, what function was the State Wildlife Agencies. I think the public also, sometimes, felt a little threatened or whatever by the Fish and Wildlife Service because of the authorities that we were trying to enforce, the migratory bird stuff or endangered species stuff. They sort of felt like it was government intrusion, but it's also the law of the land.

Dorothe Norton: What projects were you involved in?



Lisa Mandell: I wish I could think of something really cool. I was involved with some really interesting stuff with the Ozark's ecosystem and helping to save the karst topography and that kind of stuff, through some of the grant writing stuff I did towards the end there.

I loved working on stuff relative to the refuges, whether it was getting a new visitor's center funded or helping to do environmental education stuff or whatever, I really liked refuges quite a bit.

Dorothe Norton: Were you ever involved in any major issues that you had to deal with?

Lisa Mandell: I can't think of anything right off the top of my head.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever feel there was a major impediment to your job and to your career?

Lisa Mandell: No, no.

Dorothe Norton: Well that's good.

Lisa Mandell: Other than budget issues.

Dorothe Norton: Now, do you remember who all of your supervisors were?

Lisa Mandell: Let me think! I probably could reconstruct who all of my supervisors were. When I left the Service Nita Fuller was my supervisor. I was also supervised by John Blankenship for awhile. I was supervised by T.J. Miller, by Bob Adair, by Mamie Parker for awhile, and I was supervised by Rick Schultz, Dick Toltzman, Dorothe Norton, Gary Steinbach, and I think John Murphy in Endangered Species when I first started. There's probably one or two I've missed in there. Oh, Jim Engle was my supervisor for awhile when I was in the library.

Dorothe Norton: Any one of those help shape your career or anybody other than your supervisors that helped you to stay right where you were and keep going for those promotions?

Lisa Mandell: You know, somebody comes to mind that was more of my day-to-day supervisor while I was in a training type of a program, and that's Don Hultman. He was very encouraging. He supervised me for about a year when I was in that program and then on and off we had other kinds of working relationships, I acted for him quite a bit towards the end there when he was refuge supervisor. He was very encouraging, helped me to kind of see possibilities and go for it, so yeah.

Dorothe Norton: That's good. Do you remember who was President when you came to work for us? Who the Secretary of the Interior was or the directors of the Fish and Wildlife?

Lisa Mandell: I remember the Secretary of the Interior was Andrus from Idaho, Secretary Andrus, Cecil Andrus. I don't remember who the President was then, it might have been Jimmy Carter, yes I think it was Jimmy Carter. That was a long time ago!

Dorothe Norton: Okay. And the director, you don't remember who the director was?

Lisa Mandell: Of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Lynn Greenwalt.

Dorothe Norton: Oh good, yeah. Lynn is a great guy and he's still very, very active in so many things.

How did changes in the administrations affect your work? You mentioned before, money.

Lisa Mandell: It always, other than the money issue, it always seemed to change. Some of the sentiment of whether being conservation-minded was really a great thing or the flipside would be the sentiment being more economic-oriented and business-oriented. That's the way I always felt when a republican administration was in place, it just felt like the Fish and Wildlife Service wasn't as valued as when a democrat more environmentally-oriented secretary was in place.

Dorothe Norton: In your opinion, who were some of the individuals you think who helped shape the Service to what it is today?

Lisa Mandell: Oh wow! I don't know that I was in a high enough position to really have a handle on that. I mean, I . . .

Dorothe Norton: You don't think like people like Art Hawkins or Harvey Nelson or Lynn Greenwalt?

Lisa Mandell: Harvey Nelson certainly influenced our region and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan stuff very strongly, but I guess I don't have an opinion about that one.

Dorothe Norton: Now we get to the fun part!

Lisa Mandell: The fun part!

Dorothe Norton: What was the high point of your career?

Lisa Mandell: The high point of my career, wow! I think probably the last couple of years of my career, when about a third of the time I was acting refuge supervisor on and off and really very involved with some of those issues and helping to push things through for the various refuges in the region. That was probably the most fun, the most gratifying part, making things happen.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever get an award for anything special that you did?

Lisa Mandell: I got a few awards for special things! I don't remember them all, but that was kind of neat getting recognized, yeah.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever have a low point in your career?

Lisa Mandell: Oh yeah, I think probably the low point in my career was when I had been the librarian for a couple of years and they decided to close the library and I didn't quite understand why. It was hard because I had taken a lot of pride in making it a very, what I thought, a very nice facility. It was hard to change.

Dorothe Norton: Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience?

Lisa Mandell: Dangerous or frightening? Okay, I remember being quite scared one time when I stepped in the mud in my hip boots and went up to my hip and I was alone and I couldn't get out for quite a long time!

Dorothe Norton: Was that out on a refuge?

Lisa Mandell: That was actually up at Marquette and sea lamprey. I was kind of near a river getting a water sample and I took a bad step! I got teased quite unmercifully for awhile. I had to walk back out of that swamp in my sock, I couldn't get my boot out!

Dorothe Norton: Luckily you were saved anyway or found or whatever! Now I'm going to ask you what your most humorous experience was.

Lisa Mandell: That's probably it too! That was a pretty good one. Most humorous, hmm, I can't think of anything else. I got teased quite a bit up at Marquette, actually I was the first female that was hired into a permanent position on those crews. I think there was a little bit of that male-female dynamic going on, and I was bound and determined to prove I could do that job and they were not always real happy about it, but I think ultimately were pretty accepting. But they teased me a bit and set me up for stuff.

Dorothe Norton: Did you work Bob Braem?

Lisa Mandell: Yeah, that was when I went up there, Bob Braem was the supervisor up there.

Dorothe Norton: I interviewed him just last year.

Lisa Mandell: Times have changed quite a bit I understand up at sea lamprey.

Dorothe Norton: What were some of the changes that you observed during your career within the Service?

Lisa Mandell: Well, I think the Service made quite a lot of progress in terms of women; having women in more powerful positions, higher graded positions. When I first worked for the Service, I remember being told my somebody in the personnel office at that point that the only way that I had any hope of getting into the Fish and Wildlife Service was to take a secretarial

job. I know that would not be the counsel a young woman would receive now, sitting there with a biology degree. So, I know that that's changed quite a bit.

Dorothe Norton: Do you think there's any changes too in the personnel that they've hired in the last 10 years as opposed to when you first started?

Lisa Mandell: Well, definitely the issue with the women, and people of color. People of varying backgrounds that's become more noticeable, but I think there is still a long way to go in terms of the Fish and Wildlife Service staff reflecting, you know, the American public per se.

Dorothe Norton: Oh, we're lucky we have people like Bonnie Cyrus who has started in Region 3 and Mamie Parker, and they are now Washington "top dogs" and that's good, that's good. And Mary Jane Lavin, who is now the SAC [Special Agent in Charge] in Region 3. I think she might be the first female Special Agent in Charge, I think she is. So that does say a lot for the women, and I know that they deserve it because they work just as hard and sometimes harder than the men to try and prove that they can and will do the job.

Okay, so what are your thoughts on the future, like where do you think the Service is heading in the next decade?

Lisa Mandell: That I don't know, it's been about three years since I've been within the realm of the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think, you know, more and more towards looking at the big picture, overall ecosystem health rather than just a species-specific management style. I think that was evident as I was leaving the Service, and that's probably still the case. But I don't know really exactly what they're focusing on anymore.

Dorothe Norton: You retired in 2001?

Lisa Mandell: Yes.

Dorothe Norton: What date?

Lisa Mandell: June 4th, 2001.

Dorothe Norton: Did you have anybody else you think we should be sure to interview? Anybody you can think of that you wonder if we have or if we will or if we did or didn't?

Lisa Mandell: Well, I know a lot of people retired before me and you've probably have gone to see the Larry Sisk's and the Jim Engle's and you know.

Dorothe Norton: I did do Larry Sisk, yes. Well, thank you for the time that you have been able to spend with me this afternoon and it was just very good of you to do this interview. Thanks Lisa.

Lisa Mandell: Thank you very much.