

Long-Time Park Visitors and Campground Hosts

**Jim and Elaine Imholte
and
Leo and Erna Schafer
Narrators**

**Amy K. Rieger
Interviewer**

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Itasca State Park, Lake Itasca, Minnesota**

Leo and Erna Schafer:

Rieger: Like I said, I'll just start out with your names.

E. Schafer: Leo and Erna Schafer and we're from Minot, North Dakota. We started coming up here the middle sixties and except for a couple of years, we've been coming up ever since. The last few years it's been twice a year. We usually spend about two weeks at a time.

Rieger: What is your occupation?

E.Schafer: I was a homemaker and babysitting.

L. Schafer: I was employed by the city of Minot. Building maintenance and so forth.

Rieger: So you've been visiting for a good twenty-five years. What made you choose to come to Itasca State Park, way over here in Minnesota?

L. Schafer: We came here once, liked it real well, so we kept coming back. Made friends here. Look forward to seeing them each year.

E. Schafer: His brother is from Burnsville.

L. Schafer: I got a brother in the Twin Cities that comes up here. Part of his family shows up [at] times. They left this morning. They've been coming up here a long time, too.

Rieger: Darn, I wish I would've gotten to talk to him.

L. Schafer: Yes. They left this morning.

Rieger: Had you heard of Itasca State Park before, because of the Headwaters?

L. Schafer: I think it was in brochures and stuff that we had read. Read about it, mostly, that first brought our attention to it. And then my brother had been here, too, and he mentioned it.

Rieger: You came with your family first?

L. Schafer: Oh, yes.

Rieger: About how old were the children?

E. Schafer: The youngest must have been about three and the oldest one was then nine. There were six of them.

L. Schafer: Three boys and three girls.

E. Schafer: Didn't we start with the school bus?

L. Schafer: The first year we came, yes.

E. Schafer: A converted school bus. We actually came with two different school buses. We had a mini-home, and then we had a fifth wheel, and then now this is a little bit bigger fifth wheel.

Rieger: Were you right here at Bear Paw all the way through, or have you been up to Pine Ridge?

L. Schafer: Yes, Bear Paw. Except for a single night or something over at Pine Ridge until something opens at Bear Paw. We prefer the one by the Lake. There are others that prefer that one [Pine Ridge].

E. Schafer: Every once in a while some of our kids come up here.

L. Schafer: When we came here, the hiking trail was a hiking trail, not a paved road.

E. Schafer: That we enjoyed, just a hiking trail.

Rieger: Instead of the bike [path]?

L. Schafer: Oh, yes. Instead of the bicycles. It's dangerous actually. There are certain times of the day there it's dangerous to walk on it because of the bicycles going both ways. And when the Wilderness Trail was a wilderness trail instead of a paved road.

Rieger: You liked it better when it was not [paved]?

L. Schafer: Definitely. It was wilderness and this is what it's called [chuckles]. Paved roads in the wilderness? Let's face it. No, I think I liked it better the other way. I walk this stretch from down here at the boat dock clear down along the river, up the Peace Pipe. I enjoy walking it. That's still the way it used to be.

Rieger: Nature with the dirt and everything.

E. Schafer: Yes.

Rieger: Fair enough.

L. Schafer: Or hiking trail.

Rieger: Right. I know they just put that bike trail in within the past two-three years.

L. Schafer: Yes. Three years, maybe four.

E. Schafer: Then the bikes get to going so fast.

L. Schafer: There's a ten mile speed limit but that's just like on the lake, ten miles. Most of them don't realize what ten miles an hour is.

Rieger: Can you describe some of the activities that you were involved with in the Park in the early first several years that you were coming here with the children?

L. Schafer: With the kids it was mostly the supervised hikes and stuff, nature hikes with the Ranger as a guide.

E. Schafer: And then the films that they showed.

L. Schafer: The nature films, too, at the earlier times.

Rieger: How have you seen that change through the years?

L. Schafer: We haven't been going to them after the kids quit camping.

E. Schafer: It's about the same each time, once you've seen all those films. I think they still show some of the same films. After you've seen them for a few times you kind of lose interest in it. Just relax around the campfires in the evenings. When our kids were young, the teenagers got together around a campfire and they did a lot of singing. One would probably have a guitar. Now, you very seldom see that. Last year when we were here there was a church group up and they did just your usual courses and hymns, and that was interesting to listen to. Now usually all the teenagers have their own cars and a lot of times they don't even come to the families

anymore.

Rieger: Or else have the boom-boxes blaring.

E. Schafer: Their's was that convertible.

L. Schafer: He didn't have it so loud but it was just the same, over and over, like a broken record.

E. Schafer: Continuous.

E. Schafer: One thing I would like to see is that the grass would be cut all over. We don't have any little kids but there's a lot of them, or just walking through it.

L. Schafer: It leads to mosquito breeding, and as long as they leave it, they're going to have woodtick problems as well, from the high grass. That's where the bugs and stuff will stay.

Rieger: I was just telling your wife that yes, there is sort of a little controversy just that I've picked up on the side. There are sort of two sides to the issue. A- you have the erosional problems and types of things like that...

L. Schafer: Yes. I'm not saying take the grass out completely. Keep it within six inches. It doesn't have to be trimmed down to snub.

E. Schafer: But in like along there [points to area of tall grass]...

L. Schafer: That's a little bit too high. There's not that much area that they don't cut. When they go around all the rest of it, just by cutting across, it wouldn't take them any longer. [glances at neighbors] There's a couple of nice fish. Looks like walleyes from here.

E. Schafer: And that bathroom up there, they should have open.

L. Schafer: It's been closed for two years now.

Rieger: That's like Brower Inn has been closed for several years now because of budgetary reasons evidently.

E. Schafer: That's one thing that we always enjoyed. We'd go on the hiking trail, we'd get down that far, we'd always have a snack or just pop or something down there. That's been missed by more people.

L. Schafer: Isn't there a way of leasing that out? If they could lease it to someone, private enterprise?

Rieger: I'm not sure how that works or what the politics are.

L. Schafer: Well, some of it there's more dog-gone paperwork there that it's drowned in paperwork.

Rieger: I think it's a St. Paul decision, too, part of it. Who knows. Do you remember your first impressions of the Park, the first several years you were here? Being from Minot, North Dakota, I suppose the trees were impressive.

L. Schafer: Oh, yes. The trees and the forest. The large trees especially, which a lot of them are missing already right out of the campgrounds itself. There's some big ones up there, where the dump station is, are gone, the big white pine.

E. Schafer: Actually, we've always enjoyed it here.

L. Schafer: And I like the idea that bass wood is available. I do some wood carving. I should say I did some wood carving. I haven't carved in the last few years, sloughing off.

Rieger: So you've been coming year after year just because you've liked it so much. You must have visited other Parks as well. How does Itasca compare?

E. Schafer: No.

L. Schafer: Not that much, once we found one we thought we liked within driving distance that we appreciate.

E. Schafer: Well, those first couple of years with your brother we did go to a couple of other ones, but that was just for one night or something.

L. Schafer: Is there a park called Scenic?

Rieger: Yes.

L. Schafer: I think we were there. What was the other one?

E. Schafer: Someplace by Hibbing we were one time, or else we just drove. I don't know.

L. Schafer: No, this one here beats them all by far. Of course, I haven't seen them all.

Rieger: Can you describe a little bit why you think it beats them all, all the rest of the parks?

L. Schafer: It's got everything I like in a campsite, or in a campgrounds, really.

Rieger: Which is?

L. Schafer: No recreation hall or whatever, stuff like that that I don't appreciate, or you know, heated swimming pools, that type of thing. I don't like that in a campgrounds. I like it more...

E. Schafer: More wilderness-type.

L. Schafer: Wilderness-type. This is about as wilderness as I like. It's not too wild [chuckles].

E. Schafer: The facilities are pretty good, that I like.

L. Schafer: They're serviceable.

E. Schafer: Bathroom. Kitchen. I enjoy that because I can do my dishes there, instead of always having to be in the camper.

L. Schafer: We don't have to pick up and dump then in a two week period because of the kitchen being available. Conserve water, you know, like that.

Rieger: Can you describe some of the changes in the Park facilities, the buildings. The roads we've discussed a little bit.

L. Schafer: The showers have been modernized. When we first started coming here there was, I believe, one or two showers at the most, and you had a quarter slot, or a dime slot to feed.

E. Schafer: Community showers.

L. Schafer: The separated showers is nicer.

E. Schafer: In the women's shower they had a bathtub in one corner and the other ones they had stalls but there were no doors or curtains on them. It was just community, and then they had a bench a little bit further away where you could put your clothes. Now it's all individual and it gives you more privacy that way.

L. Schafer: Handicap accessibility is a lot better now than it was then, with the washroom facilities. The electrical power has been updated, which you don't have as much problems. Things like that, basically. Catching up with the times.

Rieger: Besides the bike trail that they put in that you folks don't like that much, has there been any other changes in the trail system that you like or dislike?

L. Schafer: That's pretty much the way it was. Getting away from the campgrounds itself, the

trails out into the wilderness, they're pretty much the way they were.

E. Schafer: They put some benches at different places where you could sit and rest a little bit.

L. Schafer: Rest areas. That's nice. Like going around Mary Lake, there's a couple new benches this year.

Rieger: How about up at the Headwaters? Can you describe the changes that you've witnessed there? I know there's been quite a few.

E. Schafer: That interpretive center, that wasn't started when they [we] first started.

L. Schafer: Not when we first started coming, no.

E. Schafer: We used to hike up there. They used to have an old Indian sitting there. He always posed for pictures. We haven't been up there this time. I want to get up there yet to take a picture of the high water.

Rieger: I was there last week and it was very high.

E. Schafer: The kids, they always enjoyed walking across the rocks.

L. Schafer: They say the rocks are under water now.

Rieger: They are. You can still get across on the rocks, but they are a little scary.

E. Schafer: I only went across once, and then I stuck my foot in it, so I'd just as soon not.

Rieger: How about the people that you come into contact with. I guess we'll start first with the Park employees that you've gotten to know. Can you describe any particular people that you've come into contact with that have worked in the Park that have been very helpful, or just the general feelings you have towards our Park employees?

E. Schafer: There's a few of them that we kind of know personally. One of them lives out on a farm a ways, and we go to see them every time we come. He stops here for coffee.

L. Schafer: He's retired several years, right?

E. Schafer: Yes, that one. But I'm thinking of Keith.

L. Schafer: Keith Demaris is still with the Park system.

Rieger: Who was the gentleman that you were talking about before?

L. Schafer: Swede Smith. What's his first name? We call him "Swede" all the time.

E. Schafer: Is it Fred?

L. Schafer: No. Floyd. Floyd Smith.

E. Schafer: I think he knows this lake backwards and forwards.

L. Schafer: Good fishing guide. I was out with him this morning. We went over to LaSalle Lake.

E. Schafer: A lot of visitors he has taken out fishing.

L. Schafer: Since he's retired.

E. Schafer: "Well, I can work you in this day and this day, but this one, I have to take this one and this one and maybe even a third different party," you know. And then, of course, there are some that have retired, especially a lot of the cleaning crew.

L. Schafer: Some have transferred to other jobs.

E. Schafer: Some of these young ones they get in there, they don't, well, they haven't worked long enough to really know what to do. Like in the kitchen. I've often noticed that a person wonders if some people leave their kitchens in the same condition that they do here, because they don't care.

L. Schafer: That's all over.

E. Schafer: Yes, but still.

L. Schafer: You have people that don't respect public property. Wait until they start paying taxes [laughs]! It's usually the ones that don't pay taxes that abuse it.

Rieger: Can you possibly describe any of your best or worst experiences here in the Park?

L. Schafer: I don't know if there were any worst ones. We didn't really have no bad experiences here, ever since we've been coming up here. Probably a kid breaking a leg or something.

E. Schafer: But none of ours did.

L. Schafer: Ours didn't. My brother's wife last year fell on the bike trail and broke an arm.
[brother Arlo, and wife Donna Schafer]

E. Schafer: The bikes were coming so she stepped off...

L. Schafer: Stepping out of the way for bicycle.

E. Schafer: And because the pavement went down a little bit, she lost her balance and went down. She broke her wrist, just the beginning of their vacation.

Rieger: That's too bad.

L. Schafer: Had that been a wilderness trail it probably would have been a twisted ankle.
Which is worse?

E. Schafer: She could still get around.

L. Schafer: Fire rings are in, too. There's all kinds of improvements if you really stop to think of it. Trash system. Sure, it's a longer ways to carry your trash, but it makes the camp cleaner overall.

Rieger: So you think that that is O.K.?

L. Schafer: Oh, I don't see nothing wrong with it, personally. How much trash do you generate when you're camping? Can't be a trip more than once a day, and a person does need exercise. Let's face it. That's the way I look at it. Of course, she's been carrying the trash [laughs].

Rieger: [To Mrs. Schafer] Do you have anything to add?

E. Schafer: Oh, it's O.K. I don't drive, so I walk anyway, so it doesn't make that much difference.

L. Schafer: We're not parked clear up there, either.

Rieger: That's true.

E. Schafer: I just have a feeling that some of those aren't always going to carry their trash down.

L. Schafer: I think you'll find a lot of it burned in the fireplace.

E. Schafer: Or else use the pit toilet up there. When they clean them out they're going to probably find out, "Hey, wait a minute." A lot of garbage is being dumped in the garbage cans in the kitchens, instead of carrying it. Years ago they didn't have camp hosts like they do now. The

present ones, you can't beat them.

L. Schafer: You can't beat them.

Rieger: I'm going to go talk to them soon, I hope.

L. Schafer: He's one of the old CC.

Rieger: Do you like that development, with the campground hosts?

E. Schafer: Especially these [Ervin and Buena Engel]. They are personal friends.

L. Schafer: Learned to know them through camping here, too.

E. Schafer: Yes, when they first started.

L. Schafer: Other than that we'd have probably never met the people.

E. Schafer: They've been to Minot to visit us, got snowed in one time, in October at that. They are always busy. They are always checking the bathrooms...

L. Schafer: They're going beyond their responsibilities as a host.

E. Schafer: They sweep, they clean. She gets in there, "This just isn't right," you know, like she would have it at home, so she just keeps cleaning. He [Mr. Schafer] once said that we would make good camp hosts, because I like to go pick up stuff and talk to people and he could go fishing [chuckles].

L. Schafer: We'll probably apply for it later on. It sounds like Engles are going to go one more year, then it will be their twelfth year so they can say they spent a whole year. See, they spend a month each time, so twelve years and twelve months. That's the way they're looking at it right now.

E. Schafer: They're both in the seventies. It's too bad we don't come during most of the time when they're here. They're very good company, just sit and talk to.

Rieger: How about some of the other people that you've met down through the years, people that have become your friends that you've seen every year? And along with that, how have you seen the visitors or the clientele change through the years, if it has at all?

E. Schafer: It seems more adults. People bring their dogs all the time. Our nephew brought his two, and he's got two English bulldogs, but I never heard them bark once while we were here.

L. Schafer: It's when they bring them and don't supervise them, that's the bad part of it, or leave

them behind when they leave the camp, stuff like that, which is against the rules, but it's not enforced.

E. Schafer: Imholtes [Jim and Elaine] across there, our vacation doesn't always coincide, but we visit. There's a young couple from someplace in Minnesota, they'll be coming tomorrow, that we visit quite a bit with. There's others that we start sending just Christmas cards and letters, so you get to enjoy just seeing them once a year.

Rieger: Right. That's really neat. When you stay here for two weeks you obviously will see around you people, families. Has that changed at all, their attitude towards the Park, the way they use the Park? Can you comment on that at all? We were talking about how the kids used to get together, the teenagers, and sing around a fire, and now they don't.

L. Schafer: They don't seem to intermix as much from one campsite to another with the people that they don't know. Sure, they'll visit with the people they know, but they don't seem to associate with the people, or try and acquaint themselves to new people. They're more to themselves.

E. Schafer: A lot of families bring their bicycles. They don't mingle.

L. Schafer: It's like, if this group had a bicycle and this group, they don't seem to get together and ride, they ride by themselves. They're not intermixing as much as they used to. Back when we used to come, if there was kids over in that campsite over there about the same age as ours, our kids would be over there, find out who they are, where they're from and so on. They don't seem to do that nearly as much anymore. Of course, maybe I don't notice it because my kids aren't here. But when the grandkids are up here, they didn't seem to mix with others like ours did.

E. Schafer: It's just different. Of course, ours were so close together. There were six within eight years.

Rieger: You were busy.

L. Schafer: Still, they associated with others.

E. Schafer: There was always somebody that had a guitar somewhere in the campgrounds, and then they'd really get together. I remember one night it was raining and they were all sitting around on the counters in the kitchen and they had their little music-fest in there. There wasn't all that hard rock and roll at that time. And the kids themselves would get together and go on the trails.

L. Schafer: They don't walk as much as they used to. They got to have their bike to get around.

E. Schafer: Now rollarblades are in.

L. Schafer: Back then they used to walk. They used to hike a long ways. I remember our kids hiking from here up to the lookout tower and back, stuff like that. On foot. In a group.

Rieger: That's quite a trip.

L. Schafer: That's a long walk. They didn't mind it.

E. Schafer: Then somebody would start telling ghost stories.

L. Schafer: They'd leave and they'd come back in the dark. We knew possibly where they were. They generally followed the route that they had mentioned.

E. Schafer: They really enjoyed it up here. It wasn't here, it was at another campgrounds, in North Dakota, when our teenage boys had gone along, and they couldn't understand how come there weren't any kids their age up there. All of a sudden they realized, well, teenagers don't always go with their parents anymore. Ours always did. Until they got jobs. Sometimes they'd kind of fit it in, too.

Rieger: That's nice. You don't see that.

E. Schafer: So in June when we came home we had our whole family together, so there were thirty of us. They celebrated our fortieth anniversary, which will be in October. Our oldest daughter lives in Montana, so she was home. She had at one time found herself a boyfriend down here.

Rieger: Was there any contact with some of the local residents, or was it mostly just sticking around in the camp?

E. Schafer: Just the campground.

L. Schafer: The local residents would be employees of the Park.

E. Schafer: We had left our camper at one and we left our boat at another one, but they live seven miles out of town. But other than that...and I like to go talk to anybody.

Rieger: Where do you usually go if you need to go for supplies or something? Park Rapids?

L. Schafer: It depends on what it is. Usually we've run to Park Rapids or if it's available in Lake George, we'll go there, or if it's available up there at the little postoffice store at the north entrance, we'll go there. The closest available spot, really.

Rieger: That makes perfect sense.

E. Schafer: It's usually milk and bread, because I usually bring the rest, as much along as we need for two weeks, especially if we didn't catch fish.

L. Schafer: We have several fish fries each time.

Rieger: Sounds good. You were mentioning the cost aspect, how it's gotten more expensive than it has been in the past. I don't know if you want to speculate on the reason?

L. Schafer: I don't know. I'm not in the management portion of it. I can't answer that, not knowing.

E. Schafer: It's gone up two dollars since June. To us, the electricity seems awfully high, two fifty a day.

L. Schafer: For some it wouldn't be out of line because they have their televisions. We don't use that thing.

E. Schafer: For us, camping is being outside, not being in the camper the whole time. There was a camper parked over here and he [a nephew] said they saw the people walk around the camper a couple of times. The rest of the time they were in the camper watching T.V. That doesn't make sense.

Rieger: No. You can stay home and do that.

L. Schafer: We don't bring a T.V. along. We bring a radio for weather and stuff like that, or news, keep up with the news. I can remember when it was awful poor reception. You couldn't hardly get a radio station in this Park. What was it, the year Kennedy was assassinated. No, that wasn't it. It was something else about as dramatic as that that happened, and we didn't really know nothing about it until we got out of the Park.

E. Schafer: Now you can usually get one of the stations.

Rieger: Are there any specific Park sponsored events that you remember at all. Fourth of July or anything of that nature that sticks out in your [mind].

L. Schafer: We don't usually camp holidays. I avoid holidays, camping. I'd just as soon be home at that time, because that seems to be the quietest place.

E. Schafer: But a couple of years ago, that one hundredth anniversary when they had that big parade here.

Rieger: The Centennial?

L. Schafer: Centennial Parade. We watched that.

E. Schafer: We watched that.

L. Schafer: Instead of getting on the road and going down there, I took my boat and I went down and walked up and watched it. I didn't have no vehicle in the way.

E. Schafer: I took my chair and I went out to the entrance.

L. Schafer: She had already gone. I just took the boat and went down to about where Peace Pipe was, no, Preachers Grove, parked my boat in the river, walked up, watched the Parade, took some pictures, come back down, got my boat, and come back. No traffic to fight or nothing. Didn't have to worry about parking a car or nothing.

E. Schafer: Last year we went to when they had that thrashing show.

Rieger: Oh, the Pioneer Farmers?

E. Schafer: Yes.

L. Schafer: We've taken that in. And we've taken in some of them craft shows down here at Park Rapids. Woodcarving Days up at Blackduck. Stuff like that we've taken in. They used to have little demonstrations right in the Park, too.

E. Schafer: In the museum part

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[Begin side two, tape 1]

Rieger:...twenty-five years here in the park, coming once a summer, the last several years two times a summer. Can you describe any of your overall impressions or feelings about the Park, its facilities, the people? Anything you want to say about it? When you keep coming for this long, I always think you develop a sense of ownership to the Park, like it's your Park. Is that a fair statement?

L. Schafer: We take pride in it and leave it the way we find it when we come, or even cleaner. Fishing has dropped off some, but I guess that will go through a cycle and it will come back up again, eventually.

E. Schafer: There's always some sites I like better than others, and if we don't get it, then we

wait, and then the site we get is probably better than the one I really had wanted, found that out last time. Waited all afternoon for one site and then we did settle for one different one and I liked it better.

Rieger: Do you have one particular spot in the Park where you like to go every time you come up here? Whether it's Peace Pipe, or the Headwaters, or one of the trails that you like to walk, or Preachers Grove, that you make a point of if you don't see anything else?

E. Schafer: What I generally do is I walk to the registration desk and then I walk on the highway up to the University and I go over to the University. There's a couple of cooks that are friends of mine, and I visit a few minutes, sometimes have a cup of coffee or lemonade, and then I take the path back to the campgrounds.

Rieger: Is there anything else you would like to add before we wind it up and I let you get on with your vacation?

L. Schafer: Still enjoy it as much as we always did.

Rieger: Despite some of the changes you don't agree with?

L. Schafer: Pretty much, yes. There are some things that will disappoint you a little, but you learn to overlook them, basically is what it amounts to.

E. Schafer: And of course, Mother Nature with her weather, you do the best you can.

Rieger: Yes. There's not much you can do if she wants to rain all day or all week, or two weeks.

E. Schafer: One thing we're fortunate we have a camper that we can stay dry in if it rains.

Rieger: Do you have anything else that you'd like to add to conclude?

E. Schafer: That should be about it.

Rieger: Thank you for talking to me this afternoon.

Additional information relayed in response to interviewer's written questions:

1) How much do you know about the history of the Park?

We have read the brochures about the history of the park - these brochures were given out at the park or at Fisher's Landing.

2) Have you participated in any programs (etc.) with this type of emphasis?

No.

3) Has anyone ever talked to you before about the history of the park, or your experiences through the years in particular?

No.

Itasca State Park Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Jim and Elaine Imholte:

Rieger: Like I said, we'll start out first of all with your name and occupation.

Imholte: I'm Jim Imholte and I'm retired.

Rieger: What was your occupation before you retired?

Imholte: Conductor on the railroad.

Rieger: When did you first start coming to Itasca State Park?

Imholte: 1947.

Rieger: Can you explain a little bit why you chose Itasca?

Imholte: Well, I had been in various Parks. I'd been in Scenic, I'd been in Carlos, I'd been over at Duluth at Scenic, and I always did like this area better. I railroaded up through this area. I went through Park Rapids to Cass Lake. I just liked this park. I liked the looks of the Park. Met a lot of good people here.

Rieger: You're from St. Cloud, I should add.

Imholte: Right. The Park has slipped considerably.

Rieger: How so?

Imholte: The people are not compassionate at all, what so ever. It isn't like it used to be.

Rieger: Are you talking about the visitors or the Park employees?

Imholte: The visitors, they're not at all friendly like they used to be. Used to be a whole gang of us that came in here from St. Cloud, Fargo, and especially a lot of people from Peoria, Illinois, and that bunch is completely gone. I think the Park has slipped considerably. If you look out here, the grass hasn't been mowed since who knows when. Instead of looking like a junkyard it should look like a golf course. I don't believe there's any reason for that grass not to be mowed. The restrooms aren't like they used to be. They restrooms used to be spotless. It isn't like that anymore. Thank the good Lord for the camp hosts that you've got over here, Ervin and Buena Engel. They keep those restrooms, if it wasn't for them it would be a shame.

Rieger: How about the trail system, and especially maybe the bike trail?

Imholte: The bike trail, my grandkids have had a great time riding it. Wally there, he's walked it many times. I'm really not interested in the bike course anymore. I don't ride a bicycle anymore.

Rieger: I know it gets awful busy, and sometimes if you're walking it, it can get a little scary. Do you usually, when you've been coming the forty years, stay right in the campgrounds?

Imholte: Right. I fish the lake primarily. I fish it and fish it hard. Hasn't been many fish available for the last three years. I consider myself a good fisherman, and you can't find them in here. I don't know why. I don't know what the feed is that's in there. There's got to be feed in there for them or they'd bite sometime during the day. I don't know what is going on there. I've fished with some good fishermen from this general area. One of the fellows that used to work in the Park and I fish a lot together.

Rieger: And it's just not as good as it was. I've heard that several times.

Imholte: The fish are there. There's no question about that. I see them on the locator, but you can't make them bite. The locator won't open their mouths. I don't understand it. For years you could go out here anyplace and catch a limit of sunfish. Something has happened. [Note: Mr. Imholte wrote and expressed interest in the construction of a fish pier on the east shore of Bear Paw.]

Rieger: Do you usually stay right here in Bear Paw?

Imholte: Always Bear Paw.

Rieger: Have you ever tried Pine Ridge?

Imholte: I camp in Pine Ridge. I come back here deer hunting, I come back Labor Day.

Rieger: What are your opinions of the deer hunt here in the Park?

Imholte: Excellent.

Rieger: I know for a long time there was a great controversy about that, "Oh, no. We shouldn't deer hunt in the Park. We should let as many deer come in as possible."

Imholte: There's so many deer here it's a crime. This park is literally black with deer. We came home last night about nine o'clock, we saw deer all through the Park. There's a lot of deer here.

Rieger: Right. I've seen them, too. This summer has been crazy. Almost everyday I go into work, it's been crazy. What were some of your first impressions the first several years that you were coming here?

Imholte: We started out, we had a tent. We graduated to a school bus. Then I bought a Greyhound. After the Greyhound and after I got hurt, I went to a motor home. We used to have a lot of fun in here. The whole gang would get together and we'd stretch our hoses over to the water faucets and we'd fill one another up. We'd have a sing-a-long at night. When we first started coming in here, they used to have a sing-a-long down behind the Headquarters.

Rieger: Was it an organized sing-a-long?

Imholte: Sure. They had college students that came in. They used to have several of the biologists and the educated individuals came in here and gave peaches on all of the wildlife. You don't see that here anymore. Kids used to sit down there and just literally love those people. They'd bring a stuffed owl or a stuffed beaver, some kind of animal or some kind of bird, and those guys would go on and talk and talk and talk about that stuff, and those kids sat right there glued to that individual. After that, a lady or a guy would get up there with a guitar or an accordion and he'd play it. We'd just have the time of our life down there. That's all disappeared. Another thing that this Park doesn't have, this Park doesn't have any playground area for youngsters. Ninety percent of your parks down in our area have a playground area. All you got here is a sandbox. I think they could have a swing or a teeter-totter. None of that here. There's never been any here, as long as I've been coming.

Rieger: Do you think that was a problem at the beginning, too, and not just now?

Imholte: Right. I really think they could stand a teeter-totter or a set of swings in here. I know that insurance becomes a problem with that kind of stuff, but I really think it could be handled. [points to unmowed area] That sight right there just completely throws me. The mowing. I think that place should look like a golf course.

Rieger: Just this summer since I've been here, on the perimeter, I've been hearing the "controversy" about that. You have some people that say, "We shouldn't mow too much because of the erosion and things like that," and other people that say, "Wait, it looks messy."

Wally Wesselman: A lot of weeds.

Imholte: All that does is collect flies and mosquitos. I think that's a shame. I think that should be taken care of, the sooner the better. I just believe that it's ridiculous. I admire what they've done here with the nice white pine that they've planted. I think it's a good deal. They got a lot of good old beautiful trees here, black ash and oak and bass wood. I think it brings something to the Park. There's a birch here and there and there's popple here, not much popple, you don't see any popple standing in here, but the rest of it is all good, solid timber. I do think they should have somebody that comes into these restrooms in the evening and take care of them. I really think that. And that garbage situation, that's a real joke, that you have to carry your garbage two blocks to put it in a dumpster. Why don't you put one of those dumpsters in the parking lot if nothing

else, if they don't want those garbage systems that they had prior. I really think that it's a ridiculous situation.

Rieger: Fair enough. Have you seen any other changes in the Park facilities, the roads, the buildings, that are good and bad?

Imholte: The buildings, they maintain them well. I see they're rebuilding that ice house up there. I remember going up there when they rung the bell. You had to be there when they rang the bell or you didn't get ice. You could buy wood at the same time. The headquarters used to be right here in the Park. They had odds and ends for the public. I understand that the outlying businesses don't like that, they want to make some money, too, and I'm not saying that we actually need that. You can go down to Douglas Lodge and have a meal if you want. You can go down there and get the paper. I think the only reason we don't have papers anymore, I think the public stole the papers from the machines.

Mrs. Imholte: Stole the money out of there.

Imholte: Well, they didn't so much take the money but they'd open it up and I think they took more than one paper, and I think that was a ridiculous situation.

Rieger: But you liked it when they had the store and everything right here in the campgrounds.

Mrs. Imholte: That was handy.

Imholte: You could get milk and butter, and bread and things like that.

Mrs. Imholte: That was nice. They used to have where the kids could get ice cream.

Imholte: We realize that this Park is off the beaten path from the highway, otherwise, why couldn't it have an ice cream machine over there. They got a coke machine. Milk machines are available. Whether it would warrant that over there, I don't know.

Mrs. Imholte: Yes, or something else. Whether it would pay for itself or not, I don't know.

Rieger: How has been your general contact with some of the Park employees and how have they changed maybe throughout the years? A lot of times they say, "The old timers really cared and they held that sense of ownership."

Imholte: You still got some good old Park employees. You've got Jack [Katzenmeyer] up there and you've got Anita [Chase] up there and Linda [Katzenmeyer]. Those are all good people. I had a tire low on my boat trailer and I went up to the workshop up there and they said, "Go ahead. Use all the air you want, pump her up." So the cooperation from the employees here basically is good. You got a lot of good employees. You got Don Olson, he's a perfect

gentleman. Old Swede Smith is a great old man. I fish with him. He worked in this Park for twenty years. I've met a lot of Park employees. Marvel Thompson, he's retired. Norman and Anita [Chase], they're fine people. I could not complain about any of the employees around here. [Note: Mr. Imholte also mentioned Ken Thole as one of the "fine people" they have met.]

Rieger: O.K. So that's generally been good. That's good to hear.

Imholte: Always. Always been fine people.

Rieger: But you say the people that have actually visited the Park have changed.

Imholte: Basically, yes. It isn't like it used to be. That guy across the road here, this gentleman over here, Leo Schafer, and Ervin and Buena [Engel], we've known them for years. Our kids have gone to Winnipeg with kids they've met here. Our kids have gone to Nebraska and their kids have come to our house. People from Canada that came to our house, but it's an all-together different situation than it was.

Rieger: Do your children still come to the Park and camp?

Imholte: Every year. On a regular basis.

Rieger: Established a good tradition there. You people come every year?

Imholte: Haven't missed a year for forty six years.

Rieger: How long do you usually stay? A week, two weeks?

Imholte: As long as you can stay, two weeks.

Mrs. Imholte: We've managed sometimes to stay three weeks. Kind of wrangled our way.

Rieger: You're entitled if you've been coming here this time!

Mrs. Imholte: They always try to accommodate us, the regulars.

Imholte: I'll tell you, one thing you can bank on in this Park. If there's any trouble, the trouble will be stopped in nothing flat. That's one thing. They don't tolerate any loudness after ten o'clock. Most of the people live by that rule. I talked to the gentleman up here when we were cleaning fish today. He's been coming in here for eighteen years, and he reminded me that I had fished with him, but I don't remember it. I see nothing wrong with Itasca Park if they'd clean this mess up. That grass, you don't go into a campsite to look at long old shaggy grass. You come in to see a pretty, mowed area, like a golf course. It should look like a golf course in here. Like I say, I really appreciate what they've done in planting those pines in here. I won't live long

enough to see them, but like I say, it's a nice Park or I wouldn't come back.

Rieger: It's amazing. Forty years. I just think that's great.

Mrs. Imholte: And our kids. They feel the same way.

Imholte: Everyone of them come up here.

Mrs. Imholte: They try to come if they can. They're just getting to the point where they're getting outfits to go on their own.

Rieger: Can you compare this Park to any of the other parks that you've visited? Or has this been exclusive now.

Mrs. Imholte: It's been exclusive. This is the only one we've been to. Oh, no. We've been to Carlos.

Imholte: We were to Scenic and Big Fork and we were to Jay Cooke.

Mrs. Imholte: And Gooseberry Falls State Park.

Rieger: But you like this one the best, you've been coming back.

Mrs. Imholte: Yes.

Imholte: We keep coming back.

Rieger: Can you describe why?

Imholte: Well, first of all, you're right by a lake. You've got an excellent boat landing right in this part of the Park as well as down at the boat landing. The people that operate the boat landing are very accommodating.

Mrs. Imholte: He liked the fishing here all the time. And the scenery. It is a beautiful park.

Imholte: I've fished Elk. I've never monkeyed in Mary or any of the other lakes in the Park. Many, many years ago I walked in with a guy to fish way back in a gully or someplace. I don't think I could find it anymore.

Mrs. Imholte: He's [Wesselman] from Atlanta, Georgia, and he called us up about six weeks ago, two months ago and wanted to know if we were going up to Itasca this year. We've had him up here several times and so has my sister over here [Louise Spaulding]. She's from St. Cloud, too. He likes it up here, he likes it here. Makes him want to come back.

Rieger: So you think it's fair to say, they call Itasca the "flagship" of Minnesota State Parks. Do you think that's a fair statement?

Mrs. Imholte: Right. It's the king.

Rieger: When you come, is there any particular spot that you always make sure that you get to, whether it's running up to the Headwaters, going to Preachers Grove, any location within the Park, or is it just basically the whole thing?

Imholte: We basically see the whole Park.

Mrs. Imholte: The whole thing. And the Headwaters, that's always a star attraction.

Imholte: We go down to Lake Alice. They have a festival at Lake George, we participate in that. The Blueberry Festival. We go in there and have breakfast, help the Lions club there at Lake George, and any other functions that are provided around here. We even went over to Mahnomen and left a little money over there, over to the casino.

Rieger: I haven't been over there yet. I sort of have that bug now. I went to Las Vegas during spring break. That's a lot of fun! Except I'm going to stick to nickel slots, but that's another story. Anyway, I won't hang out here too much longer, I'll let you enjoy the evening. Can you reflect on some of your experiences and your feelings about the Park and describe some of those?

Imholte: We come back because we truly enjoy the Park. We've all gotten older, so we don't know a lot of these young people. There's a gentleman over here from Fairmont, he's a good friend, he's in site forty-four over there. There's a bunch up here that I know from past years that I fished with or took fishing when I was up here. A lot of people come into this area from St. Cloud, Waite Park, Sauk Rapids. Anybody that really comes up here and enjoys seeing the wildlife, they're bound to come in here. You see the deer, you see the coon. I haven't saw the bear up here this year.

Rieger: They're around. There's a mama bear and three little cubs that have been hanging out over by East contact, I guess.

Imholte: Then you see the otter out here in the lake and the otter are actually comical to see them in the water out here.

Rieger: Do you think you'll continue to come for many years to come, even though you're frustrated with some of the things?

Imholte: As long as my health permits me.

Rieger: Where do you see Itasca in the future?

Imholte: I just hope they don't let some commercial donkey in here and completely ruin it. They're rebuilding that ice house up there. I've got some doubt about that, but they say it's on the historic roles.

Rieger: They did the first week of work, Minnesota Historical Society came up here, and most of the labor and things were donated.

Mrs. Imholte: We also like the enlargement of the campsites, how they have changed those.

Rieger: Were they much smaller when you first started coming?

Mrs. Imholte: Yes, very much so. You were back to back, especially in this middle section here. It was just too close. Not enough beside us.

Imholte: We enjoy seeing the kids have fun here.

Rieger: Yes. It's fun just to drive through and see all the people having a good time. Is there anything else you'd like to add about Itasca or your experiences, anything at all?

Imholte: Well, I saved a couple of lives out there. I pulled a couple of people out of the water.

Mrs. Imholte: They were boy scouts, weren't they, Jimmy?

Imholte: No. That was Frank and Bernie. I pulled them out. They were out there in the water, it was too rough. One night the sheriff came in and told me that he was going to take my boat. He was going to reimburse me. There were a bunch of scouts lost out on the lake. I took him out there and got the scouts off of Schoolcraft Island. They were all in, and I couldn't go any farther. The sheriff said to me, "I'll reimburse you for it." I said, "I've already got my reimbursement."

Spaulding: What were you going to say, Wally, about a good time?

Wesselman: About the time the raccoons got in my sister's trunk. We were all in bed. I thought I had shut the trunk tight, but I didn't. We had a wire to keep from opening it up all the time during the day. So I forgot to shut it tight. We all hit the sack. Pretty soon, I hear this screeching noise out there and the raccoons got into the eggs and the tomatoes and the clothes. We had to take the car into Bemidji the next day and rinse out the trunk. The whole trip was a fiasco. It was nothing serious.

Spaulding: We made a lot of mistakes that weekend.

Rieger: But looking back now it's not as bad, sort of comical.

Spaulding: We laughed about it when it happened.

Wesselman: It was funny as hell.

Spaulding: It was. We had a good time. Oh my God, yes. We'll never forget that weekend.

Wesselman: Weekend? It was longer than a week.

Imholte: A lot of memories here. I miss a lot of people that I'm sure got much older than we are that used to park along here. I might be in here at the wrong time of the year. Who knows? Maybe those people are still coming in here.

Mrs. Imholte: Times have changed. It's not the same. Things change.

Rieger: Well, if there's nothing else...

Mrs. Imholte: Progress.

Imholte: Tell Jack to mow the grass.

Rieger: Mow the grass. I'll underline that! Well, I thank you for sharing.

[End interview]