Ed Rizzotto left the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in 1988 for a job in Gateway National Recreation Area. His seven years in Gateway helped him recognize the unique role that urban parks play in people’s everyday lives. During an interview conducted for the ANPR Oral History Project, Ed reflected on the decisions he made while working as a center director, management assistant and unit superintendent of Staten Island.

**Rizzotto:** The last night I was in the regional office, I was moving 28 crates of references and books that I’d accumulated. I’m doing this at 10 o’clock at night. This protection ranger comes through.

He said, “What are you doing?”

I said, “I’m packing for my next job.”

He said, “Where are you going?”

I said, “I’m going to Gateway.”

And he said, “I used to work at Gateway.”

I said, “Oh, yeah?”

We talked about it a little bit, and he said to me, “You know…there’s a right way, there’s a wrong way, and there’s the Gateway.”

I said, “What does that mean?”

He said, “You’ll find out.”

Gateway was a unique experience. It was trying to do Park Service stuff for people in a big urban area who were never going to see the Park Service any other way. There are people in New York who never leave the city. Never drive.

At some point in that experience, I was at lunch with a guy named Bob Barbee. He was at Yellowstone, and we were schmoozing. I was saying, “You have a great job. What a terrific job. I would love to have your job.”

He said, “You know, you’re really doing a more important job in some ways because the average visitor to Yellowstone travels more than 800 miles to get there, which means lots and lots of people never get there. It is too far and too expensive. So they aren’t going to see the mother park or the premier sites that we all know about.”

His point was that they had to see the green and gray in New York City. Because then, when their congressman came home for a town hall meeting and said, “Do we need more jails? Do we need more sewers? Do we need more highways? Do we need to build a sewer plant?” someone might put up his hand and go, “The Park Service has taught my eighth grader environmental science. The only time we camped out was at Gateway.” They would, in a small way, see the Park Service there . . .

Rangers are here to watch you.