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Interview with Brad McDougal (FA 1098)

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Kentucky Folklife Program Interview Transcription

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

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Interviewee: Brad McDougal

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: June 23, 2014

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Others Present:

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Context:

Technical Considerations:

Transcription prepared by: Hannah Davis

Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

Use of em dash — indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ ” indicates dialogue within conversation.

Use of italics indicates emphasis.

Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.

Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.

Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

Note: This transcription is as accurate and complete as possible. In any question of interpretation, the researcher is referred to the recording itself as the primary document representing this event.

[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

[00:00:00]

Brent Björkman: Alright, today is June 23, 2014. This is Brent Björkman, Director of the Kentucky Folklife Program, continuing on my series of interviews I'm doing for the Library of Congress as part of the Archie Green Fellowship on ranger lore, the working lives of rangers and had a great experience these last few months, and today we're here near Brownsville, outside of Brownsville, and -- with another one of our ranger guests who's recently retired. Can you give us your name and also just talk about the last, most recent rank you had before retiring?

Brad McDougal: My name is Brad McDougal, and I retired November 2013 as Chief Ranger at Mammoth Cave National Park.

BB: Okay. Uh, Brad, can you tell me a little bit about -- you know I've been asking folks when they start out the interviews about their, basically how they got started, or how they got connected to the park. Can you share that and break the ice that way?

BM: Certainly! Uh, I'd say with the, uh, maybe May 1980 I was working as a dispatcher for the Edmonson County Sherriff's Office, and back in those days, the state had part of a job training program, and I'd been doing that for about a year and of course it being a state-funded grant. It was, the money was going to run out sometime around August and so forth, so I was looking for a job, and my aunt, Beverly Reed, worked at the park at the time, and she called and said, "They're hiring new seasonal employees at Mammoth Cave National Park." And I thought, "Well, that's longer employment than I'm going to have here," understanding that the program was going to run out, so I applied for it, and I was

hired as a seasonal ticket seller in the ticket office in June 1980. And that was my first introduction to working for the park, and so all that summer, I sold cave tickets, cave tour tickets.

BB: Wow. So the season, and your Mammoth Cave season was through September/October?

BM: The summer season back when I first started was usually around Memorial Day to Labor Day. But one of the reasons, right place right time, was once we got through the season there, a lot of the other seasonal ticket employees, they came in from, you know, South Carolina, Minnesota, away from here, so when that was over with, they had leave, you know, their term was up and left. And I was living in Brownsville. So they put me on, kept me on the rolls, and if they needed me on the weekend, or something else, they could call me and I could come in. So, that was one way, in fact, usually I worked weekends all the way through until November, when I was lucky enough to get a permanent job selling tickets in the ticket office.

BB: So how did that permanent job come about? Was it just, it just, it was like, right place right time?

BM: Exactly, right place, right time. The lady who had that position, Marge [indistinguishable], took a job at another park, and there was Miss Patrice Curve, who was my boss at the time, and who -- my boss at the time there, and there was several ladies there who worked in the ticket office for a time, but they didn't want a full-time job because they worked, you know, just when they wanted to there, so essentially I was

there and I wanted a full-time job, and they didn't, so I lucked out and got a full-time job. If either one of them ladies had applied for it, I would've been doing something else, but they didn't, and bless their hearts, because I got to sell tickets full-time. And, yeah, November, I think, November 1, 1980, it went through and I got the full-time job, GS-4 ticket seller.

BB: So you liked it well enough to pursue it, it was a good summer experience and you --

BM: Oh yeah, I had a good time with it, and at that time also, my wife in 1980, we were married at that time, and she was teaching school during the -- her, teaching down at Edmonson County Elementary School, and I was working up there, so the permanent check really helped along with the insurance and benefits and stuff like that. [00:05:00]

BB: How long were you in this position, the ticket seller position?

BM: See, I, I want to say around about seven, eight months, and then a position opened up in what was then called Visitor Protection Resource Management. And they split -- they called it a split position, when you'd work like maybe six months in interpretation, and then the other six months you'd come out and work either in the resource management side or visitor protection side. If you were commissioned, you know, you would carry a weapon and make a rescue, work visitor protection, road patrol, you know. If you weren't, and I wasn't at the time, then I worked on resource management things, like cutting trails, cleaning kudzu, or you know, things like that. So, so I guided cave tours, I think, two terms in interp, and did the resource management thing for maybe one thing.

BB: So how did the first ticket position, uh, how did that assist you in the job as it progressed? I mean, was it a good way to, an introduction to the park?

BM: Yes it was, because right off the bat it got you used to, accustomed to dealing with the public, and if you hadn't dealt with the public before, it was an eye-opener, you know, dealing with the public, because someone would come in, and I'd dealt with them on the phone before and stuff like that in some previous jobs, but face-to-face contact, you know, when you come in talking to the, some of them would come in and they were just the happiest thing in the world. "How much is this tour? Is this good for Mom and Dad?" and stuff like that and you'd try to help them and then someone would come in, "Uh, tour sold out." And they'd either fly into a rage, or you know, and you were the first one there, so I mean, you know, you may take some flack from them, but you get paid for taking flack. You take so much flack, and then you say, "Hold on, I'll get my supervisor." They get paid more, so they can take more flack. That's the way the food chain works. So yeah, but, I think it was good because it gets you to interact with the public, and also you know, you couldn't have a lot of ten-minute conversations with them there at the ticket office. I mean, they come in, want to do the transaction, and anything that was very detailed information, you'd try to ford them off to the interpretation desk or try to find an interpreter, because there are 20 people behind them, and some of them may be five minutes from a tour, so it's push them on out, get the money, get the tickets, and move. And we sold an amazing amount of tickets back in those days in the summertime.

BB: More so than more recent times, you mean?

BM: Oh yes. Historic tours back in those days, uh, 300 people

BB: On one tour?

BM: Oh yeah, on one tour. And it has run as high as 500.

BB: Huh.

BM: Of course they cost \$1.50 back in those days also, and \$0.75 I think for -- uh, no, \$3 for adults, \$1.50 for children and with [indistinguishable] so, yeah, people would come in. So yeah, in the summertime, historic tour 300 people easy. Bang bang bang. And if you had a parking lot or visitors center full of people, they'd come in, you know, [indistinguishable] and then the interpreters would take them down there and somehow get them through there, you know, and show them, show what the cave and talk what the cave could -- at the time a lot of people and bring them on out. But yeah, 300, 300, that was a [indistinguishable] 300 full.

BB: So you got this split position that included interp and also, I think you called it "Visitor Protection," I think it's called "Law Enforcement" these days?

BM: These days it's called "Law Enforcement and Emergency Services." Back in those days, we had the resource management and the visitor protection services were all in one section. And I got the split position since I wasn't commissioned as safe to carry a weapon. I hadn't done any law enforcement authority. I did the interpretation and then I did the resource management section of it.

BB: So when you're taking tickets, was, is that a progression in working at the park? Like, I guess you're striving to also get a better grade, but also, it's a new opportunity. Had you talked to some of the interpreters, the cave guides, during your time? Was it something you wanted to do? I mean, was it --

BM: I wanted to be a ranger, I'd seen what they did [00:10:00] and I thought that was cool, thought it was a cool job, I mean, I enjoyed the time I got in the cave tours. I mean, it was fun. It was a great group of people that I worked with back in those days. Joe Duvall, you know, and some of the older ones. Bobby Steinberger, Charles Allen, some of those, I enjoyed the times I did that, but I knew looking around that I'd really like to be doing what these guys were doing. That looked like fun.

BB: How did that first week of interp go? Did you work along with somebody? I've heard you oftentimes start out by trailing a tour, being the follow-up person.

BM: Hm, the first tour I ever guided -- no, correction, trailed, was a historic tour. And I came in that morning, and back in those days, you could throw kerosene torches at the Methodist Church, and one of the first things --

BB: Tell us a little bit about what that means to "throw a torch" as opposed to, what?

BM: As opposed to natural lighting. Well, back in the early days of the cave tours, some of the guides were guides for pay, you know. Well, not pay, but for tips. One of the ways they had to light up the cave since there wasn't any kind of electric lighting, they would either carry kerosene lanterns and they would wrap up strips of cloth and soak them in

kerosene and carry them into the cave, and they would put them on these long sticks with a metal tip attached to them and they'd have these torches soaked in kerosene and they would light those and they had a -- they'd practice the art of throwing these torches at certain sections of the cave, and certain sections of the cave, two or three torches you could light up an amazing amount of the cave, just two or three, which you of course, it's pitch, it's beyond dark, there's no light in there in there at early. Some early guides that developed torch throwing, you know, and in those days, in the early '80s, we were still doing that. You'd go down there, certain spot, turn off the lights, give people a taste of the total darkness, you know, the blackout period of the cave, and then the guide would usually light a match and show them just how much light one match would put off in total darkness. And then light up a couple torches, and then throw them at certain sections back there, and explain to them again, "This is historic. This is how the early guides in the cave, you know, would light it, show the enormity of the cave, and also their expertise in throwing these torches and stuff. And they got tips. That's one way to supplement their income." So we were still able to do that. And one of the early, one of the first duties you had in those days was the first trip down, the tour, historic down the hill, took the torches for all of the historic tours for the rest of the day. So I got there and Charles Allen, I was paired with him the first morning, and he said, "We have to make these torches and take them down the..." And you know, I had been shown how to sew, how to roll up balls for the torches, got those ready and the torch bucket, and of course, at the time I didn't know all of the torches were supposed to go for the rest of the day. Charles had just told me get the torch bucket ready for the torches, so I went down there with the torch bucket and was trailing it, Charles did the torch throwing thing exhibition, threw it up there as

always, perfect and stuff. He'd been doing it a long time. So we left and I carried the torch bucket with me, you know, because it's my torches, I'm responsible for them, so we got back to the top of the hill, and Charles said, "What's that?" I said, "It's the torches you told me to carry and roll down the hill." He laughed, and I think somebody said, "We're down here to lead this tour and there's no torches." He said, "We were supposed to leave them down there." I said, "Charles, you never said nothing about leaving them down there. You said, 'Roll these torches and bring them along.'" So, there we go. Live and learn. So the next time down, I knew to leave the torches down there, but that was the first tour through there, and --

BB: How long was it back then before you started leading your own?

BM: I think back in those days it was usually a matter of just either personal preference, or when you got comfortable about it, and [00:15:00] you'd say, "I'll get on the rock." And first time on the rock, there was, usually out in front of the historic steps, you'd step up on the top layer of the rock, or in the cave there's a couple places you can stand, but say, "I'll get on the rock," means "I'll give them the tour. I'll give the introductions, the warnings, make sure we're on time, stop at each place, give them the history, answering questions." I think within maybe two weeks, within two weeks I'd told Charles, "I wanna get on the rock, yeah." Because you listen, learn, you write down, and not only Charles, but you know, I wouldn't be with Charles on it all the time, [indistinguishable] Van Meter, Joe Duvall, you know, Don Rogers, you know, just several others. Always pairing with either this tour, or a different tour. So, you took what you got that day. And you also, you wanted to take the time to listen to these things, and you know, you don't wanna

jump on the rock and get a question you don't know the answer to, because that's kind of embarrassing, not only for you, but for the park. "What's this guy doing up here if he doesn't even know what gypsum is, or how to get out of the cave, or which way to take me?" Yeah, you're not going to do that. And yeah, also, after awhile, you do that for about a week, it starts to get boring, just walking around behind 500 people, or 300 people. You go, "This is nice, I've done this for awhile, I want to get to do something other than just walk around and make sure nobody gets behind you." So yeah, that was --

[interruption]

BM: It was all good. I didn't have anyone, thank the good lord, no one died on me, I never had -- I don't think I ever called the rangers, I had a good portion, kind of a good time [indistinguishable] both times in winter, and then one time in the summer of course, it started in the summer and rotated again in the winter and, uh, I was fortunate, because I had a good time. Never had a real problem with a visitor. No one ever died on me or got bad sickness. I had folks you had to kind of help out sometimes, but it was great, and I wish every law enforcement ranger now had to do a six-month tour of interpretation.

BB: Tell me more about why you think that's true. I mean --

BM: Uh, of course I'm showing my age here with that, but you realize David Alexander, you've talked before like that. But when I started, almost every ranger there, almost everybody in visitor protection had done a tour [indistinguishable] period of time in the cave guiding cave tours. Dave Lyons, in fact, had guided wild cave tours. David done some extensive caving. But even so, just the regular cave tour, his story, Frozen Niagara,

the half-day tour, you know, the common -- not common, but just routine, regular tours that you'll have every day, especially in the summertime when you got a lot of people coming in, back in those days, if a guide called from --

[interruption [00:19:00 - 00:19:20]]

BM: Yes, okay, so back in those days, and up until, you know, just here a few years, if an interpreter called and said, "I've got a visitor here at the water clock who's not breathing," everyone here in the division, every ranger who was going to respond knew exactly where the water clock was at. So, or if someone said, "Forks of the cave, I need help at the forks of the cave," you know, everyone who was involved in the rescue or something knew exactly how to get to the [00:20:00] forks of the cave. Quickest way to get there, and if you had someone on a stretcher, you knew, you know, you didn't take them out this way, you took them out this way, and stuff like that. And since, you know, a gigantic amount of people go through the cave, and if you get rangers in who've never had any kind of exposure to the cave before, [indistinguishable] rangers coming in, then you have to make a time to send down, to at try to get them through the cave tours, and tell them, "Look, take out your ranger notebook, and meet at the trailer," and ask them at times, especially where the people gather, and ask them, "What's the name of this place?" Make a map, because that way, if someone calls up and says, "I'm at the Submarine Steps," then you're not saying, "Where's the Submarine Steps?" You know, and that was something that, especially in later years that we've had to deal with because as some of the guys I've worked with -- guys and gals -- retired and moved on or something, you'd get tired looking around and having to say, if you were supervising someone, calling the radio and

saying, "We have a visitor down at Giant's Coffin. Emergency at the Coffin." Okay, there's a problem we probably should have anticipated. "Now meet me at the historic entrance and I'll show you, but now's not really the time for a training." That was something you'd have to put down in your notes, especially if you were supervising or working with some folks who've never been to the cave. "Look, try to get you in there and get indoctrinated," but see, before, you had folks who did it every day. They knew exactly how to get there. You can talk a stretcher down Mammoth Dome, you know, back to River Hall, but don't be taking a stretcher through Giant's Coffin and down steps [indistinguishable] Misery, you know. You're not going to make it. You know, you don't know stuff like that, someone could die. Depends on the situation. Depends on what situation you're in. And that's the worst case situation, someone's down there very bad and you need to haul them out of there quickly, then you better know the quickest way to get there, and the quickest way to be able to carry them out.

BB: That's a good illustration of why a well-rounded ranger starts it with interpretation.

BM: Yes, because you know. The same way it is on the surface. If they know how to get to Vincent's Ferry, or anywhere on the surface, sure, but once you go inside, there's the cave phones, but ladies and gentlemen, once you go inside and close that door, there's the cave phones and that's pretty much it. And I used to give talks to seasonal interpreters that'd come in for the first time and we'd talk to them about emergency procedures and stuff like that going inside the cave and just, keep in mind here, if something does go wrong down there, you always need to keep in mind where you're at and where the nearest phone is at, because cell phones don't work there, we don't have elevators,

helicopters don't land. If you're a mile and a half in, it's a mile and a half to get you out, usually. You know, it's always going to be dark, it's always going to be damp, these are the things you're always going to be fighting for, fighting against. If -- you know, it's not alien, but it's a very unforgiving environment. The cave doesn't care how sick you are or how tired you are. It is what it is. So, you always need to know if nothing else you can get the phone and let them know where you're at. If you can't get nothing else but, "I'm in Giant's Coffin and I need help," and then hang up the phone or leave it down there, that's good because someone in the shift office, Joy Lyons, Kathy Proffitt, you know, Saene Garcia, see if they hear that, okay, they know to call us and tell us we know, okay, "Problem at Giant's Coffin, let's go down there." If the ranger's in Giant's Coffin, they know exactly how to get there, what to take, but that's part of being, like a said, a ranger, is to know stuff like that. Whether to know to go down there to arrest them or haul them out of there, CPR, pull them out because they're scared or claustrophobic, or whether they're lost on the north side, yeah, I think you need to know your territory. You need to know to how to operate the park and mirror where you're working at.

BB: I've heard of people having illnesses or claustrophobia or something. Has there ever been a time you've needed to arrest someone who's being foolish [00:25:00] or something --

BM: Oh yeah, sometimes you'll -- usually, of the times I've had to rescue people from inside the cave, intoxication. I've had a couple people just be -- intoxication. You know. Thankfully, I've never had to get too violent with any of them down there, just put the cuffs on them and, "Let's just walk back." And since the cuffs aren't coming off, I'll turn

the lights on, and I suggest you walk as carefully as you can, and state "If you fall, I'm not going to catch you, and since you're handcuffed, you're probably going to break the fall with your face, but you know, nobody schools your head to make you get drunk and come down here and get a cave tour."

BB: Mmmhm. So then you went in from interpretation, and we just talked about why that's important early training for the rest of the --

BM: Yes, sir.

BB: So the Law Enforcement -- sorry, uh, I think you said, "Visitors Services" --

BM: At that time it was called "Visitor Protection."

BB: Visitor Protection.

BM: But Law Enforcement is Emergency Services, and that's [indistinguishable].

BB: So there's a progression, and I've talked to some of your former colleagues about the professionalization of law enforcement. People -- they look differently than they did maybe 20 years ago --

BM: Oh yes.

BB: -- how they dressed. And they also, you know, with the side arms, and maybe their ability to be seen as real law enforcement. Was it, back then, do you have any thoughts about that, or how you were perceived, and then maybe your training in these areas?

Because you said at first you couldn't carry a sidearm, and then what kind of trainings you had to do, and how did you learn internally at the park, or did you go away for things?

BM: Oh, I started out -- a position came, full-time position came open in the Visitor Protection section. I was fortunate enough to apply for that and accept that job, and I figure I accepted that, I think, around May the 25th, and then May the 28th, they sent me to FLETC, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center at Brunswick, Georgia. And back in those days, that's where everyone in the park service went to get law enforcement training or their law enforcement commission. When I say, "law enforcement commission," that's the same thing as saying the badge credentials of a police officer, but that's what it was called. So I went down there for nine weeks, did a nine-week training program and came back to the park, and they gave you a gun and a badge, [indistinguishable] at that time we all wore the same kind of badge, the buffalo badge, but you came back and they gave you a gun and a gun belt, bullets, handcuffs, radio, car keys, and Andrew Parsley gave me, I think, four hours training on how to run the radar gun, and, uh, handed me the car keys, and good luck. So, now, Jim Waddell, who was my direct supervisor when I came back from there, Jim did some, some rode with me some, and you know, gave me some instructions and stuff, but there was no formal training program. It was pretty much old JT, and Jim would do it when he could, but Jim at the same time was a supervising park ranger and I wasn't his only employee. He had other folks to worry about. And also just the way it was done. We just got back from FLETC, here's the keys to the car, here's a ticket book, here's a gun and bullets. I think we had to

use .38 revolvers, radio, handcuffs, I think there's a baton for the daytime, a 5D-cell flashlight for the nighttime, "Here's the keys to the car, go forth and do good." And there we go.

BB: Wow.

BM: And so we just -- taught you how to fill out tickets and teach you what was needed and go at it. And I didn't think there was anything looking back, but now, these days with the fuel training programs that all law enforcement officers have, not just the park service and stuff like that, you just think, well, I was horrified. And some of the younger guys asked, you know, "What was your field training?" Before I was handed the radar gun and the car keys and told, "Good luck. There you go. Take off." And they were surprised. Kids don't know how lucky they are because that's the way it was and that's what was expected because that's how Jim learned, that's how [indistinguishable] learned, that's how rangers on down learned [00:30:00]. You're trained, you get paid this, you want to know how to do it, you'll find out. I'll show you one time, and then after that, you better be getting out and doing it yourself. It was cool, it was good.

BB: So did you have pretty good experiences? You didn't run into too many troubles right away?

BM: Not right away. No, not right away, no.

BB: Later on, though?

BM: Oh, from '82 to 2013, yeah. Some, yeah.

BB: Thirty years almost. 31!

BM: I was a commissioned officer for 31 years and --

BB: Well maybe we could talk about whatever you felt comfortable talking about. Something you're proud of, or if you're comfortable, it was a scary moment. I mean, on-the-job training, life is on-the-job training, right, but I mean -- I'd love if you feel comfortable to share something you felt was a poignant time or experience you had in doing this.

BM: Oh sure. I'll tell you about the first, I think, the first arrest I ever made. And it wasn't bad in any way, shape, or form, but it was during the dead of winter, dead of winter, cold, snow was out, and I was just -- actually doing what we called back in those days "snow patrol." I was out in the patrol car, and the roads weren't too bad, but it was bitterly, bitterly cold out, and we were actually out checking, driving just to make sure no one got off the road, especially out at Mammoth Cave. No cell phone in those days. You did not want them walking anywhere, because, you know, you could die. So, I came up on a car parked on the side of the road, and I thought, "Okay, someone's broken down." I got out and checked the driver's side, and he was passed out. Bad drunk, bad drunk. You could smell it on him. Barely coherent, but I -- okay, I got him out of the car, told him he was under arrest. He probably didn't realize or wouldn't remember it the next day, but no problems at all. But I was really concerned about getting him out of there. Once I got him out of the car and handcuffed, I put him back in my car where it's good and warm, because, okay, he's like that, I was busy doing that, and somehow in the process, I locked

him inside the car and me out. So I said, "Well, that's good." Now, I've got a guy back there handcuffed, seat-belted in. He's in good shape. I'm out here freezing to death even though it's cold, if something goes wrong inside this car for some reason, I'm responsible for putting this guy in here. So if I can convince Henry Holman and Rich Caldwell while we're on duty, and I think Henry, when I called him and said, "Can you bring the keys to the car down here?" Henry knew exactly what I'd done. So, no way around it, and I knew Henry was going to make me say it. "Well what'd you need the keys for?" "Uh, Henry, I locked myself out of this car, but more importantly, I locked the drunk guy in it." So Henry come down and brought the keys down, and thank goodness got him out and took him to jail, but after that, I always kept after that, Rule One: always, always have a spare key to that car on my main key ring. So I have two sets of keys, I mean, the keys that they used in there, and an emergency spare key that'd open the car. Yeah. Lesson learned. Always have a spare key. And I used it, it came in handy several days, but never as handy as it did that day.

BB: Right. That was pretty early on in the career?

BM: Oh yeah. I'd, uh, I graduated FLETC July the 30th, 1982, and this was, like, maybe January 1981. So yeah, six months on the road, something like that. I was very -- I was very -- when I realized what -- I was very nonplussed might not be the word, but exacerbated, you know, because [indistinguishable] I arrested this guy, I'm really physically responsible for him. If something goes wrong in there, if he starts passing out or, you know, throwing up and he can't clear his airway, you know, choking on his own vomit and I'm just there looking at him and can't get back in there, one, he's going to die

and it's my fault because I locked him in there and I can't get to him. But of course, if that happened, I would've had to break a window or something like that. But the chief probably wouldn't have liked that. It's much better off, you know, to go ahead and get that out if you can without having to call the chief up and says, "Yeah, I locked the drunk in there and locked myself out and then I had to break a window to get back in." Would not make for a good performance review at the end of the year.

BB: You'd have to eat it.

BM: Oh yeah, I would've had to [00:35:00] yeah. [indistinguishable]

BB: Well that's very good. Telling one on yourself like that --

BM: Oh yeah, I mean --

BB: You have to.

BM: And I'd tell anybody that, because I learned a very important lesson on that one, and it was a small one, but from the day that happened to the day I turned in my gear, whatever vehicle I was driving, whatever kind of vehicle I was driving, I had a spare one on my main key ring, because that's not going to happen to me again. Because not just that -- for me, that time you get out at a crime scene, or you have to bail out at a crime scene or a wreck or something, and you just can't leave that car if you're the first one there or -- you can't leave that car unattended. You've only got that thing there. I could hit the lock button, leave it running with the lights, everything going and rolling, doing my

thing, and come back knowing, hey, no problem, I've got a spare key here. I always told the other guys, always have stuff like that.

BB: So your other colleagues were telling me, of course, but I hadn't really thought about it, you know, sometimes parks are great places for criminals to hang out and, you know, I really wasn't thinking, because they described the fact that a lot of people think, "Oh everyone's on vacation at the park, and enjoying..." Did you have any either -- and I also learned that sometimes you work with local law enforcement.

BM: Of course.

BB: You have increasingly. I think it's increasingly a thing. Is there any kind of thing you wanted to share when you worked along with, maybe it's by yourself or with Henry or your internal team at a national park, or with others to deal with some situation that you were happy to be a member of?

BM: Oh, uh, sure! Oh yes. I remember one pushback due to some jurisdiction issues, I mean, because Mammoth Cave National park is an area of exclusive federal jurisdiction, which means when the state ceded jurisdiction of the park over to the federal government, it ceded all jurisdiction, including police jurisdiction, so even to this day, let's say the Kentucky State Police, who are a great, great working partners with us, have no legal jurisdiction inside the park, unless they're either serving a warrant or chasing somebody in hot pursuit. You know. I was working, but -- in spite of that -- I was working, working a road one night and at that time I was living in the park. I lived in park housing, me and my wife and our little girl like that, and our phone number there at the

park was listed in the book as "after hours," as the "after hours" number. So my wife got a call from the dispatcher at the state police compound in Bowling Green, and they relayed to her that they'd received report that some members of the Ku Klux Klan were en route to Denison's Ferry Campground, which is a little remote campground on the Hart County side of the park, to either disrupt, or attack, or maybe they wanted to do some kind of silly whatever thing that is to a group of African American visitors who were having a reunion down there. And this was like nine o'clock at night on like a Wednesday, so I'm on night patrol, so Pat got on the radio and said this is what the state police told me. "What's going on?" "This is the report that came in." And I said, "10-4, headed that way. So, she was going to call David Lyons, I called some other rangers, you know, to come on in for back-up. There were 25, 30 minutes away at the time. At that time, at that point we had some other rangers living in the park, but they weren't there. You know, they were either on vacation, or they went somewhere else and they just weren't there at the time. And that was just something you accepted -- sometime you were gonna get the call and you'd be the only one. So I headed to Denison's Ferry. And, you know, sometimes you get [indistinguishable]. It wasn't 911 back in those days, you know, someone would call and report in to the state police on a land line, and they'd call -- so I headed to Denison's Ferry, so I get there and there's a truck setting right in the middle of the entrance to Denison's Ferry Road down there. Parked. Blocking the -- and I'm thinking, [indistinguishable] or something about it, so I got on the loudspeaker and, you know, ordered the guy out [00:40:00], to come out of the car and didn't want to come out a couple of times, it's like this, and I thought I heard movement over in the left side of the woods. Wasn't sure, but probably heard movement over there. But anyway, I got the

individual out, walked him back up to me, put the handcuffs on him, he was intoxicated, a little belligerent, but didn't have any problem putting the cuffs on him. Went up, checked his truck, and a .37 magnum pistol, a [indistinguishable] rifle, and a 12 gauge shotgun in there. And about that time, too, just after I got him there to the state police troopers, Nick Stevens and oh gosh, I can't remember the other guy's name -- senior moment, evidently. But I've never been more happy to see two guys roll up on scene, because they got the call and they were Hart County, and they rolled up there and said they knew the guy, [indistinguishable] said, "Yeah, we know him," there like that, and we got the truck moved, and those guys followed me down there and there was in fact a family having -- an African American family, a large one, having a picnic or reunion down there, staying overnight, stuff like that, and they had a generator going, and lights strung up. We got there and asked them -- thank the good lord that evidently those folks up at the gate, the only participants -- "Was there any problems?" "No, we've been here plenty of time and in fact you're the only people we've seen." But, and those troopers, they came in there and had no doubt at all they would've gladly shot anybody off my back if they'd needed to, even though they had no legal standing to do so.

[Indistinguishable] and you know, I've always -- I never met one of them that, anywhere, around here especially, that I wouldn't've trusted with my life in a heartbeat. They were great. [Indistinguishable] every trooper down there, that never occurred to them. Another officer was in trouble and they were going to help them. And I would tell my guys, even before we had any kind of jurisdiction, today, to this day, before we had any kind -- before we had state police officer status. Now we have -- 2006 we got state peace officer status. But even before then, I would tell them, "I don't know care if state police, another

deputy sheriff, or city from around here, if he calls for help, you go. We'll worry about jurisdictional things later. You do not leave them when they're lost out there swinging in the wind, because they won't leave you." So that was kind of interesting for you.

BB: Was it interesting for you to be -- wanted to talk to you a little bit about -- this is an intimate park and a lot of people, if they come here, they just love it and sometimes they retire here, but you're from here.

BM: Yes, sir.

BB: And I think that's an interesting comment on a person's working life in a region, and the idea that it was created 74 years ago. The feelings of a community as they evolve over time, and acceptance or non-acceptance of that, and just knowing the topography of the park and things, um, maybe speak to that as a local man, or as somebody who grew up here.

BM: Well, yeah, I grew up here, first time I visited the park was on a school trip from Henderson County, I remember going on the historic tour, you know, just the place from, uh, from -- I think from 10 until I was about 16, we lived on a farm that bordered the park and Highway 70, so I remember, you know, going back either on my bicycle or on a motor bike, or walking, you know, right past the boundary signs all the time, you know, of course I didn't think anything about it, because there wasn't anything back there. But, it was just great because, I mean, there was the park and once you got past in there it was all woods. And that was what was fantastic about it because everything else pretty much was farmland around there. And understand that we had farmland -- soy beans, cows, and

stuff like that, [00:45:00] but that was cool about it because, you know, once you hit the park boundaries, it was trees and squirrels and stuff like that, and it was great. And I knew that some folks that had their land, or their ancestors', their forefathers' land appropriated for the park. It really -- did -- not that much of the park of itself. I knew that, discovered that later on. When I was a kid, you know, running around, it just never came up. It as just, "Hey, this is a park." You drive through it, watch out for deer. The first speeding I ever got in my life was from a park ranger, John Howard Logsdon. In fact, the first two speeding tickets I got were from park rangers. I was a slow learner back in those days driving through the park, but never had anything negative, for me nor -- there were never any negative concepts about it at all. It was a great place. My father remembers going to the Fourth celebrations, when everyone would go down to the Green River Ferry, go down to the ferry and do stuff and get on the Fourth of July, and people would go swimming, picnics, and stuff like that. But yeah, growing up, when I was a kid -- [indistinguishable] -- cool. [Indistinguishable] as long as you don't go to fast.

BB: Right. So we were talking about some others about -- this is going back to the law enforcement thing, about people doing things. I guess my thought is, people are using the park land when they shouldn't be using it to either grow, harvest, or -- whether it's deer, or ginseng. What's interesting to me is you're local, so, the people that are doing that are often times local. Was it something that you had a lot of insight into because of that, or any stories about that? Maybe -- don't name names, but you know -- did those -- did you come across things like that?

BM: Yes, oh yes! It first shot out with marijuana harvesting. I mean, not harvesting, but growing marijuana. Uh, and the big boom really hit late '80s, early '90s, and, uh, of course the reason they started -- pardon me -- is wanting to use the park was, uh, federal drug laws evolved to the point, or changed to the point, where if you have a [indistinguishable] out here, you decide you're going to supplement your income by growing marijuana, and you're growing marijuana out there and the state or the feds catch you and stuff like that, they can use forfeiture statutes and they can seize that land. Seize, I mean, yeah, this is now the possession of the United States government! And if you have a 30-year mortgage on it, that's between you and the bank. You shouldn't be growing dope on it, it's now ours. So, let's grow it on public land! That way, if it is found, and it's nothing -- they can't take it because [indistinguishable] and there's no way to trace it back, you know, it doesn't belong to this landowner -- it's just sometime still today you'll see on the news, you know, someone got caught with so many marijuana plants in their field or something. [Indistinguishable] marijuana on their farm, you know, most of the time, true marijuana. But let's put it in the park, one, there's no risk of losing anything because park [indistinguishable], and number two, it's very, the area is thicker, very remote, a lot of people come by through it, if you time it right, you could grow a lot of dope and nobody would ever know. We certainly didn't have enough rangers to patrol all the time. We would go out on these, uh, you know, walks, we called them "dope hunts," and stuff like that, where we'd do a foot search, sometimes a state police helicopter or National Guard worked with the state police and flew in a helicopter and spotted it from the air, but yeah, we found several, several -- I think the largest we found was, I think, 600 - 700 plants. Which, at that time

[interruption]

BM: We have two. No fewer than two.

BB: Yeah.

BM: Always two ATVs. You couldn't go -- the part you didn't go. You know, because that way, if nothing else, something happened, you had someone there to drag you out, or at least maybe [00:50:00] bind your wounds or, even in the event they get shot sometimes, they put booby traps out -- fish hooks at eye-level, or, you know, animal traps, you know, the spring-loaded, stuff like that. And I used to, you know, you went with two guys. If something went wrong, hopefully at least the other could drag him out or bind his wounds or help him. Two or three cases, and surprisingly, you're just -- well, a couple years ago David Alexander made a case on a couple individuals who was growing some marijuana up in the park. He [indistinguishable], identified them, tracked them back, searched for them at their house, found them at home -- they were growing marijuana in the park and mushrooms and their apartment and all kinds of stuff like that and got convictions on those. Yeah, but the marijuana was there for awhile, and we got some, I'm sure the majority, you know, some got out, but you did what you could, and then methamphetamine, of course --

BB: That's interesting to me. It just doesn't compute to me, but it the new thing, that's what people do.

BM: When the methamphetamine thing hit the scene, we started seeing, um, you know, the marijuana gardens and [indistinguishable] just poof! Almost disappeared. And in a year, they just dropped out. Now, you might kick some folks with some joints in their pocket, something like that, you know, recreational use, stuff like that, but you started a lot more prescription pill use, but methamphetamine came in and I think a lot of the marijuana operations just switched from that to the methamphetamine. And so it's just a whole new problem.

BB: So they just do pop-up labs, just out in the woods they would do it, or --

BM: Uh, let's see, we tagged, we cleaned up one at Fresh Creek Lake, we made a case on one -- we had two individuals who were trying, I think, to do a cook behind Mammoth Cave Baptist Church. Came up on one of those. And made a case on two folks who were trying to set up a lab in the Sunset Point Motor Lodge. Did a knock and talk on them, and they let us in, and we found and made a case -- seized a car and got somebody some jail time out of that one. But yeah, you get some folks with methamphetamine possession and stuff like that. But yeah, you don't see the, you know, you don't -- we didn't start seeing the 600 - 700 plant things anymore, you might find -- check with David -- maybe 20 or 30. You don't see it grown for commercial use, not up here anymore. I think the methamphetamine kind of knocked that out, because it was much, even more toxic with the one-step method to use. You didn't have to water it, you didn't have to fertilize it, protect it against deer, even have to go back and check it all the time and, you know, make sure you cut it before frost and kind of stuff. You can take your dope lab with you and set it up where ever.

BB: Mmm. Strange. Do you -- I met your grandson, right?

BM: Yes.

BB: Do you have kids -- sometimes one of the things about working in the park, sometimes people who've met in the park -- did you have a son or daughter who worked at the park?

BM: Works at the park right now.

BB: She's at the park now?

BM: Oh yes. Been at the park, works full-time now, but she started when she was in high school in interpretation as a student aid. Used to work in interpretation and now she works in the Facilities Management Division. Works as a budget analyst, budget clerk up there.

BB: Hm. How did that work in your family, about her working in the park with you? She saw you working and wanted to, did you push here, kind of like coax her into it, or --

BM: No, I never really wanted to coax here. Meant it -- she was -- she spent -- she was born, we brought her home from the hospital, we brought her home to the park residence we was living in, so she lived the first five years of her life there [00:55:00]. She remembers the tire swing out front and living in the park like that, and I think she turned around six [indistinguishable] -- I think '87 we moved here, we moved here and we've been here ever since. And, uh, it wasn't like she went to the park every day and stuff like

that, but you know, she knew I worked up there and she went to the Christmas thing and stuff like that, but she was doing -- she like theater. Theater major -- I think it was her major, I'll have to check, look at her diploma. I'm not sure what it was. Theater major at Western, so I think doing interpretation, she really liked that aspect of it, you know. Talking to folks. And so she started doing that, and she ended up doing -- before she moved on, she was doing wild cave tours twice a week. I mean, she guided more tours, more [indistinguishable] tours than I ever did when I was up there. But it never caused any conflict or something, except when she started working there I knew it could be a conflict to her, because there was nothing in the world that could keep the secret that this girl's dad is a law enforcement ranger over in there, so I pretty much told her. I said, "Unless it's something criminal, or something that is blatantly unsafe to someone, you know, don't feel like you have to come in here and tell me anything. And I'm not going to ask you anything about what goes on. I'm not going to ask you, 'What's in this division over here? What's going on?' No, I'm not going to do that, because I don't want everyone thinking you're a snitch, or you're gonna come run and tell me something. Things will be horrible for you. So unless it's something criminal or something unsafe, keep it to yourself, and I won't ask you about. And you don't ask me stuff about that." And that's pretty much always been what we've done. And it worked out well that way. And, uh, the proof is in the pudding. If something was going on over there and it didn't get back to me because it wasn't unsafe or criminal, then I think people, okay, you talk, we talk in an open manner. You know, that feels like I have to shove her out or something or they'll be afraid it'll get back to me. And they feel free to talk about here, and like I said, she pretty

much kept her end of it, unless there was something criminal or unsafe, she wouldn't tell me and I wouldn't ask, and I think that's good.

BB: The saying "bleeding green and gray," "bleed green and gray," wearing the uniform, does the uniform -- does that have something -- tell me about, is there a certain kind of camaraderie or fellowship or pride that you've taken throughout the career in wearing the flat hat, that sort of thing, was that a big --

BM: Yes, sir, but I'll be the first -- I mean, "bleeding green and gray," if someone said, "Do you bleed green and grey?" No, I'll be totally honest with you, uh, you know, have heard how I started out in the park service. You know, did not go to college to be a park ranger and stuff, I just -- right place and right time and saw that the park rangers, that seemed like a cool job and stuff like that. But as for, but I was in the Marine Corp, and uniforms, as you know, were very important when you're in the Marine Corp, so when you came out, yes, that aspect of it kind of carried on. Gonna have your shoes shined, gonna have your, you know, leather shined up, bad shine, you know, if you're going to wear that uniform, you're going to wear it right. That's the way I wanted to do it. I wanted to wear it right. When I went into work, I might come home covered in gore, mud, whatever, but I want to show up for duty and be squared away. Yep. And there was that aspect of it, uh, but the other camaraderie, especially with other park employees number one were doing the job of trying to let the park enjoy the public and get protect, protect the park from the public. You know, protect the public from the park and the park from the public, and sometimes protect the public from the public. [01:00:00] You know, so there's camaraderie in that, especially if you have, like, a -- something where someone is -

- someone on the wild cave tour, let's say, is injured or ill. Hurt. And requires evacuation, which means a bunch of rangers go down there and unless you [indistinguishable] like Henry Holman or one of the old cave rangers who'd done the wild cave tour or something, if I got a call from the shift office, "Someone injured on the wild cave tour," Kathy Proffitt would call, or Joy or someone, one of the first things I'd ask is, "Do you have someone who can lead us to them?" And, you know, they would. I said, because I can, my guys and me know the trail to get there, but if you say, "Go on down to the Fox Avenue to Grotto's Path to Lion's Head," we have to go on there and walk and find ourselves. You'll be looking for us five or six years because we'll never make it out. We don't know. So you know, what I ask someone, "Get someone to lead us there." Yeah, they would. "Got anyone to help us carry stretchers?" Yeah, they would. If it's going to be a long protracted thing, which sometimes, you know, it could be four, five, six hours depending on how bad they were, how far back they were in, you know. We would have interpretation, maintenance division, maintenance division fantastic about sending folks to help. I've seen every division in that park at one time or another working full together to save somebody's life. So, and so, yeah, if you tried to haul somebody a mile and a half over rocky terrain, you know, and uh, not just you, but work as a team, and got them out and you know, you've pulled them through here and you've got them out and got them to the trail and there's a crew of maintenance men who would say, "We've got it from here, thanks." And snatch him up and take him off, and you're just totally beat to pieces exhausted and like that, yeah, I think a lot of them. And especially, you look over at this guide who's -- thanks a lot! Because just four rangers had to do this and didn't have these other six interpreters over here willing to suit up and go down in there and get dirty,

muddy, sweaty, cut up, beat up, beat to pieces, you know, never had a one of them that would bail on you. I mean that [indistinguishable] share the misery. Yeah. Went through the worst with them. And then you got, I think, the camaraderie within the divisions, and I think the camaraderie within the ranger division, or LE division, were, was -- and I don't know, but I think maybe the tightest in the park. That's just my opinion, and if other folks wanted to argue with it, I'd argue we'd agree to disagree, but I would say to them, with all due respect and kindness to them, "You know, keep in mind, you're going to work today and we respect what [indistinguishable] each of our mission may be. You may be going to work today and you're gonna be guiding a cave tour, or you may be going to work today and cutting grass or something like that. My guys are going to work today, they may die. They may die in a violent manner. Not just from a car wreck or something like that, they may die because somebody else has made an attempt to kill them, and that's something they live with every day when they put on that gun." Did it for 31 years, and that's the mindset you need to get into. You and everyone else in there that's wearing a pistol. You may die today just because of the simple fact that somebody's got it in their mind to try to do something, and you have to stop them, and you know, they're going to try to shoot you. So that aspect of it is pretty much, that's certainly a mindset that you get that's pretty much within that circle of people who have to do that.

BB: Mmmhm.

BM: And if you're not up to getting in that mindset, or you feel super uncomfortable with that, then you need to find another line of work. You know, and we've had some folks who come in, or work -- of course, not naming any names at all -- but we've had some

folks who've come in and, you know, after doing this, you know, either for a while, they decided this wasn't the line of work for them to do. And I respect them for that. You know. I said, "Look, you will never, if you don't want to do this line of work [01:05:00], you don't feel comfortable with it, I respect you for having the guts to come up and make that decision. Because I'll tell you something, there's an awful lot of things, lines of work out there that I would walk up and do a day and say, "I can't do this." You know, it's just, you know, it's not like a badge of honor or something like that to, you know, to do this when you're not suited to it. I tell a lot of people, "If you don't like this line of work, you don't feel comfortable about it, unhappy about especially, find something else to do. It's not worth [indistinguishable] yourself or risking somebody else's life. Different strokes, different folks. You know. If we all did one thing, we'd all just be one thing, you know, we need people who do different things. But at the same time, I mean, you know, I enjoyed it. I was fortunate. I enjoyed it. I really liked the variety of it. Even though law enforcement was a great -- what you did most of the time, because you'd write more speeding tickets than you do, you know, cave rescues, thank goodness -- but I really liked the variety of it. One thing about it that I think you had to learn that was different from the interp side of it was that in interpretation, whether you were working a cave tour or the information desk or something, people usually, they're welcome to see you, because you're going to give them some information, take them on a cave tour, or something. Something you learn real quick is when you go to the dark side [laughs] Joy Lyons [indistinguishable] -- when you go to the dark side, of the park side, the law enforcement, the step-children side, we call it, when you go to the dark side over there -- when you pull up in that car and get out with that gun belt and then put the Stetson on, 90% of the time,

these folks aren't happy you're there. And so, you learn that, you know, by the first month. You know, because, "Oh wait a minute here!" "Now, I'm not here to take you on a cave tour, I'm here to take you to jail because you're drunk, or you know, you're stealing rocks out of the cave, or causing a disturbance, or I'm here to write you a ticket or something like that." Now, of course, if someone's sick or lost in the cave or lost in the back-country or what, they're glad to see you then. So most of the time when you roll up on the dark side, people aren't going to be happy to see you, and I'll tell the other guys that. Rolling up here, these folks are not going to be happy to see you, so when you get out of the car, be ready for that. Kind of like, like they were deputy sheriff and state trooper and everything else. There's a lot of things -- you have to put that hat on, even though it's the same, you know. It's a Stetson that you put on when you go up to talk to someone at a campsite, or answer a question, and just -- I don't want to make it seem that just because we get in a patrol car and you roll it around, that, okay, I'm just the police. Of course not! It's because if it was just that, that would be a horrible job, if that was all that you were doing all the time. But, get out of the car and walk into the visitors center, even if you've got that gun on, people will still come up and talk to you. "Where's the best place to back-country camp?" "Well, how long you going to stay for? What're you looking for?" Stuff like that. And you know, that's refreshing. A lot you get a chance to do that, oh, walk through the campground on foot patrol, and a lot the time, people come up and say hi, share their supper with you or something like that, and that's kind of a break. And I, a lot of the time, yeah. Get out and do that, because after you do it for a while, you don't want to get into that just, "Yeah, okay, I'm getting out of the car, I have a gun on." It's very easy to get that, you know, stone face and stuff like that. I'm not saying,

"Boy, take your gun off and lay it on the info desk where you're talking to people," always keep situational awareness of what's going on, but you get a chance to get out and talk to the people and just tell them, "Well, yeah, hotel's over here. This trail over here's a great place. Make sure you take water. It's kind of steep over there." Get a chance to do a little interpretation, tell them this is why the way it is. You all may not like it, but, you know, I don't write the laws. We don't write them, we just enforce them, and this is the way it is. This is where these trees are, this is the trail to walk, uh, most of the time it's "restaurant's over there, going to the visitor's center, hang a left." Yeah. [01:10:00] But it was a great job. I couldn't have imagined it -- blessed. I'm not ashamed to say blessed to have the job I had for 31 years. I can -- for me, it was great. I wouldn't change a thing about it.

BB: That was actually, I was going to have your sum it up -- something like that that. Do you have any last words after these last words? Anything you want to share? It's been a great interview.

BM: Uh, it was a great job and so forth. I will say as a park service, the park service as a whole -- not Mammoth Cave, but Mammoth Cave had the same problem -- you know, and I don't want to gripe or whine or anything like that. But I want to be truthful. What an opportunity this is. Any problem that the park service had usually had to deal with money. You know. I think the park service, it tries to be a grand organization, but I don't think it [indistinguishable]. For 20 years now, 30, 30 years, I saw a slow decline. Sometimes a rapid decline in times, certain fiscal years, in funding and personnel.

BB: Insufficient allocation of funds.

BM: Exactly. Exactly right. Yeah. And for 20 years, yeah, we just bit the bullet and said, "We'll do more with less." And Patrick Reed, he was a superintendent, was the first one who came in and said, "No. We're not going to do this anymore. We're going to tell anyone who asks, whether it be the region, or Washington, or whoever, that we can't do more with less anymore. We're not going to do more with less. We're going to do what we can with what we have." Which I, I applaud him for that. But it, uh, but still, it's always been a sort -- I don't think the park service is making money. They needed to do the mission they're asked. You know. Never had a dividend in 31 years I worked there. It was always sort of coming down. But, uh, that aside, off my soapbox on that one right there, uh, I couldn't imagine having a better job.

BB: It's hard to do more with less. But, there's probably a piece of pride in doing -- you were able to pull together and financially, increasingly financially hard times to do a lot of really great stuff, too, right?

BM: Oh yes, because that was going to be our mission. Look, we're especially -- in ranger duty, we took a perverse pride in it, saying, "Okay, we got handed this, we're going to get it done. We don't have the -- really money and man power -- we're, we're the rangers. This is the ranger division. We're going to find a way to do it. It may cost, it might cost us a boatload of overtime, you know, whatever, we're going to find a way to get it done because we're not going to fail." You know. Maybe that was foolish, hard-headed at times, but like I said, yeah, we found a way to get it done and we were proud of

it. You know? It might've just been four of us and a pick-up truck and somehow we'd figure out how to haul eight people to safety or something like that, but yeah, we'd get it done. It was great. I was proud, proud of the people and the job we did, and glad I had the opportunity to work there. It was fantastic. Wouldn't change a thing. Didn't look at it as a career. Looked at it as a venture, and it was great.

BB: Thanks, Brad.

BM: You're welcome.