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Interview with Joe Duvall (FA 1098)

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**Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription**

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

Field ID and name: #0002; Joe Duvall interview

Interviewee: William (Joe) Duvall

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: 12/2/2013

Location: Mammoth Cave National Park, KY

Others Present: n/a

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Context:

Technical Considerations:

Transcription prepared by: Jennie Boyd

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: There we go. We got it rolling.

JOE DUVALL: Now, I, I smile a lot, just normally.

BB: Me too.

JD: That really knocked me in the army, when I was in the army.

BB: What are you []

JD: Duvall, what in the hell are laughing about? Why is this so damned funny? I just smile a lot sir. (laughter)

BB: I'm just happy to be alive.

JD: That's right. Happy to be here. (laughter)

BB: How you doing? You alright?

JD: I'm fine.

BB: Today is December 2, 2013. And I'm here at Mammoth Cave National Park working on the Ranger Lore project for the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress has given a grant, the Archie Green Fellowship, to do a number of interviews. I'm working with my partner, John Kay, who's doing a similar interview series in Indiana with state park workers. And I'm really concentrating here in Kentucky on, on federal park workers. And really a lot of the interviews will be done around Mammoth Cave. So, I said we're here with Joe Duvall. Joe Duvall has been with the park for quite some time. And we're going to talk to him about his working life and see which kinds of ways we go. Joe, tell me a little bit about, did you, did you grow up in this area or—

JD: Yes, I was born in Barren County. It's an adjoining county. In fact, some of the park came from Barren County. I was born out in the country. I had a midwife and I asked my dad, "How much did it cost you?" and he said, "The going fee was ten dollars." So she came and stayed with me one whole day. August 24, 1936.

BB: So, so you've been connected to this, physically, to this landscape for a long period of time and, you know, we're going to be talking about rangers, but tell me about your growing up. Did you, were you connected to the cave, from, were you exploring it when you were a kid or....

JD: Well, nearby Mammoth Cave, privately owned property, we boys liked to go in—we didn't have girls. Girls weren't spelunkers yet, you know. Boys, we'd go in sometimes on privately owned property. I remember one instance. A gentleman had a cistern out back and the water drained out of it, so he asked us spelunking boys to investigate. So we went in the bottom of that cistern, and there's a nice cave there. And it was never opened to the public, but a local found out about it and went in with an axe and broke all the formations and sold rock on the side of the road. So, yes, we, we did a lot of little small caves on farmers' property, you know, that did not merit commercialization. So we, you didn't never tell your mom where you're going. "I'm going to stay all night with John." And John's going to stay all night with Joe. So sometimes we'd spend the time in the cave. But you didn't tell too many people.

BB: Right. So did you learn, did you have brothers and sisters that were in, involved in—

JD: No, I was the oldest in my family. I had a younger brother and a younger sister and my dad, we moved to Park City in 1946, and my dad had a feed store, fertilizer and coal. So I was just nine miles away and Mammoth Cave was *the* place. So I grew up in Park City, went to high school there, and had a paper route at age 12. And Diamond Cavern, I had a friend that worked there, and the lady that worked there, and they said, "Will you come to work

for us?" I said, "Surely. If you'll train me." So the lady was very attractive and training was a pleasure. So, I went out and trained with Mary Jane for one day and then the next day I began guiding at Diamond Cavern, age 15. And the boss said, "You're a talker, Joe, so I'm going to use you on the road some." So using you on the road meant that you were a capper. You solicited business from people that were in their automobile heading toward Mammoth Cave. And you tried to persuade them to stop at Diamond Cavern.

BB: Where did that name come from? The cap-, capper name?

JD: We wore caps. The early guides at Mammoth Cave, before we got the—

BB: Does it work?

UNIDENTIFIED: Um-um. Not video.

JD: Oh.

UNIDENTIFIED: What's going on here? Yeah, we're not recording. Audio's recording, but not video's not.

BB: Good thing Joe is a talker. Or I'd, otherwise, I'd have to rewind him.

JD: Yeah. I did a cave trip one time from the University of Virginia. The whole cave trip, and the guy came out and he was so boasting, so bragging. But he said, "I'm sorry, Joe, I forgot to turn the camera on."

BB: (laughs)

UNIDENTIFIED: Alright, now we're good. See. That wasn't rolling.

BB: Okay. Alright. My fault. Well, I'm here, it's December, December 2, 2013, and I'm here with the Kentucky Folklife Program. We're conducting a project for the Library of Congress. It's called Ranger Lore. I'm looking at some, some of the ranger traditions, the working traditions of some of these folks that I've known for, some of them for some time here at Mammoth Cave. My counterpart, John Kay, is at, with Traditional Arts Indiana. He's looking at state park rangers up there. And we just have a wonderful group of, of different people we're talking to. And today I'm with Joe Duvall, who's been with the park for quite some time. He's been, done many things and we're going to talk to him about his life in the park, in this region. And tell me a little bit about growing up here. I know that we talked before the interview, you know, you've done everything from having a paper route—you're from the area, right?

JD: Yes, that's correct. I live now at Park City. That's exit 48 on the interstate. And my family moved there in '46. My father had a feed store, grocery store—I'm sorry, a feed store and a coal store. We sold coal and fertilizer and cow feed at the store. And of course, as a young man, I had a paper route in Park City. Park City was about 500 people, and I delivered "The Park City Daily News." Actually, of course it came from Bowling Green. But it was named the Park, Bowl-, Bowling Green was the Park City. And they named it "The Park City Daily News." And I heard about a, a job at Diamond Cavern. I was fifteen at the time and interviewed for the job, went to work there the next day. And they trained me for one day and by, they, there was a young man and a nice-looking young lady that trained me. And I started guiding at Diamond Cavern. Diamond Cavern is a very scenic and beautiful cave. It lies just off the interstate presently. At that day it was off 31-W. Thirty-one West. Just a mile and a half in. So I really enjoyed that, guiding people through Diamond Cavern. We got to keep our tips, and we made nickels and dimes and quarters and half-dollars. I got twenty dollars a week in the summer. And when I just worked in the daytime, I got three dollars a day. And one day, a gentleman came by, and said, "Thank you, Joe. I had a wonderful trip." And he put a folded bill in my hand. So, I went to the restroom and opened it up, and it was a ten dollar bill. And ten dollars was a lot of money to me then. So from the restroom window, I watched the parking lot until he left. I thought perhaps he made a

mistake and didn't mean to give me that much money. So I was greedy. I wanted to be sure I got to keep that ten dollars. So my boss there discovered that I loved to talk, and he liked my voice, and he liked my attitude. And he said, "I'm going to put you on the road and make you a capper." The guides at Mammoth Cave, when they first were transferred to the federal government and a few years prior, they wore caps, like a truck driver's cap, with a bill. So what we tried to do was dress like them. I wore a grey shirt and a grey pair of pants and a tie and, and a truck driver's cap. And we had this stand, when you came off of 31-W, halfway out to Diamond Cavern, about a half mile out. And we had a big sign there, says, free cave information. So a lot of folks didn't plan. They didn't know where they were. So that caught a lot of people. They stopped. Now, if you didn't stop, I had a badge on my cap, had a badge on my uniform. And I would come out there and write something down on a piece of paper, as if I were taking their number from the license tag. So, we, many times they would come back. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to go by you." And I would make this speech, something like this. "You're going to Mammoth Cave?" "Yes." "Well at Mammoth Cave, you'll have to wait. The crowd's over there. And some of it is lit with lantern and sometimes the guides are really boresome presentations. Right down the road here is Diamond Cave. We can get you in, get you out. You don't have to wait over twenty to thirty minutes. It only costs two dollars. It's very beautiful. It's all electrical lit, and the guides there are educated. And I can sell you the ticket here, or drive down a half mile." So surprisingly I got quite a bit of business. So I took down their license plate and they had a guy at Diamond Cavern that, on the front parking lot, and he took down their license plate. The boss wanted to know if I were getting him business because they would record the vehicle that came in. So all the time I worked there for about six summers and on weekends, I said, I want to guide at Mammoth Cave. So at that particular time, they didn't hire many people in the summer, and those that were hired were veterans, World War II veterans and the Korean War. And of course, as you probably know, they got a five and ten point bonus when they took the test. So I heard about a job at the Mammoth Cave hotel, so I came out here. And Mr. Demumbran said, "Yes. I, I'll give you a job. And you can start Monday. I pay—" I think it was fifty-five cents an hour. "And you'll be working the back bar making sandwiches. So I, while I was here, I applied for a Mammoth Cave job too, and took

the test, but I got beat out. I'm not anti-veteran. I'm a veteran too, but, you know, when they get five or ten points added, you know, you don't have much of a chance on the test, really. So Mr. Demumbran said, "I'll see you Monday." So on the way out, there's a little booth there, and they had a boat ride on Green River, called Miss Green River. And they sold tickets. And I knew the gentleman who owned that. Bob McDaniel. And he said, "Joe, what are you doing here today." I said, "I just took a job at the Mammoth Cave Hotel at the back bar." He said, "I wish I had known it. I'm hiring people." And I said, "Would you hire me, Bob?" He said, "I surely would." I said, "How much do I make?" He said, "I'd start you out a dollar an hour." I said, "When can I go to work?" He said, "Monday." So that's my first step into working at Mammoth Cave. Selling tickets for the boat. And he found out I could talk. So he said, "I want you to do some boat interpretation too." So I started working for them in the summer, a dollar an hour, selling boat tickets. And then the next summer I applied for a job. And the chief guide, Parker Ritter, was a great friend of mine. And he would come by, and he says, "I'm sorry, Joe, but the veterans beat you out." That went on for five summers. But the sixth summer, Parker came by and said—1961—he said, "Joe, I got a job for you. You'll be a trailer at Mammoth Cave." And—

BB: What does that mean?

JD: That means you'll be walking behind. They were a GS2. Guides were GS4s. So, but it was a step in the door. And he said, "You'll have to have a uniform and we'll notify United Tailors in Louisville and they'll have you one back here in three days. And we'll give you some old hats. And so on and so forth, so you can start—" I believe he said, I think he said, maybe in, next week, the next week. So I told the man that owned the boat, Bob, I said, "Bob, I won't be coming back." He said, "I understand, Joe. You've been waiting for that." So I became a trailer at Mammoth Cave. But they found out I loved to talk, so after the first two days I started guiding. Management, they knew that, so they got the guide's rate for a GS2. Am I talking too much?

BB: No. No. No, not at all.

JD: (laughs) Oh, okay.

BB: I'm, I'm, I'm enraptured with this.

JD: So, so that was my first, that, 1961, June, I started guiding at Mammoth Cave in the summer.

BB: Um-hm.

JD: And now, I, I had a job at Temple Hill in '59 to finish the year teaching, and I found out that the teach—there was a teaching job open at Caverna, and that was much closer to home, and they paid more money. So I went up there and interviewed, and I got that job in September 1959. See I'd, January of 1959 through May, I taught at Temple Hill. I got out of the Army in December of '58. So I took the job at Caverna. And I was there in '59 and one of my outstanding students was Denny Doyle. He played for the New York, he played for the Boston Red Sox in the World Series. And in '71-'72, he had two twin brothers and they were my students. And one of those played for the Yankees in the World Series. So little Caverna had some outstanding baseball players, to my pleasure.

BB: So were you a seasonal employee? Is that what your title was?

JD: Seasonal. I was a seasonal employee. Yes.

BB: And you continued to teach.

JD: Yes.

BB: And you taught for many years.

JD: Yes, I taught for thirty years. But I worked here in the summer. It was sort of SOP, you know. The day after school you came to work here. And back in those days, Caverna, we didn't start school til the Monday after Labor Day. So Labor Day was my last day here and I started teaching, and anytime I was, I was sort of intermittent, they could call me anytime. On Saturdays, Sunday, and I would come in. Because to be frank with you, I needed the money. I needed the money. Yeah.

BB: Um-hm.

JD: I don't remember just exactly how much I got paid as a GS2, but I think it was around \$2.20 or \$2.30 an hour, which was quite a bit of raise from a dollar an hour working on the boat, you know. But I did get, I think my last year I made \$1.50 on the boat. He gave me a couple of raises.

BB: Hm. So how is it, tell me about, so tell me about guiding. It's, you went right into being a trailer, trailing, to actually doing the guiding and interpretation.

JD: Yes. Yes.

BB: Was there a process about learning that kind of...

JD: Well—

BB: Here.

JD: The older guides here, they were great people, but very little formal education. And there was a lot of jokes, you know. I love them all, but they thought they had a successful trip, you know, if they told jokes and the people laughed and, and—they didn't know much geology. They didn't know a lot of history. They didn't have a lot of formal education. They were grandfathered in from the Mammoth Cave Association. And they were great guys in

their time. They taught me a lot. I was sort of, with a college degree, you know, a little bit of an outsider. But they made comments like me, like this, “Joe, if, if I make a mistake or grammatical error, tell me after the trip, I want, I want your help.” So I helped those guys every time I could.

BB: You’d gone to Western, didn’t you?

JD: That’s right. See? I, I was a college degree man, you know. In, in my home, I was the first person to graduate from high school, much less college, you know. My dad had a sixth grade, my mom had a seventh grade education, so, you know. My parents were proud.

BB: Oh, I bet they were. Yeah. Absolutely.

JD: Um-hm. So it was a great experience working with those older fellows. I learned a lot and we came back at night and went in places of the cave where we didn’t go on the guided tours. And they explained this to me, and they, they gave me the history, you know. Gave me a good background. And I was a presenter. I had all this experience of guiding at Diamond Cavern and working on the boat and the capper and—you see, when I worked for the boat ticket office which solicited people too—if you came by, “Here’s a boat schedule. We have a nice boat ride on Green River. And this is our schedule and we see animals in the park. Most likely we’ll see deer and we see snakes and turtles and what have you.” And we did one thing, I might mention this. We had an idea to attract deer. We went down the river six miles. And I said, “Mr. Nash,” He was one of the owners too, Captain Nash, I said, “We need to bring some apples and throw them out of the boat going down and coming back we’ll see deer.” So we did that. But the park service found out about it that, that, you’re luring animals. Stop that. So okay, we stopped that. (laughs)

BB: So take me through a typical day when you first, maybe when you first started guiding. How many trips did you have? Did they work you harder than they do today?

JD: A typical day, I'd, I'd come in, the old-timers came in early. I had a late shift, you know. I came in at nine or ten. The early shifts and Saturday and Sunday were, they were reserved for the old-timers, you know. Senior-, seniority, you know, pays a little bit. So I'd come in, let's say at nine o'clock and we had an Echo River at nine, at eleven, one and three. So probably I'd do the Echo River at nine. And I'd either trail it or guide it. And now back in those days you had to make a few torches. We threw a torch at Methodist Church. So I'd make two or three torches and soak them in kerosene and wrap them in a bag and put them in my pocket if I were going to trail. That was a trailer's job. Sometimes just hold them in my hand because that kerosene would smell terrible. So I would trail the, the Echo River trip, three hours, three miles, and I would turn the lights out. The cave was crudely lit with, looked like a used car lot, you know, a bulb here and a bulb there. And yeah, I went along and turned the lights out. At Methodist Church, I would throw the, the trailer would throw the torch, take the torch and light it and put it up on pulpit rock and just listen. And some of the old guides would say, "Now you're a trailer, Joe. So your job is to listen. You don't talk unless I ask you. Now if something comes up and I ask you, why, you talk. So you're to be seen and not heard. The guide, I'll take care of the trip. We don't guide from the back, we guide from the front." Now when I got back, I'd have lunch and maybe I'd do another Echo River. That's a pretty tough day. Two three hour trips, yeah. And, you know, after two or three days, I would guide the Echo River. Now if I didn't guide the Echo River, we would probably do the Mammoth Dome trip. Now we would make what is the historic trip today. And we'd do three of those. That's two hours each. That's six hours. And I'd either guide that trip or trail that trip. Now if I didn't do that, we'd do a Frozen Niagara. Now at that time, the Frozen Niagara was an hour and a half. And we'd do three and four of those. Either walking in the front, guiding or walking in the back. Now it's sort of SOP here, standard operating procedure, if you had twenty-five or more you have a trailer. You went alone if you had twenty-four. So sometimes I'd go alone. I really liked that because, you know, the old-timer in the back, they always found things you were doing wrong, you know, when you got back. "Now Joe, you talked too long here. And Joe—" for instance, one of the guys, he would shine the flashlight in my eyes and shine it on (laughs) my watch, you know. That meant you're talking too long, Joe, get out of here. So I love to talk, you know.

BB: Yeah.

JD: And I would answer all the questions, and I love my job. I love Mammoth Cave. I love teaching too. But I, always in May, I look forward, man, I'll be at Mammoth Cave. No homework, no papers to grade. And at 4:30 or 6:30 I will come home. And you know, don't worry about school, no, no parental calls. But along about September, man, I'll be glad to go back to school. I'm tired of the crowds and I'll come home at three o'clock and have time to mow the yard and—

BB: So you enjoyed that—

JD: Oh, I, it, it—

BB: Change of seasons—

JD: And change of pace. Change of jobs. Basically, it's doing the same thing, you know, but—

BB: A little bit of—

JD: But you've got a change of environment, and you've got adult people, and they're a lot more appreciative sometimes than students, you know. And all of us like recognition, you know. I got recognition, you know, "Good job, Joe." I got letters and all of us liked that.

BB: Yeah. How about, I've been talking to some other employees about, what's the change over time, you know, your co-workers or how many trips that you would guide in there. Did you have more? Did you increasingly have to do less? How about your colleagues? How about maybe women that are working here? Did that, you know, you've been here for quite some time, so I just think you really in-, you have a lot of insight into that change.

JD: Well, when I first came, women did not go in the cave. Women did not go in the cave. It was a man's job. And one of the excuses was they didn't believe husbands liked their wives going in the cave with other guides, you know. Of course, we had plenty of chaperones, you know. (laughs) And so women sold tickets, but the people in the hiring and firing offices didn't consider ladies as guides. Rachel Wilson was one of the early ones from Edmonson County that was a woman guide. Yeah. And blacks, when this became a national park, they didn't transfer any blacks in to be guides. There were eighteen people, and I had the pleasure of working with sixteen of those people when I came a little bit later, two of them had passed on. But that was a great experience for me too. But—

BB: The original guides or the original black guides?

JD: The original guides.

BB: Uh-huh.

JD: Now black guides didn't come for a long, long time. We had some seasonals from Bowling Green, I remember. One of them is director today at Warren RECC. He's a great friend of mine. But in the early days, no blacks and no ladies. It was a man's job. Even I was, we had about four out of those fourteen that would not let me guide. They said, "You are a trailer. You don't guide my trips. I'm guiding my trips." I don't know whether they didn't want to recognize me or they might have been a little jealous or, or you know, but I didn't guide when I went with certain people.

BB: Did you have to prove yourself with those people or were they just, you're not—

JD: Well, you, you didn't prove yourself ever. I worked with some ten, fifteen years and didn't prove yourself. We had an all day trip up until '65. When I came in '61, for four years we did an all day trip. And a friend of mine who worked in the summer, we loved that trip.

So every day we could, we volunteered for the all day trip. I guided halfway, to the snowball room, three and a half hours, and he guided three and a half hours back. We came at nine, went at ten, we got back at five, off at 5:30, and that's all we did, the all day trip. Of course you walked seven miles and you talked for three hours and a half. But the old-timers couldn't get over how well we liked that trip. Of course, you know, we were young whipper-snappers and we loved to talk and loved to do the all day trip. But after '65, they stopped that. I don't know just exactly, maybe maintenance, they had to maintain seven miles of cave and a lot of people didn't want to walk seven miles and, and—see, while I'm doing that, my partner and I, we could do three of those historic, or maybe four Niagaras, so you could take care of a lot more people if they did shorter trips too.

BB: Did you have electricity all the way back to the, to the Snow Dome?

JD: No, we used lanterns. From Echo River to, back to Snowball Room.

BB: Snowball room?

JD: Um-hm. It's unusual. They decided to wire that in 1966. And then they decided the same year to cancel that trip. So in 1991, for our fiftieth anniversary—would that be fifty? No, what was, what, nineteen-ninety—yeah, 1941 a national park. Nineteen-ninety-one, so management said, "We're going to do five all day trips. Joe, we want you to do one." So we got to do the all day trip. I had eighty people. And I really enjoyed that, fifty years later, you know.

BB: Wow.

JD: And we got to use those lights, but—

BB: So how is that changed, you learned a lot from, from some of the old-timers, as you call them. How about the people that you've interacted with over the course of your time here? The younger people?

JD: Yeah.

BB: What, what are some of the things that you've always consciously or, or thought about over time that you've taught them that you're very proud of, or that you've—

JD: Yeah.

BB: You know.

JD: Well, these things you don't learn in college. Number one, when I, I'm a position man. I taught them to get into position when you talk to a group, where you can be seen, and where you can be heard, you know. So I did a lot of positioning work. I trained those people for a long, long time when they came here new. They were unaware, a lot of them, you know. And number two, when you're walking with a group, don't just talk to two or three people up front. We have, you may have a hundred people and they say, "What's that guide telling them? I missed out on that." If you got something to say, you have your whole group there. And you know, just fundamentals like this that they didn't learn in college. And I know they learned grammar and they learned how to organize my speech and how to outline my program. But there's so many little things that they just didn't learn. So I'm bragging a little bit now. I'm a bragger, okay? So I taught them some of the essentials, you know. If you're talking to a group of one hundred, it's not like speech class, you know. If you've got a hundred people here and I have talked to—my record's 186 at one time—so you've got to be in a position. If I were out there, could I hear what he said? If I were out there, could I see him? And some of the basics. I think I did a favor for those folks that came in. And I'm not, I'm bragging yet, but watch me. Do it like I do it. I'm not saying that's the best way. If you have suggestions for me, I'll take that too, you know. Just last summer, I

had this lady, I had seventy-two fourth graders. And after two weeks I got this email from her. She, she was all, "Joe you did such a great job. My children. And I'm going to send a copy to the superintendent. P.S. You made four glaring grammatical errors and you'd be much better if you improved those." So I wrote her back a letter, "Thanks for listening so closely, and I will do my best to improve those for you and for all the people I talk to in the future." So, you know, things like this.

BB: It goes both ways, doesn't it?

JD: Surely. Surely. Yeah. I made the mistake and I was glad that she was there. Um-hm.

BB: So you have, you've developed lots of relationships—

JD: Oh, yes.

BB: Relationships with people.

JD: Oh, yes.

BB: Can you share, you know, we talked about people working, some of the, some of the working lives and maybe the jokes or the insider jokes, that you can share.

JD: Yes.

BB: Certainly there's a lot of those things that you keep on the inside.

JD: Yeah.

BB: But what are some of the, are there some fun things that you remember that are maybe more of a traditional, maybe there's a rite of passage or something that a, that a ranger might have to go through.

JD: Yes, yeah. Well, the traditional uniform joke at cave guides, when I came here. "Right now we're at Rotunda. We're a hundred and forty feet underground. A normal funeral nowadays is three thousand. If the cave were to collapse, where in the world could you be buried any deeper, any cheaper?" So you know, that, I went to Carlsbad and heard that joke too. Yeah. So you know, I, I don't like that joke. I don't like that joke at all. I, I never tell that, but all the guides, like I told you earlier you know, the guides, they had a great trip if people laughed. And they sometimes would, their trips, they had the flashlight and they would show them, you know, this is John Houchens, and he's in the cave, and maybe a gypsum formation looks like a hunter. And they show them little images on the wall, you know, and pick out things and they would have a successful trip. Like I said they didn't know much geology. I didn't know much geology. So I copied a little bit from these summer people that came because many of those people had degrees in geology. So it was a learning situation for me too. As a cave guide, you're a number one plagiarist. You know, if you hear something, boy, that, that sounds good. I want to tell that, do that next time. Well it's a trade off, you know. I, I like that, I like his method, and I'll tell you, "I like your method and I'm going to steal that from you." "Okay, Joe, I probably stole it from somebody else." So we're all plagiarists, you know. If we hear something that we like, that would make our program better.

BB: Right.

JD: One, one new, one new guy worked here for a few years and when he got to Rotunda with his thirty or forty or fifty, he would stand behind them. And the first time I went with him, you know, I said, name was Bill, I said, "Bill, I'm doing this because I love you, but the people you're standing, you're behind the people, you're not making good reference to them. You should be in front of the people. I know you can't have eye contact, but you can

turn your head as if you did have eye contact so they would get the impression you're talking to them." So he said, "I'm going to try that next trip." So he tried it. "Guess what, Joe? I liked that. Thank you so much."

BB: He just didn't have anybody to tell him.

JD: That's right. And maybe, maybe they weren't brave enough to tell him, you know. Now, you know, I've got to be pretty brave to tell you that you're doing something wrong. "You're a know-it-all, Joe. I've been doing that for forty years. I'm not going to change because this young guy from college told me to change." And you know, we, we got to be an actor too, you know. Shakespeare says we're all actors, you know. We are, aren't we? So I, I enjoyed helping people like that. And I think the, the people that they talk with, they get the benefits too, you know. If you have a better program they're going to enjoy it more. If you have geologists in the group, they're going to enjoy a little geology. If you have historians, they're going to enjoy a little history, you know. And you got to have a little humor too. I like a little humor along the way. And I like this too: when you present things, you know, don't read it, don't act as if you're reading it, you know. You present it as if you're speaking, you know. You're giving your inaugural address. Give it formal. Add a little humor. Like, here's something I do. On my cave trips, we have oil. Try not to touch the rock. When you touch the rock, you discolor it. So on a cave trip, we touch two things, handrails and another person if they agree. That's all the touching that we'll do. See, they get the point. Some of the rocks are going to be a little bit low. If you happen to hit one of those rocks and you want to name it, give it a nice name.

BB: One moment please.

UNIDENTIFIED: We've reached our—

BB: Forty minutes? No, thirty minutes?

JD: Am I talking too much?

BB: Not at all.

UNIDENTIFIED: No, you're golden.

BB: It's just this equipment. It's—

JD: Oh, okay. Okay.

BB: [] recording. So—

JD: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED: Keep going. It will cut off at a certain point.

BB: So you actually, going back to that, we just, it just stopped for a moment. You, you used the humor some of the old-timers did, but you used it in a way that's—

JD: Yes, and, and, and to insert it in interpretation. Like people remember humor, you know, more than anything in the world. When you come back, for instance, if you're walking to the mats, you know, I get by with this. I tell them, you know, it's an extra added attraction to walk through these mats, they're treated and your soles will be cleansed. You'll go home with cleansed soles. S-O-L-E-S. (laughs) See, they'll remember that.

BB: Is that for the bats?

JD: It's for the bats. Right.

BB: I haven't been in since that.

JD: Okay. See, we have treated mats. Really, it's just Woolite. So what we do, we, we wash the soles of your shoes so they, none of the fungus will spread. But if you approach it, or, you know, what if you come up and say, "Well, we got to walk through this mat over here. I don't like my shoes to be messed up either, but we got to do it, so okay, line up and do it." See, that didn't, you didn't get that, did you? I mean you got a negative impression, didn't you? But if you approach it, you know, make it fun. Life's fun.

BB: So, I think one of the special things talking to you is, you know, you remember having lived in this region growing, growing up here, being an interpretive kind of fellow, but also seeing the change and, and what different people come into this job. I think that's one of the things that intrigued me about your job.

JD: Um-hm.

BB: The ranger's job, is so many people come into it. Can you tell me what makes a good ranger. And, and, and yeah, just that. What, what makes a good ranger?

JD: Um-hm. Well I think number one, sometime or other you have seen a park ranger and you've been impressed. I want to be one of those. So you have to want to be, rather than I have to be, okay. I want to be. So sometime when you're young, you know, you've been impressed by the hat, by the speech. I was. I was. I saw a park ranger: I want to be one of those someday, you know. But I want to be a teacher too. So really I had the best of two worlds. So, number two, I think if you have a degree in geology, it goes right along with my profession, you know. And, or if you have a degree in history or maybe I'm a, have a degree in speech, you know. It goes right along with, I'm trained to be a park ranger. And it's a profession that's highly respected. Sometimes, I want to be a ranger because of they're all nice and informative. I know very few rangers that have ever been arrested for a crime, you know. And they're highly respected. A park ranger, you know, they're respected about as much as a preacher. Seriously. By the uniform, you know. And it's an honor to wear that

hat. And that's what I want to be. And I can further my purpose in life by sharing the education I have, the knowledge I have and my love of the park service and the love of the park ranger. So it, all those are good combinations, I think. And these people come in summer, they've been teaching, most of our seasonals, you know, are in education. And I think it goes along hand-in-hand, you know. It's a teaching job, that interpretation. It's a teaching job. And, and so they get to further their teaching experience. They learn something here that will help them in their classroom, when they get back to the classroom, you know. Well, I picked this up at Mammoth Cave and it works. I'm going to try that in my classes. Or vice versa. I do this at school. I'm going to try it here. It might work. You get my point?

BB: It's all interpretation.

JD: It's all interpretation. Right. Uh-huh. And motivation and, you know, keeping their attention. It's all the same thing. Working the crowd. Positioning yourself, you know. Preparation. We got to prepare. You know, you just don't open your books and say, "Today, read page fif-, sixty-five." You don't go in the cave and say, "Y'all have any questions, I'm here." You don't do that, you know. Did I take too long?

BB: No. So the uniform is, is very imp-, it is, you're right, it's an impressive—

JD: Yes.

BB: Were there certain regulations or things that have, and have those changed over time?

JD: Well this is, this is a, a great benefit of the, coming early. Those first sixteen guys I worked with, they loved this uniform. And they had their shoes shined every day. And they had, I have my uniforms dry cleaned. I believe in having a—I'm bragging again now—but I believe in having a sharp, nice uniform, you know. You can look at a person's dress, and some people impress you by their dress, positively, and some impress you negatively by

their dress, you know. So, they took pride in their uniform. And even if they didn't have the money to have it dry cleaned, you know, they pressed it. Their wife pressed it, they pressed it, they had the shoes shined, they had a crease in their pants, they had a crease in their shirt. Now, of course, the military crease's built in. The, the government found out, hey, that looks nice. Let's order these shirts already creased and pressed. So uniforms—

BB: Do you pay for them?

JD: No, we get a uniform allowance and it—maintenance, we pay for maintenance, and to be frank with you, that's one of my tax-deductibles. If you wear a uniform that's not street clothes and you maintain that, you can deduct that on your long form taxes. But we get an ample uniform allowance of, if something is ragged a little bit, you know, I just put it back or give it to somebody. I can tear this off and give it to some guy that maybe needs a shirt, works on a farm. Or my hat, I take the hat band off and my brother-in-law is a farmer and he uses that hat in the summer, you know. That's permissible. I don't like to wear my hat, you know, if it's got perspiration on it or, you know, it's faded with the sun or it's limberjack and, and I think most importantly, we set examples to these other young people come on here. I'm bragging again, but sometimes Joy would say "Look at Joe's uniform. Dress like him tomorrow." You know, I, that really makes you feel good too. But you're setting the example.

BB: I wanted to go back to something you talked about with, you talked about 31-W and, you know, there's Highway 65—

JD: Um-hm.

BB: Coming in over time too. And I wanted to talk, and then you talked about being a solicitor and trying to get people to come to your cave before you worked here. So there was a bit of tension between national park folks and private caves. How did that change

after Highway 65. And I can't, can you, can you lead me through what year that, that was and how that changed, did that change with auto tourism, did that change over time?

JD: Well, it was, it was completed in '67-'68 and of course, prior to that, most people came to Mammoth Cave from Cave City. That was Highway 70. Now Park City, where I live, is 255. So most of the people that came, that came to the cave came from the north. So, their opportunity was getting off at Cave City and coming in 70. When I worked at Diamond Cavern, Dr. Rowsey owned it. Great business man. And he bought up all the property between 31 and his business so he would have no competition. So when he moved on, he donated the Mammoth Cave Parkway to the state of Kentucky and they donated it to the federal government. So all the way from Park City to Shomont now is a national parkway that is owned by Mammoth Cave. But we're talking about more people are coming from the south entrance now because that is the one the maps recognize, the Mammoth Cave Parkway. And with I-65, more people in my opinion, I don't count them, are coming in through the Mammoth Cave Parkway than are coming through Cave City, which the tourist people there don't like that at all, you know. But it, they're missing out on a lot of business. And I think we've always had good relations. When I worked at Diamond Cavern, the guides here would even send some people, you know. "You want to see another cave? Diamond Cavern is very beautiful." And I'd see them on the street, "Joe, I sent some people last week. I hope you get some more people. The more you get the less I'll have to do at Mammoth Cave." You know, so we had great relations. Now some of the other privately owned caves, like Great Onyx Cave and Crystal Cave, there was a competition among the private owners. Cave wars, you know. They had solicitors and Diamond Cavern had solicitors, and they competed with each other for the dollar, you know. But I didn't, I didn't see any competition between the Mammoth Cave people and Diamond Cavern. In fact, we served each other. I didn't, when I solicited, I didn't tell a lie. If people, now we hear those wild stories, "You can't go to Mammoth Cave today, they, that, all those guys have TB, the cave fell in yesterday. I didn't tell, I, I'm a Christian, I did not lie. Y"ou want to go to Mammoth Cave?" "Yes." "It's seven miles down the road. It's a big cave and it's a national park. But this is a nice cave here though, if you just want a short trip and be on the road." So

my point, we had good relations between Mammoth and Diamond. Now they didn't have too good of relations, you know, sometimes, because Mammoth Onyx Cave was privately owned and they got a lot of business on their name. It said Mammoth Onyx and all the tourists that didn't plan, say, they thought they were at Mammoth Cave. So they didn't have a, good relations. Am I talking too much?

BB: No.

JD: Okay.

BB: []

JD: Yeah.

BB: No, I'm just asking a few, I'm mean—

JD: Yes.

BB: It, it's just really interesting.

JD: Okay.

BB: Maybe just encapsulate a little bit about your life. So continuing to guide here, you've, when you were, when you retired from teaching—

JD: Um-hm.

BB: Did you become a sea-, did you start working here full-time then?

JD: Well I retired in, in May of '59 and I worked six months. They call it 1039, it, you could, they can work a half a year. And at that position, you don't get any fringe benefits, and then they moved me up to a position where I could work, I think it was nine months a year. But I had to take a leave during the year. And, but then I got all of the goodies. I call them goodies, you know, the fringe benefits. You get the insurance, the hospitalization insurance and the life insurance and, and you get to count your time towards retirement. You know you get some of those things. When you get, it's, so I moved up the ladder. Six months, nine months, then in ninety-, I guess it was '96, I got a permanent position here. And from my two, the next summer I came back, I was a three. And the next summer I came back, I was a four. And the next summer I came back, I volunteered. Eastern national parks said, "We need a lantern trip at Mammoth Cave." I'm making a long story short. And government, "If you'll put on a lantern trip, we'll pay the guides." We'll give them the GS5. So my supervisor came to me and says, "We're going to have a lantern trip at Mammoth Cave. And you have to do that three times a week and you have to do two of those a day. That will be six hours. But we're going to, we'll make you a GS5. You can be the same as all these other people that's been here all those years." So, I, I say, "I'll do it!" So the second year I came back I did the same thing, and the third year they had other lantern people. So I was a five. I've been a five ever since. Now to move up you have to be a, a 5/7/9. But I'll be very frank with you, that job involves supervision, hiring and firing information, sitting behind that computer all the time. I'm a talker, I'm a walker, I'm a cave man. That's not my cup of tea. I applied for that job. The biggest favor Joy Lyon ever did me was not hiring me for that job. She knew my personality so Chuck, Johnny got the job. That's fine with me. I'm happy. They're happy. They're going up. I'm happy where I am.

BB: That's good. So tell me, your fin-, some final thoughts about this job and this place and the work that you do.

JD: Yeah, well, the memories. I have memories here of Mammoth Cave and... it's kind of hard to talk about.

BB: It's just a real important place for you and for your life.

JD: It is. It's my life. Yes. In fact, I would, I'd like to be buried in the, in the Mammoth Cave Cemetery with my wife. See you can, with certain permission, you can still be buried here. And with all my years, I believe I could get permission to be buried here. But my wife said, "No, we want to be buried in a Park City, Park City cemetery." I have, they're figuring my retirement now. There's a possibility I might retire in 2014. I have enough time. And I would get some money. I, I'm not bragging, but I'm not working for the money. I get a teacher retirement. I got Social Security. My debts are paid. My daughters are through college with Masters degrees. I'm not bragging, but I, I'm not working for the money, okay? I'm working for the fun and the enjoyment and health. I'm working for the health, my health. It keeps me going and keeps my weight down. Great exercise. So, I may retire in 2014, it depends on how I feel. My feelings, health-wise, I'm seventy-seven, and they have begun to enter into the picture now. Is that what you want, something like that?

BB: Perfect.

JD: Yes. Um-hm. So I'm really happy and I'm healthy. I did have a couple of by-passes back in May. Dr. Paul Moore of Bowling Green. He's a great guy. He said, "If you hadn't been in Mammoth Cave, I'd have had to do this thirty years before. So," he said, "Do you want to go back to work?" I said, "Sure, I want to go back to work." He said, "You do what I tell you. I'm going to send you home in three days and back to work in seven weeks." So what he told me is go home and start walking. So I came back in seven weeks. Feel great. And no health problems. I go once a year to the heart doctor.

BB: That's great.

JD: And so, I may retire. It depends on how I feel.

BB: Good. Thank you for your time.

JD: You're welcome. I've enjoyed it.

BB: Good.

JD: It's been my pleasure. I hope I've done what you wanted me—

[End of interview]