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Interview with Saene Garcia (FA 1098)

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Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)
Field ID and name: #0010; Saene Garcia interview
Interviewee: Saene Garcia
Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman
Date: 12/5/2013
Location: Mammoth Cave National Park, KY
Others Present: N/A
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Recording Format: .wav
Recorded Tracks in Session: 1 audio track
Duration: [00:13:21]
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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: Okay, today is December 5, 2013. This is Brent Björkman, the director of the Kentucky Folklife Program at Western Kentucky University. I’m working on a Library of Congress project, occupational folk culture of park rangers. And I’m talking to a number of folks right now that are working at Mammoth Cave park about their working lives. And could you introduce yourself and tell me what you do here?

SAENE GARCIA: My name’s Saene Garcia. I am an office assistant at the shift office at the visitors’ center. We take care of any emergencies and daily operations that were to happen here inside the cave.

BB: Okay. So tell me, how did you get connected to, how did, how did you get connected to the park?

SG: I actually was connected via a friend of mine whose father actually works here. So he saw the position came open, let her know about it, and because he works in that area, she was not able to apply for the job, but she passed it along to me. So I was very grateful. And I got to join the crew here.

BB: How long have you been here?

SG: This is going to be my fifth year here. So it's really awesome. (laughs)

BB: Are you in a seasonal capacity, or—

SG: I am in a seasonal capacity. In the summer I’ll be full-time, most of the time, and then it just goes down as well as work around my schedule at school, because I am a college student right now.

BB: Um-hm. Were you telling me that there’s a specific program through the park service that this became available? You, it had a name.
SG: Yes. It is now called the Pathways Program. It takes in students that are going into college and as long as you are in, once you’re inside the program and you have your job, as long as you always bring in your verification letter, you always have that job until you come to graduation. And then it’s a little bit murky how that works after graduation. (laughs)

BB: Okay. All right. And so you are, you know, I’ve been talking to a lot of rangers and guides and things, but I haven’t talked to a lot of, I haven’t talked to any office assistants. Can you, can you kind of run me through, it’s a loaded word, a typical day?

SG: (laughs) There’s not really a lot of typical days here. But usually we open up the exhibits, we make sure all of the exhibits are working, are on. We go through our daily schedules, make sure the next one’s ready to go. We also take care of phones, anything that were to ever happen, any special groups. Sometimes we deal with them, as well as just anything under the sun. We do have our emergency medical kit up there. We do have medicals, we usually bring them back there, and we have a chair for them. We’ve got all of our supplies there. We also do cave rescues. Those are coordinated through our offices, as well as we do phone checks. People inside the cave will call via certain phones and check in, as well as if there’s any kind of problems, we are the one who they would call and then contact law enforcement.

BB: So it, I’m thinking about all these different medical things, and what kind of, I would think an office assistant, I’d think of what kind of training would an office assistant have, but the name probably doesn’t fully—tell me about the training that that, that, that’s gone on with you over this, over this time. Maybe the, what was the first part of the training, and has it evolved or, or tell me about that.

SG: Well, I was actually trained the same as a cave guide would be trained. So we were in the same training. So, and their first aid, CPR, we went through all procedures. We went through the ISPs, which is Individual Service Program, or Plan. And that’s just all about like
your cave tours, logistics, things like that. So I’m kind of in one of those odd jobs that’s not really here, but not really over there. I’m just kind of in between.

BB: Um-hm. So do you, what’s the difference between a cave guide and a ranger, or the different jobs here at Mammoth Cave?

SG: A ranger I more think of as law enforcement, and then a cave guide is what we have here, that they actually are guiding tours, doing interpretation. That could also be a person in EE, which is environmental education. They handle lots of different groups with them as well.

BB: So you’re around [0:05:00] guides all, all the time.

SG: Yes.

BB: So how’s that?

SG: It’s always fun.

BB: What are they, you know, what’s the interaction like and, you went through all the training so you probably, they understand that you do have that training.

SG: Um-hm.

BB: And do you go in the caves?

SG: I do get to go in the cave every once in a while. There’ll be, we’ll need someone to trail a tour. I, I don’t feel confident enough to lead one, but I can trail any tour that we do have. And I’ve also been able to do some interpretation as well because of my second language in
Spanish, and I did get to interpret two tours one summer. And that was a really cool treat to do.

BB: That’s—wow, that’s great. Tell me, do you have something memorable about, about leading a tour? And did you have a group of Spanish speakers? Is that []?

SG: I did, I had two groups. One was a family from Spain. And then I had a group from, I think Ecuador, I want to say. And they were like a, I think it was like a youth group that was coming here. So it was, it was interesting being the, and interpreting for that.

BB: Were you able to answer their questions and, and give them—

SG: Yes, I was able to answer everything pretty well. I got a little stuck on my words, but, I’m not quite up to that speed just yet, so.

BB: Does the park service have many Spanish-speaking interpreters or other language interpreters?

SG: I do not know. I don’t get paid extra for that or anything like that. I was, just so happened that I was working that day and I heard what was going on and I was like, “I can do that.” I do know we do have some people here at work that do sign language interpretation as well. And we actually do have a sign language interpretation program where we actually have people who would want to do that, they call us and we contact an outside source, and they bring their interpreter here. And then we pay them separate out of that.

BB: Okay. So do you have any hazing or jokes that were played on you when you first started? That’s part of working life culture.
SG: Um-hm. Not really. The worst thing I can think of is one of the law enforcement rangers couldn’t pronounce my name correctly, so he calls me Satan. (laughs) And he’s always called me that.

BB: And your name is spelled...

SG: It’s spelled S-A-E-N-E.

BB: I can see how that would be kind of a joke. Right. So do you see, it’s been five years.

SG: Um-hm.

BB: And you’re, you’re coming close to, now, now you’re in, at the university.

SG: I’m, yes. I’m at Western Kentucky.

BB: And you’re coming to the close of your undergraduate degree.

SG: Yes.

BB: So are you thinking about, what’s your, what’s the future? What are you, are you majoring in, are you majoring in Spanish?

SG: I am majoring in Spanish and majoring in psychology. I’m hoping to be able to expand on the translation and interpretation area of Spanish. That’d be really cool. And I don’t really know what I’ll do with the psychology, but it fits in anywhere, so.

BB: Um-hm. Um-hm. Have you thought about, you know, what is your, your experience here has been, at the park has, can you talk about that overall, in general? Like it’s, has it been a good experience? Is there any ways you see that fitting into your life or, because
people have talked to me about, they’ve had other jobs and then they’ve worked seasonally for many years. I don't know, just your thoughts about what your, what’s rolling around in your head about that, or if anything is, about the park service later.

SG: I always tell anyone who asks me that, that I’m kind of spoiled with this job. (laughs) Just because it's—

BB: How so?

SG: It’s just such a great work environment. Everyone’s so nice. They’re all very connected. They’re very, they all worry about if someone’s out sick, then everybody knows and is looking out for everyone. I know we had a case where one of our cave guides actually had a dizzy spell in the cave, and we had, after that happened, we had someone was going to his house, checking up on him, you know, making sure he was doing okay, recovering all right from after the surgery that he had to take. So it’s just a really tight-knit community.

BB: And they've let you into it?

SG: And they've let me into it. Yes. (laughs)

BB: What would you say to somebody that wanted to pursue, if they got into the Lifeways program—is that what it was called?

SG: Pathways.

BB: Pathways. Excuse me. Lifeways is something else. You know, what would you do? You know, what were the, would you share the steps that you took to come in or, you know, what would you, what kind of advice would you give somebody? [0:10:00]
SG: The only advice I could really give, since the program has changed so there’s a different process for it now, to get into it. When I was first starting here, it was actually under a different name, and you had a different starting process. But it’s a great experience. I think it would be wonderful for anyone who’s interested in starting in the park service or wanting to see if that’s what they want to do. I don’t know about other places, but Mammoth Cave has been a really great experience for me. Like, I love it here. I always tell people whenever I don’t have work, I’m like, I kind of wish I were at work right now. (laughs)

BB: Are you, you’re from the area? I mean, you’ve, you’ve been, you’ve grown up in the area?

SG: Um-hm. I grew up, I came here about seven, when I was seven or six years old from Puerto Rico, so I’ve lived in Bowling Green most of my life.

BB: Um-hm. And had you experienced the park prior to knowing about this position?

SG: I did. I still remembered it whenever I came, whenever I heard the position was coming up, because I remember we were going up the tower, which is in Mammoth Dome, and there was a bat flying around. And I thought that was the coolest thing I had ever seen.

BB: Is this when you were—

SG: This is when I was probably in elementary school. So I remember that a lot.

BB: On a class trip? Uh-huh.

SG: Yeah, on a class field trip to here.
BB: Got it. Is there anything that you wanted to share, other than the things that we’ve been talking about? I mean, it’s been five years of experiences and—you all right?

SG: Oh, there’s just so much. (laughs) It’s—

BB: Just pick something if you want to.

SG: I guess it’d just be, really, I was to-, like, I guess maybe surprised by how, how close everyone is, like, really, like, and how much, you know, how friendly everyone is. You know, everyone has their days, and we’ve had our days here, but, it always, everyone, someone’s got a joke or something to bring someone up or we always have some kind of craziness going on, if not in the office then down here in the guide lounge.

BB: Had you had jobs before this job as like, you know, you’re quite young so maybe you haven’t had a lot of jobs, but.

SG: I’ve had two jobs before. One, I don’t think even counts as a job, but, the first job I ever had was I was actually a secretary at my dad’s, my dad’s automotive shop. So I would answer phones, type in stuff into the computer, data entry, things like that. And then my second job was at Stephen Berry’s. It’s an, I don’t think it, we don’t have the shop in town any more, but it was a clothing store, so, I didn’t like that very much. It’s very different from here.

BB: Yeah. Very unique place isn’t it?

SG: Yes.

BB: Well, I think we’re good. I think that’s great.

SG: All right. Sounds good.
BB: Thank you. Thank you.

SG: Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]