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Interview with Brian Sacia (FA 1098)

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Kentucky Folklife Program Interview Transcription

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

Field ID and name: #0017; Brian Sacia interview

Interviewee: Brian Sacia

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: 4/17/2014

Location: Mammoth Cave National Park, KY

Others Present: N/A

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Context:

Technical Considerations: Audio file was created from the compiled video files for the purpose of transcription

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. It is April 17, 2014. This is Brent Björkman, with the Kentucky Folklife Program. And I'm here at Mammoth Cave working on this project for the Archie Green fellowship, Library of Congress, called Ranger Lore, looking at the occupational working culture of park rangers. Been working here at Mammoth Cave for a while, talking to a bunch of people that work in various capacities. And I'm here in the fire cache, starting to talk a little bit to some law enforcement folks, and Brian, if you could tell me your name and, and your current duties.

BRIAN SACIA: Brian Sacia. I'm a, the US Park Ranger here at Mammoth Cave. Also in charge of the field training program here at Mammoth Cave, Big South Fork and Cumberland Gap.

BB: So, so I've been asking folks kind of their origin story. Some people have different variations on that. You know, how did you first get involved in thinking about this as a career. Was it an early memory? I think you might have said you had a little bit of a story about that or something else?

BS: Yes, it was, it was fairly early. I grew up in, in Wisconsin, northern Minnesota area. My parents, big time campers. Grew up, you know, going tenting and then eventually they got a pop-up tent trailer. My sister and I would travel all over out west, all over Canada, just about every summer. We were, we were gone in that thing, having a large time. So that, as well as growing up on the, pretty much the banks of the St. Croix River, which is a park service managed landstrip anyway. I, you know, knew what rangers did and grew up seeing rangers. I didn't quite understand the law enforcement aspect of it at that point, but I, I saw the uniform and of course, you know, the old cartoons with, with Yogi Bear and all that other things, you know. Put two and two together. About twelve, thirteen years of age, we went to Glacier National Park on a, on a vacation and I always tell my trainees and stuff when I get here, I say, thank God I was too young to know better. (laughs) Basically some of those things, because, my parents, I don't know, typical touristy, not necessarily doing the right thing all the, at the, at the same time. We were in our campsite and the rangers were coming by, making sure everybody was policing up their food scraps. And we had, of

course, like good tourists, not paid any attention to any of the, the rules and regulations or stuff like that. We'd eaten a whole bucket of KFC chicken and threw the chicken bones into the fire ring, which we were going to burn up anyway. However, the grizzly bears—there aren't many of those in Wisconsin, so (laughs)—I remember having, basically, a, a light bulb came on and an epiphany if you will. You know, it's like, my God, that's, I have to do this for a living. So, I tailored my college and, and—

BB: What was the col-, did you, what was your college, kind of your, you tracked yourself?

BS: Yeah, I, I kind of aligned myself, had that in the back of my mind, graduated in high school, and started looking in, how do I become a ranger? When it, started at, at a community college that offered the, the ranger skills course or the seasonal academy along with an Associates Degree, got an Associates Degree, got out into the field and was lucky enough to be hired on right at St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, which is in my backyard, basically. Was an interpreter there for two years prior to becoming a commissioned law enforcement officer in '96. Worked there seasonally up until 2000, so.

BB: Wow. You're coming up on twenty years.

BS: Yeah.

BB: Yeah.

BS: Eight more years and I'll have my twenty in. Not because it counts for permanent, permanent status. Sea-, not all of the seasonal time counts towards retirement, so.

BB: What, so what were some of your first experiences getting into law enforcement in the park? I mean, a lot of people that I've interviewed, Mammoth has kind of been the, but—

BS: Right.

BB: Some people are more transient and they, they go—

BS: I started, like I said, seasonal, those years up until 2000 at St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Law enforcement from '96. Summer seasons, '96 through 2000. Two thousand, I transferred to Katmai National Park in Alaska as a seasonal, was a backcountry ranger there and that July ended up going permanent because I had, in between seasons, I was, I went back for my Bachelors Degree at the University of Wisconsin River Falls, and got my Bachelors Degree and as soon as I had my, that piece of paper, my ticket punched with the experience that I had, I knew that most likely I would be having a better shot at getting a permanent job within the park service, which that summer I did.

BB: Right.

BS: So I had to make the quick adjustment from backcountry Alaska to permanent at Glen Canyon National Recreational Area in Utah, in July, [0:05:00] so, (laughs) so I was back country ranger living out of a tent for ten hours, ten days at a time to going to Glen Canyon which was one hundred fifteen degrees in the shade right after the Fourth of July weekend. So, to permanent status, so it was, it was a crazy summer.

BB: Right.

BS: Crazy, crazy summer.

BB: Yeah.

BS: Was there from, let's see, 2000, most of 2000, 2001, after 9/11, and then gee, thinking back, then 2002. And in November of 2002, that winter, I moved to Mammoth Cave—

BB: Okay.

BS: For a, it was kind of a promotion. A lot of the jobs out west in those entry-level positions are subject to furlough. So even though they're permanent, you know, I was getting my benefits, my retirement started and everything else, it was still somewhat of a seasonal job. And I'd work nine months out of the year and have three months off. So my transition from there to here was full-time, permanent, year round.

BB: And that's something you were looking for?

BS: Right. I was looking for that anyway. A lot of the big west parks, you aren't, you have to live in government quarters because there's, there's not any, anywhere else to live or if there is housing available, it's so expensive. So that was one of the big draws is to try to get, I got that, that whole western park ranger vibe out of my system. And then, you know, I was getting a little bit older, wanting to come back east and, and try to settle down.

BB: Right.

BS: So Mammoth Cave seemed like the—

BB: Yeah.

BS: The right opportunity to, at the time, and I've been here since. So I love it right here.

BB: Yeah. It's, you know, I, when I explained to you that I was talking to, my initial interviews were mostly with interpretive people. And I do understand that some people go from there to—but you've really been a law—have you been law enforcement for—

BS: Since '96. Yeah.

BB: So, I mean, I mean, you haven't really done any interpretation?

BS: We bleed over a little bit. Whenever they have something going on over there, that, like Junior Ranger Day, we'll go, you know, do our, our spiel as—yeah but still, either from a fire or a law enforcement status, you know, standpoint, but it, it's still interpretation, you know, so.

BB: Is your training a lot like, like, does it encompass things like EMT, fire jumping? Is it, is it, can you maybe give me an idea about—

BS: We're, we're kind of, that's one of the reasons why I did also get into, to rangers, is because it's so diverse. We don't have to do, you work, we're police officers first and foremost, but what comes along with that is the EMT, the search and rescue, the structured firefighting. And we're all of those things. If you call a ranger, especially here at Mammoth Cave, you're getting all of those in one person. So, yeah, I'm an, I'm an EMT. I'm also the, (clears throat) excuse me, the emergency medical services coordinator here for the, for the park. CPR, first aid instructor, all of those things. So, yeah, you, we wear multiple hats.

BB: Yeah. And I imagine, you know, I'm trying to think about, this is about working life, and I, I know from some of the stories from interpretation and the guide force—you know, they have their own, their own folk culture around that particular job.

BS: Right.

BB: As they mentor one another, presenting in the cave and that sort of thing. But can you tell me a little bit about, you know, your experience with the crew here? Certainly with those, with those folks, there was like, I wouldn't call it hazing, but there's jokes you play on one another and daily—

BS: (laughs) Yeah.

BB: You know, things you feel comfortable about presenting. I want to, I don't want to, you know.

BS: Right. Oh there's, there's a, when I first moved here, it was a different dynamic because I was at the time young, the youngest one here. I was single, didn't have, you know, any ties to anything. I had literally everything that I owned fit in my truck when I moved here from out west. So, and all the other guys including the chief, all the way down to the field staff were all, you know, married and had, had been, you know, in their careers for a while. And most of those had worked here for almost twenty years at the time and were very established. Men with great wealths of knowledge to, to learn from, but as far as an after-hours type of thing or even in the field, you know, the camaraderie, the cutting up and the carrying on, it wasn't there. So I had to adjust myself a little bit to that. But now, since there's been a little bit of a turnover, there's some, there's some, more positions that have been hired, you know, so I'm not the youngest one anymore. I'm, I'm back up there, I'm probably this, the old dog. We've got, a couple, three others that are, you know, also seasonal and permanent as well, but they all have, you know, young families and we all get together and hang out, have fun. Even, you know, on and off duty, so.

BB: Sounds like, from what you illustrated before, it sounds like you were drawn to this because there is some diversity in what you do and I wanted to ask a question. I'm thinking about how to frame it, can you maybe run me through, [0:10:00] and I'm quoting, typical day. And I know you don't have a typical day. Maybe think about it, I don't know, maybe a day that you'd really like (laughter) to have happen and it never does. Or maybe if you want to share with me something about, you know, challenges, rewards, something that made you think, I really made a difference. And I'm sure you feel that way often, but—

BS: Yeah. I don't know. That's a multi-pronged question there.

BB: It is. I'm sorry. Pick one.

BS: Yeah. What was the first thing you said there? I'm sorry.

BB: I said, you know, run me through a typical day, but I know there aren't—

BS: Yeah, you just hit the nail on the head right there. There is no typical day in emergency service work. I mean it's, there's, there's an old adage, something about, you know, ninety-nine percent, you know, boredom and then one percent sheer terror, you know, to when that, I mean, the phone, my phone could easily, or radio could easily go off right now and we'd have to switch, you know, from talking one-on-one here to emergency services mode, just like that. And, you know, that's kind of the way it is. And that's part of the reason why I do it. I like that initial adrenaline [] that we, that we get for it. I'm trained to, to do it and I kind of go to robot mode then. I know what to do, and I just, I don't know, it's hard to explain. (laughs) So, typical day here, you know, kind of consists of looking forward to, you know, coming off of days off, this is, today's my Monday. Look at the schedule and see who's on, on duty, what I got, kind of line out what I've got, responsibilities to take care of and just go from there. Get all of those things done and then try to go on a patrol. Go out and drive around and see what's up, so.

BB: Yeah. I was talking to a friend of mine who, who was in the Tennessee State Park system.

BS: Um-hm.

BB: Bobby Fulcher, who actually started this Folklorist in the Park project in, back in the late '70s or early '80s, where we put a folklorist to document park culture and present it back at evening. And he was into his career before he really jumped in and really went through training as law enforcement. And the intensity of his story about how his eyes were opened to what you have to be and what's out there—

BS: Yeah.

BB: And it, it, you have to really believe in, in this way of operating, this new way of thinking. Sounds like that's something that you've been, you know, you've been going for law enforcement—

BS: Right.

BB: Throughout the time, that, it's very different than a civilian in, could you speak to something like, it just seems like your role is so multi-faceted, that's the first word that I think of, but you have to be always on guard, yet you have to be this face—

BS: Well, there's—

BB: That's, that's like, I'm the fri-, I am a friendly ranger, but yet—

BS: Yeah. That is one of the drawbacks to, to being a ranger as far as law enforcement mindset goes, and that's, I've, since I've been in the field training program, that's some of the, the issues we do see with, with, it's kind of built into, to, I don't know how to explain it, but when we have some problems with, with performance in the field from some trainees, that's what they have in their minds. They became a ranger because they get to do all those things, which isn't necessarily bad, however, you have to do law enforcement very well first. And that becomes hard to do when you're, you know, you're, you're an EMT. We've been here, you know, going to emergency calls, we had a call that I didn't personally go on, however, I know the, kind of the gist of it, came in as an emergency call, a woman screaming in the woods, unknown what it, what the, the issues were. However, turns out she's wanted and she's coming down off of a, a, very high on methamphetamines. I mean, you know, so, they ended up taking her to you know, into custody and sat with her at the hospital until she came, came down off of it, and you know, processed her. And instead of an Emergency Services, which, yeah, they took care of that part too, however, you know,

they made the arrest and, and you know, followed it up that way. So, that, it can go from one extreme to the other, but law enforcement always comes first.

BB: Yeah. Right.

BS: And you know, it's, I mean, the way I look at it, I tell my cousins they're real outdoorsy people and they're all the time in national parks and state parks, and stuff. And they're, and I've been there too, you know, when you're a civilian, you, you turn, you're kind of oblivious to, okay, I'm in this most beautiful place, you know, I'm seeing all of these really, really interesting natural features. And you know, yeah, there's people around me, but some of those people are criminals, you know. (laughs) So when I'm on patrol, I, I'm not seeing that. I'm seeing that one percent that need to be looked at for X reason. [0:15:00] So, whether they're, you know, speeding or doing something far worse, so.

BB: How do the visitors in your time, or do they, they react to you differently than, with the vest on and with a side arm []?

BS: Yeah, a little. Early in my career, I don't think, of course, you know, you're walking with your chest poked out a little bit, you know, and you try to, try to be seen. But and it, we've just recently transitioned to wearing the external body carriers, body armor carriers. So I think that, that does separate us from the interpreters or the other uniformed employees. Which I think is a good thing, because there's times where, like, ticket office has a problem with somebody that's, you know, got a, had an issue with a ticket going bad or somebody that's had a little bit too much to drink tries to get on a cave tour and they're of course trained to monitor for that and they call us. So they're not, when we show up, they, they know there's, there's something different, you know, going on. So I think it helps with the, the authority aspect of it, so.

BB: Yeah. Does the training continue on? I mean, is there, are there periodic things or new legislation, new mandates?

BS: Absolutely. We're constantly learning. We, we're responsible for doing forty hours minimum, forty hours of in-service every year. We just finished that here a week, week and a half ago, which we host here at the, at the park. And all of us are, that have been long e-, in long enough have, we're, we're instructors on, on certain things. I'm a firearms instructor and a Taser instructor. So I'm responsible for, for doing those aspects of it. We've got to do certain minimums, legal update, of course case law's ever-changing. So you have to be up on that. And then the field application of the, the case law. Of course, everything is all stemmed around the Forth Amendment, basically. All law enforcement, that's, that's the, the golden rule is the Forth Amendment.

BB: When you go forward to become a Taser trainer or something—

BS: Um-hm.

BB: Are those things that supervisors kind of target you for or is it something that's built into you—

BS: Somewhat.

BB: Your DNA? Like, you know, I really want to progress and I'm going to—

BS: Yeah, early on in my career, I was wanting, I was a, a training junkie, you know. All the training you could send me to, the better. And training is good, however, you get overrun with it and it's really easy to get bogged down with trying to keep refresher hours. You know, just my EMT license, I've got to have forty-eight hours of continuing ed, plus a twenty-four hour refresher every two years. So I've got to do that. And I have to maintain that, because a) I want to, and b) my job position as the Emergency Services Coordinator, I have to have it; that's the minimum standard. I have to have an EMT license. So I have to keep it, although that's one of the things that I would love to scale back now that I'm in my

position in my career. You know, I'd go back to a first responder, which is much easier to keep. However, I can't. So I've got to keep that up. Yeah, all of the, the other instructorships that comes more responsibility. So yeah, it, I've learned now that it's, it's better to find two or three that are really, really important to you and, and kind of be good at, at that. I consider myself a jack-of-all-trades, master of absolutely nothing. But that's not necessarily always a good thing. So it's better to have, you know, two or three things that are, you can really do well and, and teach well, so.

BB: See, you're a master, you're a master at one or two.

BS: (laughs) I wouldn't say master, by, by no means. I'm good at, at two or three things, so.

BB: Right. What are your favorite things and then maybe not so favorite things about this diverse life in this position?

BS: Favorite things? Getting to come to work with some of the, the just awesome people. I've been here long enough now where they're, they're family. And literally are some family here. My, my wife's family, you know, she's from here, from Kentucky, met her here at the park. And her whole family, in a lot of different ways have, either still do or have worked here at Mammoth Cave National Park, so. So that's kind of, the family aspect of it, the cohesiveness, that's, I really do like that, just the general camaraderie of it. That's, I absolutely love that. But, the, the not so good things anymore, I've got two young boys and a, and a wife at home. And my job requires me to be called out at all hours of the night, depending on what's going on. And nights and weekends, shift work, and then most every weekend I'm at work, when everybody else is off, I'm at work, so. But I, I kind of like that. It's the same way, you know, there's, everything's two-pronged deal to it, but.

BB: So you were saying today's the, it's a Thursday today, and this is your Monday.

[0:20:00]

BS: Yes. We're working, we work ten hour days, currently. That's not across the board, nationwide. But here at Mammoth Cave we've, we've worked it so we can work it out to work out ten hour days and I think that really, really works, works nice, because I can get three days off then, during the week, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, I'm off and watching my kids, so.

BB: And they get used to Daddy doing that right?

BS: Yeah, yeah. (clears throat) Excuse me.

BB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. How does this particular assignment, I mean, you've grown in this assignment, so it's hard to make the connection when you were young at the other, at Katmai and those sorts of things, but, how, how is this, is this park different than—

BS: Well, all parks are different, yeah. As far as size—

BB: Can you tell me a little bit about each one of the ones you were at?

BS: St. Croix Riverway, of course that was home, you know. That was, that was just like being home, you know. I was very familiar with all the areas, all the local deputies and stuff that would, would help us out. So I was, you know, completely comfortable doing a lot of things, and looking back at it doing a lot of things that I probably shouldn't have, not have done, as far as the safety aspect of it. And things that just make me cringe now that I'm in a teaching role, it, just like, oh, my gosh, you know. Never, never would we, would we do that, you know. Going into these places and dealing with these, these, literally, parties of drug pe-, individuals and by myself with relatively limited experience, with no communications, you know. It's like, oh, my gosh, why would you do that, you know? (laughs) But I was young and dumb and, and definitely have learned from it. So that was a comfort level there, and then, of course that was one of the reasons I got into the, the park service is the fringe benefits. I got to travel and see and go and do all these things that people literally save their

entire lives for, like Katmai. People, you know, that I'd see fly in there, because there are no roads for, for those. You either get there by plane or by boat. That, it costs thousands of dollars to go there as a, as a visitor, park visitor. I got to live there and work there, you know, so it was, it was really, really cool. And just the immense size of that place. It was, it was insane. And of course, the bears—that's why everybody's there is the big grizzly bears. And so I, I got to see that. I grew up seeing that on National Geographic. And got to live it, so—

BB: Yeah.

BS: That was, that was one of the reas-, one of the big reasons I got there. I kick myself for not going a few seasons early, and, because I ended up going, going permanent that summer.

BB: Oh, that's right.

BS: And then had, had to transfer to Glen Canyon. And Glen Canyon was a, outside of the comfort zone. So that's, that's a large scale national recreational area where there's, yeah, there's rules and regulations. However it's, it's a rec area, it's not managed as, the same as a, as a national park would be as far as the preservation of resources go. The resource out there is of course Lake Powell and the, the canyon through, Glen Canyon. But it's, it's a rec area. It's, it's meant to be used. So, you've got, you know, all the, the multi-million dollar boats and jet skis, and everything running to the river, and the clientele that comes with that. And all of the emergency services, whether it be, you know, from search and rescue to law enforcement, to, to the whole gamut of it out there. And that was, being fairly young in my career, as a first permanent job, it was kind of a sink or swim type of thing. And thank God for a very good district ranger and first line supervisor. And they were the teaching type, and all, there was five of us that were relatively new, first permanents hired that summer. And we, we all, we all swam instead of sank. So and I directly attribute that to good supervision.

BB: Yeah.

BS: And worked my way up into the position I'm in now, so.

BB: Yeah, that idea of mentorship, I mean, certainly to the ranger, but I mean, it's, it's—

BS: Oh, that's, it's huge.

BB: Yeah. Because it is a very intimate learning environment, I think, I mean—

BS: Yeah. And I—

BB: Like for here, is it the same way here too?

BS: Yes. Yeah. And that's, I think, one of the, going back to the being good at certain things. I've kind of found my niche. I think I mentioned earlier that I manage the, the field training program which started here at Mammoth Cave and has, has blossomed into, we've got a partnership between Cumberland Gap and Big South Fork as well. And I lead that, that, that program.

BB: What does that mean to be, tell me a little bit more about that. []

BS: The field training program?

BB: Yeah.

BS: When you, when I graduated from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center at, at FLETC, they, the program didn't exist. It was in its infancy, in its planning stages. It was going to be implemented, [0:25:00] however, when I graduated, I was basically the old

grandfathered in type. Now when you graduate from FLETC, you're required to do eleven weeks at a field-training park. And there's twenty some odd parks throughout the nation that you will be assigned to, to do your, your eleven weeks. And you're with three different seasoned officers, training officers, basically checking off your skills in the field. (clears throat) Excuse me.

BB: Okay.

BS: So we're here at Mammoth Cave, Big South Fork, Cumberland Gap, are training parks. That's what I was doing this morning actually. I was planning for the next batch of students coming out here in June. We get two trainees that are, will be here all summer.

BB: I started these interviews in December, was able to do interviews in the archive because the guide lounge was pretty quiet, and now, you know I'm going to different locations because things are ramping up.

BS: Right.

BB: How does that affect you as a law enforcement personnel person? The ebb and flow of the, of the tourist season.

BS: Yeah, it's starting to get busy. Our case numbers are starting to increase. And in springtime, it's always kind of, we run around like chickens with our heads cut off. Both in the interpretive division and in the, the law enforcement division because we all have— wintertime is training time and then springtime is refresher time. Everybody's got to get their refresher hours in. And we kind of cross over that way. I'm a CPR instructor so that all the new hires and all of their, people that are on a research cycle, I've got to train their CPR and all the new hires we'll get, we'll sit down with them and do a, you know, three or four hour presentation on how we want emergency medical services, incidents in the cave to go. And they're all cross-trained, so they, you know, they help us out with that. And all, you

know, new hire, first time in the cave and they have an injury or, you know, God forbid, somebody having a heart attack in there, they need to know how, how it's supposed to go. So we'll talk to them about that. And then as, a lot of the other things too that happen at the visitors center, you know, drunks, drugs, it happens. (laughs) And the more numbers of people that come, the more chances of that happening. Fairly, fairly common.

BB: It's the percentages that go up.

BS: Yeah, the percentages go up, so.

BB: Do you have any particular things where, a rescue story or a close call or a happy ending or both?

BS: Oh yeah, there's, you don't ever seem to remember the, the happy endings. (laughs) The one in particular that I did feel, you know, that ended very well, we, it was a couple summers, no a couple springs ago. It was one of those, during one of those icy cold snaps we have here in Kentucky. And the maintenance division had been out, making sure the roads were, and the cave entrance roads and stuff were, were safe to send the busses, the tour busses down. So I think we were maybe, had been open on a delayed basis. And when that happens, when maintenance comes in, a law enforcement officer comes in as well, just to kind of make sure everything is safe and secure before the, the full open. And one of the maintenance's, maintenance guys goes down in to Carmichael Entrance and hollers at me on the radio. Said, "There's a vehicle parked down here with a, with a gentlemen inside, appears to be sleeping." I'm like, "Oh crap. That's not good." You know, it's like nine in the morning and so I go down there and meet him and he says, "I've, you know, roused, roused him up, but he's, he's not all there." Turns out he got, the gentleman, elderly gentleman had Alzheimer's. And he'd urinated on himself and defecated on himself. He was a complete mess. I'm like, "Oh crap, now what am I supposed to do with this guy, you know?" I run his driver's license, or not his driver's license, his license plate tags. Comes out of Indiana, Fort Wayne, Indiana. And luckily his family members had flagged his car so it was, it was wanted

as a missing persons. So of course, got, get ahold of Indiana State Police, get some more information. Turns out he's an Alzheimer's patient that hadn't been seen in two days. And family was, you know, completely worried as anyone would be. Okay, you know, he's fine. We got him. Put him in my car. And of course, he's a, literally a mess. And—

BB: He's really a mess.

BS: Yeah, he's literally just awful mess. And, but he's compliant, you know, and I didn't, I don't have a lot of experience dealing with, with Alzheimer's patients. So I was like, okay, he's compliant, I'm not going to do anything to disturb this. You know, because I've, my grandfather had a little bit of that where he would go violent if you suggested anything that didn't sound right to him. So, I just sat with him, got him something to eat, kept him warm, and [0:30:00] hated for him to have to sit in his own mess that long. But his family members, I knew they were coming down from Fort Wayne, Indiana, which was, you know, three hours, so they showed up and everything was, was well. And they ended up donating a, a huge sum of money to the park, which we have a donation account set up for—we can't take any services, you know, any money for our services, but we do have this. If you want to donate, that money is used for training, gear, things like that that aren't ordinarily budgeted for. But since, you know, the, myself and another ranger, we handled that professionally and got, you know, closure, got the, everything ended very well. They ended, I forget how much they, how much money they donated, but it went a long ways into, you know, helping paying for trainings, fees and, and gear. So that one ended up really well. And it, one of those days, that, you know what, that made a difference to them. So other than that it's, the, the bad ones, which we have fatalities. I worked a number of those. Body recoveries, drownings, things like that, that, some of those stick with you, so.

BB: So this is a big piece, this is a big chunk of land.

BS: Fifty three thousand acres. Yeah.

BB: So one of my things, I'm putting two and two together and thinking about law enforcement, land, and people using it for other things. And do you have to go out and, and, and talk about the largest cash crop in, in—

BS: Oh, yeah.

BB: Is that something that people do? And is that something that you are dispatched to take care or investigate?

BS: People do do it. Every year we're, we'll go on—

BB: Marijuana?

BS: Yeah. On, on patrols, you know, specifically targeting, you know, marijuana groves in the, within the boundaries of Mammoth Cave National Park. We work very closely with the state police and the, the county. They all have, and David [] or David Alexander can touch on this, much, much more detail than I. But yeah, we're, we're all on the same page as far as going out and, and looking for it. The state police usually flies it, from Louisville, with a spotter, and find it. In the last, definitely within the last five years, we've had multiple marijuana groves in the park.

BB: Um-hm. How do you work with other law enforcement, the variety of law enforcement, state, localized, and how are you perceived? And then, as, as comfortable as you, how do you perceive them. And is it a—

BS: We've got a very good working relationship with them. In years past, I don't believe it to be so. And I've seen a difference since I got here. And to where we're at now. It, we train together. We, we'll have, you know, tailgate sessions together. We go to lunch together. We're seen in the community together. A lot of our kids and stuff will, will play baseball together. So that's, it's, it's just another extension of the family, really. And there are, you

know, at two in the morning if I get called out on something and I can't get another ranger, guess who's coming? They're coming. So, and, and vice versa, you know, we've helped, you know, them out with, with, with things outside of our jurisdiction as well. So, but we're, you know, that, we're all, they're not recognized as rangers, however we can go outside the boundary. We're recognized as Kentucky, Kentucky peace officers. So you know, legally standing, we're all covered, so.

BB: Yeah. And you probably need to do that. You know, I hear that, and it's not unique to the park service, I don't think. I think in the university, myself too, we want you to do more with less.

BS: Oh yeah, that's, that's common here. We have been doing that. Last summer there was, there was four of us. This summer we've got a little bit of boost and we're, I don't know if it was a boost in funding, but we've got enough money to pay for seasonal employees. So we're going to have three seasonals to help us out with the summer workload, and that's going to be huge, really huge. So you know, I don't have to take the two in the morning call. Someone else can do it, maybe. (laughs) So, spread the wealth out a little.

BB: What are your, what would you say to somebody who thinks they have an interest in doing something like this? You, you certainly had this—

BS: Yeah. I was tracked.

BB: Eclectic career. You were tracking yourself because of your interests. If somebody came to you as Brian the law enforcement guidance counselor, (laughter) I mean, with your vast knowledge over the years, what would you, what would you try to tell them?

BS: If they truly wanted to do it, if I had to do anything over again, and change anything the way, the way I got into it, I would have went in the military right after high school and used that as a, as a tool, to a) get my head screwed on straight and not wasted a couple of years

in college, not, I mean, wasted, meaning and I did get a degree, however, I was, my mind wasn't right. You know, they got that whole party atmosphere done. [0:35:01] If I'd have went in, in the military, I would have a) got my head screwed on straight and had the GI Bill to pay for my education instead of graduating with, you know, in debt, and, you know, so I'd, I would have done that and then had vet status to use towards a government career. If someone came to me I'm going to, the first thing I'm going to say is you got to really want it. You, you don't, it's not easy. These jobs are very, very highly competed, you know, for, especially now days with, with the budgets and you know, we're, if I was to apply for a job right now, for, you know, the next step in my career, I would have to compete with you know, my colleagues and it would be, you know, the best man or woman for the job, hopefully. But if there was a vet, if one of those guys had a, or women, had a, had veteran status, they would, they would most likely get that job before me. So I don't have that, that ticket to punch so I got, I got to fall back on my experience and training and everything else. So that's the key right there is to work hard at it and, and kind of be a self-starter. If you're not a self-starter in the government, you're not going to, you're just going to get passed over, so.

BB: Are your kids interested in, in—

BS: They're too young.

BB: Yeah, I was going—how old are your kids?

BS: They're, they're five. I got one turning five and three at the end of the month. So yeah, they're too young.

BB: If they were interested, though, would you—

BS: I would support it, yeah. I would. I don't know about the law enforcement aspect of it though. Look at my mom, she, to this day, worries. I know she does. And I've been out of the

house since I was seventeen years old. (laughs) So she, and of course if you add a firefighting car-, detail into that for two weeks, and you know, and she for some reason thinks that's way more dangerous than, than law enforcement is. But I'm like, man that fire is a little, is a vacation from law enforcement. (laughs)

BB: Yeah.

BS: So I don't think she has, I think she has a little bit of a disconnect there.

BB: Yeah.

BS: With what I actually do. Either that or she's in complete denial about what a police officer does. (laughs)

BB: Our parents never understand exactly what we do. It's a—

BS: Yeah.

BB: Different world than they, they're in. Yeah. Do you have anything else you want to, want to share about this? I mean it's such an, such an interesting job and, you know, your feelings about any of this?

BS: Man, I don't know. I don't know. I just absolutely love my job. I love coming to work every day. And if I didn't, I'd definitely find something else to do. (laughs)

BB: Yeah. You live near here?

BS: Yeah. I live here, just outside the park. Yep.

BB: That's right. Well, Brian, thanks for your time.

BS: No problem.

BB: For a little while, upper mid-westerner.

BS: Yeah. (laughs)

BB: All right. Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]