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**Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription**

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

Field ID and name: #0035; Lora Peppers

Interviewee: Lora Peppers

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: July 2, 2014

Location: Mammoth Cave National Park

Others Present:

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Context:

Technical Considerations:

Transcription prepared by: Hannah Davis

Transcribing Conventions:

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

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

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

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ ” indicates dialogue within conversation.

Use of italics indicates emphasis.

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

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

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

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

[time elapsed in hours:minutes:seconds]

[00:00:00]

BRENT BJÖRKMAN: Okay, today is July 2, 2014. This is Brent Björkman, director of the Kentucky Folklife Program, and we're continuing our interview series with park rangers as part of the Archie Green Fellowship, a national, uh, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress work we're doing on working America. And we are here today at Mammoth Cave talking to somebody who's very well-acquainted with this area but has recently moved back to take another position. Can you tell me your name, and tell me your title?

LORA PEPPERS: I'm Lora Peppers, and I'm currently the chief ranger of law enforcement emergency services here at Mammoth Cave.

BB: Tell me a little bit, it almost seems like you've come in this circular direction after you've had this really long, expansive career -- well, kind of long -- with the park service. Can you tell me how you first got connected to this kind of work? Was it Mammoth Cave and how it kind of began?

LP: Sure. I was in high school at Edmonson County High School. And at that time, Mammoth Cave National Park went to the surrounding counties to look for folks from the local area to work the desk at the visitors' center, so I came over, I applied,

interviewed for the job and got it, so Mother's Day of 1985 I started out at Mammoth Cave National Park, and I have not held another job with another agency since.

BB: Wow. So you worked at the front desk –

LP: I, I worked at the front desk. Answering many questions.

BB: Yeah, is that the key to that position? Answering questions for the public?

LP: Yes, yes, being the front line of people coming in, trying to determine which cave tour to go on, what hikes on the service that they wanted to do, where to camp, all those kinds of things, that would be at the information desk, uh, I answered.

BB: Had you done, was this your first connection to public speaking? Was it a nervous making thing for you? Do you remember?

LP: Not really, I remember when I, when I gave my first cave tour I was extremely nervous, but working the information desk I had a lot of really good people that I worked with, got some good training, and yeah, nervousness was not a factor in answering all the questions because I had all the answers. And if I didn't have it in front of me with the newspapers, I always had a coworker I could call and ask questions of.

BB: Was it a full season you did that, or two?

LP: I, I worked at Mammoth Cave from 1985 to 1990 seasonally and while I went to school at Western Kentucky, I worked weekends and eventually every other day. I kind of worked a little bit, almost full-time and went to school full-time the last three years I was here.

BB: Okay. And was any of that in cave guiding?

LP: Yes. I think I worked the information desk for two years and then went into guiding.

BB: As in interpretation?

LP: Yes, as in interpretation.

BB: So what was that, you probably as you were doing your first job at the park, you were witnessing getting to know some of the guides, what was that first week on the job when you started that, that position?

LP: It was pretty interesting to be responsible for that many people at that young of an age, and I look back at it now saying, "Oh my goodness, I was responsible for a lot of people," and it never really even registered with me at the time. You know, I think I was more nervous about speaking in front of my co-workers who had been doing it for years and years and years, thinking I was going to misspeak interpreting the cave, but after a few weeks of that, working with the folks who had been here for a while, I had great mentors to lean on and to learn from.

BB: What was the, was there a lot of people? We were talking before, they used to lead more people through the cave than they do today. Was that that mid-'80s, late '80s, was it a lot –

LP: Yes.

BB: -- a lot more than today that people have spoke of?

LP: Absolutely. I remember in the summer, particularly, like, well, Independence Day weekend is coming up, we would have so many people coming in we would actually split a tour. And I think that's how I got interested in actually guiding is when they would split a tour, they would have to send a third guide along, and I was sometimes asked to do that, so I got to accompany them without having the responsibility of giving information, but I could trail the tour or take the middle part

of it, because we would split the group to get more people in the cave. I'm not sure how good of an experience they had with, you know, almost three hundred people going through, but shortly after that in the late '80s it started changing a little bit where we started having definitive limits on the tours to provide a better experience for our visitors.

BB: So you said for maybe '95, '90 you finished up school around that time?

LP: I graduated in 1990, and part of my program [00:05:00] was, I was part of the cooperative education program between Mammoth Cave National Park and Western Kentucky University, so after my first two years my supervisor, Joe McGowan, who was here at the time, uh, he said, "Are you interested in a permanent job in the service at Mammoth Cave National Park?" and I'm like, "Well, I'm having a great time, great group of people to work with, yes, I'm young, what do I need to do?" So I actually changed majors and started in the parks and recreation department at Western, so when I graduated in 1990, um, I decided with a little help from some friends here at the park that to get a broader experience with the National Park Service, so I transferred and got my first permanent job at St. Augustine at the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine, Florida, and that was when I started some interpretation.

BB: I think one of the most interesting things about interviewing people, a lot of the people I've interviewed have been here and stayed here, and it's interesting, there

are people that have had their whole career moving up in the G system, in the government system, um, but you've seen a lot of things and you've experienced a lot of ways that other, you know, this is about working national parks, can you tell me a little bit about that first experience? And we don't have to go through every one, but when you went to St. Augustine, and your only experience as I understand it would be here, how, how was that different? I mean, you went into a permanent, a permanent is different, but can you tell me about that?

LP: It was a complete shock. I had -- I was also very young, just out of college, moved to an area I didn't know, no support system like I had here, but what was really interesting, and it actually created a career change for me, I expected the interpretive program to be somewhat like it was here at Mammoth Cave but not knowing what to expect, so when I first started giving interpretive programs at the *castillo*, they were like 15-, 10-minute presentations and people could wander in and out as they wanted to and -- it was just such a shock for me. I'm like, "I don't think I care for interpretation in this type of venue," because in a cave, you had a captive audience. No one could walk in or out of your program, so you had them for the allotted amount of time. Now whether they listened to anything you said or not, who's to know, but at least you know you had them for two hours and could give a full program and they would get the whole message if they chose to. But at the *castillo*, it was, you know, those few 15-minute programs and you did more roving interpretation, so I liked the more organized venues. So when a position became

available in that park for law enforcement, I said, "Hey, Chief Ranger, would you mind if I go to FLETC?" And, which is the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and it was such a small park, and at that time you could do both law enforcement and interpretation, they were mixed positions.

BB: Is that what they refer to as a split position, or –

LP: No, no it was completely mixed, usually a split position you would do law enforcement for part of the year and interpretation for part of they year, where as in the mixed position, I could give a program now and two hours later I have to go to law enforcement. So it could all be done on the same day. So when I was at the *castillo* and Ft. Matanzas Monument in St. Augustine, I asked the chief ranger, "Can I go to the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center?" It's a small enough park you did both, and they said, "Sure, we'll send you to FLETC." So that's when I started my law enforcement career in 1991.

BB: Where's FLETC located again?

LP: Southeast Georgia, in Glencoe, Georgia.

BB: So you went to FLETC and you came back and you had this mixed position?

LP: I had a mixed position, which worked out very well for me at that time. I went to Ft. Matanzas full-time, which was 200 acres, so it was back to a little bit more of a natural setting, which I prefer. By the career I've had, I've always chosen mostly natural areas, and that's just what I prefer. Shortly after that, I moved to Everglades, which was a completely different –

BB: How was that different than –

LP: Well, I was doing all law enforcement at the time, and I started supervising the FEED [?] program there at Shot Valley, which is on the north side of the park, but it's such a vast resource, and completely different than anything I had been exposed to before, but it was very interesting operating air boats, which is kind of an unusual mode of transportation for anyone in the park service, but it was fascinating.

BB: Wow. Um, something that's interesting to me is, you know, one of the things I've been looking at when it's appropriate -- and Joy and I talked about this when I was going forward planning this research -- was women in the park service, because as I understand it, it has progressed, there's more women [00:10:00] to an extent?

You're the first person, first woman I've talked to, I think, in my little bit of interviewing, that went to FLETC. So maybe, was that an interesting thing? I mean, I would see that as quite a lot of bravado there, but I'm just making that up, I mean, was that different for a woman in your estimation, or –

LP: Not a whole lot. There were, in my FLETC class, there were a total of 24 people, and we had, at that time, a -- what I think is a significant number of women in our class, and I'm trying to think, probably close to 10? Which is, I think, rare, um, I still have worked with mostly men in my career, but I've really not had any issues with that. I think those that came before me really set the example that women can do it just as well as men can. And I really didn't have any heartaches, or any qualms about what I was doing.

BB: I mean, I can tell by your personality, I mean, I can it doesn't seem like it's that much of an issue.

LP: No, not it all, it's never been an issue for me.

[INTERRUPTION 00:11:13 - 00:11:37]

BB: As you're going forward, you're trying new challenges, you're doing things, you're going to FLETC, you're expanding your own horizons and pushing yourself. I think that's what's interesting about the, this particular federal national park system is, people have a trajectory and they're going forward -- can you tell me a little bit about your own trajectory? Are there just opportunities that happen to come, or was this something you thought, "You know, I want to get to a GS-something by, in seven years"?

LP: I don't think I ever had any goals set like that, but one of the goals I always had in the back of my mind was coming back to Mammoth Cave as the chief ranger, and I've already succeeded in that, so I'm not sure what else is on my horizon, but mostly it's been opportunities that have become available. In the park service, just like many other agencies and entities, uh, we post our announcements, and so I occasionally look and see what's out there, and if I'm ready to move on, and, you know, my family life is, is willing to support that, I've applied for a few jobs. But mostly I'm pretty picky, and I kind of know what I want to do, but it just depends on the opportunities that become available.

BB: I know with law enforcement there is no typical day, but can you tell me how procedure-wise how a day would go? Maybe we could start out by talking about one of your earlier days as a law enforcement person, then maybe talk about as you get into more administrative things, things that are duties that you have to take on. And I know, again, I know situations you never know what might –

LP: And that's one of the things I like about it, is that there is no standard day. Yes, I come to work, I'm prepared to do law enforcement, I'm prepared to do emergency services, and so it just kind of depends on how the day unfolds for us. Um, at the beginning, I really liked engaging with the public, whether that be in a violator context or just educating visitors about the resources of each park that I've worked

in. The transition to sitting behind a desk is sometimes been a challenge just because I like being out and doing things. My last job was the supervisor of a large district with a lot of visitation, and I still -- I had a good balance there in that I was still almost expected and had to go out in the field and do search and rescue, which is kind of been one of the things I have found very interesting and fulfilling for me, and that is to be able to direct people into rescuing individuals who have gotten themselves in trouble or actually searching for lost persons. So that's one of the niches that I've found I really like working in, so I did a little bit of that, so I've kind of transitioned into the office full-time, and I'm still adjusting. It's incredible, the amount of policies that we have to look at and follow in running a program, so I'm still kind of learning all those, all those things that I need to do to keep the superintendent out of hot water, and myself, as far as administratively.

BB: Search and rescue seems to be, you talk about -- it's been a passion of yours. Can you share, you know one of the things I like to hear is stories from people. Anything that comes to mind. [00:15:00] It could be something about guiding in the cave, maybe it's a scary, or an embarrassing, or a fulfilling, or somebody, some visitor said something to you, and maybe walk me through one, however you want to, an interpretation, maybe one in search and rescue or in law enforcement, maybe you came across something very new and you handled it very well, or, you know, like I said.

LP: Sure. One of my first experiences, like, anytime you're in the cave the lights can go out, it's guaranteed, while you're in the cave it will happen. So one of my first experiences in kind of an emergency situation, I look back at it now like, "That's not really an emergency, the lights just went out." But if you've got 200 people with you who have no idea what's going on, or how they're going to get out because they only have two guides with them with two flashlights, how are all of them going to get out of the cave when it's completely dark? So that was my first exposure, you know, having to get lanterns having to hand them out periodically throughout the tour so everyone would have lighting to get out through the cave, and you know, having to call those types of things in, and like I said, at the time, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I have 200 people I have to get out of the cave, and we have to get all the lanterns and get them lit and get them distributed, and trying to stay on time because we have another tour coming in if they had the lights back on." And that's kind of my first exposure to it, and then as I went through my career with boating operations and then in the Great Smokey Mountains in Shenandoah National Park I had a lot of exposure to search and rescue –

BB: Because of climbers and hikers?

LP: Climbers, hikers, day climbers, you know, coming into the park. You know, mostly ankle injuries, but sometimes there were cardiac -- heart attacks and strokes and things like that, but most of them were extremity injuries, ankle injuries,

dislocated shoulders and those types of things, but I think one of my most rewarding times was I did planning for a search for a 10-year-old boy who ran ahead. So here's my public service announcement: If you take children to national parks, don't let them run ahead on trails. But this young man ran ahead of his family, got to a trail intersection -- he should have stopped and waited, but he's 10, he's excited about where he is, so he continued on, and he actually got off-trail, into a drainage, and then his parents came, you know, obviously reported it. And I'm like, obviously, "Ten-year-old? Was he abducted?" I was the first ranger on the scene trying to get a situation update on exactly what we had, where was the boy last seen, and all those types of things, and I'm thinking, "Was he abducted? Did he get off in the woods?" Or, I was also thinking, the area of the park he was in, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people hike this trail. It was a very popular trail. And I was going, "He's either abducted or he'll show up in five minutes and we're all going to call it good and go home." Well, he was out in the woods by himself for two days, because he got off-trail, went into a drainage, so we had to call in a bunch of people, a lot of it was in-park staff that we had trained in search and rescue, and so they started searching the areas of the park where he was last seen, other trails that were in the area, and um, we found him like two days later in a drainage. He lost his glasses and he lost his shoe, but just reuniting him with his family and just seeing the relief on the family's faces was very rewarding for me. And particularly being in on the planning section of that, and directing where the searchers went to, at that time I started moving out

of being in the field and being the ground-pounder actually out looking for people to planning areas that we actually searched.

BB: Wow. Thrilling and scary and all those things.

LP: All those things.

BB: Yeah. Some of the, talking to actually some of your colleagues here about law enforcement and the change over time in the public perception of what a park law enforcement officer is, there are a lot of analogies, too. "You're not a real law enforcement officer." I was just curious about your take on that, and also, this might have no bearing on it as far as gender goes as well, I was wondering if that's thrown in there, too, or maybe what they were referring to was so long ago that it's not an issue.

LP: Oh, I think it's still is depending on where you are. You know, part of it is a lot of people are not familiar with law enforcement rangers unless they've had an incident. You know, if they've had, um, a motorcycle accident, a car crash, or they've gotten injured in a national park, that's when you're going to see the law enforcement rangers unless you're doing something wrong. So, a lot of times, it's the lack of exposure. So if someone says, "Well, I've never seen a law enforcement ranger, a ranger in the park carrying a gun," I'm like, "Well, you behave yourself

when you're in a park [00:20:00] and you're safe at it as well, so all is well." Uh, and you know, gender, I think it really depends on the area of the country that you're in a little bit. And I know when I first started out obviously being young, it's a little bit different, there's a "Hey, little lady," and I'm like, "Whatever, you can stay stuck in the sand, I don't care, I can either help you out or you can get yourself out and that's up to you. I'm here to help. If you don't want it, I have other things I can go do." So no, gender's not a huge factor, but I think there's a difference in -- our culture in our country is changing, and a lot of that is, I'm not sure that it's disrespect, or just lack of respect for anyone that's, for almost anyone who's trying to give advice on anything, you know, because the individual knows best and they weren't out there to do harm. And I'm like, "But you chose not to know what the regulations are, or you chose to do it even knowing that you think you could get away with it, because well, 'It's just me. If I'm the only one doing it, what's the big deal?'" But they don't know that, they don't grasp the bigger picture of, well, "I'm not the only one that's going out there to do harm in a national park." You know, for instance, for us here at Mammoth Cave and other natural areas, there's plant poaching, and some people just think, well, "That's no big deal."

BB: What kind of plants are poached?

LP: Ginseng mostly, which is used as a medicinal, so we have gone out and had a ginseng marking program in the park service for quite some time, and a lot of work

has been done here at Mammoth Cave on that, so hopefully when we catch someone with ginseng we can put it under a black light and actually see that the roots have been marked, which is a phenomenal thing. We actually made a case just a few weeks ago where the individual had taken quite an amount of ginseng and it was marked, so that helps us in the prosecution in that we don't have to prove that he took it from Mammoth Cave, he did that for us. Because the roots, the roots are marked. So yes, ginseng is a huge problem in Southern Appalachia in our national parks.

BB: So you've had a lot of experience, I mean, relatively, quite a bit of experience --

LP: Yes. It's just kind of interesting because a lot of people like, well, my granddad, [indistinguishable] ginseng. And I'm like, well, "Your granddad had ethics with it." You know? And I found this at Shenandoah National Park as well, in that the old-timers that would go out and dig ginseng, they'd wait until the berries were ripe, and they would bury the berries, so they would propagate the plant. Now, the people that are digging, they don't care if the berries have turned red, or even if the berries are out yet. They're digging it much earlier. It's just definitely a commodity. They look at it -- it's a way to make money. Which is unfortunate, but you know, everything in our parks has a value, and someone will find it and extort that value. So yeah, the person that we got, you know, the ginseng was too young, it wasn't in season, and by the way, it's in a national park and you can't take it anyway. But some

people just kind of disregard those boundaries because of their personal -- I'm not even sure if it's a personal belief -- but for whatever reason they go out, whether it's funding their habits, or looking for money to feed their family, but most of it is feeding other habits. So it's just kind of interesting to see that the culture has changed because, you know, old-time rangers that I talk to, they're like, "Yeah, no, they always buried the berries, and they always waited." Even if they dug it illegally, they had some ethics with it in that they'd want to propagate the plant, because that was what they wanted to do --

BB: Because they wanted to go back the next year --

LP: Exactly. So it's just kind of interesting that the mentality has kind of changed over the years. And you know, it's kind of the same thing with poaching, too, of deer, or in some areas, black bear. Or turkey. Historically, I think people probably poached to feed their families, uh, and when I was in Shenandoah, they were poaching to get the big racks to compete, and they would never even take the animal. They would leave the meat behind and just take the head, which is just, you know, one of the things that I hated the most was -- I, these guys really need to be caught because they're not, they're not hunters at all. They're definitely poachers and they're out for themselves, and when they leave that animal there to waste, it's just very unfortunate as far as I'm concerned, and they're definitely not doing anything to support national parks, or even wildlife conservation. You know, they

say that they're hunters, and I'm like, "You're not a hunter. Not an ethical one, anyway."

BB: How do you help teach the stewardship that you wish everyone would have for land? [00:25:00]

LP: You know --

BB: Or for our parks.

LP: I think that it's kind of interesting because they have to appreciate what they have, and that's the tough thing to do, particularly in my role, because usually I don't come in contact with them until they've done something that they shouldn't. So I think it depends on the severity of what they've done. There's some educational opportunities to do that. But, uh, you know, in the parks we try to put up adequate education. You know, signs don't work, you can't say, "Don't feed the wildlife." They're willing to pay for that opportunity, if you will, to feed wildlife, so you have to come up with some different education opportunities and put it where the people are going to see it, understand it, and buy off on it, which is a tough thing with a lot of different cultures coming to our parks, even if it's all Americans, we all have different value systems, and if you've grown up just going to zoos, feeding the wildlife is no big deal. In fact, you buy the food, you give it to them. And in national

parks, that's just not appropriate, because these are wild animals, we want to keep them wild, we want to keep them healthy, we want a healthy population of wildlife, and they don't understand that feeding the wildlife actually habituates them and it's actually going to kill them. Whether it be that they get hit by a car, or at Shenandoah, we always said, "You feed the wildlife, they're going to get poached, because they've lost their fear of humans." So when you talk to people and share that type of story with them, they go, "Oh, okay, I didn't know that that's why I shouldn't feed wildlife." Something pretty basic as, don't feed the wildlife, they have to understand it first, is just not doing it.

BB: Are you unified in this message with your other law enforcement officers? How do you learn these things? Certainly you're taking it all in, you're understanding "I know this is bad," but is there, is it, you know, studies like this about occupational folk culture, about work, we talk about the mentorship idea, or how we share and transmit to co-workers different things –

LP: I think it is. You know, unfortunately, nowhere in the park service, regardless of the profession that you're doing, that there's a lot of people that you actually have a coworker with you all the time, or particularly someone that's been there for a while to learn those things, but I think, you know, we go to FLETC, but then we also have the Field Training Ranger Program that started several years ago, but it's one of the best things we've done for the law enforcement program.

BB: Tell me about that.

LP: It's when you graduate from FLETC, you go to another park that is not your home park, and they -- you apply what you've learned at FLETC and you have to graduate from the field training program to be fully successful and returning to your home park. And I think that is a good time for that mentorship, and how do you talk to the public instead of coming across as really gruff, you have to be able to explain why it is what you're doing. You know, a friend of mine, who also used to be my supervisor, told me a story about, you know, this younger ranger who'd been in the parks service several years, working summer seasons, and said, "You know what, I just don't think it's right to run radar at the entrance of a park." And that's, you know, you come in one area and you had to pay a fee, then you'd go to the visitors' center several miles down the road, uh, not quite set up the same way as Mammoth Cave. But he was like, "That's just not the message I think we need to send welcoming visitors." You know, so even running radar there should be a protection part to that, and it is "Do we have wildlife on the road? Do you have a lot of hikers coming across there? Is it a congested area?" Now, I'm not saying all speeders, if you're driving 60 and the speed limit's 35, yeah, you need to be pulled over regardless of where you are, but there should be some either, you know, human protection, protecting our visitors, or some protection of the resource part of it. It shouldn't just be "I'm gonna go out and run radar because I can." And I think that field training program does that, I think supervisors do that, those of us who've,

particularly if you've moved around a lot and you pick up, yes, we have national policies that provide guidance, but every park is different, and we want to do it differently at every park. So there's a basis to build your programs on, but I think the message is pretty clear as far as what our role is in protecting the resources of the.

BB: So Lora, um, I've been talking to some of your other colleagues about [00:30:00] maybe if they've met a spouse or a significant other or something while they were working here and the dynamics that flow along with it, I understand. Could you tell me a little bit about your experience that way? I think you met your husband, or --

LP: We actually met at the FLETC when we were both going through the academy. After we both graduated, we kind of went our separate ways. I went back to Florida and then eventually to South Florida. He was working in Ohio at the time at Cuyahoga Valley, and eventually, years later, we ended up at Shenandoah National Park and married, which is one of the reasons that we stayed at Shenandoah for a very long time. I stayed at Shenandoah for fifteen years, which was the longest I stayed another, and it was because it's very difficult to move with a dual-career couple. Yes, the park service supports it, but the park has to be big enough and the jobs have to be there. They don't create jobs just because you're married. And you know, Shenandoah was a great place for both of us. We both had great opportunities there, could work in the same division, separate districts, so it all worked out really well for us. But in coming to this job, my husband couldn't work for me, so he ended

up retiring April 30. I think he was ready, at least he says he was, um, so, to support my career in coming back to Mammoth Cave as the chief ranger, he retired after a 20-plus year career in law enforcement with the national park service. So yeah, there's a lot of dual-career couples. If you're in separate divisions, it's a little easier to move around, you know, because he couldn't come here and work for me.

BB: Because you were going to lead –

LP: I was responsible for the division, so he would not be able to work for me, so that's why –

BB: And he's law enforcement, right, of course –

LP: It's been interesting, both of us having the same career. You don't have to explain kind of what you had to do at work, or if I'm running late, you know, all he had to do was turn on the radio, and vice versa, if he was running late all I had to do was turn on the radio and figure out what was going on. So we kind of check up on each other very easily without calling and asking anyone else.

BB: Was it hard to make a decision -- was, was there a decision made? Who's going to retire? Or this was your fit and he was kind of ready, or –

LP: Yes, it was a little bit of both. Um, a couple years ago, I had an opportunity to move, but we weren't sure if he would be able to get a job in a nearby job, so I chose not to take, take the job, and, um, I think in hindsight it worked out very well, because then this opportunity came open to come to Mammoth Cave, and then he was definitely in a better position and ready to retire. We had some things going on in the park service, and he's done his 20-plus years, so he was eligible to retire. Computer systems change and they get more complicated, so it's kind of one of those things, "Yeah, I'm ready." And then this computer program came in and he was like, "Yeah, I'm definitely ready to go now." So, it all worked out really well for both of us. We've both had rewarding careers.

BB: Trying to think if we talked about this on camera. So, a lot of these parks you've been in, I think, Everglades, Smokies, Chickamauga –

LP: I did a detail at Chickamauga/Chattanooga as their acting chief for a few months. So yeah, in the park service we have an opportunity to do details to other parks, so while I was at Shenandoah for 15 years, I had three or four details outside the park that I was able to take advantage of and get additional experience that kind of set me up for the job that I'm in now.

BB: So the detail, tell me, tell me what that would mean. Like, you have a detail outside of the park, what does that mean?

LP: Well, I was at Shenandoah, I did the three month detail at Chickamauga/Chattanooga as their chief ranger, so I got to learn a little bit about that park, as well as the, um, broader scale of running a division and kind of looking at things from a different perspective. You know, I brought my perspective from all the parks I went into, and obviously all the rangers there came from a variety of places, so it's just kind of interesting, you're going in temporarily, you have to get to know the people, and, you know, I always try to make a positive impact. Hard to do in 90 days. Um, you know, you had to get to know a little bit about the park, and it was a little bit more than keeping a Band-Aid on it, or just keeping things running. There was always something that I felt that I could look at, look into, and be able to leave the park with a product, even in a short period of time. So at Chickamauga/Chattanooga, they were going through a lot of changes in their interpretive program. There it was the chief of interpretation and law enforcement [00:35:00] so I had, I got to put on my interpretive hat again, which was, um, I'm glad I had experience here and at the *castillo* to kind of be able to, to step into that role and not be completely green at it. So I had some experience to be able to tie in, but they were doing a lot of program reviews in the law enforcement program, and then in interpretation they were getting new programs, new videos, new wayside exhibits and things like that, so I actually got to, you know, put all those kind of projects together in a timeline and reviewed a lot of them. A lot of them not necessarily editing, they already had the story, but kind of like, "Do I understand it

as a newcomer coming into this park talking about the Civil War?" So there was some thing that I felt I could do with my experience in law enforcement to be able to help that program out. You know, when I left that park, I left them a review of what I thought was needed, short-term or long-term, or if anything at all, and then I did a detail at [indistinguishable] in South Florida, which was just an amazing resource with the reef system there, and you know, very good program, but just kind of some, you know, if you have nothing else to do, you could improve upon. So it's just, it's been very interesting to be able to go out and help other parks out when they need it. And I'm also part of the Eastern Incident Management Team, responding to hurricanes, um, or other natural disasters and things like that, so my last assignment was after Hurricane Sandy came through and I went to Assateague Island National Seashore and was able to help them recover from the hurricane, be able to document everything that occurred in the park, and what the park was doing to clean up from that incident.

BB: Where's that located, in Jersey?

LP: Uh, no, it's the Delmarva, the Delaware/Maryland/Virginia peninsula.

BB: So the experiences help them, but it also adds to your own toolkit?

LP: Exactly. I think it -- it helps a couple of things. One, it helps me build skills to make me more competitive when I am applying for other jobs, but I think it also helps in that you're making connections with other people, and it's always nice to go out and say, "Okay, things really aren't as bad as what," you know, it helps keep a positive attitude. You go out, you see things, either you can take things back and say, "Hey, this is how they did things at this park, I think we can incorporate it a little bit here, tweak it a little bit and improve our program, or I can say, "Know what, that program, they don't have the equipment we do, we don't need to be complaining about how bad we have it because really we don't." So it just kind of helps you become more objective, or stay objective.

BB: What's the most meaningful part of this job to you?

LP: Uh, I think it's connecting with people, whether it be the people that you work with on a daily basis, and as a small, particularly in this park, in this division, we've got a small cadre, but they are a very tight-knit group and they work so well together, so I'm looking forward to being able to fit into that group, and I think it's the teamwork, I think most people who work for the park service do believe in the mission of the park service, and I think it's very rewarding to work with a group of people that have the same goal in mind. We may have different parts of that goal, but I think at the end of the day we're all in the same, we all have the same thing in mind. And that's providing for a good experience for our visitors, and unfortunately,

you know, for me, it's like when visitors get in trouble or they're doing something wrong, that I engage with visitors, but on the same thing I think that what we do is very important to the preservation of the resource. Plus, I get to see a lot of wonderful places. My mother-in-law is -- my husband and I, we visit national parks when we go on vacation. You know, for me, it's just like, okay, maybe we want to work there. But the National Park Service has so many wonderful places that, yeah, those are the places I want to see or I probably wouldn't have been drawn to the job that I'm in.

BB: Have you been to a lot of them?

LP: I've been to several. Yeah. I think my favorite one, or favorite place so far has been Alaska.

BB: Denali?

LP: We went to Denali and Mt. McKinley and Kat -- not Katmai -- uh, Kenai Fjords. It was pretty amazing. It was a great trip. I mean [00:40:00] we got to see Denali in all its glory, so it was awesome.

BB: "The great one."

LP: "The great one," yes. Absolutely.

BB: What else do you want to tell me? Do you want to tell me -- do you have anything... "He hasn't asked me that!"

LP: Part of it is dealing with our visitors and with the cultural change, law enforcement when I first started was more definitely on the educational side of things. And with the changes in society, um, you know, criminals go to national parks as well. And, you know, the parks that we've worked in, we've dealt with the whole variety of, you know, from assaults and things like that, so I think that law enforcement rangers now have more serious incidences to deal with where as before, you know, yes, motor vehicle collisions, some people breaking into cars and things like that, but I think day in and day out now we are exposed to more of the, of the society's changes. You know, whether it be prescription drug abuse, you know, meth labs are huge in national parks, um, those types of things that we have to respond and react to, which is not something that I think a lot of people expect in your national parks, and I think that that's kind of one of those things that we have to do -- I'm not going to say a better job of letting people know what's going on, I don't think that, you know, when I go to a national park, I really want to dive into "What are your issues here, you know, what's your criminal activity?" I want to go and enjoy the place, which I think most of our visitors do, but from a management standpoint we have to acknowledge that those things go on, and we have to address

them, so I think it's those type of things that will be a challenge in the future for all law enforcement programs in national parks is how do we respond to all those issues that are outside the park that are actually in the park as well.

BB: What are your hopes for the future of the national park? People there doing the work like you are, of the system, the whole –

LP: Well, I think that's interesting, and I think that, you know, the funding for national parks is what it is, I think that that's going to be challenge, facing that moving forward, I think that we're not getting the funding that we're -- the funding doesn't go as far as it used to, inflation, uh, and all those types of things. Everything you can throw at, you know, just like your budget at home, it is what you have coming in. So we have to work within those limitations, and I think sometimes when you're looking at enhancing your own programs, that it's very challenging to do that within the financial constraints that we have. So I would like to see some avenues, um, you know, whether it be grant writing or those types of things where we can bring in more money to the national parks and be able to spend it where that money comes in at. So yeah, I think just to be able to address those future challenges, uh, you know, if money's not the answer, we have to come up with some more creative ways to either provide training for our staff, to provide equipment that is necessary, uh, you know, keeping up with what the standard practices are across the board for law enforcement organizations and educating our own employees, the, you know a

lot people don't understand exactly what it is that we do. While that's acceptable for the general public, I think that the parks service employees, we should educate them about what we do, and that goes across the board with any discipline, that we do all work together for the same goal, and I think we have to be open-minded enough to say, "Yes, we all have a value here, and no one position, or one division is any more important than the other. We all have the same goal, and that is to provide facilities and opportunities to engage our public." I think that that's a tricky balance for park managers.

BB: Thank you.

LP: You're welcome. Thank you.