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**Kentucky Folklife Program
Interview Transcription**

Project name: Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

Field ID and name: #0036; Coy Hanson

Interviewee: Coy Hanson

Interviewer/Recordist: Brent Björkman

Date: July 10, 2014

Location: Mammoth Cave National Park

Others Present:

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Transcription prepared by: Ellie Hasken; edited 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: Today is, uh, July 10, 2014, and, um, this is Brent Björkman, director of the Kentucky Folklife Program. We're working on the, the Library of Congress Ranger Lore Project that we're doing for the American Folklife Center, and, uh, it's a real honor to be here today with, uh, a very special guest. We're here in Cave City with somebody very special who worked with the park service for quite a long time, he has a long family history, he's been at several different parks, he's a had a lot of, uh, different positions so we're going to be here today and talk about, you know, what life has been like been working as a ranger and all the-all the various types of duties and potions that he's had. Could you, uh, state your name? And tell me the position that you ended your career with the park service in?

Coy Hanson: Coy J. Hanson. I was district ranger on Natchez Tooth Parkway in northern Texas.

BB: Okay, well Mr. Hanson, I know from talking with all these -- some of these younger folks at the park, they all really look up to you and, uh, uh, the whole Hanson family. And certainly, um, I'm happy to be here and learn more about it. One of the questions I ask people to start out the interview is, uh, you know, how did you get -- how did you become a ranger? Or how did you first get involved with thinking this might be something for you? And I think with you perhaps was it a family kinda thing? Or did you live near the park at the time when you were growing up?

CH: Well, when I was 17 years old was my first job at -- public job and that was being a night bell hop at the [indistinguishable] Hotel in Mammoth Cave National Park.

BB: What year would that have been, roughly?

CH: 1937. And from there, the following year, in 1938, I was employed as a trailer at Mammoth Cave National Park today. At that time, it was still under private ownership of the -- the Association --

BB: Uh huh.

CH: National Park Association.

BB: Wow.

CH: I was a trailer and a handyman.

BB: So, trailer. That meant that you were along with a lead guide.

CH: Along with the party and at that time you could still get tips, but in 1941 it became a National Park and I got a little raise but I didn't get anymore tips. [laughs]

BB: That didn't balance itself out then, did it? [CH laughs]

CH: I did better with the raise -- new position. My first official park service thing was field service one. \$100 a month.

BB: Wow.

CH: And I worked at that until -- at '38 until 1941 it became a national park. And I graduated from high school in '40, I got married in '42. And I stayed as a seasonal guide until 1960.

BB: Okay.

CH: I had the war in between there.

BB: You did service?

CH: I had -- I went to service in '42, the same year I got married. I got married one day and got my notice to come the next day to be examined. Twenty-three days later, I was sworn into the US Army and was there until, let's see -- I guess I got home in '45. My son was born in the meantime and he was eight months old when I first saw him. I had '41 missions over Germany in a B26 bomber.

BB: That's a whole other -- that's a whole other series of interviews. Have you been interviewed about that yet? Have you been interviewed about your service, is that something that you've talked --

CH: No. That's -- it's very brief, I guess, according to some. But, I went over there in, uh, July of '44 and come home in August of '46.

[00:04:55]

CH: I don't know what else I should say about that.

BB: No, that's -- that's fine.

CH: One thing that I found that's intriguing was the B26 bomber was of course the main bomber at that time, but that pilot had control of two machine guns that shot out threw the propeller without ever hitting the propeller.

BB: That was some advanced technology at that time, wasn't it?

CH: Yeah, it was. I thought so.

BB: Yeah.

CH: My first position in that airplane was between the two ways to under, I had .50 caliber out of each one and we'd test for them before getting over into their territory. And that -- after that, why, I never did get to shoot much except [indistinguishable]. The, uh, enemy fighter planes concentrated on B17s flying from the 8th Air Force, I was in the 9th Air Force.

BB: So, when you came back, you came back from service, you had been married right before you went in and then you-you came back and you went back to the park.

CH: When --

BB: Is that right?

CH: Went back to the park, yes.

BB: Uh, huh.

CH: As seasonally still.

BB: Still as seasonal, still? Okay.

CH: And I got -- I finally stayed long enough in 1960 I became a permanent guide, but I had, uh, assistant interpreter that would come in and I had a taken the federal service entrance examination three times and had passed. He asked me, "Coy, you think can pass that test again?" I said, "Well, I believe so." He said, "I'll tell you one thing, you pass it, you got a permanent position." I did pass it. According to the results it said you passed it well enough to be a GS-9, but I didn't immediately get that, I got a GS-7. And from there, I went to Chickamauga/Chattanooga National Military Park up in North Georgia. There two years. Then I went to Olympic National Park as a seasonal district ranger again. I stayed there about 19 months and transferred to Great Smoky Mountains National Park with the Job Corps.

BB: Okay. You were connected to the -- with the Job Corps. Yeah.

CH: Yeah, the superintendent at the park that time knew me personally and he come out and stole me from Olympic National Park. [laughs] I was there at that Job Corps for about six months. Am I doing all right?

BB: Yep. [CH laughs] Great.

CH: And then I went over to -- that was Oconaluftee, then I went over to Tremont Job Corps until I transferred back to the Smokies as a district ranger in the Smoky Mountains National Park. The North Carolina side and my territory. All of it. And

then from there, I transferred to Russell Cave National Monument down in Alabama. That was a Indian-type cave that-that National Geographic had given to the Park Service and I was there for about a year. And the difference I had at North Carolina to many people, so what's going on down there in the mean time and during the winter you get two or three cards a day that didn't satisfy so I transferred to Natchez Trace Parkway in Tupelo, Mississippi, as Assistant Chief Ranger and the later getting ready to retire, I asked the district ranger on north part of the Natchez Trace and that's what I retired from in 1982. That pretty well lines up.

BB: So you had 40 years in the park service almost, right?

CH: Well, if you counted over 30 years of actual time, but I mean, some of that seasonal time didn't add up too quick.

BB: That's true. Right. That's, that's --

CH: I had a very interesting career in the National Park Service.

BB: Tell me about, uh, so when you were 17 and you first started here, you know you started. Did you have other family members that were connected to this -- you know how where you connected to this -- this area? Did you have other people in your family?

CH: My brother, Pete Hanson, were very instrumental in discovering that huge discovery of 1938. He was later lost his life on Noto Island and my brother Garner, just younger than I, was director of the National Park concessions for many years. We were born and raised on a little farm in the park. We all graduated from high school, but I never did get

to go to college. My brother, A.C. Hanson, and Garner Hanson and my sister, Mary Alice, all graduate from college. My youngest brother was a downs syndrome victim and he the only one that never did graduate from school.

[00:10:42]

BB: Mhmm. So, tell me about, um, what I've been hearing a little bit about, that you seem connected. You went to the Smokies to be part of the very interesting time that when the Job Corps came in. Can you speak about that time? The Job -- the Job Corps. Can you tell me what it was about and how that worked? The Job Corps?

CH: The Job Corps was good for a lot of kids and it was good for the community some places too. It helped different projects come along. Joining the Corps is really adding to the benefit of the county and the cities.

BB: Mhmm. We're, we're talking -- I'm very interested in this working life. You mentioned that you were trailing some tours and things like that. I talk with a lot of cave guides and they told me that some of them had mentors, you know, somebody who brought them along and taught them a lot while they were -- you know how to talk to people or what -- how they interpreted back then. It sounds like it was a little different way back before the -- as it is today. Maybe more informative today, but maybe it was more joking kind of atmosphere? Or? Can you tell me some of the names of some of those folks that you worked with when you were first here and some of those old timers?

CH: Yeah, Steve and Lloyd Wilson. Two brothers that were born and raised in the Park Service. Lester Carney was very joking with people. Like, at one place, there's a little nodule coming out of the ceiling and it looks like a donut. And the question that people would ask, "Oh where is the hole?" "You're in the hole." [Laughs]

BB: So, they had their little ways of talking --

CH: Yeah.

BB: To people. [CH laughs] Mhmm. So you were married. So, can you tell me a little bit about -- did you have a fa -- did you have children? Did you have children and things? You and your wife have children?

CH: Just that one son.

BB: Okay.

CH: She went through all that by herself, I was overseas and it was her choice not to produce any more children. [laughs]

BB: Okay. So, they -- she -- she and your son, they followed you around the parks? I mean, you traveled as a family and you stayed in, in quarters?

CH: Right. My wife -- my son didn't get to travel unless he was getting married, about that time we were doing some of traveling. He got married when I went to Chickamauga/Chattanooga to Olympic.

BB: Oh.

CH: He's, uh, 49 years old right now. [laughs] So he didn't travel much with us after I got out of the -- into the Park Service. But my wife, as long as I was in the States, I went in -- I hope I'm not running south.

BB: No, no, no, it's good. I just need to look at the tape counter.

CH: Anyway. When I first went in the Army, I went up to Indianapolis and from there I went out in -- near St. Louis, Missouri for basic training. But when I got there I went in that night overhead that had a placard overhead that said, "Be a US gunner and earn your starts and stripes." Two months later, I was a buck sergeant. And after that, I went to Frieda, Washington, to B17 training. And, my wife came out there to be with me. Her first time ever being out of Barren and Edmonson County. She came on a night that I had to be out night flying for basic training and I left a message for her at the local train station what she should do. I had a place for her to go and stay, but when she got there the fella I left the message with was no longer on duty. She got there after dark. But she saw my handwriting on the wall, on the bulletin board and got her information from that. Next morning, I saw her about four o'clock. I was out to join her. I had been up flying around mountain, that one out in Oregon.

BB: Huh.

CH: And she stayed with me there until I went to South Dakota to gunnery -- radio gunnery school then. She with me until we went back to Frieda. There I transferred to

Lawton, Oklahoma. In 1944 I took her home and went overseas to join the Army Air Corps.

BB: Right.

[00:16:08]

CH: 9th Air Force.

BB: Right.

CH: Yeah.

BB: You, um, you worked your way up in the, uh, Park Service in different jobs and you would --

CH: Yeah.

BB: You'd progress. How did that -- how did that -- how did that training work at the time? Did you have to go to a special training session? Or was on the job training for you?

CH: Just on the job.

BB: Can you tell me how maybe when you first got in that first position -- I'm trying to think now -- after you were -- you were here in your first permanent position that -- that wasn't just trailing was what position? I can't --

CH: Oh, I was a ranger there at Mammoth Cave for two years.

BB: That's right.

CH: And my first assignment was to move over to Sand Cave and check on Floyd Collins once a month. [laughs] He has since been taken out and buried, but his body was there.

BB: Oh, it was on display. Or on --

CH: Yeah, it had a glass or coffin like thing over -- over. But he had been patched up because he had -- his body was stolen from that cave at one time and thrown over a cliff near the river and later retrieved and put back in there and patched up.

BB: So that was part of the whole experience of cave touring then, to see [CH laughs] to see this Floyd, Floyd Collins?

CH: I'd have to go down and check on him once a month. [laughs] Yep. And from there I was to Chickamauga/Chattanooga about two years after that.

BB: And that position -- how did you -- what was that position?

CH: Well, it was --

BB: What were your duties there?

CH: Patrol some during the park, but then we also had a place up on Lookout Mountain that I had to go relieve a fella two days a week, that he worked up there. I'd ride that train that went up the mountain. I guess you've heard of it.

BB: Yeah.

CH: Yeah.

BB: And then you would stay up there for -- you would stay up there for two days to give him a -- to spell him?

CH: Yeah, I would go back to, to my home, but I didn't get much sleep those two nights.

BB: Mhmm. So, it's a variety of duties. You have a lot of different duties when you were at that job.

CH: That's right.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: They had a little visitors center up there and that fellow, I'd go up and relieve him that two days and I'd go up there and answer questions and be available.

BB: Yeah.

CH: But down in the park itself, on night patrol a lot.

BB: What does that mean? Night patrol? What did you do?

CH: We got out into the park and break up beer. [laughs] And people dating.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: Had some strange experiences with that, too.

BB: Really?

CH: I won't go into them.

BB: Yeah, okay. So there were park people partying in the parks back then too? People were drinking and having parties back in that day, too.

CH: I went up -- one fellow asked if he'd been drinking and he said no. Beer cans were laying all around. [laughs] And another evidence that we won't go into.

BB: Uh huh. Yeah, so you saw a lot of things. Yeah. I was wondering -- I've been talking to the law enforcement -- today's law enforcement in the park and they went through a lot of times when they couldn't carry a gun on their body or they had to leave their gun on their truck. Did you carry weapons back then when you were --

CH: I never did carry a weapon -- well, I'll take that back. When I was in the Smokies, Cherokee Indian Reservation, I wore my gun that night. Well, two or three different nights. But that's the only time I ever carried a weapon.

[00:20:13]

BB: Hmm. Did you have a weapon issued to you?

CH: I had one in the vehicle. I was with the superintendent in Tupelo one time, I had to stop and get after a boy that was misbehaving. I didn't take my gun, but, the superintendent said you handled that well.

BB: Yeah.

CH: I don't know about those weapons.

BB: Yeah. Yeah.

CH: I don't know I can brandish them, I know that.

BB: Yeah.

CH: A lot of the guys coming in the ranger job today may not like to hear me say this, but I didn't believe in it.

BB: Yeah, I think they try to use them at a minimum. I, I think they're pretty thoughtful that way too.

CH: Of course, some of the rangers have lost their lives. People like that.

BB: It's not an easy job. I don't think everyone knows that. So, um, I was talking to Mr. Lee --

CH: Dan Lee?

BB: Mhmm.

CH: Well --

BB: I was out with him too, you must know him well.

CH: Well he'd go on up to Chickamauga/Chattanooga. He brought back -- I've known that family all my life.

BB: Yeah, they're a very nice family, that's right.

CH: Another experience I might like to tell you about, I was up in Olympic. We had, uh, river that runs into the ocean, just below my ranger station and three boys got into the boat and tried to cross it after a rain storm and they got swept out to sea. Well, about six weeks later, one of the bodies comes back on the shore and it was late in the afternoon when they reported to me, so, we took the --

BB: Now, Mr. Hanson, we were talking about the young boys that got swept out to sea? And one of them came back?

CH: One of them came back. That's all we ever found. But it's late in the afternoon, or almost dark, so that body was taken up to my ranger station and stayed all night long.

[laughs]

BB: Wow.

CH: They picked him up the next morning.

BB: Yeah.

CH: But, that was kind of a strange experience.

BB: Mhmm. Did, did you have to supervise a lot of people? Supervising any different?

CH: Now there are seasonal rangers I'd supervise, four control aids that would be out in towers, like that. That's the way it was out at Olympic. Out in the [indistinguishable] River sub-district and we had a place up on the other side of the [indistinguishable] River from where we stood. We'd have to go up there and take care of situations.

BB: What kinds of things -- what kind of situations up there? What kind of situations did you have to take care of?

CH: Well, people that were doing wrong things. [laughs]

BB: Mhmm.

CH: And who had control -- fire control aids up there doing forestry, too.

BB: Mmhmm.

CH: Forestry and not too long out there, but -- you had a lot that you, you could go up to that ranch that we had up there and walk along the trail and you'd have moose. Not, not moose. Elk. Laying beside the trail. To get over that river we'd ride a horse and then walk in the rest of the way. It was a great experience.

BB: You, you were speaking about watching for fires. During your career, were there fires in the parks you were at? Different fires that happened?

CH: Well, not, not a big fire, except on the coast this drift wood would catch fire and we'd have to try to put it out. [laughs] We had plenty of water but, it's hard to get from the ocean. All that saltwater kinda bells up the equipment. But I remember one time we did have a fire that went on for two or three days before we could ever get it controlled.

BB: Hmm.

[00:25:09]

CH: Clam Days were popular out there, too. I used to try to get clams, but you had to be pretty fast to catch them.

BB: At low tide, right?

CH: Yeah. You could see them bubbling where they are. You start digging, before you get there they're gone most of the time. What else should I talk about?

BB: Did you have fire crews that came out there? Like, today they have fire people that actually are dispatched out to different locations for fire control. Or did the local rangers take care of the fires most --

CH: Most, most that we had there, see you got a lot of rain in, in that part of the country. That's south of there into California and Oregon it's quite different, I guess.

BB: What was your favorite park? What was your favorite park, or your favorite duty?

CH: I hate to say, but I think Mammoth Cave was my favorite. I enjoyed Smokies, that was very busy. Kept me out of doldrums.

BB: Now, your duties there, with the Job Corps, Mr. Lee brought you were specifically to -- was it work with the Job Corps? Uh, with the -- with the you --

CH: Yeah.

BB: Young people? Or with?

CH: Yeah, you worked with the children and also got control of their activities, then not all ready to be organized. [laughs]

BB: Mhmm. So, some of it was kind of organized babysitting? I mean, you had to watch them and help them grow up, I suppose.

CH: Yeah. I know one occasion we lost a corpsman. He was on the back of a roller, it was down in trails, you know? And jiggling, pulling that thing, he lost the thing and he was crushed right in, in there.

BB: So you had to take care of that, call his family and all that business?

CH: Right.

BB: Well, they sure built a lot of great things in our parks, those Job Corps.

CH: They did a lot of different places. The Mammoth Cave area had actives too.

BB: What did they build at Mammoth Cave? What kind of things do you remember?

CH: Really, they went to Branville, the county seat, and did some local projects. I didn't work with them there, but I was aware of what was going on. In fact, they're still active, the Job Corps Smokies, at Mammoth Cave. Talking about my brother, my brother, Garner, was general manager of the National Park concession operation.

BB: At Mammoth Cave?

CH: All, all the national park concessions. They had one in -- up in Alaska, Elroy, Big Bend -- that at one time, briefly. He had quite a good job I guess.

BB: Did he make a career out of it too?

CH: He did. He died in 1988. When he was still going pretty active.

BB: Was he older than you?

CH: He was younger than I -- he was immediately under me. Now look, my brother, who was just older than I, lost his life. But the national park concessions used to carry mail from the old Mammoth Cave hotel to Frozen Acres. One rainy day, he was going towards Mammoth Cave, and if you're familiar with where the elevator is, before he gets there, goes around a curve and he didn't make that curve. Later, my oldest brother, still working for national park concessions, on my mother's birthday was going to Glasgow to get her a present, and if you know where that souvenir stand is, Ferguson's, just outside the park, the old road running around the other side of it, and he hit a big gas truck, or a big gas

truck hit him. His death was instant. My brother that's just older than I lost his life, like I say down there, but he lived a couple days and he had punctured lungs, which today would not have been too bad, but at that time it was fatal for him.

[00:30:37]

BB: That's some tragic, tragic happenings. Yeah.

CH: The day that he had the accident I was just coming home from my first year of high school out at Glasgow Junction, it was then. When I got home I got the news that he had a wreck.

BB: Hmm.

CH: I guess I'm getting too much personal stuff in there.

BB: No, not at all. I just needed to look at the timer. I just -- yeah. Wow. So, what was life like growing up in the park? What was your --

CH: I mean, there was farm life, you might say. My brother Pete, that lost his life, and I did a lot of share cropping because our farm was only about 49 acres. And we -- Dad and Mom raised 10 children.

BB: What'd you grow there? What kind of crops did you grow?

CH: Tobacco and corn, mostly. We'd raise our own bacon and pork. Raise our own wheat, for flour and our own corn for corn maize. Me and my brother just older than I

used to travel from four miles to go into Glasgow Junction to get our needs like salt and pepper and anything [laughs] like that.

BB: Other than that, you grew it all, or? You milled your own flour? And --

CH: You --

BB: You ground your own flour and corn?

CH: Yes.

BB: You had it ground?

CH: Also, our -- we'd dry sorghum, or sugar cane, and make molasses. We'd pick blackberries and different things. My mama'd have at least a 100 half-gallons of blackberries canned. Besides jams and jellies. Our food -- we ate well but we worked for it [laughs] pretty hard.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: We'd raise our wheat and combine -- I mean, thrusher -- would come around and turn it into from sheaves to the loose wheat. And down at Rocky Hill Crossing, you'd turn left and go out there to the little town of-where we had -- left our wheat and we'd go back when ever we'd need it and get more be on deposit. So, most of our food we'd raise ourselves. We had a share cropping with the Greg Doyle, he had -- he owned Doyle Valley, you've probably heard of Doyle Valley.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: But anyway, he had raised turnips down there and we'd go down and load up the wagon-load of turnips. Mama would bury them in the garden and we'd have turnips all winter long. [laughs]

BB: Wow.

CH: She had a way of getting that to stay dry, nothing but dirt showing and grass or whatever.

BB: Did she know how to do -- did you also dig medicinal plants and stuff? Did you have ginseng and different --

CH: We would hunt ginseng. It used to be plentiful. And poke salad.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: We -- that was buried.

BB: You like the poke -- you like the poke salad?

CH: Well, I do.

BB: You get it very often anymore? You try it anymore?

CH: Pretty regular. I've got a lot right in, around here. I can get all I need.

BB: Hmm. So your mother's people -- what family -- she's a local, she was a local girl, your mother?

CH: Yeah, you know what? In all her life, she's within three miles of where she was born and raised, except – now, she did travel later after my son was born. They went to Big Bend and Carlsbad and places like that. I got a picture of her down and out in the middle of Rio Grande River with dress above her knees going over to [indistinguishable], that little Mexican village.

BB: So, she had a chance to travel because of you and your, your movement.

CH: Yep. I guess that's right. I had a sister working at Big Bend when she went there.

BB: Wow, your whole family – all, many of your brothers and sisters were connected to the park in some way.

CH: Yeah. My two sisters -- I had three sisters, two of them, one worked at Big Bend for a long time. They both worked in Alaska and Florida. They -- it used to be a concession national park, a national park concession operation in Florida. The Everglades. I guess between concessions and park service we did a lot of that.

[00:36:06]

BB: Got Hansons everywhere. Hansons all over the United States. [CH laughs] Did your brother, your brother that was in charge of, uh, concessions, did he help them get those jobs? How did women get jobs back then? Do you remember?

CH: I can say the one that's in charge of National Park concessions --

BB: Mhmm.

CH: Family operated, I reckoned. And my brother that got killed in Alaska, I mean Matthew Allen, he was instrumental in Discovery 1038, the new discovery.

BB: The New Discovery Cave? Or the new --

CH: He was the main one of finding that thing up Roaring River.

BB: Mhmm. Wow. So you have a, your --

CH: He and my dad, and Leo and Claude and aunt were the four who went up there.

BB: Did he tell you about that? How did --

CH: He didn't say much about it, bless his heart. At that time, seemed like they tried to keep it kind of quiet for some reason. I was working there, but he never did tell me anything about it.

BB: So your dad was, your dad was involved in cave exploring, too? Your dad?

CH: Oh honey. My dad -- the year I was born, in 1921, when George E. Mershon (HANNAH, NOT SURE ON NAME [00:37:36]) opened up New Entrance and also Frozen Niagara. My dad and Uncle Earl was right there with him through all that. I remember they used to have what they called a Deleco System that showed the pits and domes running down through the New Entrance and I'd go with dad down the Bone Ring

to get distilled water to operate those bat systems, I don't know how that did it. I, I know something about Mammoth Cave all my life, I reckon.

BB: Did your dad first start taking you in-did he start-was he the one that took you into the cave the first time? Or was it your brothers? Was it a family?

CH: Uh, I just don't remember. It's -- I was born in '21. [laughs] I guess I got first acquainted with it going at night bellhop and then working down at the New Entrance. I used to carry lanterns from what we called Mount McKinley back to [indistinguishable] Entrance. We'd have lanterns, or what they called a dyke's kerosene lantern. You'd put one out here then you'd take the hooks off the others. You'd have about ten there and ten here, then you'd tie them together with what you call "grass sacks," sling them over your shoulder and carry them back to the cave entrance, up 183 steps, I believe it was. [laughs]

BB: Wow. Times have changed.

CH: [laughs] I'll say.

BB: You were, you were around when they used to throw flares, too. When they used to throw --

CH: Oh, yeah.

BB: Torches.

CH: My dad was left-handed. He was real good at that. I never did get that knowledge or experience. I remember one of my first experiences, there's a place called Purgatory

Saloon, that's a little hole over above there called Gnat's Eye. I remember the first time I tried there. I threw, hit the wall and bounced. I lit another one, didn't learn anything from the first one. Somebody said, "Looking good!" [laughs] But my dad, there's a place called Mammoth Dome out what used to be the Echo River trip, and you walk out on a bridge and you look up at the big tall, tall dome above you. But anyway, there's a place up there they called the Liberty Bell. It's shaped just like a bell. And my dad could hit that about every time. He's left-handed and it worked out just right. I'd try it. I wouldn't hit the bell, but there's waterfall right under it, I'd get it on the, that ledge. The waterfall would show up so beautiful. I didn't explain anything about the Liberty Bell. [laughs] But anyway, I, I had a few things with the, with the torch.

[00:41:03]

BB: That would be something to see. I would love to see, see somebody throwing a torch again. That's interesting.

CH: Fred Furlong was another left-hander. They, both them, they could hit that about every time. That's way up there too. That went through that hole, it's narrow at the top and just kind of looked exactly like the Liberty Bell.

BB: How did they do those torches? Did they, is it kerosene soaked? How did you produce -- how did you make a torch? Do you remember that?

CH: It's cotton cloth, twisted pretty tight, wrapped it up pretty heavy at the bottom. Soak it in kerosene. And it'd smoke up the cave pretty good. [laughs]

BB: And the handle was just a chunk of wood, or, uh?

CH: Do what now?

BB: The handle? The torch itself, was it a piece of wood, or was it?

CH: Yeah. The torch stick.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: I guess I don't have one here right now. I let Ronald Doyle have one of mine for display out at his place out in Cave City. I still got some over at my home place.

BB: Where's your home place? You mean the place you grew up? Or --

CH: Yeah, where my mother grew up. Oh, are you familiar with what's called Showmount?

BB: Mmm --

CH: Down in the cavern.

BB: Mhmm.

CH: You know where you get to the top of the hill?

BB: Mhmm.

CH: That's Showmount. Anyway, just cross the road is where my mother was grown and raised. The little clump of trees there. And now there's a house that sits just beyond it. That's where my brother, Garner, built my home. And that – down into the park about a mile and half was where I was born and raised in a log cabin. You, you heard the dogtrot cabins?

BB: Sure have.

CH: I was born and raised in that. With the big chimney at each end, with sandstone chimney. But the dogtrot was closed in, so that was a bedroom for my dad. [laughs] And he had built a little room on the back of it for all of us boys.

BB: So you all lived together in that one room, the boys did.

CH: You got four or five of us at the time. You had two beds. You ever hear of the straw-tick?

BB: The straw-tick mattress?

CH: Yeah.

BB: Yeah.

CH: That's what we had to sleep on. We had plenty of straw. [laughs] How my mother kept us going, I don't know, but she did.

BB: Your dad was a guide then, right? Your dad, your father --

CH: Yeah, until he had to retire.

BB: When did he -- when do you reckon he started guiding?

CH: '21.

BB: He started guiding in '21.

CH: Well, it wasn't guiding to start with. But, George E. Mershon had he and Uncle Earl and two or three other fellows help develop those two entrances.

BB: And he guided for how long? Until?

CH: Until he was 70, they made him quit. About 44 years I believe he would be. And that entrance, that new entrance -- there used to be a man the name of Mr. Braden and Mr. Yearl. There's a building down right up from the entrance built around trees. And that Mr. Braden had made me that little thing shaped like an acre and it tipped right like top to point and it screws -- I still got that. But I think it's over at the home place. He made me when I was just a three or four years old. Oh, I have a lot of memories if I could bring them all up. [laugh]

[00:45:18]

BB: Well, you're bringing some up. You're doing good. Yeah. Yeah. It was quite a time here. You all made your own food and you, you got, you got along. But you worked hard didn't you?

CH: Yeah, it felt like I've had plenty of good food all my life. [laughs] Course, I thought my mother's cooking was the best there ever was.

BB: I'm sure it was wonderful. What was your favorite food? What did you like the best? What did you look forward to?

CH: I guess -- ham. Ham for me.

BB: Okay.

CH: And corn's awfully good, just on the cob. [laughs] I -- right now, I eat in the morning that Fruit Loops one day and bacon and -- oh, where'd my -- running out of words.

BB: Whatever tastes right to you at the time. You enjoy whatever you want to eat.

CH: Yeah. I'm trying to think what I had for breakfast. [laughs] Is that not pitiful? Bacon and biscuit and honey and egg. That's it. Eggs and bacon, biscuit and honey.

BB: Sounds great. Have you been at the park at all? Have you been back to the park lately?

CH: Not since last Fourth of July. Oh, yeah I went back Sunday after Fourth. [laughs] I was there on Fourth of July. My son and I went and had a good day. My brother didn't get to go, but he wanted to go the next -- he wanted to go Sunday. We had the same waitress that -- as I had about back in Easter. And she come in to wait on us and after she service

us, I said, "Your Debbie aren't ya?" She said, "Yeah." Said, "You remember me?" About three months earlier she had served us. You know what?

BB: Hmm.

CH: Got ready to get the bill, my brother was paying that day. He said, "Hon, you haven't added that ice cream on there." She says, "It's on me today." [laughs]

BB: She appreciated that, didn't she?

CH: Yeah. Reckon that, I guess.

BB: Yeah. So you've been going to the reunions? Do you go to the guide reunions they have every few --

CH: Every -- yeah. About every five years we have one. I believe one's due this year. And usually they have one right after Christmas. The first Saturday after Christmas usually. George Duvall used to head that up, but last year he went off to Florida to be with his daughter. [laughs] But we have a good time.

BB: That's great. What do you -- do you have any hopes for the -- hopes for the future for the park? What would you tell some young people that really wanted to start working at the park? What would you -- what do you hope for them about the national park here?

CH: I hope that, that it will be easy to access. I have a friend, he goes to church, she's 16, she's working down in the cavern and she wants to apply for, when she gets 18, she wants to apply to Mammoth Cave. She's trying to get a little experience.

BB: So you're encouraging to her?

CH: I am.

BB: What do you tell her? What kinds of advice, what advice do you give her?

CH: I tell her to keep plugging. I plugged from '38 – '64, I got a permanent [laughs] job. Speaking of Diamond Cavern, though, my granddad on my mother's dad, he was a guide for Diamond Cavern for years.

BB: What was his name?

CH: Ian Doyle. It was -- Dr. Rowsley owned it at that time. I guess his descendants still do, I'm not sure.

BB: So, you've got cave guides on both the sides of your family.

CH: Oh yeah. [laughs] And my grandfather, Peter Hanson, was a carpenter for the old Mammoth Cave operation. He died in 1912, I believe. But he -- he did a lot of work for the old hotel. You know, one burned about '16, but he was already gone, he wasn't there to help rebuild that one.

BB: How long have the Hansons been around here? How far back do the Hansons go, do you know?

CH: Well my granddad goes back -- I can't pinpoint it exactly.

BB: At least middle of the 1800s.

CH: Uh?

BB: At least the middle of the 1800s somewhere?

CH: Yeah. That's right. He died in 1912. The -- yeah, he was -- you got it right there somewhere in that vicinity. I had Uncle Oscar born in '89. Uncle Oscar, by the way, was town marshal in Cave City when Floyd Collins was trapped.

BB: When Floyd Collins was trapped?

CH: It was 1925.

BB: Yeah, you were just a little tyke when that happened, weren't you.

CH: Yeah. Yeah, but there --

BB: Were you?

CH: My dad went over there and he talked to Floyd Collins, a lot of Model T's around. That's about the best thing I can remember about it. But yeah, he took me with him. That is right.

BB: Big audi -- a lot of people around there waiting.

CH: Oh -- a lot of moonshine being sold. [laughs] Oh my.

BB: Yeah.

CH: I guess I -- he just --

BB: I think you're right.

CH: Yeah.

BB: Yeah.

CH: I can remember all those cars and people being around.

BB: Lots on the radio too, I think.

CH: Do what?

BB: There was lots of talk on the radio is what I --

CH: Oh yeah. The only communication they had like that in those days. And the newspapers. I've been a fan of Courier-Journal for, oh, probably [indistinguishable] puzzle down yonder?

BB: Mhmm.

CH: My daughter-in-law enlarges it for me. I've been working on crossword puzzles since way back.

BB: Yeah, I like them too.

CH: In fact, my son has them now with the computers, some of those questions that I wouldn't have any idea about he'll find on the computer for me. And between us, since 19 -- since 2008, we haven't missed one. [laughs]

BB: That's great. Keeps your mind sharp.

CH: Yeah, I hope so. [BB laughs] Hope it can help me keep my memory.

BB: Yeah. Well you've done a lot -- you've done real well today. I appreciate you sharing with us today. Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to give me? You've sure shared a lot.

CH: I don't know. I -- I'm not much on giving advice. [laughs] But I think you're doing a wonderful thing.

BB: Thank you.

CH: Kind of getting some histories.

BB: Well, it's been a great experience. And, uh, we thank you for adding to it. Thank you.