

## Kentucky Folklife Program Interview Transcription

**Project name:** Ranger Lore (LOCRP)

**Field ID and name:** #0015; Tres Seymour interview

**Interviewee:** William (Tres) Seymour

**Interviewer/Recordist:** Brent Björkman

**Date:** 4/16/2014

**Location:** Mammoth Cave National Park, KY

**Others Present:** N/A

**Equipment used:** EOS 70D DSLR Camera

**Microphone:** Rode, VideoMic Pro Compact Shotgun Microphone

**Recording Format:** .mov (converted to .wav audio file)

**Recorded Tracks in Session:** 1 audio track (compiled from 7 video files)

**Duration:** [01:04:47]

**Keywords:** Echo River, Stephen Bishop, Wild Cave Tour, graphic design

**Corresponding Materials:**

Forms: KFP2014LOCRP\_0015\_BBms0001 - KFP2014LOCRP\_0015\_BBms0003

Audio recording: KFP2014LOCRP\_0015\_BBsr0001

Video files: KFP2014LOCRP\_0015\_BBmv0001 - KFP2014LOCRP\_0015\_BBmv0011

### **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: Today is April 16, 2015. This is the director of the Kentucky Folklife Program, Brent Björkman. We are here continuing our work with our Ranger Lore occupational folk culture project. We're at Mammoth Cave National Park and I am here with a special guest today. We're doing three interviews today. If you could, introduce yourself and, and say your current job title and then maybe you could go into what we've been talking to most people, starting out with, is you know, what brought you into the park service? You know, it's, it's everyone's maybe origin story or a variation thereof.

TRES SEYMOUR: Sure. My name is William Randolph Seymour, III, which is too much name for anybody, so they call me Tres, for the third. Uno, dos, tres. Tres Seymour. I am the park's visual information specialist, which is also too much title for anybody. What it means is I'm the park's graphic designer. I deal with publications, the Web, basically anything that's non-personal interpretation. Designs of various sorts that help people to understand the resource. I didn't start that way though. I started out as a cave guide back in 1987. Mammoth Cave is the only job I have ever had, aside from a couple of assistantships in college, but one summer, when I was a college sophomore, I needed a job, and my uncle, Leland Gregory, at the time also a friend of mine, both were working seasonally here at the park. And they suggested I would enjoy it, so I applied and was taken on as a GS3 trailing guide. And I never stopped coming back. In the spring of 1994, they called me for a term position full-time, which I accepted at the cost of finishing my Masters degree in English at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. I just sort of dropped that like a hot potato and came up here and took that in hopes of getting a permanent position, and, and that turned into that. I already had one Master's degree, so I figured, oh well. Term positions in the park service don't come along everyday, so I thought, well, I'll, I'll take that.

BB: That's great. I, I've talked to other people about this idea of timing and, and other things. Some people had military service, so at that period of time that gave them a leg up. But it sounds like that was a wonderful timing for you. So you began your job journey through the park. You started out trailing, which means following a lead.

TS: That's right. In the guide service, you have, you have guides who lead the tour and then you have beginning guides when they first start off who bring up the rear, learning as they go. It was kind of irritating, actually, because I spent two years as a GS3 trailer, even though in my second year, my second season, other people who had come on as threes the same time as I did got promoted up to fours, that second year, so they could actually guide tours, mainly on the strength that they had guided at private show caves, that sort of thing. I was perfectly capable of guiding a tour at that point, but they kept me a three, so it was kind of annoying, but anyway. I did my duty and I learned a lot. But now I am one of only, I think, three of us left from that 1987 class, if you will. Kathy Profitt and Charlie Hanion and I, I think are all that's left of, of 1987. We're some of the longest-serving group of that sort of middle group that came in.

BB: Um-hm. So this trailing-leading mentorship, did, was there something to explain about that, or was it simply you wa-, observing them? What was that process like?

TS: Oh, it was a, mentorship. (exhales) [0:05:00] I'm not even sure that's the right word for it.

BB: It may not be.

TS: My first experience, my very first trip into the cave was with Duke Jenkins. And if you haven't heard about Duke, I'm sure you will because he was a character. It was a, what then was called a Half Day Tour. It's now the Grand Avenue Tour. But Duke had a walk like John Wayne, sort of a lope, and he'd have, he had a big googly eye, and he'd stare at you like that and he had a real big voice. And at one point I said, I'd found a bat on the wall, and I was explaining to a visitor, and I said, "Duke, is this, is this an Eastern pipistrelle or a little brown—" And he said, "Hell, boy, that's a bat!" That's what sort of man he was. But we got to Jenny Lind's table, not far in, it's actually, well properly speaking I guess you could call it Cornelia's dining table, but in latter years, it was Jenny Lind's dining table. But he, he got there, and we, the habit was to go and stand in the middle of the table and the people would assemble around it, and then you'd talk. He got in the middle, and then he went down on

one knee like this, and I thought he was praying. Well, no, he nearly fainted. He'd gotten swimmy in the head or something. I didn't find out about this until later. But for heaven's sake, this was my very first trip into the cave, the lead guide nearly passed out on me, I was going to have to take—and we had big groups back then. I mean it wasn't uncommon for us to take a hundred and fifty people through the cave with two guides, and as many as three hundred with a third. And so, you know, I was green as you get. And you know, my lead guide almost passed out. I mean, that's the, you just roll with it. That's the sort of nonsense we had to put up with all the time.

BB: Yeah, maybe mentorship wasn't quite the word. But yes, that, you gave me a nice encapsulation of—

TS: But at the same time, mentorship is absolutely the right word really, because I'm, I'm just being facetious because you only have each other underground. You only have your colleagues. Yeah, today we have phones, but even so, it can be a pretty good trot to get to the next telephone and the cave is not meant for human beings. It is a hostile environment, no matter how you try to sugarcoat it, it's, we're not supposed to be down there. It's dark, it's cold, there's nothing to eat, there's nothing safe to drink. There's jagged edges, there's hard surfaces. There's every thing that can go wrong. And it does. And for those of us who have guided, the duty is to get those people through, not just to get them through. They're not cattle. It's to fill their buckets. I'm sure you've heard that phrase.

BB: Tell me about 'fill the buckets.'

TS: Well, I've always heard it. I mean, it was one of the first things that the old guides told them. When I say the old guides, we often speak of the old guides as in people who had a tradition of story-telling of a type of guiding that came before a National Park Service thematic interpretive approach. More of a raconteurism, less of a strict fidelity to facts, you know. A good story might have been worth more than, than data about cave crickets, you know, that sort of thing. A good joke might have been told in the dark that, you know, wasn't politically correct. So, you know, that was where I came into it. That was still, there

were echoes of that that were still prevalent. But at the same time, you know, I, I, I had people like that, but I also had very strong National Park Service ethic people. Don Rogers, I will never forget it—it was the first day of training, first day of my training, and we were in the training center and he went up and he wrote “National Park Service” on the board. He said, [0:10:00] “National Park Service. What’s the last thing I just said?” Service. And he instilled into us that this was about providing the best quality service to the American people that could possibly be provided. For my generation of guides, that’s what we were about. In fact, as time went on, service-wide, “Legendary Service” was the motto. Now, in later years after that, it became “Do more with less,” you know. So it, but that’s what we were instilled with, his “Legendary Service” is give these visitors the best we can give them. They are here to see the cave. That’s what they want. They’ve heard of the great Mammoth Cave. They want to see its wonders. And it’s as though they are coming in with a bucket, like a lunch bucket, and our job’s to fill it. So we’re going, I mean you, you can still hear it as, in the guide lounge. You would go in and say, “Oh, let’s go. We’re going to fill their bucket. We’ll get them in, get them out on time.” And that’s the other thing, is the duty is to get them in and get them out on time. It is part of the skillset is to learn how much or how little to say, how long to stop, when to go, where to climb, where not to climb, when to turn the lights on, when to turn them off, when not to. Not just a consciousness of your place and time in the darkness, but what else is going on around you, courtesy to the other guides. That makes their trip a success, as well as yours. Of course, everyone has their own style. Some pairings of people work better than others. But generally speaking, you let the lead guide have their style, and they let you have yours. And do the best that you can to work it out, and.

BB: So as you’ve learned what to do or not to do by trailing other guides, you certainly have done the same thing as the leader for others I’m sure.

TS: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I can’t make any assertions about whether anybody ever learned anything from me, but, but I always tried to make my trailer a partner. I wasn’t the sort of person that, you know, said, “Well, this is my trip, and, you know, the other person’s just there to bring up the rear.” Because it was always a team, a team effort to get those people

in and out. I always tried to make sure that the visitors had a consciousness that there were two rangers, both in front and in the back, that there were two people guiding. Now that wasn't always the case. Some tours, at least the, the, and this is not so now, but at one time, Wild Cave Tour was guided by a single guide. In fact there was one spring where I was the only guide available to guide crawling tours. Had it not been for me, we wouldn't have had Wild Cave or Trog or Intro. I guided them all. But that could be a very solitary experience because you knew that it was entirely up to you to get those people in and out of the most undeveloped areas of the cave.

BB: Crawling means literally crawling at points.

TS: Right. Wild Cave Tour requires you to crawl on your belly, to crawl on hands and knees, to canyon walk where you've got a foot on one ledge, a foot on a ledge on the other side, and nothing for fifteen to twenty feet in between. You know, vertically, fifteen to twenty feet down. Climbing, you know, it's all very rough caving, like that. And, and for, in Trog you're doing that, not quite that extreme, but you're doing that with eight to twelve year old children. That was always two, two rangers though. But— [0:15:00]

BB: How was the prep done for that? I mean, it seems like there's a little bit of instruction about, "You're, we are going to come across this, folks."

TS: Sure.

BB: "You should set your foot this way." Is that something that happens on, on the surface?

TS: To a, to a degree. We used to have a box that you would crawl through if there was any doubt about whether a person was of such a girth that they would not do well. That was eventually dispensed with, but ultimately, you, you, we can't tell someone, "You may not go." We can only tell them, "If your body size is larger than a certain dimension, you will not fit through these holes." But we can always take them around. There's always a way around. So, you know, we can't tell some one, you may not go. So once we get inside the

cave, it's a matter of helping them spot by spot. At the Martel climb down, I will stand there each time, and I'll say, "All right. If you'll put your left foot here, and now a quick step down," and it becomes rote almost. It's um, um, um, and you get them down. I never had an accident in five years of guiding crawling tours, I'm very pleased to say.

BB: Um-hm.

TS: I did have, you always have hairy moments where you wonder whether someone's going to take a fall or you have moments where a visitor realizes—they did not know, but they discover—that they are claustrophobic, when they have gotten to a specific point. It just suddenly hits them. And they freeze. And you get them out. Because, you know, I discovered that I had a good voice for talking people out of panic a couple of times. There was one time I may have instilled panic, I'm not sure, but—

BB: Hm.

TS: Huh? I'm autistic. Like, I'm, like, doesn't bother me to, to tell people. It's Asperger's syndrome, which many people are becoming more aware of. And it doesn't really affect my life much except that people don't know how to read me sometimes. I'm a little bit, a little bit odd to them. Well, I was guiding a Wild Cave Tour and I don't drink a lot of water when I go through the Wild Cave Tour. I just take a sip now and again. Well, we got to a place called the Star Trek Room, which is down at the bottom of this, the steps below Robertson and Nickerson Avenue. And I was sitting down there waiting, and there's, there's these iron and chert nodules hanging from the ceiling. It's called the Star Trek Room because there's an episode of the original series of Star Trek called "The Devil in the Dark," and this silicon-based alien lays these silicon nodule looking things, that look like, they're eggs. So that's why it's called that. But, so I'm down there waiting for the, all the other people to come down the steps. And a few of them come down. And one of them says, "Hey, I want to ask you a question. All this time, we've never seen you drink any water. How is it that you go through this trip, and, you know, you, you, you don't drink. You're not eating? You don't do anything." And I said, "Oh, it's easy. I'm not human." And I just went about what I was doing.

And they were very quiet for a bit. And I never corrected the impression. But later on, I thought, you know, that was an odd thing for me to have said, considering. But, and an odd place too, but—anyway. Wild caving was one of my favorite things to guide.

BB: So you gave, guided in various capacities on various tours for a number of years. This—

TS: Seven years in total.

BB: Yeah. And then, you know, [0:20:00] I think about service. Remember service. What led you further on to explore, maybe it's your passions or other ways that you've contributed to service at Mammoth Cave?

TS: Well, my talents have always been in words and pictures. I suppose I leant my hand while I was still guiding to doing some publications, and then that got me into being asked to work with that on a full-time basis. Really, there has been a, always been a dearth of that kind of specific ability here. At least for people to have the time away from guiding to target abilities to produce images, to produce good writing, to produce publications. The sort of non-personal, non-head-to-head sort of things. In fact that's why I was ultimately taken out of the division of interpretation, because I couldn't get any work done. They kept pulling me into the cave. That's what interpretation has always been about here. It's that face-to-face contact with the visitor. So the non-personal has tended to get short shrift. And it's the sort of thing that made me think, well, we can do good quality here. We can produce very good things for people. We can give the best service. They don't have, the people, the visitors here don't have to go away having some shoddy handout. They don't have to have seen low quality posters. They don't have to have, you know, had a lesser experience. They don't have to have seen a dreadfully designed wayside exhibit. So maybe that can be where I give my best effort. I was a pretty good guide, I think. But we have a number of good guides. I've been very fortunate in that I've had a number of books published. I'm a children's author. I've had thirteen titles published by national presses, eleven picture books and two novels for young adults. So I've had success outside of the institution. But I've been able to take that same skillset and try to make something for the park service. I



created the park service's second Website, ever, back in '95. Mammoth Cave National Park had the second one after Glacier. Glacier National Park had the, the very first Website for a national park, and we had the second one, and I, I developed it. So I was kind of proud of that. Of course, we've gone a long way since then, but, but—

BB: Did you learn that, I mean, I, what I seem to be piecing together, and that's the beauty of doing these type of interviews is that the supervisors, the superiors let you play on your strengths, and you, and you, and you've said it—I mean, to a degree anyway.

TS: Um... I'm self-taught at just about everything I do. Now, you know, I've got a degree in journal-, a Bachelor's in journalism, a Bachelor's in English with a creative writing specialization. I have a Master's in librarianship, archives. So, you know, I draw on that formal education, but in terms of a number of things that I do, I, I'm just self-taught. And I've had to be, because there's no means of getting that kind of training within the park service. But also because nobody here knows what to do with me, you know. (laughs) [0:25:00] It's a relatively esoteric skill set, and it's, it's a bit of a problem because in this day and age, everyone has a computer, and they can all get software, where they say, oh, well, you can make movies. You can create with, you know, with this or that. And they think, oh, well anyone can do that. No, not anyone can do that. Anyone can do something, but it's not going to turn out well. And it's been a struggle for, well, up until very recent times to get park management to understand that good design requires professional services, and not just anybody can do it, and no, beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder. There really is a set of standards. Part of my task was quality control for a good long time. Trying to persuade people that, look, the service has standards. And we had, we are expected to follow them. And I know what they are. I can implement them. And just because somebody at the visitors' center turned out a flyer doesn't mean that flyer's acceptable. It could look a lot better—and don't we owe that to our visitors? That's what I call service. And you're always up against, "Well, we just needed to get something out." So, you know, I wouldn't necessarily say that I was given license to, to really play. It's, because there's just not time. There's not time in the day to get everything done that needs to be done. And partly because of that, now, I've had a lot of ideas that I would have liked to have seen developed

for the park, but, more mundane tasks get in the way. I think that something that's been neglected is the literature that surrounds Mammoth Cave. There's been a long history of words from the very first time that European settlers began discovering Mammoth Cave, they began writing about it in exceptional language and properly considered Native Americans thousands of years ago. You go down into the cave past the Acute Angle, and you find the Devil's Looking Glass, which is covered with petroglyphs, whose meaning is quite unclear to us, but I spent some time doing a restoration, digital restoration of a photograph of the Devil's Looking Glass and teasing out the, the authentic early, you know, petroglyph markings out from the scratches and other stuff that happened over the intervening time to pull some of that out. But the literature that comes down to us, you know, even such luminaries as Emerson, you know, wrote essays about Mammoth Cave. John Muir spoke of Mammoth Cave. Travel writers of the nineteenth century, and that music of language. And also the music of music. There was, there have been some compositions that were, to be fair, rather pedestrian, but still, there's "In the Grand Old Mammoth Cave," "The Mammoth Cave Waltz," and there's a flavor of Mammoth Cave that belongs to the humanities that has not been properly interpreted in a long time. I, about, gosh, I'm giving away my age. I guess about, was it, maybe twenty years ago? I don't know. I had a little book of poems about the cave. The cave has rather irritated me because [0:30:00] you know, I've done all these picture books and novels, but the cave hasn't given me a book. I talk about the cave as a person, by the way, because that's how I see it. It is a friend. I speak to it whenever I go in. I greet it. And there is a picture from, I believe it's *Scrivener's Monthly*, a drawing that is associated with the cave. It shows a hooded figure, blind, with its finger over its mouth. And it says, "The spirit of eternal silence reigns supreme." And that hood echoes the historic entrance and that, to my mind, is a perfect depiction, a perfect embodiment of the great cave. It has so many epithets. It is the Monarch of Caves, grand, gloomy and peculiar as Stephen Bishop is said to have called it. It is the labyrinth, the great secret. Stephen Bishop—and, you know, I'll digress for just a moment, if I might.

BB: Could you explain who Stephen Bishop was?

TS: Well, I'm about—that's what I'm digressing into. My colleague Chuck Decroix and I once crawled to Tann's Pitt, which is at the end, I believe, of Bishop's Avenue. It's a horrendous crawl because you have to crawl over these little rimstone dams made of chert, and they're about this tall, and they just go like this for a great, long way. And it's, oh, it just kills your knees. And the, and the passageway is only about this tall, so you have no choice but to crawl over them. So, you, just over them, over them, over them. And it's just murderous to get back there. And finally, they're over. And you're just exhausted. And at that point, I just lay back and, up against, in the sandy ground, up against the side, way back in the end of this thing. And there was a little overhang next to the side of the wall. And I just laid my head back in it and I looked up. And over my head was S-T-E-P-H-E-N written in smoke. Stephen. Stephen Bishop. And I thought to myself. My shoulder blades are lying where Stephen Bishop's shoulder blades lay in, God knows, 1840. And he had done the same thing I had just done, over those wretched, wretched rills, except he was pushing an open-flame smoky lantern. He didn't have a headlamp on. So, you know, it was far worse for him than it was for me. But I had pursued that, that same course that Stephen had done. And he has always been a bit of an inspiration to me as I've, that, that story always just—I've had other similar moments of, if any where, I might stand somewhere and I look at the wall, and there's charcoal, and I realize it's a place where a Native American five thousand years ago took his river cane and knocked the char off the end of his torch. Well I'm standing in the footsteps of someone from five thousand years ago. And they were right here in the same physical space that I occupy. The cave has a way of talking to you without talking. And it's, I'm not even talking about the sound of wat-, dripping water, although you can, can think of that too, but the question of what is it that prompts human beings to keep going into the great, big, dark, cold hole in the ground and keep on pushing into these muddy holes. And I come back to Stephen [0:35:00] who explored so much in his time. It is known that Stephen was saving money to emigrate to Liberia, and had purchased his freedom, but he didn't go. He kept putting it off. He didn't go, he didn't go. And finally, he succumbed to tuberculosis, we believe. But why didn't he go? Well, on the one hand, I speculate that, well, he became known by people who wrote about their experiences as the "sable genius of Mammoth Cave," the, he became sought after by scientists and enlightened people of the day, who, they would come and they would ask for him. So it was an existence that he could

not hope to realize elsewhere, perhaps. But I kind of wonder, based on my own experience, whether it was a little bit of the Persephone experience. Of course, the myth of Persephone from Greek mythology is that, Persephone was the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of fertility. Persephone herself was the goddess of vegetation, of vegetative growth, and apparently a hottie, because Hades took a shine to her and one day while she was out picking flowers in a field, opened up a cleft in the earth, and snatched her away down to the underworld. Well, nobody knew where she had gone, and her mother was all to pieces and searched for her at all corners of the earth and left the earth to go fallow and nothing would grow, and people were starving to death. And Zeus heard the cry of the people on the earth, and realized, well, this won't do. But, and he knew that his brother Hades had snatched Persephone away to become his bride. So he said, "Well, you're going to have to let her go, because they're all going to starve to death up here." So Hades reluctantly agreed that he would release her, but he gave her a handful of pomegranate seeds to eat, and she ate them. Well, if you take something from the underworld, you cannot leave. And so she was bound to return for a third of the year. Of course, this is a myth to explain winter and the spring that follows, because when she came back to the surface, oh, her mother was all right again and then everything could grow. But the cave shares secrets with people who listen, and it exacts a price. It gets its hooks into you and some people, I think, have a very great difficulty leaving. That's, I think, why we have some people who have been here as long as they have. I know that Mammoth Cave will always be a part of me, no matter where I go from here, you know, when I retire, ultimately, and then I'll go do something else, but there will always be that debt to the underworld. There are, there are things that every guide would like to be remembered for. Everyone wants to be remembered for something. Some people are fortunate enough to have a passage named for them or something. And of course, I don't have anything like that, but I am the last qualified member of the Echo River Club, which was established back in the days of Stephen Bishop. When, it, it was basically established for a very small group of guides who, for whatever reason, had to get out of the boat on the Echo River to get people back to shore. I was the last person that had to actually evacuate the boat into the cold, cold water of the, cold water of the Echo River, and pull the boat off the rock to get people back in. I guided the last Echo Riv-, the very last, along with Kaneetha Sanders who was my trailer, but the, the— [0:40:00]

BB: Why, why was that dis-, disbanded? The, the—

TS: Oh, the Echo River Tour was discontinued because—

BB: Discontinued.

TS: We always had flooding and silt would get up over the walkways, and so maintenance had to go down constantly and shovel the silt back into the river. And there was a cost involved in that. But also it appeared to be interfering with the reproduction of certain creatures, eyeless fish, Kentucky cave shrimp, and so on. So there were a number of reasons. And, you know, with flooding we could never guarantee the thing'd run. I was the first person to find a shark's teeth in Roger's Avenue. Just little things like that. Now people know there are shark's teeth in Roger's Avenue. But I was the first person to say, "Oh my gosh. That's a shark's tooth." Because it, and I remember it well because people didn't know that that's what it was. If we have time, I'd like to share with you something that really reflects a sense of, this is, of, of my experience of a cave. This is from "Made of Stone." It's a book of poems that's really the only literature the cave has given me. This is called "The Other World." "There is another world beyond this one. That other world is unnatural and strange. Strange things with wings take to the air, but then we have those here. The folks who live in the other world come here far more than we go there. Is that other world so empty, so poor in wonder that they must seek it here? If you went out into that other world, you would blink if you had lived in this world all your life." Sometimes I stand at the vestibule looking out. And sometimes I don't even want to go back out because there's a stillness and a quietness and a oneness that you gain after you've guided for a long time, a solidity that you form with the stone, and you look out. A friend of mine, a good friend, that I grew up with, the poet Davis McCombs, had a phrase in one of his poems in which he spoke about coming outside of the cave into "a world gone green and roaring." Which is absolutely right. That's, it's a cacophony, it's tumult, it's the opposite of what's underground. And in a way I sort of prefer the cave, in some ways, because even though it's hostile, at least you meet it on your own terms after a while. And it isn't dead. There are

living things there. They creep and they have their own life that informs itself all around you. And if you let it, then you can be a part of it. I think that's what we try to do for visitors. That is a service we provide here. That's why interpretation has to be done by guides, not just because for safety reasons, to make sure people get in and out safely, but because it is so ultimately a human experience that it must be done by humans to humans. To take this alien world and make it something understandable. I got to do one more, because—

BB: Sure.

TS: This is—

BB: It's very good.

TS: This is, [0:45:00] it speaks to the, anyway, inflicting poems on people is, is a terrible, terrible thing to do, but this is called "Made of Stone." It's about the gypsum flowers in Cleveland Avenue. Gypsum flower, gypsum is a, a calcium sulfate mineral, and it oozes out of the pores in the stone, and sometimes it forms what look like almost chrysanthemums, or other types of gorgeous, gorgeous flowers. "It breaks all the rules to have a flower made of stone. What kind of flower burrows earthward where it's roots should grow? What kind of flower shuns the sun? What kind of flower never felt a summer rain? You think you know what's what, and then you go underground and everything changes." My great-great-great-great grandfather, the elder Jacob Locke—my mother was a Locke—was the first man to clear timber over Colossal Cave for his homestead. And it is almost as though I feel a resonance when I go down in the cave. Sound has a great deal of influence on me. I used to play my fife down on the Echo River. I'd play "The Road to Lisdoonvarna" and, and whenever I'd go down to the Wooden Bowl room. You can stamp the floor there and if you know the right pitch, you can go "Oooommm," and visitors can hear the, the, the cave resonance that takes place there. And wonderful acoustics at that point. On the Echo River I would also do the same things that Stephen Bishop would do. He would do a five tone call, "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah." And the harmonics would pick up and carry all the, all the way through that. In some ways it's almost as if the sounds, once made, always continue to echo. There's

a saying that we have in the guide force: "Once a Mammoth Cave guide, always a Mammoth Cave guide." If you look at the walls of the cave, you still see the names of the people who came before: George Slaughter Gatewood, Stephen Bishop. The lives of those people still resonate. And even though we guides are more like cogs in a great machine now, our, our names are not as important, we carry on those stories. We are a living testament. We are a living continuation, we are a living tradition. Whatever little portion of that I may be responsible for makes me very proud. I am the originator of that phrase, "Once a Mammoth Cave guide, always a Mammoth Cave guide." It is a permutation from C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia, "Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen." I was the one who made it up. And I think it's very true.

BB: You mentioned to me you have a couple of daughters.

TS: I have a son and a daughter.

BB: A son and a daughter.

TS: Yes.

BB: And one of the things I've been talking to people about is how children of, of people connected to the, to the cave grow up in that environment. Some may be repelled, more often are attracted to it in some different ways. Is, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? I mean, it, it doesn't have to be a grand tale, but it's an interesting thing for me to learn about these things.

TS: Well, my two are right here on the ends. [0:50:00] This is my daughter and that's my son. And God bless them, they've been used in photographs for a number of, of different publications about the cave. They're no strangers to being underground. You know, I don't know if either of them will take an interest in working here in the summer or not. They might. My son has a mind of wheels. He's interested in engineering. But my daughter, she has just the sort of, the sort of shadowed outlook, darkened humor that might make her a

very good candidate for getting to know the cave better in time. I, you know, nothing would please me more than for them to develop their own relationship, one-on-one, with the cave. But at the same time, the world is full of places. Part of my time has been spent away from here, at Munfordville, at the Battle for the Bridge Historic Preserve, which is a Civil War site that my family has lived on since 1867. You know, I have family tradition and history tied up with the Civil War there just as much as I have a personal history with the cave here. Every person finds significance where they are in the things that most closely surround them, most closely touch them. They find meaning in what they see and hear. And who knows where they'll go, who knows where they'll end up. But they've always had the cave around them. They've always had—and not just the cave, but, but the south-central Kentucky region, the karst region, the riv-, the rivers, the, the hills and hollows. Colloquialism, ways of looking at things, both the bad and the good. Stories, you know, everything from Floyd Collins, you know, things that just have not happened anywhere else in the world, you know, that they can take with them wherever they go. They'll always have dinner conversation, something to interest people wherever they go because of where they've been.

BB: Tres, let me ask you about, I was watching most of the Ken Burns piece on the National Park Service—

TS: Um-hm.

BB: [ ] talks about Stegner, maybe it was Stegner that said, that they got the title from America, America's Greatest Idea.

TS: Um-hm.

BB: And certainly you're familiar with this. I think it came out just a few, a few years ago. And not so long ago, Ken Burns, not his most recent, but, what do you think about that? It is a good, I mean, this whole idea of the park, you know, not Mammoth Cave, per se, but just this idea from, from Muir and going forward and—



TS: In nineteen, in the 1940s, the area called New Discovery in Mammoth Cave, had, it had been found, and it was absolutely gorgeous. Little paradise, big paradise, gypsum tendrils that snake away from the wall and if you pass by them—this is mineral, you understand—you pass by them and they waft on the breeze. It, you know, rock doesn't do this. It's just, my very first time in New Discovery, I came away stunned because of its unbelievable beauty. Prior to World War II, plans were being drawn up to open New Discovery to the public. And [0:55:00] it was understood that its fragility put it at risk. So they were talking about putting glass globes around some of these formations, which would have been a terrible idea, just terrible idea. Well, the Second World War comes along, and that all gets sidelined. After the war, New Discovery is not opened. And there's no real evidence in the record as to why it was never revisited. But after the '60s, you get policy that, well, we're never going to open New Discovery to the public because it is too fragile, it is too beautiful, it is a section of the cave that must be preserved for its own sake even if no one ever sees it. It is Stegner's vision of wilderness that has intrinsic value whether a human being ever enters it or not. Somewhere between the end of the war and Stegner, we get the birth of that wilderness movement, and we see that impact on Mammoth Cave National Park, the idea that there are places so special that they must be preserved for the future. And of course, the National Park Service's true ethos is that we preserve for the next generation. We're not just preserving for our own enjoyment, but so that the next generation will find these things, enjoy them, and see fundamentally the same thing that we can see today. It's a brilliant idea. It's inspired. It's enlightened. I'm frequently dismayed when I hear in the news that there are people saying, "Oh, we need to privatize the national parks. We need to give them to the states." That would be a catastrophically bad thing to do because it completely misunderstands why it's important to have national parks to begin with. We live not for today. We have to have some thought for tomorrow. These two are why I am here. Every child that comes here is why I am here. It's not necessarily just for the children that I take into the cave. It's for the children that those children will bring here in fifteen years. And they do. Mammoth Cave is what we call a generational park. It happens all the time. We have visitors that say, "I was here when I was a kid, and I wanted to bring mine." It happens all the time. And the cave actually makes it somewhat easier, because the cave

doesn't change much. But for us to be able to take someone down and say, "This is Frozen Niagara. You saw exactly this when you were ten." And they turn to their child and say, "This is Frozen Niagara. That's what I saw when I was your age." That's why we're here. That's why I've never gone anywhere else, I guess.

BB: It's also your friend.

TS: Yes, it is. In a way it's almost family. Of course, I'm local around here. My father's people arrived here in 1819 and my mother's people came here in 1790. So we're like the dirt in south-central Kentucky. But, yeah, kind of like family in a way. [1:00:00]

BB: Tres, do you have anything else you could, you've enlightened me in so many different ways, it's just been a, just a wonderful, sharing your readings as well and your very, really profound thoughts.

TS: Well, like I said, you know, I could, I could tell you, you know, about the time I turned the lights out on the superintendent. (laughter) He was not amused. I used to climb Pulpit Rock in Methodist Church to do my presentation. I would talk about George Slaughter Gatewood doing his preaching. And it's no, it's a bit tricky, because you have to go all the way up, right, up and around the ledge and climb up and around to Pulpit Rock, then you have to stand. And I had two lanterns with me, so I'd carry those lanterns up there, and then I'd set them around the foot. And it was pretty impressive I think, because I mean visitors seemed to, to enjoy it. My supervisor eventually made me stop, for fear I would fall and die, but there was a certain feeling of obligation to carry on this showmanship, the guiding tradition. It meant something to be a guide. I think it still does. I made my own torch stick. I was part of the guiding tradition when we still threw torches. I can still tie a torch, you know, make it, it's an art that's dying. There are very few of us that can still do it properly. But I made my own torch stick and, you know, could make my own torches, and was not a bad shot, actually, with them. I could paddle a boat on the Echo River. I could get them in and out of the cave on time. I had my pacing whenever I walked. I, I taught myself perfect pacing with the Stronsay Waltz because—duhn-duh-duhn, da-da-da da-duhn, da-

da-da-da-da-da, da-da-da-da-da-duh-da-duhn. And I would make my way through the cave. Da-da-da-da-da-duh. Da-da-da-da-da-duh-da-duhn. And you know, the visitors never heard it. It was all in my head. But I set my pace and that way they wouldn't stretch out too far behind, and it wasn't running them through the cave, but they never knew it, but they waltzed with me through the cave.

BB: That's a great vision. That's a great thought.

TS: There are lots of, lots of little personal—oh, on the lantern tour there's a h-, a spot we would call the hidey-hole. Hidey-hole. And the trailer some-, when the guide would be stopped at Star Chamber, the trailing guide would go ahead, up ahead and you'd sort of step into the hidey-hole. You just, you just step there. It's just this little alcove. But the shadows are just such that nobody sees you and they walk right past you unless they happen to take their lantern and look in. And there you stand. And they're just shocked. I'll never forget once there was this Amish girl, and she came by, and she looked in, and she shrieked, and leapt all the way to the other side of the trail. And I thought, oh my goodness, you scared her to death. And I came up, you know, up behind the group and she looked back and said, "Try to stay sober, sometime." You know there are thousands and thousands of stories. There are new stories being made in Mammoth Cave every day. And you could do this forever and never get to the end of them. You just have to decide when you're full, when your bucket has been filled.

BB: That's perfect. Thank you for your time today.

TS: My pleasure, always.

[END OF INTERVIEW]