

Bringing Magic Into Interpretation



What is an Interpreter?

William Penn Mott, Jr
Director, National
Park Service

I am constantly being asked, "what is an interpreter?" To get a definition, I consulted the dictionary which defines an interpreter as, "One that interprets." That's passing the buck. I then looked up the word interpret and found it defined as, "To explain or tell the meaning of; present in understandable terms." I can agree that an interpreter should be able to explain or tell the meaning of the subject under discussion and do so in

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understandable terms, but I expect a great deal more from our interpreters.

First, they should be professionally trained, enthusiastic, creative, flexible, and be able to communicate to people at all age levels.

Secondly, I believe that a good interpreter should become very knowledgeable about a particular subject around which he or she can create a unique program that is his or hers alone, and which reflects that person's personality.

Thirdly, I want our interpreters to use whatever special talents they may possess in the field of music, drama, puppetry, magic, dance, etc., to enrich and create new and exciting interpretive programs.

Interpretation has been, and must always be, the hallmark of the National Park Service.

An interpreter can be an entertainer, but of greater importance is his or her ability to be an **educator** utilizing the captivating environment of a national park so as to stimulate interest in, and respect for, the wonders of nature and the interesting and exciting heritage of this country.

It is a challenge to be an enthusiastic, creative, and exciting interpreter. The effort and training required will produce results that will be very, very important to your success and for the quality and mission of the National Park Service. You also will have the opportunity by your magic to stimulate people to new goals and objectives beyond their fondest dreams.

Go Do It!

One Time ...

Michael Smithson
Assistant Chief Park
Naturalist
Olympic National Park

One time, at the heart of a vast kingdom there lay an enchanted wood. Many travelers came from near and far to look upon the wonders and mysteries of this place. Even the ancient ruins among the great trees spoke softly and spun the legends of the ancestral people.

Those who came were each affected in their own way. A few beheld the secrets of the grove and found solace and new meaning, while many rushed about seemingly blind to the wonders before them. This troubled the king greatly for he knew that if his subjects did not care for this forest, they would,

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in time, lay waste to it.

A decree was put forth to find a wise teacher who could help travelers understand the forest's magic. Many came from all corners of the kingdom to show their skills and fulfill their destiny. The first hired was a learned scholar who knew the names of all the herbs and creatures, both backwards and forwards. He could also recite the history of the ruins without error. But when the scholar took others through the wood, the king noticed the peoples' attention wandered. Many left knowledgeable, but uninspired.

In a fit of anger, the king threw the scholar into the deepest of his dungeons and put the royal speech writer in his place. The speech writer was known throughout the realm for her eloquence, and the king thought her capable of exciting the common folk. But her words, beautifully crafted as they were, seemed empty and without substance. Travelers who listened appreciated the speech writer, but not the forest, and she soon found herself sharing the dungeon with the scholar.

One day, while the king was deep in thought on how to resolve his dilemma, the court jester made his normal grand entrance by leaping through the air while juggling nine eggs. The king smiled and raised an eyebrow. He remembered how the jester made him laugh during the darkest of times; the scholar and the speech writer had not succeeded - why not try the jester? He was given the job, and though he tried hard, the travelers left entertained, but without true knowledge. We all know where he spent the night.

That month, at the bottom of the long twisting stairs in the darkest recesses of the castle, the scholar, the speech writer and the jester argued endlessly over whose approach to teaching was best. A waif, who brought daily food and drink, would stop and listen to their debate. It just so happened this young girl lived at the edge of the enchanted wood and from wonderful experiences and feelings she knew, deep within her heart, the mystery and magic of the place.

Week after week, she listened to the three bicker until finally one day, she yelled, "None of you are right! Nor are any of you wrong!" The three stared at the impudence of the girl, but she seemed to have a wisdom beyond her years and a kindness in her eyes. They had grown weary of their fight and each sat down to listen.

"You each have a special gift" she began. "Use it

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wisely, and learn from the others talents." "Remember you have nothing to teach... the story you seek to tell is not a story at all, but something others must experience. The wood and the ruins have their own story to tell. Help travelers open their eyes so they may behold the wonders before them." The young girl was quiet for a moment and then continued. "Know above all, that your love of the place is most important, for when travelers feel and see this in you, it will rekindle their flame." She bowed her head and stared at the dark floor, then silently turned and left.

The three sat for a good long while and thought of the girl's words. Later, as the months passed, they shared their knowledge and skills with one another. They yearned to hear once more the soft-spoken stories of the wood and begged for another chance. A year passed before the king finally let them return to the forest to try their skills once again.

From then on, a few travelers still stumbled blindly through the enchanted wood. But most left with a countenance and new understanding in their hearts. As they discovered the forests' innermost secrets each would, in turn, share them with another. The forest with its wonderful mysteries was safe, and prosperity, happiness and wisdom reigned throughout the kingdom.

Interpretation as Language Charged with Meaning

James F Phelps, Jr
Park Ranger
Manassas National
Battlefield Park

The subject at hand is "Magic in Interpretation." How can we, those of us charged with the responsibility of facilitating communication between visitors add the elusive element of magic to our interpretive tools?

Can we do so at all? *Webster's Dictionary* defines magic as "an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural force." Few interpreters have the ability to harness the forces of the supernatural, even if we really desired to do so. Yet magic in interpretation remains a real element in effective dialogues between interpreters and audiences.

What ties all of our positive interpretive experiences together? The rising wonderment of a child discovering nature's abundance on a guided nature walk, the realization of the horror that war in-

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flicts on men as seen through the eyes of a living historian, or the gentle grace of a miller grinding grist in an age old method; all can be magic. But what exactly is it that is magic about them?

One answer is language. And language is indeed magical.' The challenge is to choose words appropriate for a talk or program, words which will excite and stimulate an audience. Language is a powerful tool, perhaps the most important tool the interpreter can bring to our trade. In language, and in the use of language, can be found the magic we all desire in our interpretive programs. The problem is this: What is effective language and how can we bring it into our programs? Before we consider the how, let us consider the why - the why of language.

Language Charged With Meaning

Speaking is something we often take for granted. Since we learned to speak, all of us have been in the communication business. As a child you make your wants known. As an adult communication becomes more complex and multifaceted in order to meet new and greater demands, but we scarcely give it a thought. We often choose words to convey our meaning to others because we have always used that particular word to solve that particular communication challenge. Much like Sophie in *Sophie's Choice* we say "fast" to describe speed, even though there are innumerable other choices and another might be more appropriate for the situation. The Poet Paul Claudel described this in his work *La Muse Qui Est la Grace*, "The words I use are everyday words, and yet are not the same! You will find no rhyme in my verse, no magic. There are your own phrases."

Claudel's cynicism is highlighted when you consider the impact in our time of the electronic media. Seldom are we required to be careful in our use or understanding of descriptive language. All we must do is view, not ascribe imagination to words or weigh understanding against the descriptions presented without visual elaboration. If a picture is worth a thousand words, those thousand words are in jeopardy of being lost. A word not used is a word approaching oblivion.

The front line interpreter is one of the few remaining examples of a person for whom the effective use of language is a requisite of satisfactory performance. In a generally short amount of time, an interpreter must give the visitor an idea of the significance of a site, specific information about that site, a feeling for the site's relevance, and an overall appreciation for a site's unique

qualities. The ability to impart information in an effective and condensed manner is the key to the overall quality of interpretive programs. The best way to keep the content of a program in the proper balance with the time limitation imposed on programs is to choose language which has the greatest impact upon the subject being covered. This is language charged with meaning.

Language is an Art to be Practiced and Mastered

Language is a skill, and like any other skill, requires rehearsal and consideration of its usage. Many interpreters are specialists in some field or another. But vast knowledge of your subject can be a double-edged sword. In one way your knowledge gives you the confidence which emanates from a person well-versed in a subject. On the other hand, your specialized knowledge brings a specialized vocabulary peculiar to your field. Professionally, this is a useful phenomenon. It allows you to communicate with others in your field with precision. Yet the visitor, unaware of the esoterica specialized language entails, will only be distanced from you. Not understanding what you mean, the visitor will go away unrequited in his/her desire to be enlightened, and you will have failed in your primary responsibility of interpreting your area's resource. It is not enough to "talk down" to visitors; inevitably, they pick up on such intellectual arrogance.

The answer is to use impact vocabulary. Impact vocabulary, simply put, is the art of choosing words which convey the maximum amount of meaning possible. Words chosen because of their inherent power of expression, carefully crafted to become ripe with imagination and meaning. Impact words bring detail to language without the necessity of extensive elaboration. They should be whole unto themselves. For example, "this tree, the Pine, is the forerunner of the Oak and other hardwoods." Cast in a different light, the same phrase could read, "the Pine is the youth of the forest and eventually gives way to the mature woods of the Oak." The difference is subtle but substantial. Words like "youth" and "mature" are pungent with the association of life and death. Both words convey a sense of urgency and process; a link between the mystery of nature and the universal human experiences of birth, death and renewal. The first description is not incorrect, but it is flat. Like a cardboard cutout it fails to convey to visitors the depth, majesty, and intricacies -- the human qualities -- of the forest.

The muse has long realized that the best words to evoke and provoke responses in people are those

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words which bring us closer to the human experience. We may not understand the botanical life cycles of evergreens. But, we do understand life and death. In interpretation, art should imitate life. Happiness, sadness, excitement, fear, beauty -- these aesthetic qualities can be reflected in language. I believe that this is what Freeman Tilden desired when he defined interpretation as "revealing, to such visitors as desire the service, something of the beauty and wonder, the inspiration and the spiritual meaning that lie behind what the visitor can with his senses perceive."

Where To Go For Help

I purposely have not listed many specific examples of language. It is up to the individual to decide the type and quality of words chosen for use in the presentation of interpretive programs. There are guides, however, which can provide you with the best of impact language. Reading will allow glimpses of language as an evocative and powerful tool. It is a particular kind of reading, however. It is a reading of contemplation; one where you think not only about the story being told, but why the artist chose the word written and the effect those words have on the texture of the language. This essay has been a call for all of us to evaluate critically the words we use to communicate. Here now is my suggested reading list for any interpreter who desires to expand his/her linguistic horizons.

One Man's Meat -- E.B. White. A master word crafter shows that even everyday ordinary events have a dignity deserving of loving description. See especially his essay on lambing.

Winner Take Nothing -- Ernest Hemingway. The quintessential sparse prose of Hemingway can show you how to get the most "bang" for your word buck.

The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas. A single reading will have you quickly realizing the power in well-chosen brevity.

Ulysses -- James Joyce. Convoluted and difficult, it remains perhaps the finest single work in the English language in the past hundred years.

The Responsibility of the Interpreter As an Artist

So far, I have called us to task for a lackadaisical use of language and suggested ways to overcome this misuse. In essence, what I am saying is that the interpreter is an artist. We are given the opportunity to represent our nation's most precious natural, cultural, and historical resources, and it is our responsibility, our vocation, to do so with

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as much quality and care as possible.

Well-chosen words spoken with integrity, sincerity, and just a pinch of pizzazz convey to the visitor an unmistakable message: You care about your resources, and you care about them. It is a testimony to your art and an affirmation of your commitment to both your work and the visitor. That is magic: the unspoken respect between you and the visitor facilitated with the use of good language. And it is magic we all hold in the very palm of our hands.

Some Personal Views

Force change. Junk your program every year and do something new.

Dan Murphy

Take advantage of spontaneous occurrences; don't get too locked into your plans.

Andy Kardos

Allow the opportunity for magic to be made by others; allow your audience to take the wand.

Andy Kardos

Rediscover your resource. Look for things that are different; look at them from a different angle.

Joe Geary

Rediscover yourself. Who am I today? How do I feel about visitors today? What worked to help me feel good yesterday (borrow only good stuff from yesterday; learn from the bad and then leave it behind).

Joe Geary

Magic and Rewards

Dan Murphy

Interpretive Specialist
Southwest Regional
Office

It was an odd roll of the dice that made me co-editor (with Sam Vaughn, who luckily knows more about it) for the issue on "magic." I've always been weak when it comes to magic, or other things I can't get a hold on.

I thought of something like "Magic and Rewards." As an article it didn't work, but thinking about it led to an odd realization. Trying to remember times of "magic" I thought of the half-dozen times it worked like it's supposed to, the interpretation came alive, and some kid just lit up. He'd recognized a great truth. (I deny that's an over-written sentence. Sometimes we really do deal in great truths.) Oddly, when I tried to remember "rewards," those same scenes came up again. We seem to be in a profession where the magic, and the rewards, are the same thing. I wish my bank understood.

Magic. Scattered throughout the Service, like skyrockets at the mall on the Fourth, are splendid

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fiestas, reenactments, occasional mind-boggling programs. Living history explosions still fascinate, or deafen, anyone standing in the neighborhood. But if those are the magic, what about the ordinary visit, of an ordinary family, on an ordinary Tuesday? Houdini was magic on stage, but I'm curious what a magician is like at the breakfast table. Does he do clumsy things like I do, reading a book and pouring coffee on the plate?

I am convinced that the great work of interpretation is in the details, the ordinary things we already know how to do. Recently I saw an evening program with multiple projectors, but the park's bulletin boards were yellowing, sheets askew because of fallen tacks lying at the bottom of the case. There's not a Ranger in the Service who can't do a fine bulletin board, if we get around to it. We quite naturally tune up for the big events, and they go splendidly; but I at least am slackest in the things that are easiest. Is there paper blowing around the parking lot? Nothing mysterious about how to take care of that. Do programs start on time? Are they related to the theme of the park? Have you started the process to fix the out-of-date information in the exhibits? Worked on a clearer illustration for a tough concept? None of this is adrenalin-producing, yet it's where our success rides or falls.

This view of excellence and magic in overall programs applies to individual presentations, too. I've been to a campfire where the Ranger had a broad and possibly exciting insight, but talked so softly most of us missed it. He'd worked hard on the main event, but stumbled on a detail along the way. And that little detail blew the whole thing for most of us.

Still, isn't it boring to just worry about talking loud enough, or being organized? I've done that for years. Now I want magic! I want to design the four-laser show for the return of Stephen Mather! I'm tired of telling once again the story of the hydrologic cycle to some kid from Iowa I'll never see again. I want to deal in magic--I want to be a skyrocket.

Before Sam comes over and hits me over the head with my typewriter for cynicism, I'd best redeem the theme: I BELIEVE in magic! I want it, the public wants it, whoever does our annual evaluations wants it. Besides, the best feeling in the world is driving home from a campfire that you know had the magic, when the visitors suddenly shared an insight, and maybe they are thinking about it in their sleeping bags right now. The little kid lit

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up. The hitch is, I don't think magic comes from thinking about magic. It comes from thinking about details.

There are a couple of advantages to this view. For one thing, it's relatively easy. Once you notice details, it usually doesn't take a course at Mather to know how to fix one. But the greatest advantage is, that by ignoring the magic and going for the details . . . the magic appears. That's where magic lives. It's in the details.

Magic Moments

Anne Castellina
Superintendent
Kenai Fjords National
Park

In looking back over 15 years in the Park Service I find magic interpretive moments popping in and out of my consciousness -- scattered, yet all adding up to a warm picture of pleasure and pride. What, I ask myself, created these memories for me and can I, the interpreter, provide the same opportunity for these magic moments to others?

I have found one common element in my magic moments and that is a personal involvement by myself, either as an interpreter or as a visitor, in the activity at hand. And I see that that personal involvement has been unique. It came from a certain time and place, a mood, a certain way the light shone, a smell bringing a rush of reverie, the glow on someone's face. It came sometimes because of me and at other times with the help of another, an interpreter.

Magic has been a Luna moth emerging from a cocoon on a forest trail, a mountain man appearing from those same woods to tell tall tales of his life, a rush of hot air and the acrid smell of gunpowder from a 19th-century musket. Magic has been reflected in a child's eyes as she took my hand and asked to wear my Stetson. It has greeted me in the words of a John Denver song accompanying slides of a white beach surrounded by an azure sea.

Magic has surprised me as an old soldier on a three o'clock fort tour, proudly spoke of his days as a coast artilleryman and shared pictures and stories of his youth. It has mesmerized me as a boatload of compatriots and I approached the serene blankness of "our" park, wiped clean and pure by a hurricane.

Magic has quivered in the fingertips of a blind and deaf visitor as she "saw" Teddy Roosevelt, tracing the bronze lines of his face on a bust removed from a glass cabinet. Magic has soared in the laughter

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of children as we played "point to point" just as TR had with his children years before. Magic has overwhelmed me in the sounds and words of a taped tour of an old island prison, in the address of an earth child pleading for an understanding of our wolf brothers, in the simple, slow and quiet words of a fellow interpreter weaving the story of our Park Service heritage.

I have been given the opportunity to find magic and as an interpreter I can think of nothing better than to try to offer that opportunity to visitors. Sometimes my words will open that opportunity. At other times the door may open with an interpretive device, a song, a picture, a game, an exhibit. Will I know when "magic" is in the air? I will when visitors exclaim, "you must really like your job!" or when the smiles and even the silences wrap around all of us and leave a warm glow that just makes you glad you're alive! It's there for all of us to find again. And once experienced it can never be taken away.

Magic isn't so much in the program as in the people.
Joe Geary

There's no such thing as uninteresting things, just uninterested people.
G K Chesterton

Magic in the Audience

Robert Fudge
Supervisory Park Ranger
Independence National
Historical Park

Interpretation is like a meal. We, as the cooks and hosts, decide on the ingredients, the proportions and the atmosphere. The success of a meal is indicated by how many asked for recipes, or how many leave the table early. Do our programs excite the appetites of visitors to learn more and act upon what they learn, or do we force feed them indigestible information? Like good hosts we must consider who we are hosting and prepare something they will enjoy and remember.

How many times have we returned from a program we conducted not knowing who was in our group or only remembering those who paid us a compliment or asked questions? The audience should not be simply bystanders at our programs. They are an essential part of the story we tell and the moment experienced. "Who is in the audience?" should be the first question we ask ourselves when we give a program.

The best programs I have attended have been those that consider the audience. If there is something about the program that lets me know the presenter cares about me, it puts me in a very receptive

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mode. It is hard to be ambivalent when I am being treated as a friend or a special guest. In large groups, personal attention may be difficult, but visitors will respond when the interpreter treats them as a distinctive audience and involves them with questions and activities.

Every audience is different. Depending on their ages and backgrounds they will be more or less receptive to the interpretive techniques used. A children's group will require more activities, more attention to objects and more tactile and visual aids. Adults may respond better when attention is shown to their children or when their intelligence is acknowledged and they are allowed to contribute to the program. Everyone enjoys a mystery, a surprise or a challenge; and everyone enjoys humor, as long as it is not insulting or cruel. All these techniques will help, but the program will fall short if the audience thinks the interpreter doesn't care about them.

Ironically, an interpreter may be most effective when s/he does not speak. The highlight of a program may come with a pause. This can be a moment filled with suspense or significance. It can be an invitation for people to consider what was said. In silence visitors are made aware of their immediate surroundings and feelings. It can jar them from their complacency and give them an opportunity to participate.

No quantity of special effects or techniques can replace the excitement and magic of a moment when we make a personal discovery, when we understand something for the first time, or when we develop feelings for someone or something else. As interpreters we should be facilitators of revelation. We must know our audience and care for our audience if we want them to care about our park and what we have to say.

We humans are able to see much more with our minds than we can with our eyes. We transcended our physical limits a long time ago, and there are no discernible limits to how far we can go. We do it with imagination.

**John P. Wiley, Jr, "Phenomena, Comment and Notes,"
Smithsonian, Vol XIV, No 12, March 1984.**

Introducing Wonderful Appearances

Glen Kaye
Chief, Division of
Interpretation & Visitor
Services
Southwest Region

There is today in New England a fellow who presents a most extraordinary show, a magic show that people of the eastern seaboard would have encountered in the early 1800s.

His subject is magic, but magic is his effect as

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well, as with feat after spectacular feat he dazzles audiences with his legerdemain, his theatrical oratory, and his spectacular dress.

For a moment or two the magician and the audience are separate, each in their own space and state of mind. Then, swept up by the unfolding drama, the audience relaxes, forgets itself, and enters that condition where time is meaningless and all consciousness is consumed by passing events.

This magician's magic produces "wonderful appearances," as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, a trait so characteristic of good interpretive programs within the National Park Service. And what fine interpreters the Service has in this context! And what a fine reputation has been built as a result. But the fuller Oxford English Dictionary definition, "producing wonderful appearances or results," suggests that in magic there is the potential for much, much more.

First, interpreters are sharers of information. Whether about the processes of nature or historical events and people, interpreters, as Jerome Bruner put it, practice "the canny art of intellectual temptation."

With question and anecdote, with humor and enormous reserves of knowledge about the subject at hand, interpreters are involved in the transmission of knowledge from one mind to another, from one generation to the next.

This in itself is exciting, for the world is full of wonder. Learning how the world works, how people of the past coped, or cultures of today operate, is of tremendous help to each of us in our own search to cope with and understand life.

The transmission of knowledge is a cornerstone of interpretation, but if this were all there was to it, how static and dry and unfulfilling interpretation would be. This dim approach assumes that everything is known, every thought worth thinking has been made. The truth is that most of what we "know" is not fact, but what we have uncritically gathered into complex belief systems. This holds true both for ourselves and for the people of the past, for their understanding of how the world works, and for our own.

And herein lies another cornerstone of interpretation.

"Revolutionary thinkers are not primarily gatherers of facts, but weavers of new intellectual struc-

tures," observed Stephen Jay Gould. And revolutionary thinkers are exactly what interpreters should be. Not every lesson has been gleaned, not every insight into the working of nature has been made. Not every possibility of the relationship between humans and nature has been perceived, not every way of living has been proposed.

With this in mind, suddenly the possibilities of what we do seems limitless. We each begin from a specific resource base, but what we do with it is limited only by our level of courage, and our willingness to capture some vision of the universe never seen before.

"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible," penned Jonathan Swift. And vision is what makes magic -- producing wonderful results. Without it we only parrot what people have perceived before. With it, we shake the world, and contribute to mankind's growth.

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should see that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life . . .

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."
Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*, p 91

Magic and the White Buffalo

Jack de Golia
Park Ranger,
Yellowstone National
Park

There's supposed to be an Indian legend about the White Buffalo. You see it once in your life, just as the herd of regular black and brown bison are ready to stomp you into the prairie dust during the stampede you're in the way of.

At least, that's what happened in one episode of "Rin-Tin-Tin." That's as authentic a source as I have for the White Buffalo story. Corporal Rusty was about to bite the big one when he looked up on the hillside and there was a white buffalo calmly eating. Next thing he knew the stampeding herd was quiet.

I don't know why I remember that vignette from my formative TV days. But, it does seem that "magic" and interpretation coincide almost as infrequently as the White Buffalo comes to the rescue.

I remember a magic interpretive moment. It happened while I was giving a Shark Valley tram tour, back in 1975. That was when the National Park Service did such things at Everglades National Park.

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Anyway, on the way back from the Shark Valley Tower, there was usually not much to see besides Everglades vastness. (No "oo's" or "ah's" for gators or wading birds.)

I made up a story in the guise of a "once-upon-a-time" tale about a river of grass whose name was Pa-Hay-Okee. The future of this river, at the story's end, was in desperate doubt.

After telling the tale a few times and working out the kinks in the telling, I could take time to get some emotion behind my words. I cared about the place and the story was a way to share that without my coming across like a drippy-sappy-bleeding-heart-environmentalist bent on spoiling people's vacations.

One day after I brought the tram-load of people to my story's climax, an elderly lady looked up at me from the front row, touched my leg, and said, "You are young. You will fight for this."

I almost dissolved into tears. I spent the rest of the trip facing into the wind, trying to see, trying to get back my composure. I had touched that lady and she, in her wonderful way, had touched me back but good. She not only had heard the message but felt it!

I spent the rest of that season and the next trying to find that lady again. I never did. But, that's the way it is with High Magic. It's like the White Buffalo. It happens and then maybe it won't again.

I was never so fresh with the story and so unprepared for the lady's reaction. Other people liked the story and said so, but I never felt anything inside more than the smile and a simple thanks I gave back. Nobody ever again knocked my socks off!

A few years ago I did a one-man show using Rudyard Kipling's 1889 Yellowstone diary as my script. It wasn't quite High Magic this time, but I remember the time when one of the interpreters who introduced me came back to tell what a visitor had said. It seems my show was the first live theater this middle-aged Montanan had ever seen, and he liked it.

I felt I'd struck a blow for theater. That was magic. But, from then on the others who said the same thing didn't tingle my nervous system like the first time.

Maybe that's what makes us keep creating new things. We're always after that tingle. And maybe

if an audience is lucky enough to be there when the performer/interpreter is in High Magic/High Tingle (and doesn't know it yet), then they get the show of their lives!

Maybe that's why audiences keep coming back. They remember that one time or two that the whole place sparked because some performer/interpreter was ON; you know, the interpreter was COOKIN!

Take a school group on a walk. Go to a Walt Disney movie with a kid. Read science fiction and children's stories. Play games.

Mike Watson

Start the day by looking for similarities in others; when we look for differences, we find them; when we look for similarities, . . .

Joe Geary

Don't fall into a mindset of traditionality. Evening programs don't have to have slides, they don't have to start at 8:15; think of other ways to accomplish your goals.

Bob Huggins

Look at mass media; we can borrow and modify many of their approaches, such as cable programs into visitors' hotel rooms, cartoons, Burma-Shave signs, radio talk shows, using public access cable stations and radio/TV time.

Bob Huggins

Some Magic People

Bill Clark

Interpretive Planner
Division of Interpretive Planning
Harpers Ferry Center

"You have always walked in beauty. All you have to do is keep going."¹

Bertha Stevens, Navajo weaver

When I began my first summer with the National Park Service I had no idea what I was doing, but I was filled with the magic. By the end of that summer (after six 45-minute or four 1.5-hour cave tours five days a week all summer), I knew what I was doing but my magic was used up. In the years since some magic people have instructed me. They taught me that the magic begins within, but to keep going I must be in love with the parks and with their visitors.

Alan - The Grand Canyon is a tough place for magic--the scale is all wrong. But I remember Park Ranger Alan Berkowitz meeting visitors for a rim walk with a pile of plastic bags over his arm. He gave one to each visitor. "Ha! You thought this was a nature walk. Today we have to clean up the rim between here and El Tovar Hotel. Are you up to it?" He did not meet or greet his visitor--he collected them.

Alan didn't deal in people's names, but he found out their home towns. "You there, Toronto, you missed that paper under that cliff rose . . .," leading into a dialogue concerning that plant and

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its environment. "Winnemucca, be careful with that wrapper. Do you know how far the first step is?"

These walks were magic. The interpreter wove a tight personal relationship between himself, the park visitors, and the Grand Canyon. Alan's visitors learned, understood, appreciated, and remembered.

Salmon Ruins - One year I searched for the definitive Anasazi interpretation. I never found it. National Park Service efforts were professional--and I learned about corn, beans, and squash (honest!) and about the Archaic, Basketmaker, Pueblo, and Classical Pueblo periods. As an educational endeavor the interpretation was successful.

Then I found Salmon Ruins, a San Juan County park in northwest New Mexico. The museum exhibits were unprofessional but they had the magic of love. Every object in every exhibit case was arranged to best display its individual art and beauty. Labels were warm, and spoke to my humanity. What I remember best were two large glass cases filled haphazardly with unlabeled Anasazi artifacts. The message was clear: "We have so many wonderful things and they wouldn't all fit in the formal exhibit cases and we couldn't bear to lock them away so here is your encore. Please enjoy." And I did.

Tim - Tim Radford of Harpers Ferry Center made a motion picture about President Lincoln's visit to Antietam after the battle. I have seen it twenty or more times. I cry unashamedly every time - and in different places. I never know where in the film it will hit me. The presentation is honest and beautiful and matter-of-fact and tragic. It tells me what happened and that is enough and too much.

Bill - Park Curator Bill Cissell of Christiansted National Historic Site filled one room of Fort Christiansvaern with some homemade exhibits. His subject was the almost 200 years of Danish military history on St. Croix. I remember that his exhibits had some "technical" or "professional" problems, but I can't remember the specifics. I remember the magic.

The exhibits are very austere, very simple, very uncomplicated. There is nothing extra, nothing irrelevant, nothing out of place. The objects and graphics are chosen with extreme care. Each is completely appropriate and each is tightly focused.

The stories he tells are carefully chosen - perhaps for drama, perhaps for illumination - but I suspect because they are Bill's favorite stories. Clarity

of vision is Bill's style. The exhibits do not give me the history - they give me the pageantry, the boredom and occasional excitement, the society and lifestyle, and the people on an outpost of empire. Bill uses simple sentences, the ones with a subject, verb, and object. And at the end of each story he has placed a period and that is the end. He supplies no moral, no meaning, no significance, and I stand before his exhibits thinking of these things.

To keep the magic - Those of us who are privileged to work in the national parks walk in beauty. All that is required of us is that we have a lifelong love affair with the beauty and the people - every day.

"All you have to do is keep going."

¹Quoted in Noel Bennett, "Halo of the Sun," *American Way*, July 1, 1988.

Magic in Modern Architecture

Mona Rose McKindley
Park Ranger,
San Antonio Missions
National Historical Park

At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial the ranger interprets modern architecture while visitors interpret the memorial - the names.

"Hey smokey-ranger, I seen another one of you smokey-rangers at the other place", the skinny toddler stammered in his country slang. "You have!" I shared his enthusiasm with a wide smile. I soon learned he had seen some rangers at a forested park in his home state. I guess he was surprised to see a National Park Ranger at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. "Do you know what all those park rangers do?" I asked as I stooped down to his level. "They tell people the story of the park," I answered my own question. We stepped toward the black granite wall his parents were studying. I spoke with him at his eye level and we touched some of the engraved names. "This park is kind of magic because people tell one another stories about these names. They know the stories the ranger doesn't know."

I didn't attempt to tell him how this ranger believes it is the modern design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that inspires those who visit to share stories at the Wall. Could I tell him there is magic in the architecture? The polished, black granite wall which emerges from and recedes into the earth is a "moving composition, to be understood as one moves into and out of it", creator Maya Lin wrote of her design.¹ It consists of two

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sides or arms which point to the Lincoln Memorial on the west side and the Washington Monument on the east side. These two arms join at the apex where the list of names begins and ends.

As one journeys down to the apex of the Wall, a powerful presence, a kinship with the group is felt. This is magnified as one notices reflections in the dark stone, mingling with the names. Architect Wolf Von Eckardt proclaims the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is "... abstract yet functional" in design and "modern in the purest and simplest manifestation of twentieth century abstract art and architecture."²

If my little friend could have stayed longer at the memorial he would have noticed how strangers come together at the Wall, sometimes in laughter, often in tears, as they share the stories of lost loved ones. The interpretive ranger is witness to this alchemy daily. One warm, August morning I spoke with a high school football coach from the Midwest. I made a rubbing, a penciled impression of a name on paper for him. As I worked with the artist's graphite, I listened to him tell his wife and two children about three young athletes he coached. One was an all-star who excelled in track, basketball, and football. After high school all three enlisted in the Army together. The all-star never came back. The coach thanked me for my help as I gave him the rubbing. Strangely, I felt I should have thanked him for sharing with me. The power at the Wall moved both of us.

Later that morning I met three attentive women tracing the flow of names -- the timeline of lives lost -- panel by panel. I offered assistance, our volunteer offered assistance, another ranger offered assistance, but they needed none. Upon returning from my lunch break I found the women there still. One of the group began to speak to me. She did not look for a single name on the Wall. She couldn't bear to single out a particular battle or casualty; one day of the war was the same as the next to her. She proudly told me that she and her friends were Veterans, nurses, who served two terms of duty in Vietnam. Together they had seen many lives saved, and many lost. "We can't single one out over the others," she explained. "To us nurses these are all our boys, all these names." I could offer nothing more except to point out the eight nurses whose names were on the Memorial. The Wall brought these nurses together and the Wall consoled them.

As the end of my work-day approached, I thought back to a worn veteran, living in blue jeans and fatigues, whom I spotted earlier at the top of the

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path leading to the Memorial. It seemed as though he could not come down to the Wall, yet he had been in the area all day, unaware of the bustling crowd around him. Perhaps he was concentrating his courage before venturing down to see the 58,154 names. I thought of him and the many others like him, while working my way through the crowd. As I looked up, suddenly he was there beside me. "Welcome to the Wall," I offered the greeting I heard countless Veterans use. I assisted him with a general orientation to the order of the names and he found the panel many of his close buddies were on. "Thank you, ma'am," he said while staring at the Wall, his hat in his hands. I could tell he wanted to be left alone. The healing of wounded spirits, the magic at the Wall would continue as I went home.

¹ Ying, Maya Lin, Untitled essay. Submitted with her design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial design competition in March of 1981.

² Von Eckardt, Wolf, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. Paper delivered at the Society of Architectural Historians 39th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., April, 1986.

As I awoke I looked forward to the excitement of a new day.

Joe Geary

Chief, Visitor Services
National Capital Park,
Central (Retired)

It was April, 1969 when I first heard those words at Mather Training Center. A fellow student, Charles Long, was describing his early life during which he tended his family's sheep. Unbelievable, I thought, how could anyone tending sheep day after day in that desolate reservation country find excitement?

But I had missed the point entirely. Charles had said "the excitement of a new day", a brand new day. So there was no day after day piled on top of one another, no day after day sameness. The excitement was within Charles, in his awareness of his surroundings, the involvement of all of his senses and in his ability to be comfortable with himself.

I didn't realize it at the time but these words would become the basis for keeping the magic in interpretation. The qualities needed to find the excitement of a new day were the same ones needed to keep the magic in interpretation.

Over the years I have attempted to maintain this "new day" approach for planning, researching, and presenting interpretive programs. When I remembered, the magic was there and when I forgot the

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magic was gone.

One of the surest ways of keeping an awareness is combining what I saw and felt with what others experienced. This not only broadened my perspective but added a new dimension to my observations and feelings.

The resource became new everyday as I viewed it through the eyes of others. Each new day visitors arrived bringing with them a wide variety of interests, curiosity and excitement which would become a part of the interpretive activity. Seniors, provided with a lifetime of knowledge and experience, teamed with the mellowness of age. The young arrived bursting with enthusiasm and an energy that seemed endless. A perfect balance for an interpretive experience.

Magic in interpretation requires the resource, the audience and the interpreter. And it's the magician, the interpreter that keeps it all in balance. "Now all I have to do is keep it all in balance." I can't remember how many times I have told myself that. It soon became apparent that I could not wish or think myself into balance; it required constant practice. I had to learn each day to start anew, looking to yesterday for those things needed to improve today and leaving the rest go their way.

Sometimes I would try to review a past talk or program and would become very uncomfortable: I shoulda-said, I coulda-said, that old and tired routine adding nothing and subtracting whatever may have been positive. I had lost my perspective and it was through the interest of others that it was restored. They gave me confidence by giving an honest evaluation and courage to try new things by offering reassurance.

Soon the realization came: The more comfortable I became with others, the more comfortable they would be with me, and as a result I became more comfortable with myself. I had learned the magic of the mirror: being able to see a reflection of myself in another.

As time went by I was able to find in myself certain traits and feelings that served as magic-warning danger signs:

When I would recall the number of days, hours, or minutes I had been behind the information desk, or entrance station or given the same program.

When I would start to rationalize by saying "'they'

ask the same questions or 'they' don't have any interest or 'they' only want to know ..."

How could I get out of this rut? Because when I saw little value in what I was doing it was difficult to feel positive about myself. And in order to find that magic I had to first look at me. Me -- that was the answer; get me in balance and everything else will fall into place.

Now about that information desk. Instead of answering those same old questions, I think maybe I will incorporate some new interpretive material and see what audience it will appeal to. That entrance station may be the best place to develop some mini-interpretive messages.

So you see the magic never really leaves -- it's always there. It is inability to see it or use it that makes it seem to disappear.

Since 1969, when I first heard those words, I have seen many exciting new days. And many magical moments have occurred watching an interpreter using the skills of communication and the magic of imagination to recreate a moment in history, bringing it to life to the delight of an audience.

I have seen visitors entranced as they listened as an interpreter unravels some of nature's mysteries. There have been great moments as the audience and the interpreter became one.

The magic of interpretation does not end with the program. It is passed on from visitor to visitor, enhancing everyone's experience. Interpreters who keep the magic in interpretation also keep a little magic in their lives. In helping others find the excitement of a new day they have a new day themselves.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming

Sam Vaughn

Interpretive Specialist
National Capital Region

Think for a moment about some of the magical moments you remember from interpretive programs -- on a trail, around a campfire, even at the information desk. Who were the interpreters involved? Were they aware of how they orchestrated (or allowed) that magic? Can they do it again? Can we teach others to do it?

These were some of the questions on my mind as I tried to find out whether a new package of communi-

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cations techniques could be useful to interpreters.

Last December I began studying Neuro-Linguistic Programming under a Horace Albright Fellowship. I had heard about NLP since 1975, and had read *From Frogs Into Princes* and several articles. I thought there might be something of value here to interpretation, something relating to magic. I think I was right.

NLP is basically a set of techniques for improving communication and assisting personal change. Sound familiar? Interpreters want to become better communicators -- whether at the information desk, in a program, on a trail, or in brochures. As for assisting change, we may not think of ourselves as social crusaders, but we do want to enhance visitors' enjoyment while minimizing their harmful impact. Maybe there's something for us here.

NLP was developed about 15 years ago by a pair of linguist/computer scientist/psychologists, Richard Bandler and John Grinder. They were trying to discover what made some therapists so effective at helping people change in a short period of time. They studied several therapists, especially Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson, and were able to identify several elements that improved communication and assisted change.

For example, Bandler and Grinder noted that people concentrated on different sensory systems at different times: one particular memory was mostly visual, while a nagging voice of guilt was chiefly an **auditory** message, and anticipation of a pleasant experience was felt **kinesthetically** (through feelings or sensations). If the therapist matched the dominant sensory system, the rapport between therapist and client was greatly improved. Like many people we know who are "good people persons," Satir and Erickson seemed to match sensory systems automatically, almost without thinking.

In addition, Bandler and Grinder described ways that people distort their experiences when they record, remember, and talk about them. We leave out details, change facts, exaggerate distance and sizes, and assume intentions and thoughts of others. Effective therapists are skillful at helping their clients to recognize and modify these distortions. Effective interpreters do this as well.

The theoretical foundation for NLP is rather basic, since most practitioners are more concerned with discovering what works than constructing theoretical systems. **When we respond to our environment, we are responding to our images, interpretations,**

concepts, and assumptions about our environment.

We don't react to the world directly; rather we respond to how we see it, hear it, feel it, smell it, taste it, think about it, and remember it. We respond to our **map** of the world, a **map** that we create and modify.

NLP assumes that the map is not the territory.

Everyone modifies and responds to a unique map of personal experiences. Achieving rapport with someone means understanding and to some extent matching their maps. NLP provides useful and precise models for doing this.

Visitors bring their maps with them, and when we give a talk or answer a question, we are speaking to and affecting their maps. If we can increase rapport, if we can more frequently match sensory systems, if we can anticipate distortions that visitors are likely to make (or have already made) of their experiences, then perhaps we can provide more effective interpretation.

Now, building rapport is not exactly a breeze in one-to-one situations; how can I expect to match sensory systems and reframe distortions with 15 birders at Great Falls, 25 fourth graders at Manassas, or a Pakistani family at the Lincoln Memorial? I don't know yet, but NLP has some leads.

NLP may also prove helpful for training. For example, an NLP assumption is that we have most of the resources that we need to be successful, only we don't always have access to them. We all can be friendly, enthusiastic, and helpful at times; but when that family comes through the visitor center door at 4:50 on Friday, and you are counting change and closing up, and you know they will want to see the slide show and ask dozens of obvious questions, you might have a less than a Host-of-the-Year response. NLP can teach us to be aware of these times, and find some enthusiasm and hospitality.

Or take someone with stage fright. He does not always feel faint, frightened, and devoid of conscious thought. Perhaps when talking casually with friends, or when discussing a topic he knows well -- then he is at ease. NLP can help him transfer those communication skills to the problem context (ie formal talks in front of strangers).

NLP activities can teach us how to maintain better rapport with our audiences and our co-workers, how to design better training, how to correct distortions in peoples' images of parks, how to encourage low-impact behavior, and how to change habits. It can also provide a model of exemplary performance,

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and then teach it to those of us not blessed with innate brilliance.

For example, magician-interpreters. Andy Kardos, that master debater and cunning linguist, sent forth scores of oral and written communicators from Stephen Mather Training Center in the 1970s. Ron Thoman has preached and written the Gospel in several parks as well as Albright Training Center. Bruce McHenry does it in private instead of public now. Dan Murphy inspires with word processor, campfire tales, and details. And Corky Mayo ..., and Jack de Golia, and ..., and

NLP practitioners may be able to model the approaches of these magicians, and teach some of the magic to us stiffs. Then we can modify the approaches to incorporate our particular talents and perspectives.

There are precedents. For example, NLP trainers have modelled expert marksmanship for the Army, and reportedly produced the first significant improvement in pistol range scores in some fifty years. And NLP techniques themselves grew out of modelling the communications approaches of Satir, Erickson, and others.

NLP is evolving. Starting as a therapeutic technique, it has spread to management, sales, supervision, training, and education. Being a practical more than a theoretical approach, it can adjust to meet different objectives and settings.

Perhaps there are some new ways that we can more precisely "relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor." After all, Tilden's Six Commandments were inscribed some thirty years ago.

My goal is to identify potentially useful techniques, and start to modify them for use by interpreters, managers, and trainers. Unfortunately, there is little experimental evidence, but a wealth of experience, and no lack of endorsements. Now to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Doubtless there is a lot of crap written to make new-age authors rich; bookstores are full of it. But we would be fools not to look at new discoveries in neuro-psychology, linguistics, communications, and social psychology to see what we can apply to interpretation. Will someone out there look at split-brain research? How about the work in learning styles coming out of education, Myers-Briggs, etc. And certainly the impressive results of guided imagery in amateur and profes-

sional sports suggests likely application to interpretive training.

Meanwhile, we will field test modified NLP approaches for training and interpretation. We offered an NLP basic course in October, with more to come. We could all use a little more magic in our work.

Playing Merlin

Rita Cantu

Park Ranger Interpretation and Visitor Services
Guadalupe Mountains National Park

What I want to know is, how do we change the linear concept of "creativity" on the emotive end of the scale and "intellect" or "science" on the other end. How do we change that line to a circle? Can we re-focus our Western perspective from a segmented, compartmentalized mentality to a more integrated, holistic view of all extremes as part of the process? If we can do that, maybe then we can respond to the self-doubting concerns of many interpreters: "But I'm not artistic . . . so I can't be creative." If we do that, we can respond to managers: "I want Programs of consequence . . . not entertaining, ephemeral moments of magic!"

How can we (and we **must**) inject these moments of magic into the most important messages of all--the interpretation of critical natural and cultural resources, the interpretation of controversy, the connection of this immediate resource, wherever it may be to issues affecting all parks and the global environment? I submit that the **only** way we can tie these resources and issues together, without bludgeoning the visitor, is with magic.

The one place we need magic most, is this. It is in moving beyond the "wonder of the moment" (emotive) to the development of a sense of stewardship (intellectual). The wonder of the moment is often presented by the resource itself, if we'd just have sense enough to shut up and stop interpreting it. The development of stewardship--**that** can use some magic.

In addition to magic, we need facts. Good, hard-hitting, dramatically presented facts. There it is again: yin and yang. The circle. Emotion and intellect.

Real magic is the Merlin that transforms us into birds and trees, but always changes us back again; forces our return to the real world, and then helps us re-shape the knowledge gained from our experience into the wisdom of integration and action.

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That's what interpretive magic is really all about.

To trigger the "ah-ha" isn't enough any more. To be less than Merlin magicians is to do only half the job. We must also engender and help answer the "now-what," not to mention the "so-what."

Sadly, I think we are facing another malady as a profession, and as a human race: despair. For many, there is a growing certainty of our eventual self-destruction as a people, even as a planet. Talk to a group of teenagers, and you'll be sobered at their unconcerned assumption of eventual annihilation. "There's not much of a future, so let's get it all now, while we can."

How do you meet this kind of pervasive, societal despair with "moments of magic?" What's the use? How can it possibly matter? What difference can we make?

I'm not sure how we conquer that social despair, but we can alleviate it, and keep our own sense of purpose alive, with magic. For me, it's a constant struggle to keep alive, not my sense of wonder, but my faith in the future. But I intend to do so, at all costs. It's the only thing that keeps me going. Without that, the magic evaporates. Without the incandescent, shimmering, bubble-pop moments of wonder, of oneness with life, I have no message to relate, no mission to accomplish. I am only a self-absorbed performer in a tiny, meaningless arena.

We need magic, not just for the visitors and the resources, but for ourselves. We must not only create magic--we must **believe** in it.

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About This Issue

Interpretation is edited and designed by the staff of Harpers Ferry Center:

General Editor: Julia Holmass

Technical Editor: J Scott Harmon

Designer: Phillip Musselwhite

Contributing editors for this issue are:

Sam Vaughn, National Capitol Region

Dan Murphy, Southwest Region