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*Shane Watson:* Today is June 18<sup>th</sup>, and on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College, and Team for Success, we'd like to thank you for agreeing to speak with us today. My name is Shane Watson. Today's interview will be archived only at Crossroads to Freedom. Can you please state some basic background information like what your name is?

*David Haggard:* David Haggard. I'm a park ranger with Tennessee State Parks, and worked here at Reel Foot Lake for 28 years.

*Shane Watson:* Okay, and where were you born and raised?

*David Haggard:* I was raised in upper east Tennessee near the Smokey Mountains.

*Shane Watson:* Okay. Would you say living – being born and raised around the mountains made you want to work in a more natural type of occupation?

*David Haggard:* Growing up in the outdoor family farm – on a farm doing lots of outdoor activities, this was the career I always wanted to pursue.

*Shane Watson:* Okay. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

*David Haggard:* I've got two younger brothers.

*Shane Watson:* And, they were involved in the natural lifestyle, as well?

*David Haggard:* They are – were.

*Shane Watson:* Okay. Do you have kids of your own?

*David Haggard:* I do not.

*Shane Watson:* Okay.

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We've all ready asked that question. Well, since you work here and you've been here for over 20 years, what would you say is the best part of your job working with the Tennessee state?

*David Haggard:* The best part of my job working with state parks is helping to educate our park visitors about the beauty and history of Reel Foot

Lake, all the things found here, and especially the Bald Eagles, which have always been one of my favorite creatures.

*Shane Watson:* Can you speak more about the Bald Eagles being at this lake?

*David Haggard:* Well, Reel Foot Lake has always been a winter home for Bald Eagles. It's on the Mississippi River flyway, which is basically how the birds migrate up and down the middle part of the country. So, Reel Foot is home to lots of eagles – always has been. And, the park offers tours to go out – to take people out to see the eagles. And, then we also have injured non-releasable eagles that we use for environmental education where we actually handle them and let people get up close and see and learn about them.

*Shane Watson:* Okay, so you would say that people visit Reel Foot Lake year round?

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*David Haggard:* They do visit year round. Actually, July and August are the two slowest months because it gets hot and humid. But, Reel Foot has visitation throughout the year. The winter when a lot of parks are slow, Reel Foot is actually very busy because of the eagles and also the ducks and geese. We have over 300,000 ducks and geese that spend the winter here, besides the eagles.

*Shane Watson:* That's really amazing. How many tourists do you think visit per year?

*David Haggard:* They say about three-quarters of a million tourists on a normal year will visit this area.

*Shane Watson:* All righty. Well, that's pretty amazing. Besides the wildlife, and seeing the birds, and all that type of stuff, what other activities go on at Reel Foot Lake?

*David Haggard:* Well, one, it's known as a fishing lake. This is one of the best fishing lakes in this part of the country. It's very shallow because of the way it was formed by the earthquakes. It is literally full of fish. It's also known for its bird watching. People come here not only to see the eagles, ducks, and geese, but all just the smaller, migratory birds, the water birds, the herons, egrets, the warblers.

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It's a great canoeing and kayaking lake. We have a lot of that. And, it's a great photography lake. We have a lot of photographers that come here to photograph the birds and then the natural beauty.

*Shane Watson:* Okay, we're going to come back to the legend/how the lake was formed. But, I want to talk about the fishing. So, last month Bass Pro Shops hosted the Crappie Masters tour here. How did that go for the lake?

*David Haggard:* Anytime you have a big tournament, especially one sponsored by a big sponsor like Bass Pro Shops, that brings in a lot of visitors, a lot of publicity. Even people that did not come to fish the tournament – they hear about the lake, they see them catching a lot of fish, so they plan a trip here to fish. Fishing is the number one activity that brings people to Real Foot Lake.

*Shane Watson:* Okay. And, I hear that the winters are actually – this is their hone lake – Ronnie Caps and Steve Coleman.

*David Haggard:* Ronnie Caps and Steve Coleman are both local. They grew up here. They are fantastic croppy fisherman fish tournaments all over the country. Have won many of the tournaments over the years. Yes, this is their home lake.

*Shane Watson:* Nice. Nice.

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So, going back to how the lake was formed, I've heard there's a legend and I've heard there's a story. Could you speak more on the story and then tell us what the legend is?

*David Haggard:* [Laughs] Right. There's lots of mis-legend stories. Kind of I guess the truth about the earthquakes – the earthquake started on December 16 of 1811 with an 8 point-plus earthquake. Earthquakes continued through mid March of 1812 with almost 2,000 individual quakes in that four months. Five of those quakes were above eight on the Richter scale. A large section of land sank and filled with water, which is where we now see the main lake. Another area rose, called an uplift, that acted as a dam to back the water up. You have all sorts of written accounts on the land changing, on the fumes and vapors shooting up out of the earth. So, it was totally dark at mid-day. Crevices in the earth. The Mississippi River running backwards for a short period of time. Extremely large, violent earthquakes formed the lake.

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*Shane Watson:* Okay. And, do you know anything about the Native American legend of how?

*David Haggard:* I know a little bit about it. Of course, that's one of the things we talk about and one of the things that's on the literature. There is a really neat legend. As far as we know, it has nothing to do with reality – it's just a legend. As a historian, we have never found a Chief Reel Foot or Princess Laughing Eyes mentioned in the historical documents. But, basically the legend is – this is going to be a shortened version – is the Choctaws who lived in this area, the chief had a son that had a crippled foot, so he reeled when he walked. Hence, he was called Reel Foot. And, as he grew to manhood, he could not find a maiden that he wanted to marry in his own tribe. So, he started traveling with a group of other braves looking for a suitable wife. They traveled down into the Chickasaw country, which is north Georgia.

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And, was visiting a tribe, and he met and fell in love with a Chickasaw maiden called Princess Laughing Eyes. Well, her father did not want his beautiful daughter to have anything to do with the club-footed Choctaw. So, he drove Reel Foot from the village, but Reel Foot was a young man in love so he decided to go back and kidnap Laughing Eyes. So, him and his braves went back, kidnapped Laughing Eyes, brought her back to his own village for the wedding ceremony. The gods looked down, became angry on what Reel Foot had done, and destroyed him and his entire tribe by stomping their feet, which would correspond to the earthquakes. That's kind of a shortened version. It's half a book, but that's the high points of it.

*Shane Watson:* All right. Thank you. So, would you say that many people come here to visit ask to hear that story, as well?

*David Haggard:* Not as many as used to. I mean, it's something you can pick up in the literature. It's in the books.

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It's in a lot of the promotion for some of the local motels and stuff. They have that as part of their literature just because it's interesting and people have heard about it for 70 years now. And, like to read

about it. So, it is still available to people for read. And, even there's a song that you can listen to and several books written on it.

*Shane Watson:* Okay. So, going on to more recent history, I've heard of the Washout Edgewater Beach and Sunkissed Beach. However, I don't feel like I completely understand the history of these places. Do you know anything about these places?

*David Haggard:* A little bit. The Washout was actually formed by a series of Mississippi River floods. It was not formed by the earthquakes of 1811-1812. Basically pre-levy. And, the levies in this area were completed by the early 1900s. The river would flood through during flood stage. So, part of the lake is old river channels, areas deep under – enlarged the by the river. And, the Washout was made by a series of river floods.

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So, the Washout is deeper than the main lake. It's a natural sand beach. And, for years that is where everyone in this area swam because it was really the only place to swim. And, you had three beaches. They were operated through most of the 1900s. They closed in the 1970s mainly due to pollution problems. And, just due to lack of use. As communities built swimming pools, most people instead of coming to swim in the lake, preferred to go to a swimming pool – swim in clean water where you didn't occasionally see a snake, or get bit by a fish, or get bumped by something under the water – couldn't see your feet. So, all the beaches are now out of business as a commercial operation. Sunkissed Beach was the largest, and it is still operated as a swim-at-your-own-risk beach where people can get in the water here.

*Shane Watson:* Right. So, you spoke on pollution – it being the reason why these lakes are closed. Did you say pollution is still an issue today?

*David Haggard:* Pollution is not the issue today.

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If you go back pre-1970s, everything around the lake just had septic tanks – all the businesses, all the homes. And, in this low water table, you didn't have a lot of time for that to be dealt with, especially after a heavy rain, before you had sewage issues and pollution issues going into the lake. In the late '70s there was a big federal grant, and everything around the lake was put on a sewer system. So, everything is now treated. So, all of those problems

were addressed. There's a little bit of issues with agricultural pesticide runoff from spring to farm fields. But, kind of the same thing with that. When you go back to the '50s, '60s, and '70s a lot of those chemicals were very long lasting, like DDT, which almost everyone has heard of. Very long lasting pesticide. Where today, most of the chemicals used break down very quickly so they don't stay potent after they go in the lake.

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So, a very minor issue today compared to what it was just 30 or 40 years ago.

*Shane Watson:* That's really good. So, you would say that has been a change that has occurred over the years at this lake.

*David Haggard:* A major change. It's just lake use, the sewer system – a huge thing. Change in farming practices going from no till, or going from plowing the land to no till has made a huge difference, which no till is where they don't plow as deep. They plant through last year's crop stubble. You use more chemicals – more herbicides and pesticides – but you don't plow, so you don't have the erosion runoff where the land erodes back into the lake. Just the publicity of all the tourism. Tourism is just continually growing here. So, a lot of positive changes over the last 50 years.

*Shane Watson:* Nice. So, from my short time being in the city, I've noticed that the lake is massive – like really massive. And, almost, from my point of view, bigger than the city of Tiptonville originally, themselves. Would you say that it plays a big role in this community?

*David Haggard:* The lake plays a huge role in this community.

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And, I think almost everyone in this community realizes that the lake is the lifeblood of this area – the tourism. Tourism brings in a tremendous amount of money. And, people coming here for the lake, for the hunting, for the fishing, for the bird watching, canoeing, kayaking, photography, just to look at the lake, just to walk this boardwalk and relax and get away. So, tourism is huge here. And, plus, just for the people that live here. I mean, most of us that live here enjoy getting on the lake whether it's to fish, or just boat ride, or just like this – to walk out and stand and look at the lake and relax.

*Shane Watson:* So, outside of you working for the state of Tennessee Park and Recreation organization, what would you say is your biggest hobby out here on the lake?

*David Haggard:* My biggest hobby is photography. I'm a serious photographer – mainly wildlife. I like to chase birds and animals with a camera and take pictures, and share them, and help promote the park through Power Point programs, through magazine articles, a lot through the internet now, through the websites.

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So, photography is just, to me, a really fun hobby to get out and enjoy nature, and to share that beauty and love of nature with other people.

*Shane Watson:* Okay, so you spoke on programs. Earlier you spoke on teaching – using educational programs to teach the visitors. What type of programs do you guys use?

*David Haggard:* We use a lot. I mean, one we spoke of earlier is the Bird of Prey Program where we have the non-releasable birds of prey – eagles, hawks, and owls – that we utilize those creatures to let people really see and learn about the animals, the lake, the history. We have reptiles, snakes, and turtles that we also use for environmental education. We do canoe trips. We do pontoon boat trips. We do eagle tours to take people out to see the eagles, depending on time of year. So, over the entire year, the park here is doing some type of educational fun activity. You know, it's not education like sitting in a classroom. It's education by actually being out, and doing stuff, and seeing and learning it hands-on. That's our goal in state parks is to actually have people involved in doing, not just sitting and listening.

*Shane Watson:* That's really interesting. And, you mentioned turtles, and in my short time in the city I've seen a lot of turtles. Would you say that there's a large turtle population?

*David Haggard:* There's a very large turtle population. In fact, if you look behind us on the log, there's about five or six big ones laying on that log right there. And, a couple swimming around here behind us. So, about 11 different kinds of turtles live here in the lake. A couple of them very small. A couple of them very, very, very big. But, yeah, turtles are something that we see here a lot and just an interesting part of our natural world.

*Shane Watson:* All righty. So, actually, one question – it's kind of serious, kind of not. If you could describe Lake County or Reel Foot Lake in one word, what would it be and why?

*David Haggard:* Oh, that's hard. If you could describe Reel Foot Lake, it's definitely a naturalist's paradise. If you enjoy nature, whether it's hunting, fishing, photography, canoeing, kayaking, bird watching – if you enjoy getting outdoors and doing outdoor related stuff, this area is just has a tremendous diversity to off.

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And, that includes more than just the lake. It includes a lot of Lake and Opine County. And, part of Dyer County and the surrounding area. So, this is still an area that, yeah, we have a lot of things developed. We have some great restaurants to eat at. We have some nice motels to stay in. You have your local businesses. But, you know, this area primarily is still farmland and natural area. I mean, that's what drives the economy of this area is the farming and the tourism, and the natural areas found around the lake.

*Shane Watson:* All right. As an organization, Crossroads to Freedom focuses on assets-based community development, meaning that we focus on the institutions, ideas, and organizations that bring value to the communities. In your opinion, what are the greatest assets of Lake County?

*David Haggard:* I think it's the lake. I mean, it's Reel Foot Lake. There's no doubt.

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I mean, if you compare Lake County to a lot of other counties across the state – small rural counties – you know, having a large lake with all the attractions, and natural things, and the people that that brings in is just a huge asset. So, there's no question. It's the lake, itself, is the primary resource that we... And, then all the great productive farmland is definitely important, but the lake is why we get tourism and why we have so many people come here.

*Shane Watson:* I would definitely agree with you that the lake is massive and it's definitely an asset to this community. And, as we wind down this interview, I want to ask if there's anything else that you'd like to mention that we haven't covered so far?

*David Haggard:* Not that I think of. I mean, once again, if you've never been to Reel Foot, it's one of those places that's on a lot of people's bucket list because of the history, how it was formed by the earthquakes, the uniqueness of it with the cypress trees all out in the shallow water. I mean, some of these trees here behind us are 300 years old, so they're pre-earthquake. I mean, the earthquake was 202 years ago. So, these trees were here growing, living, before the earthquake.

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And, sometimes that's hard for people to wrap their mind around that you're standing here among 300-year-old trees. And, if you come and take one of our canoe trips, you may be among 600-year-old trees. There was still a lot of really massive forest in this area. But, it's just a place that's on a lot of people's lists, whether it's to see the eagles, to come here to fish, to duck hunt, or just to relax and enjoy nature's beauty. It's just a great escape if you like nature.

*Shane Watson:* All right, well, we'd like to thank you for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom project, and we enjoyed learning about Reel Foot Lake today.

*David Haggard:* Thank you. Glad I was able to.

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