

My Ranger Experiences

By **Monica Hicks, Fairmount Park Ranger**

When I was growing up in West Philadelphia, I thought that Philly was the center of the universe. I grew up in the '70s, so we're talking about "The Sound of Philadelphia," Rizzo and *Rocky*. I was six years old during the Bicentennial celebration-- I don't remember much, but I remember having a lot of fun that year! I have always loved this city.

Fast forward to becoming a college student, still in love with Philly, but needing to find a way to pay for school. I was already enrolled at Temple University when my mother found out about the Philadelphia Ranger Corps. The Corps paid for tuition and half of our books, and we received a stipend of \$10,000 to \$14,000 per year. I told her I did not want to be a ranger! She said, "You are doing this!"

During my two-year training, I learned things about my city and park system that I never knew. My love for the city deepened and transformed into a sense of ownership and responsibility.

I never get tired of admiring Grant, the Playing Angels and the Remington statues on Kelly Drive as I take my boys to and from school. I test them; I ask, "What does Schuylkill River mean?" To which they reply, "Hidden river!" As I take my daughter to school, we enter the Wissahickon. I ask her, "What does Wissahickon mean?" She rolls her eyes (she's 14) and says, "Catfish creek."

I have made a lot of memories in the park system. I was in training as a ranger when *Rocky III* was being filmed. We happened to be at the art museum steps when they were filming the character Rocky being honored with the statue. I was there again, working, when "Sly" was at the Museum of Art to dedicate his statue. Hopefully, it will remain at that location. Those were good memories!

My first summer as a ranger, I was almost pushed into the Swann Memorial Fountain by a homeless person. That's not a good one--but I can laugh about it now!

The park system intertwines with my daily life (even when I am off duty), the same way the waterways and parks intertwine throughout the city. Wherever I am going, I pass a body of water, a park or a rec center, and I think about how profoundly important what we (as a department) contribute to the "Philadelphia Experience."

But mostly I marvel at what this park system gives us.