



Zoo Edition Archives - Fall 2009

Career Corner

Excerpts from an interview with Kelly Staples and Greg Brandell, Education Department

WPZ: What is your job title and what duties does that entail? **GB:** Our official title is 'School & Community Program Specialist' which means that we teach programs that focus on school groups and community groups (as opposed to daily visitors at the zoo).

The majority of my time is really spent teaching and developing Wild Wise, which is our statewide outreach program that teaches 4th through 7th grade students about Washington habitats. In the summer I work with our Public Programs team presenting programs on-grounds.

KS: My title is the same and I also mainly work with Wild Wise. In the summer I work with Zoo University, an on-grounds day camp.

WPZ: What type of education and previous work experience is valuable for this job?

KS: My educational background and work experience are very different from each other, but the combination of each ended up being the perfect blend for this position. My educational background is more science-based - I have a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University. My work experience is heavily in the Environmental Education field. I've been an Environmental Educator for residential programs at Camp Killoqua in Stanwood, Washington and North Cascades Institute. In these residential programs I led students in everything from environmental studies to activities such as orienteering, rock climbing, and night hikes!

GB: As for school, I attended the School of Education at the University of Michigan. I originally wanted to be a drama teacher, until I worked at a zoo. I started at Binder Park Zoo in Battle Creek, Michigan. At Binder Park they had summer programs with animals on stage, and needed people with a background in theatre and with educational skills. I worked there for three seasons before moving out to Seattle about two and a half years ago.

WPZ: Can you describe a typical day?

KS: One of the things that I love about this position is that there really is no typical day. Most days start with picking up the Zoobaru (our white Subaru that is decorated all over with images of Washington flora and fauna), and then driving to a school to present our classroom program or taking students who have already had our indoor program out to their schoolyard for an Outdoor Exploration. On my favorite days, the Wild Wise team joins students in exploring local state parks or wildlife areas. It is very exciting to be with students as they explore these areas with the new interest and skills that they've gained from our earlier visits. Being able to witness the excitement that students experience as they see their first sea anemone, woodpecker, or nurse log covered in a world of tiny organisms is such an incredible experience.

GB: I agree. One of the neatest parts of this job is that there really is no typical day. Every day we're in a different spot, meeting new people and exploring new things. Seeing the kids get so excited about what most people would dismiss is definitely the most rewarding thing about this job.

WPZ: What is your favorite outdoor place in Washington and why?

KS: I could never pick one favorite. I love wild places, whether I'm deep in the forest looking for evidence of wildlife, or high on the windy, rocky summit of a mountain enjoying the view and the challenge of the journey. I also love exploring the itty-bitty, such as the abundance of small organisms that can be found in a tidepool or on one square meter of soil in the shrub steppe!

GB: Hmm, well being fairly new to Washington one particular area is hard for me to nail down. I'd have to say the coast of the Olympic Peninsula. The forests and the coastline there are amazing. I really didn't think areas like that actually existed. I'm more than happy to be mistaken on that count.