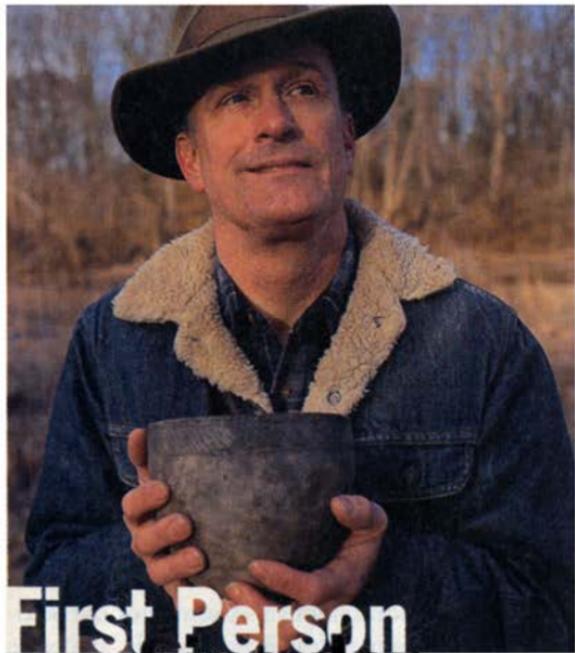




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**First Person
Singular**
Stephen Potter

National Park Service archaeologist, Washington

My interest [in history and archaeology] began with my grandmother Viar. When I was 4, 5 and 6, she would tell me stories, tales that had been told to her by her grandfather, from his time in the Army of Northern Virginia. She would ask me if I wanted her to read to me, but I'd say no, because I knew even then that any adult could read to me, but only my grandmother could tell me tales. That's what piqued my interest in the past—in particular a past that was my past, the past of my ancestors. Then, when I was 6, I was walking with my grandfather Viar in the barnyard, and he kicked something up with the toe of his left riding boot. My grandfather was no shrimp like yours truly—he was 6-2—and he said, "Pick that up, boy." I did and got this object that was rather heavy for its size. It was kind of a gray blob. "What is it, Granddaddy?" I asked.

"That's a bullet from the war, boy."

"You mean the war happened here?"

That's when the light bulb went on between the oral history of my family and the tangible present of an artifact from the past. I was hooked. It was just a question of whether I would get dust up my nostrils from being a historian going into dusty archives, or whether I'd get dirty fingernails from being an archaeologist. Of course I chose to try and do both. I still get excited about holding an artifact, particularly if it's something where you can say, "Oh my gosh, this projectile point I just picked up is 5,000 years old." One of my professors, who was an archaeological giant, used to say, "If you still don't get excited when you pick up an arrowhead, it's time for you to get out of the business." And I think it's true. It still gives me a thrill.

— Interview by Alison Rice