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Interviewees: Bruce Algar (BA)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
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TM: Today is Friday, August 13, 2021. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Bruce Algar. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Bruce. How are you today?

BA: Good afternoon, I'm fine, thank you. Good to talk to you, Tom.

TM: Great. You, too. Bruce, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

BA: Yes, I'd be delighted.

TM: Thank you so much. What year were you born?

BA: I was born in mid-year 1941.

TM: And where were you born?

BA: I was born in the hospital that is across the street from the main gates of the Disney Studio. And, I may, if I think about it long enough, recall the name of the hospital. But I do know where it was.

TM: Okay. And what did your father do there in Los Angeles?

BA: He was with the Disney Studios, since, actually, before I was born, and he spent his entire career there. He was, in sort of general progression, an animator, and then a writer, and then a director, and then a producer, or at least a co-producer, in Walt Disney productions.

TM: Okay. And was that a ladder? Was he climbing a ladder doing that?

BA: Oh, not so much that. I think just as the studio grew and expanded beyond just animation, their needs grew for talented writers, talented directors. And I don't know that it was a strict progression. He may have written something, then directed something, then written something, then produced something, then directed something.

TM: And I would imagine that directing and producing is a whole lot more fun than being an animator?

BA: Probably so. Animators are kind of the bottom of the food chain, even when it's making an animated production. It's certainly not – look, it is artistic work, but it's kind of mechanical, repetitious artistic work. It takes thousands of drawings, each just slightly different than the former, to give that impression of movement when you're flipping through drawings and film frames at 24 frames a second.

TM: Right, right! I just see that as really, it can be tedious work, frame after frame after frame.

BA: Well, yeah. I mean, it takes talent, but it's a tedious use of talent.

TM: Yes, yeah. What are one or two of your earliest recollections of the land of pixie dust out there, at Disney Studios?

BA: Well, actually it's curious you put it that way. When I was in grade school, grammar school, even high school, it didn't seem to be that remarkable an environment because many of my school contemporaries – the kids I went to class with – also had, mostly fathers, maybe some mothers, who were associated with the motion picture business in some capacity or other. So it didn't seem all that remarkable. I mean, it wasn't every kid in school, but most of the kids in school, that I went with, were associated with the movie business in one form or another.

TM: Okay. Where did you grow up?

BA: I grew up in the part of the San Fernando Valley called North Hollywood. It was kind of over the hills from downtown Los Angeles. And, although the Disney Studios started in LA – I think it was on Hyperion Boulevard, as I recall – at some point they moved out to Burbank, in the San Fernando Valley. And North Hollywood was like the adjacent community.

TM: Ah, okay. So nearby?

BA: Oh, very nearby. It was an easy commute, even for those days.

TM: Your father is James Algar. Did your dad bring his work home? Did he ever tell you kind of what was going on at the shop?

BA: Actually, not very often. He was a very reserved man, and tended to not talk shop at home. Now if things were going exceptionally well or exceptionally difficult, he may have talked to my mother. But in front of us kids, he didn't talk about the business much at all. We had an idea of what was going on, and if he had to go on some location trip, we were aware he was going somewhere. But he didn't discuss

the details of his work. And as I say, we didn't think his work was all that remarkable, since most other kids also had fathers in the business. Going back to that point for a minute of, what was it like growing up, on the street that we all lived, Vantage Avenue: Two doors down was the Williams family; Johnny Williams and Star Wars music fame, and whatever else he composed. Across the street was a studio musician who played regularly in background music for movies. Coming up the street across from him -- or next to him, across from us -- was a guy named Tyler McVey, an old-time character actor. You can see him on the board of the court martial of "The Caine Mutiny." So, even our neighborhood had a fairly good representation of motion picture-related people, and families.

TM: So the film industry was sort of like ho-hum for you, as a kid?

BA: Well, yeah. I mean, when father would go to the Academy Award ceremonies, we were certainly aware of that, and we were proud of it. But it's not that he discussed it a whole lot as we were growing up.

TM: Did you as a child, did you guys do typical vacation in the station wagon kind of thing? Did you like out-of-doors kind of stuff?

BA: Oh, we were great annual vacation station-wagon-driving vacationers. We probably, more than once, drove through every state west of the Midwest. I mean, I won't name them all off, but if you can name a state west of the Midwest, we went there on some vacation.

TM: Okay. What's your first recollection of the Grand Canyon? Was that on one of those vacations?

BA: No, I don't recall that I ever went there before the film trip that we made. I remember we went up - - oh, we went up to Wyoming, we went up to Colorado, we went up to Montana. We did even British Columbia, that part of Canada. But I don't recall having any occasion to specifically go to the Grand Canyon, as I say, before we made the filming trip.

TM: Okay, did you learn how to swim, as a boy?

BA: Oh, yes. Yes, it was pretty common. Either the YMCA, or local community pools. I was not a beach surfer type; we were a little far over the hill to do that regularly. We did the occasional vacation at the beach, but, yeah, a California surfer I was not.

TM: Okay. But you knew how to swim?

BA: Oh, I knew how to swim.

TM: And did you like camping out?

BA: We did. I don't know if things have changed, but I remember we took a family vacation in Yosemite. And you could basically rent a pre-staged tent, with cots in it, and there was a wood stove you could

cook in. So, compared to vacations in parks these days, it probably sounds kind of primitive. But back then it wasn't all that unusual, or that difficult.

TM: Were you in Boy Scouts?

BA: No, I was in the Cub Scouts, but then about that age-difference time, I got involved in the YMCA. Which was very active, at least at that time, in that part of the country. And I went to some YMCA camps, as a camper, in the various hills surrounding Los Angeles, up near Big Bear and Arrowhead Lakes. And then when I was in high school, I was a YMCA camp counselor, and did that for several years.

TM: Oh, great. Okay. So, not totally averse to sleeping on the ground with a sleeping bag?

BA: Oh, no. No, no. It was not remarkable. Indeed, the YMCA would run some trips where basically they'd get some trucks, about the size of a dump truck, but it wasn't a dump truck. It had like a stake --

TM: Yeah, stake beds.

BA: Stake trucks. Whatever they're called -- you know what I mean. You could probably put -- oh, 15 kids, and their sleeping bags, in the back of those. And we just drove off, and every night we'd either stay in another YMCA, or we'd stay in a county park building or something, in our sleeping bags. So, you know, if it rained, well, you got wet! So, no, sleeping on the ground was not remarkable. Even the YMCA camps I went to, basically you had a sleeping bag on a bed bunk-board, or a board bed. So, not remarkable.

TM: Okay. So slowly and steadily, from 1940 -- I'm gonna say 1947 -- Walt Disney became friends with a fella named Otis Marston. And Marston kept pushing Walt to do some filming on the Colorado River, including Grand Canyon. And that -- there was a 1953 river trip that Marston did with a film producer, with a film scout. And nothing kind of came of it, until 1958. So, how was it that you ended up on this river trip that was a Disney river trip, on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon in 1958?

BA: Well up until I got a call, I wasn't paying all that much attention. I was probably aware that father was going to go on this trip, because that in itself wouldn't have been so remarkable, going on a location trip. But I was in school, high school, senior year. One afternoon, got a call to take me out of class, go to the principal's office. Where I don't remember exactly but either, I suppose, my mother or father must have come and got me. The gist of it is, that father, at the last minute -- like that afternoon before he was due to leave -- decided that I should come with him on this trip. Which was a total surprise. We had not discussed it when I had breakfast and left the house. I was more than willing to get out of school and go to Arizona, so we went. That all happened fast enough that I can only recall by assumption that we must have flown out that night. Or that evening, to go to Arizona. I do remember that we stayed at what must of been one of the Grand Canyon lodges. It had kind of that national park feel about it, in my memory. I remember that it was staffed, in terms of the wait-service people in the dining room, by a bunch of college kids who were working there for the summer. 'Cause I talked to some of them, and they would have been like two, maybe three, years older than I was at the time. I remember they had a gift shop because, just to kind of walk around and kill time that evening, I went in and I bought a turquoise-blue straw cowboy hat. Which I think shows up in some later pictures. And then I guess we stayed the night there. And then the next morning, again I don't remember how, I can

only assume it was by car or van or something, we drove up to where you could come down to the river front of the Colorado River. And I want to say Glen Canyon, but I may be mis-remembering that or juxtapositioned itself from somewhere else.

TM: Yeah, let's see if we can figure this out. So there are a number of lodges, and I'm thinking about an airport. There is an airstrip at the Marble Canyon Lodge. There was also an airstrip out at a place called Cliff Dwellers. And most of the river runners in the late 50s they were spending their money at Cliff Dwellers. Marston definitely liked Art Greene, who was running that shop over there; and his family running the restaurant. And they had curios for sale there, certainly. And then it would have been a vehicle drive on a paved road, and there was a bridge there. There was a bridge that crossed Marble Canyon.

BA: I do remember the bridge. It was, if you're on the river, a very high bridge. Kind of a thin steel, kind of arch bridge.

TM: Yes, exactly.

BA: I do remember that. So wherever that bridge is, must have been where we embarked on the river.

TM: Okay. Well, or nearby. Which is Lees Ferry, which is at the end of Glen Canyon and the start of Marble Canyon.

BA: Lees Ferry does sound familiar to me.

TM: Okay. So this would've been like, kind of a fun adventure. What time of year was this again?

BA: It would've been, I think, approximately April, May, June of '58.

TM: Okay. April, actually, sounds right. And I can get the exact dates, but I'm just seeing if it was that spring, 1958. So you're just about ready to graduate.

BA: Well, actually I was in the California school system that graduated people in both June and January. I was a mid-year class, so I actually graduated from high school not in June but in the following January. So I... We referred to ourselves as the Class of Winter '59. As opposed to those, you know, other...

TM: Summer '58.

BA: Summer. Well, or, summer '58 or summer '59.

TM: Okay, yeah, got it. That makes sense. Okay.

BA: In fact, I didn't go to college until the following fall. So between January '59 and August to September '59, I worked at the Disney Studio in the mail room. Which was totally staffed by sons of Disney employees. The place was very -- lot of nepotism going around the Disney Studio, at least back then.

TM: Okay, all right. Well certainly in the mail room.

BA: Oh, absolutely -- totally in the mail room.

TM: What do you remember, I mean just sort of taking it step by step here, of Lees Ferry? In driving down to the river, do you remember that road, dusty dirt road?

BA: Nah. Not particularly. I just remember, when we were down there, being on the water's edge and looking way, way up at that bridge that we must've just crossed.

TM: Yeah, well you went under the bridge, actually, a few miles downstream from Lees Ferry. Where the ferry crossing was, and the long history there. What do you remember about the boat? Your first impression of the watercraft you were gonna use?

BA: I did study that fairly closely, since I was gonna have to get on it. It basically was three pontoons, of the kind that's probably used in bridge construction, or river construction -- black rubber pontoons. I'd say each one was probably six or seven feet wide, maybe eight at the most, and probably 20 feet long. One end of each pontoon may have been raised up a little bit; I don't remember specifically. But, so each pontoon was, let's say, 8 by 20. And they were arranged in a raft, side by side. But the middle pontoon was set ahead by probably 4 to 6 feet, and there were boards strapped across, between the two aft pontoons -- that is the aft end. So an outboard motor could be attached to these boards, which in effect was on the centerline, and slightly forward of the back of the two outer pontoons. So it was, in the back, the middle pontoon was pushed forward, and in the front, the middle pontoon was also pushed forward. So you had sort of a boat shape there. I mean, not really, but sort of.

TM: Yeah, a little bit of a vee wedge there, with the center boat pushed a little further forward.

BA: And that probably gave a little more leverage to the outboard motor in terms of making a turn. Although, as it turned out later, once you get in the rapids, that leverage became pretty irrelevant to whatever the water wanted to do with you. So if you were sitting -- well, we all were sitting on the pontoon -- you were probably 2-1/2, maybe 3 feet above the waterline. The front of the, this barge, whatever you want to call it for this collection, and I'm guessing that this was done special for this trip, Georgie had taken a couple of probably 2 x 4s, or maybe 4 x 4s, and lashed them down to the front of the center pontoon. They were probably like six feet long, and they were strapped down pretty firmly to straps attached to the pontoon. There were a lot of hand-hold type straps you could use there. And then sitting across those two 4 x 4s, say, was a 4 x 4 sheet of plywood, probably 3/4s or an inch thick, and that was nailed down to the 4 x 4s. Obviously you're not going to nail down to the pontoon, but the framework underneath was lashed down and then the platform was nailed to that. And then, I think, probably bolted to this center platform was a big, Hollywood-type, motion picture camera. It was not on a tripod, because that would've really been an awkward arrangement, with the boat pitching and so on. But even without a tripod, by the time you have just the camera stand, and then the camera lenses and so on top of that, and then the film canisters on top of that, the camera probably stood at least three above the wooden platform that it was bolted to. So when Ernst, the filmographer -- Ernst Heidigger, or Heiniger -- I don't quite remember what -- was shooting, and of course, being in the very front, he could kind of pan from all the way left to all the way right, and he wouldn't see the side pontoon because it was three or four feet behind him.

TM: Right, so just out of view.

BA: Yeah, just out of view. So he could get a pretty wide-angle shot, or he could, as I say, pan the

camera from all the way left to all the way right, and all he would see would be river, water, or whatever he was filming. And he could, like, kneel on this platform and that made the eyepiece of the camera at about his eye-level. Which again, says that it was probably 3 feet, 3 1/2 feet, above the level. And I can either tell you now or tell you later, what happened to that camera when we hit the rapids.

TM: You know, I was gonna say, I was like, how did you keep it dry? Because you hit rapids, that water goes up over the front of that pontoon pretty happily.

BA: Yeah, it does. Well, I don't know that he did always keep it dry. He at least kept it dry enough, or it was dry enough, but he didn't seem unduly concerned about being inundated. And I'm trying to recall... I think he had maybe some plastic film wrapped around -- not in front of the lens -- but around the camera box. But since we're talking about the camera, and you bring up the waves, at some point in the trip, probably into the second or third day, we were going through an exceptionally big rapid. With lots of wave action. And the bow of the boat pitching up and down. And at some point, we hit a wave that brought the bow, and probably like the first half of the pontoon, up to what may have been a 30- or 45-degree angle. And the weight of the camera, and probably the weight of Ernst hanging on to it, and the leverage that it had -- being raised above the platform -- it pulled the nails of the platform out of the 4 x 4s, and the whole contraption of Ernst, the camera, and the platform, flipped back into the center of the center pontoon. Now, he was not injured, and he didn't lose the camera. And they were able to get it all put back together eventually. By eventually I mean when they finally got through the rapid. But that was enough to take what was already a somewhat sticky relationship between Ernst and Georgie, to a new level of antagonism. They were not, they were not getting along well before, and after that they weren't getting along at all. And she, she was the one who had constructed the platform, and its supports.

TM: Okay, okay. Before we kind of explore that a little bit, had you met Heiniger before? Had you met Ernst before?

BA: No, I had not. I had not met any of these people.

TM: Okay. His wife was on the trip -- Jeannie, or Jeanne.

BA: She was. I recall her vaguely. A nice woman, as I recall.

TM: And you didn't know her either?

BA: No.

TM: Okay. Okay, so you're looking at this big, this big boat rig. It's got this 4 x 4 sheet of plywood out on the front there, with a camera on it. And what did you think about the rest of the craft?

BA: It was comfortable enough. I mean, it, as a rubber pontoon, you could sit anywhere and kind of bounce on it, if you were of a mind. There were an awful lot of things tied downward, or tied on to it. There were sleeping bags lashed down, there were ice-storage chests of food lashed down. I don't recall if Georgie had any spare motor parts; she may well have. You know, I'm sure we all had, like, duffle bags with a change of clothes lashed down. But it was a pretty gypsy-looking outfit, really.

TM: Besides Georgie, and Ernst and Jeanne, and your father, Jim, or James, and you, who else was on

the trip? Did you remember?

BA: The people I remember was a guy named, I think his name was Dan. And he was a park ranger, as I recall.

TM: Okay, that'd be Dan Davis.

BA: Okay. So I remember he was always wearing a kind of a faded green baseball cap. And it seems to me Georgie had an assistant. But he was a pretty quiet type; he does not really stick in my mind, other than the fact that he was kind of there. And if there was anyone else, again, they didn't make much of an impression. So I don't recall anyone else.

TM: Okay. All right, so that's the team. And things would've started out on a pretty good, pretty good start, I suppose.

BA: Yeah. Everybody seemed to be looking, looking forward to it, and people seemed to know what they were doing. Georgie knew how to handle a raft. I mean, she was obviously very experienced at this, she'd done it before. So none of us doubted that, you know; this was probably do-able, and she could do it. I don't know how many times Dan had been down the river, but he was obviously familiar with the whole process. I'm supposing that Ernst and his wife had not done a river trip like this before. Or at least not literally this same river trip. Since it seemed somewhat new to them. I don't -- my father had been on lots of filming trips; I don't think he -- I think this was his first time down the Grand Canyon. He may have been to the Grand Canyon, as a tourist up on the rim, but I don't think he'd ever been down the river in this manner before.

TM: Yes. So what do remember about that first day?

BA: Ooh. Well, it was a novel experience, but at least the first day, the river's fairly calm at that point. You know, it was hot, certainly. As you go from that point, the canyon kind of gets deeper and deeper, or at least the rim, the edges kind of get higher and higher. Probably the, once you get used to the fact that oh, 'kay, I'm on a raft going down a river through a canyon, it was more like, okay, how's this gonna work? You know, what kind of food do we have, and who cooks, and... Dan was very particular, that not a shred of paper, not a single napkin, got left on the shore, on the beach, when we pulled in for either a meal or the night. It was an adventure. I was gonna say, on the quiet parts of the river, it was more pleasant and relaxing than it was strenuous and exciting. Although it tended to get more so as we went along.

TM: Right. And then, thinking about camp, fire on the beach for cooking?

BA: I'm trying to remember. It seems to me that maybe Georgie had one of those camp stoves. As I recall, there wasn't a great deal of wood, driftwood, along the river. At least not at that point. We did see some later, and actually I got to push some around in front of the camera, just for affect. But, I'm pretty certain that there was like a camp stove, for cooking. Probably the usual camp kinds of utensils, and so on. Wasn't fancy but it wasn't all that different from other YMCA camps I'd been to. Well, I mean they had real kitchens, but it wasn't all that fancy.

TM: Okay. Bathroom? Roll of toilet paper? Upstream, downstream? Pretty simple?

BA: Pretty much, yeah. We didn't... There was no tent erected. So, yeah, bathroom was pretty much as you say -- you go over there, and we'll go over here. At least in those stretches of the river, and I guess in every stretch, if you look long enough you would come to a sandbar, or a sand beach, that was maybe only six feet wide, between the canyon wall and the river. But six feet's enough. You could beach the raft and put out sleeping bags, and so on.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Place to camp.

BA: Yeah. Where it was narrow, and deep, it was very narrow and deep. But there were plenty of places where there was what would pass for a six- or eight- or ten-foot-wide beach, that would run for a 100 yards or so.

TM: And then, as to the filming, was your father acting as a director, or a producer, on that film, on that trip?

BA: Well, the film for that trip became the film for the movie "The Grand Canyon Suite." Which came out, probably, a year or two later; it takes a while to make a movie. But that movie, as you may know, there's no people. It's all just filming of the Grand Canyon, and maybe some of the animals in the Canyon, set to the music of, I think it's Ferde Grofé, if I have the right name there, of *The Grand Canyon Suite*. So that trip, and that film, matched up with that movie. I think it was only maybe a couple of years later, that they finally came around to the making of "The Ten Who Dared" movie, which took a totally different trip down the Grand Canyon. With boats that supposedly looked like rowboats -- well, they actually were rowboats. But they also had motor and props so they could be steered and so on.

TM: That's right. And that would be the next year. But in '58, on that trip that you're on, with your dad and Ernst and Jeanne and Georgie and Dan, that filming Ernst did, that won an Academy Award!

BA: I think it did, as a matter of fact.

TM: That film.

BA: Maybe Best Documentary, Best Short Subject.

TM: Something like that.

BA: I could look that up. But, yeah, we... So, many of the pictures father worked on, particularly in that True Life Adventure series -- of which there were, hmmm, eight or ten pictures, probably half a dozen of them, at least, won Academy Awards for their category. And by that time in his career, I don't remember personally being aware that Walt Disney went to the Academy Award ceremonies. I mean, I'm sure he did very early on, but by then he was not. So he would send, to collect the awards -- not keep them, but collect them -- whoever was like the key person on whatever films would get an award that year. And so my father went to the Academy Awards, hmmm, had to be two, three, maybe four times that I remember. To go collect whatever hardware Disney was going to win at that particular event.

TM: Nice. Okay, all right. Yeah, and so that was an award-winning film you were watching being made, right there.

BA: Yeah, I guess it was, now that you mention. I think he did, yeah. It was all just film and music, no picture; I mean, no people.

TM: There was a little trouble that happened to that boat. The water was coming up, it was unusually high, and unusually early, with a lot of driftwood in the river. Do you remember lots of stuff floating in the river at all?

BA: Ummm. What I do remember is that at one point we had pulled the raft inshore, and I guess it was pointed such that the camera could shoot along the edge of the bank. And there was like an eddy, a whirlpool. Not a big one. I mean, it was like six, eight feet across, and just kind of a, you could see the froth kind of slowly turning. And Ernst wanted to not only film that, but wanted to emphasize this eddy. So he asked me to pick up a piece of driftwood that happened to be lying along the bank there, of this six-foot-long, kind of a parched gray. And at his direction, when he had the camera at the angle he wanted, I kind of gave that piece of driftwood a little bit of a shove, and let it float into this eddy and spin around four or five times, and then it eventually went on downstream. So that was my Best Supporting Actor, in pushing a piece of driftwood.

TM: Star performance, right there!

BA: But I don't remember the driftwood so much as lots or little, compared to paying more attention to how big is this rapid? And how high are the waves?

TM: Right, right. Yeah, no, there's a funny event that happened there. There's a big eddy at a rapid called President Harding. There's a rock in the middle of the river, and you have to go either side of that. Then on the left, below that rock, there's a big eddy goes around and around. And Georgie had a propeller motorboat, outboard Johnson, I think, if that rings a bell.

BA: Ah, coulda been.

TM: And it's a shear-pin on the propeller, so if you hit something, instead of destroying the propeller, the little shear pin would break. And in this eddy, every time Georgie tried to get the motor in the water, start it, and then get the motor to push the boat out, the shear pin would pop. Because the eddy was full of driftwood, and that boat spent hours going round and round. Do you remember that at all?

BA: Not specifically. But it certainly may have just melded itself into the trip overall, and melded itself into and out of my memory. You'll have to give me the benefit of the doubt, Tom, this was quite a while ago.

TM: Exactly.

BA: Certainly what you describe, certainly would have been consistent with just the adventure as a whole.

TM: You mentioned the plywood frame, the plywood and camera being thrown into the middle of the boat. And this trip -- as far as the letters between the river people, and the people at Phantom Ranch that saw the trip come in, and then leave, a day or so later, after you left at Phantom -- was known for an incredibly poor amount of civility between Ernst and Jeanne and Georgie.

BA: Ah, I can imagine that, because it certainly, it certainly started while we were there. And magnified by a factor of ten when the camera came undone and rolled over. And I can't imagine it getting any better, even after we left.

TM: So as a -- I'm trying to think about you -- you would've been 18?

BA: 17.

TM: 17 or 18. Were you aware of the sparks that were flying between those folks?

BA: Aah. I was certainly aware that they had a very tense and mutually hostile relationship. But it may have been that it got worse after I left, and therefore more obvious. Or, may have been that, you know, hey -- I'm just a kid along for the ride. What do I know? This is not my problem to deal with.

TM: Exactly. It's not my dog in that fight, and what do I care.

BA: Exactly. You know, you guys are getting paid to do this, I'm just here.

TM: I'm along to push driftwood, in the little whirlpool, when you say push it.

BA: Yeah, yeah. That's my job, I done it. I was neither inclined nor interested in getting in between two adults, neither of whom I knew or needed to know.

TM: Right. Exactly, exactly. What else do you remember about Georgie?

BA: Short woman, always wearing, I think, a red hardhat helmet kind of a thing. A construction type helmet; red, as I recall. Dark black hair, short, curly; kind of a wiry frame; very deeply tanned. Obviously spent her life out in the sun; looked like anyway. Not a young woman, even then. Hard to guess ages, but she struck me as an older woman. Seemed capable at what she was doing. I would not call her, you know, polished in the sophisticated sense. But polished people don't go down the Colorado River for a living. So, she seemed well suited to her environment and to her career, or her job or interest there. I didn't have any qualms about her abilities, or doing what she was doing.

TM: Yep. And what do you remember about just other little odds and ends of the trip, things that you might have seen that still, 60 some years later, you remember?

BA: I remember Ernst was complaining about the food, you know? We had these ice chests, these coolers, why couldn't we have steaks every night? I don't remember Georgie's response to that, but it just was -- we didn't have steaks every night. Now that may have been after Ernst was already hacked off, at the camera, but he also chose to be totally disparaging of the, the menu and food choice being served. Chooo -- I'm trying to remember. I don't, other than obviously the film camera and so on, I don't remember people taking a lot of pictures. My father may have, because that's typically what he did. But the other people, there was not a lot of, you know, posing for one more shot kind of a thing. I think there is in the archives, somewhere, a picture of me standing next to Ernst Heiniger, with the blue cowboy hat. But I don't have, or I don't recall seeing, 20 or 30 similar pictures. That about covers the river part. As I say, the rapids were exciting, I will say that. And it was kind of a -- once you're into the rapid, it, you know, the raft's gonna go where the water takes it. Your job is to hang on, and to hope you

come out on the far end. Which we all did.

TM: And this was maybe four or five days from Lees Ferry down to where the bridge, the black suspension bridge, was?

BA: That sounds about right. Yeah, it's probably of that nature. And then I remember, I think, we came out at what was probably mid-canyon, or midway down. I don't remember the names: it may have been Bright Angel; it may have been Phantom Ranch. Something like that. They get a little mixed in my mind.

TM: Yeah, both the same. Bright Angel's the name of the creek, and Phantom Ranch is right there. So it's all together.

BA: Okay. Well, we did come out by mules, that apparently made that trip fairly regularly. And I do remember observing, thinking, the mules have done this probably dozens or hundreds of times before. And I haven't, so I'm just gonna sit here, hang on to this animal, and assume he knows how to get from the bottom to the top. Which he did. It was a, it was interesting; if you leaned over a ways -- not that they recommended leaning over very far -- but if you did, you could see a pretty straight drop down. But, you know, the mules seemed to take it as, ho-hum, another day going up and down the canyon walls.

TM: Right. Was that your first time on a large animal like that? Or had you had experience riding a horse?

BA: I'd been on horses. Never been on a mule. I would not call myself an expert rider, but I was able to get a horse to go, you know, left, right, or straight.

TM: What do you remember about the ride out? Besides the mule knew where to go, and you just...

BA: Not a whole lot. Probably took a couple of hours. By then we were, we were pretty much used to the sights and scenes of the Grand Canyon. So coming up the wall was kind of more of the same. I mean, it's truly beautiful, and it's just an amazing place, but by then we'd had four or five days of it. Looking up from the bottom, so we didn't spend much sightseeing, or remarking on more canyon walls.

TM: Right, right. You'd seen a part of Grand Canyon that the vast majority of the tourists at the South Rim had no clue about.

BA: Well, that could be. It's certainly a different perspective, to be down in the bottom. And then, I don't recall if, by the time we got to the top, we stayed overnight, and then flew out the next day. We probably did; that would probably fit the schedule. I don't even remember how far it was from there to whatever airport we came out of. But it had to be an airport with flights back to Los Angeles, because I'm pretty sure that was a direct flight.

TM: Right. And there were a number of options. It could of been the Red Butte Airport, just south of the Rim there a ways. Or actually further, all the way down to Valley; I think there was an airport stop off there. But a...

BA: Yeah. I don't recall. I don't remember going through a big airport, so we probably didn't.

TM: Right. No, it wouldn't be a big airport, either one of those wasn't a big deal. Plane would be there, there'd be a strip, and that would be that.

BA: And for that matter, it may have been the Disney plane. They had a couple of business planes. That would make sense, given my father's role at the time, if they just sent one of the planes. My sister was on those, herself, later on, in a different context. But there were a couple times we could, or at least she could, and I think I did, too, hitch a ride.

TM: Did your father ever speak with you about that trip, later in life? Sort of reminiscing ?

BA: No, not particularly. As I say, he was a somewhat reserved man; didn't reminisce a lot. At least not to us. He always, even before he went to the studio, considered himself more of a writer than an artist, even though he started out as an animator. And, so he used to keep journals, where he would record the days' events, or the weeks' events, what have you. In retrospect, I wish I had kept those and spent more time cataloging them. But he did not share them with anyone when he was writing them; it was only after his death, we kind of gazed through some of them. As I say, in retrospect, I kind of now wish I had kept them and given more attention to them. But, it just didn't occur to me at the time.

TM: I, totally understood; that's very normal. Did he ever talk about the next year's filming, of "Ten Who Dared," in 1959?

BA: Not in great detail, but I remember it was a pretty difficult experience for him. It was filming under difficult circumstances, on location. It was difficult to make the boats and the actors behave the way the script asked for them to. You're dealing with, you know, ten actors who are probably no more prima donnas than all actors were, but they were actors, so they were somewhat. And some of those actors are at least sufficiently well known that I recall who they were -- there was Ben Johnson, there was L. Q. Jones, there was Brian Keith, there was John Beal. I don't think John Beal was a well-known name -- he played Major John Wesley Powell. Actually, he was from the Northeast; he lived in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. And years later, when I was at school in New Hampshire, because of the connection between him, my father, and so on, he invited me down for Easter vacation, to stay at his house. Which was a, you know, 1780 Connecticut farm house. Anyhow, very nice man, very nice man. I do remember one comment my father made, and I don't recall the context of the conversation, but he was talking about the experience of having these actors, you know, out on the boats, on the river. And I guess they maybe had some stunt doubles, but pretty much, I think, the actors had to ride the boats. And he was remarking that Ben Johnson, who was a real cowboy before he was an actor, was the only one of them who really knew how to handle a rowboat, make it go where he wanted it to go. And he was one of the few actors who was willing to do extra duty, in getting the boats to move around the way the film wanted them, without complaining that, you know, I'm an actor, I read lines, I don't do rowboats. Ben Johnson was perfectly willing to do rowboats.

TM: Nice. And that filming with the actors was done mostly up near Moab, and it was late in the year, later in the year, the water was cold. It was a... You know, it was supposed to be August, in 1869; and here it is the fall, of 1959, and pretty cold! And so it was a -- they did the yeoman's work there of... On the river.

BA: Yeah. I have seen some pictures. And it's certainly, you know, a difficult place to do a movie, and certainly there was, you know, there were no special effects in those days. So if you wanted a film of a boat going down the river with John Wesley Powell perched up in a seat that was tied down to the top

of the boat, that's what you did.

TM: that's right; that's right. No, it's pretty fun. What else do you... Is there anything else you can think about, about that river trip, that I haven't asked you, from 1958?

BA: Not so much about that trip, but I do remember, years later, both when I worked at the studio -- oh, it's not years later, but -- well, years later, after I worked at the studio. Being in my father's office, on some occasion, and he had a souvenir from the second trip. And it was the outboard motor prop from one of the boats they used in that "Ten Who Dared" movie, and it had been set in a piece of driftwood. They probably cut a gash to put the prop in this driftwood mount. And one of the blades of the prop had snapped off, broken in two. And so you had this 2-1/2 bladed, outboard motor prop, that he kept as a souvenir, for many years in his office. Apparently one of the boats had hit up against the rock -- probably a rock -- or a big piece of driftwood! And snapped off one of the blades.

TM: That's fun. I wonder who put that together for him?

BA: Oh, one of the crew, I'm sure. He always referred to that as his Oscar for doing "Ten Who Dared." I think in some sense he was underwhelmed by how that picture turned out. But he at least had that memento of it.

TM: Your father was a historian. Can you tell me a little about that?

BA: He had a long interest in the West, generally. I don't remember exactly when he did this, but at some point he joined a group, a club, in Los Angeles called "The Westerners." They used to meet, I guess, once a month, maybe, somewhere downtown. And they would have speakers come in, presentations made, on all kinds of subjects about the West. But he had a, he had always collected books, or at least did a lot of reading and saved his books. And he had a lot of books on the West. You know, one of the places on our vacation that we went, included the Custer Battlefield. And he spent an entire day kind of wandering around that, familiarizing himself with the layout of the land. So, you know, being from California, growing up in California, he had a kind of natural feel for that part of the country. Both his parents and my mother's parents were also Californians. So they had a long history with the area.

TM: Nice. Okay. All right. Well, I can't think of anything else right now to ask you about this '58 and '59 trip.

BA: Okay. That's kind of all I can drudge out of my memory, at least at the moment. And, you know, I did think about it, knowing you were going to call. But, as I say, it's been awhile but those are kind of the memories that at least stuck in my mind. And still occasionally come to the fore.

TM: Yeah, it's almost 65 years ago. And you've done really well; really, really well. Well, Bruce Algar, it's been just a pleasure to speak with you this afternoon.

BA: Well, I've enjoyed it; I'm glad we did this.

TM: I am, too. And with that, this will conclude this Grand Canyon Oral History interview. Today is August 13, 2021; my name is Tom Martin. And Bruce, thank you so very much.

BA: It's been my pleasure. I've enjoyed it. Good talking to you, Tom.

END of Bruce Algar interview.