

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Curt Sauer (CS)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Curt Sauer recounts his experiences working as a dispatcher and river ranger at Grand Canyon National Park in the 70s

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TM: Today is Monday, September 21, 2020. This is a Part 4 Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Curt Sauer. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, Curt. How are you today?

CS: Morning, Tom. I'm fine, hope you're well, too.

TM: I am, thank you sir. May we have your permission to record this interview over the telephone?

CS: Yes sir.

TM: Thank you. We had left off in the summer of 1979, when you were offered a job at Grand Canyon National Park as a permanent job, and you were a GS-6 in the pay scale and this job was a GS-3. You were offered the dispatch position. Can you pick that story up from there?

CS: Sure. I was working seasonally at Rocky Mountain, then my fourth or fifth year as a seasonal ranger at Rocky I was trying to get on, as so many other seasonal rangers had been trying to get on, permanent with the National Park Service because I had been working winters at Grand Canyon and summers at Rocky Mountain. The previous winter I had gone down to Phoenix and taken an OPM clerk test in order to be able to apply for dispatch jobs. Dispatch was one of the paths into the Park Service at Grand Canyon. The chief ranger used it to bring rangers in. You were given the opportunity to get permanent by taking a GS-3 dispatch position. It might've been a GS-3/-4/-5. So I accepted the job, reported in June, June 1st. Had a week off around my birthday, July 20th. On July 29th, got married in Rocky Mountain National Park. My wife and I jumped in the car the day after and drove through Farmington, New Mexico. Right before dusk, we had a mountain lion run across the road in front of us. Took that as a good omen. Stayed some place in New Mexico, in that area, and showed up to Grand Canyon the next day. We moved into seasonal quarters, which allowed dogs, over at Albright Training Center. And then started work as a dispatcher.

TM: So can we back up for a minute to the clerk test that you took in December. What was that test like? What kind of stuff were they asking you?

CS: You know, I don't remember the questions. They were basic arithmetic, maybe some logic. What I do remember is your answer sheet was a computer punch card. The way you were supposed to pick

your answers was they gave you a stick pin, which was about a half an inch long with a, I don't know, 3/16ths of an inch diameter ball on the end of it so you didn't prick your finger. And you had to push all these—they later became well known as "chads"—push all these chads out of the answer blocks. I think that might've been a dexterity test, I never could figure that out. Why you couldn't hold onto a pencil and punch them out with your pencil lead is beyond me. So, I don't know, took 45 minutes or something to take that test. Then they put all the computer punch cards in the system and they gave you your rating. Then you got rated on the register. The park received that register and whatever rules they had to follow at the time, if you were in the top three, you got offered a job. So that was a pretty weird test for me just because of that push pin.

TM: And also, you mentioned that the dispatch job was a GS-3/-4/-5. What exactly does that mean?

CS: It means that if you work in that position for one year, you can go from a GS-3 to a GS-4. You work another year, you can go from a -4 to a -5, and then that's the maximum you can get paid in that position. The rangers and technicians were GS-5-6, and their park ranger position was GS-7/GS-9, general field ranger. District rangers and subdistrict rangers were... Actually subdistrict rangers I think were nines, district rangers were elevens, chief ranger was -12/-13 depending on the park, and superintendents were -14/-15 depending on the park's complexity, its political sensitivity. I'm not sure whether or not the senior executive service system of payment existed in the seventies for the National Park Service, but nowadays many superintendents are senior executive service, which is a higher pay grade than a GS-15. So it's just a progression. As long as you do well and don't get fired, you're guaranteed a pay raise up to your max, and in the case of the dispatcher it's a GS-5, I think, at the time.

TM: So you took the test, and had your birthday, you got married, you saw a mountain lion—that's pretty neat—and you showed up. The Albright quarters are these long rows of buildings. There was an upstairs and a downstairs. Can you describe that some?

CS: Well there's five there at the time, there were five dormitories, or apartment complexes. They weren't dorms. There were probably four apartments on the bottom, four apartments on the top, maybe five. We stayed in a one-bedroom apartment and had an efficiency kitchen. The sink was about fourteen inches by fourteen inches, with a refrigerator under the counter, and that was it. Buildings A through D were for the Albright students. Because the park was short on housing for park personnel, they'd worked out an agreement with the Albright Training Center, Grand Canyon had, that building E was for Park Service permanent employees. You stayed there until you were able to bid on houses that came open. So if somebody was living in a house and they transferred, or they happened to bid on a larger house and their house came open, then you could bid on it. And if you had enough...was your pay grade, the size of your family, your time in service, maybe a couple other criteria. So we probably lived there for about six months before cabin 16 came open and we successfully bid on that.

Actually, I think that gets me to the first recollection of a fellow by the name of Dick Marks, who was the superintendent after Merle Stitt. I'm not sure the exact time frame, but I put in my bid for cabin 16, which was a one bedroom and had what probably used to be a wood shed. It was one of the old train company's housing. You walk down out of the living room into this eight-foot-wide by maybe twelve-foot-long room. The argument with the housing committee was whether or not it was a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom 'cause we weren't eligible to bid on two bedrooms. I bid on it anyway, and they couldn't decide amongst themselves so it got pushed up to the superintendent. Dick Marks, I was told, went over and took a look at the cabin and said, "This is a one-bedroom." So we were eligible to bid and were

successful in that bid, so we moved out of Albright after about six or eight months of living in an efficiency one-bedroom apartment.

TM: You know, let's back up a little bit, because I think Superintendent Marks would've been new to the job there like you were in dispatching, or you weren't new to Grand Canyon. In the seventies when you were there, there was a superintendent named Merle Stitt. Did you have any interactions with Superintendent Stitt?

CS: [chuckles] Yeah, I had two interactions with Mr. Stitt. The first one was sometime in the first week of my job, I was taken up to meet the superintendent, and that was his policy. Anyone new who came to the park, he wanted to meet them, talk to them, and just know who was working for him. And again, he was a throwback to the way the Park Service used to be. Kindly gentleman. I remember his secretary, don't remember her name, but she was just always pleasant and very pleased to be working for Merle. And, you know, we probably had about a fifteen-minute conversation. And again, just like my comments about being at Phantom Ranch and "oh, by the way, the director of the Park Service is gonna show up on a river boat," just got on permanent and now I'm gonna go meet the superintendent of the national park. That was pretty impressive to me that superintendents were like that. And, you know, Superintendent Roger Contor at Rocky Mountain had been pretty much the same way. He was a little bit more aloof, but just was... It seemed like, thinking back on it, seems like in the seventies, maybe even the eighties, it was expected that you would be brought to the superintendent's office and introduced. Part of the Park Service family. So that was my first interaction with Merle Stitt.

The second one, that I remember quite clearly was more of an indirect interaction with Merle Stitt. When I was a dispatcher, because I had worked on South Rim patrol, when they needed additional patrol and I was off duty as a dispatcher, I would work as a patrol ranger. I was gonna mention to you that I think the experience of being on patrol for three years, and working with the fire brigade, and working with Ernie Kuncl and EMT response, helped me out quite a bit in helping the dispatch rangers on call. But anyway, I was a new permanent dispatcher and went out and worked ranger patrol as a GS-3 dispatcher. [chuckles] I'm not sure if it was '79 or... I'm not sure when Merle Stitt left, but he was still there. I was out on a night patrol and one of the things that we worked on was people that had been drinking out in Tusayan and coming back into the park. I stopped a car on the way back into the park, inside the park, that seemed to be weaving to me. Ended up having pulled over the North Rim manager, a fellow by the name of Rick Gale, who had been drinking and was with another female employee whose name I don't remember. So now I've put myself in a position as the new dispatcher having stopped Rick Gale.

TM: Working road patrol, okay.

CS: Rick was kind of one of the men that you didn't mess with. He had a reputation. During that car stop, he assisted me—involuntarily, as far as I was concerned—with administering a breath alcohol analyzer by grabbing it out of my hands and blowing into it and blowing up the balloon. It came back over the legal limit and he became quite boisterous and said, "You don't know what you're doing! You don't know how to operate that! See, you put this in wrong, put that in wrong, and I'm going home." I said, "Well, no, you're not going home, not if you're driving. But you can have your person in the car drive you home." So off they went after I had checked her out. Went back into dispatch after that car stop and I'm going, "You won't believe what I just did! [chuckles] I'm screwed!" Then the phone rings, and it's Rick Gale calling dispatch, and he wants to talk to the ranger that stopped him. The dispatcher says, "Well, he's standing right here. Let me put you on the phone." He continued a conversation with a bit of

a tirade about how I didn't know what I was doing, etcetera, etcetera, and then hung up. Well, when you call dispatch, it's all recorded. So the next day, called...well, I didn't call, Ernie Kuncel called me and said, "When you get off duty from dispatch I want you over in my office." So I went over and he said, "I've listened to the recording that dispatch from last night told me about, and I just want you to know that I'm going to Merle Stitt." I said, "Okay, great!" Like, shall I start packing my bags now? So anyway, Superintendent Stitt found out about the situation, listened to the recording and called Mr. Gale, and told Mr. Gale that if he wanted to keep his job, he was gonna apologize to dispatcher Sauer. Well, it took Mr. Gale about two weeks to finally apologize in person, which he did. That was my second indirect interaction with Superintendent Stitt, who, as I was told—I never talked to them about the incident—as I was told, he was somewhat irritated. So that was in the late seventies? I'm sure all the parties in the story have their perspective. That's what I recollect.

TM: But yeah, this is an interesting issue of what happens when a junior employee that's a law enforcement officer pulls over a superior employee who is legally over the legal limit for drinking.

CS: Exactly, and not unusual in this country or any country.

TM: Sure.

CS: But I experienced it first-hand, that's for sure. I think that's the only time that I had an employee that I stopped that was over the legal limit. And in hindsight, I was quite intimidated and, say, I chose to take the low road by letting him go. But, what I should've done was call the supervisor. But that's what I did.

TM: Yep, yep. You mentioned that your three years working winters seasonally at Grand Canyon was very helpful for you as a dispatcher. Can you expand on that?

CS: Sure. It's the same as working in the backcountry permit office and never going in the backcountry. You try and interpret the rules and educate the visitors, but until you get out in the field you just don't know. About that time, my recollection is that we had periodic ride-alongs with dispatchers, but they were not routine just because there weren't that many dispatchers, and send somebody out on patrol and you gotta pay somebody else overtime. Very seldom were there two dispatchers working. So I had the field experience and I knew where everything was in the village—every hotel, every restaurant, every bar, every trailhead—and so did all the other patrol rangers. So when we got a dispatch call, many times the dispatchers didn't know exactly where they were talking about sending you. And when the fire alarms went off, we were used to responding. So as a dispatcher I was already used to emergency calls for fire alarms or heart attacks or whatever, and it allowed me to be calm. Another fellow by the name of Mike Ebersole was a dispatcher and he also had similar field experience. It just helped in dispatching resources. You knew how long it was gonna take someone to get there, you knew who was closest, and you knew how long it was gonna take them to get to the fire engine or the ambulance. That type of experience was good.

TM: You know, now that you've explained it, this makes an awful lot of sense to take seasonal law enforcement rangers that have Canyon experience, whether it was South Rim or corridor, backcountry, and get them into the dispatch where they can work on being calm, cool, and collected, and they know where to send people. "This is what's happening, this is the incident, this is where you need to go." That's pretty clever.

CS: Also, a lot of the chief rangers asked the district rangers to pick the cream of the crop, get them on the dispatch cert and bring them into the Park Service. Clever.

TM: Clever might not be the right word, I think maybe smart or... You know, it sounded like a good strategy. You mentioned Mike Ebersole. Can you spell Mike's last name?

CS: I think its E-B-E-R-S-O-L-E, Ebersole.

TM: What do you remember about Mike back then?

CS: Cool, calm and collected, always interested in aviation. In fact, he became an aviation officer for the Park Service, I believe, some time after I left. I'll tell you what I remember most about Mike, is he's the reason that I got promoted. Mike did a little digging into the rules and regulations and discovered that since we had been GS-5s, and in my case -6s in my career, that we should've been hired as GS-4's. That didn't go over well at all with the powers that be, but Mike was insistent. So I think three months after I was dispatching, we both got a promotion to GS-4 with retroactive backpay, because the hiring process had been delinquent. Of course that didn't make any friends with the personnel office.

TM: No, and the budget office either.

CS: The budget office, yeah, another 27 cents an hour. [laughs] But it allowed us to progress from a GS-3 to a -5, and replace that with progressing from a GS-4 to a GS-5, which was instrumental in my getting my next job because I was in there long enough to become a GS-5. Then the next job was as a river unit permit manager working for Steve Martin in the river unit, and that was a GS-7 position.

TM: Okay. Well before we get there, let's back up a little bit. Where was the dispatch office and what did it look like?

CS: Well, the dispatch office was in headquarters. You went in the main doors of headquarters in the visitor center. Off to the left are a couple of double doors that lead out to a plaza, which at that time had four or five old wooden dories that had been used by river runners historically. I don't remember the names of them or who they were owned by, but they were on display in the courtyard underneath an overhang. You walked through that courtyard to the far left corner and you went through a locked door, and that's where the chief law enforcement officer's office was. Lloyd Hoener shared with Michael Swickard and the dispatch office. And the dispatch office, I'm gonna guess, is twenty feet by twenty feet? Had a fax machine. Most interesting thing it had was a...I think they were called PBX telephone system. I think I mentioned this—I know I mentioned this earlier. You had little headphones on with a microphone that came in front of your face. The best way to visualize this is Lily Tomlin on whatever that show was. Rowan and Martin?

TM: Yup.

CS: When she was... The phone would ring and you would pull a cord out of the panel on your desk and you'd plug it in so you can take the incoming call. They would ask to talk to extension two-two-three or one-forty-seven. You pull out another cord, you plug it into the appropriate extension, and the phone in that office starts ringing. If you worked it right, you could just sit there and listen to the phone call, which I didn't do very much. But, it was really just like Lily Tomlin. You had this whole board in front of you with all these wires and all these holes that you plug stuff into and wires running and crisscrossing

and whatnot. It took about a week to figure that out and get used to it. But that's how you answered the phone.

TM: This sounds like something from the 1950s. That building was built in mid-to-late 1950s and that would've been a state of the art phone back then. And here it is twenty years later, twenty-five going on, still there.

CS: Yeah. I don't know how long it took to come up with enough money to replace that with an updated system.

TM: So your job as dispatcher was also phone operator.

CS: Yep.

TM: Okay. So when things were busy in dispatch world, that would be kind of unnerving to have to, you know, connect regular park business on phone. How did you kind of juggle that out?

CS: Well, regular dispatch calls were handled like regular phone calls, but car stops and emergencies took precedence. So if you had something going on, the phone didn't get answered. Or, if you were fortunate enough to have two dispatchers, one of them was running the phones and one of them was running the radio.

TM: Sure. Was the radio there as a kind of big box on a table? How did that work out?

CS: Hmm. I don't recall how big a box it was, but there was a microphone on the table that you sat at. You just pressed the lever on the front of it to activate it. I don't remember exactly where the phone or the radio system actually sat, but all you had was the microphone on your desk.

TM: Okay. And this giant phone connection system with all these little cables and pins to place in. Was that, what, four feet wide roughly? Three feet high?

CS: Yeah, something like that. You could reach everything, and you could see over the top of it. It was about two feet away, so it must not have been too big.

TM: And you would've known Swickard and Hoener because you'd been there for three years. I can't remember if I asked you about Lloyd Hoener. I think I...

CS: I don't think so.

TM: Okay, what do you remember about Lloyd?

CS: Tall, thin, professional. He was clean cut. A sixties kind of officer I guess, sixties and seventies. Clean cut, fair. He was the prosecutor for the Park Service when we went to the magistrate's office for court. Always had his ducks in a row. That's pretty much what I recall. He was warm. He wasn't extremely outgoing, but he treated you fair.

TM: So he was getting ready to retire at that time or was he still gonna be in the service for another ten to fifteen years?

CS: I don't really know the answer to that. He was probably fifty, I don't know.

TM: Okay. And then your shift was running... Were you working all different shifts, or how did that work out?

CS: Yeah, there were three different shifts. Eight to four...whatever they were. Twelve to eight, eight to four, and four to twelve, they were. And you just rotated, I think it was every week. It might've been every two weeks, but... And frequently in the summer your shifts were longer. So the second dispatcher would come in but it was so busy that you would stay.

TM: Would you get overtime for that or was that just on your own?

CS: No, you got overtime if you stayed in. Your supervisor would determine whether or not you stayed or left.

TM: Alright. Clearly working graveyard, it would've been a little quieter one would assume.

CS: Yeah, that's when you worked on court records and filing.

TM: What did that entail?

CS: Just keeping the court records. The cases would be completed and reports would've been written. Filing those and filing the case incident reports that had been received and reviewed by the supervisors. Keeping track of the citations, making sure they had been mailed off correctly. Just general paperwork for the law enforcement function.

TM: Alright. And at this time were you also... You'd been a volunteer with the fire team, were you still carrying that on?

CS: Yeah but it wasn't as a volunteer. Whenever I worked seasonally or as a dispatcher, if there was training or there was a call that I responded to, if you were working you got paid regular time, if you were off duty and you responded then you got overtime. And if there was an actual fire, you got hazard duty pay. And you wanted to always work on Sundays, because you got an extra ten percent.

TM: [laughs] Alright. What was your wife doing at this time?

CS: She was a leather worker. She's a craftsman, seamstress. When we got married, she left a job working at an awning shop, but she also had her own industrial sewing machine. She was making leather garments and that wasn't bringing in a lot of money but it's something she liked. She ended up getting a job at Grand Canyon Helicopters out in Tusayan as a front desk greeter and often a helicopter loader. So she got to know the helicopter pilots very well that I had been flying with and continued to fly with on emergency responses in the canyon. I think she did that until we left. And then she also had a big... [laughs] That was in 1983, so...

TM: Okay. Alright. What else do you remember about working dispatch?

CS: Well, it was interesting. I would rather have been out doing the work, but it was a way to get into the Park Service. A lot of comradery. People depended a lot on the dispatchers. Dispatchers had to make sure everything was going as smoothly as it could behind the scenes. I learned when I was working seasonally that they did a good job and I intended to continue to do that. Most of the time it was routine. Especially during graveyards, it was very quiet. Once you got the paperwork done it was just make sure that you don't fall asleep. Phone rings. There was no one on patrol after 2 PM [sic], or after they got done wrapping up all the drunks coming out of the bars. So after 3 or 4 PM [sic], certainly, there was nobody on duty until 6:00. So from 3:00, 4:00, until 6 o'clock in the morning, it was you and the PBX, and nobody was calling. You get the occasional call. People, generally inebriated, wondering how long it would take them to get to South Rim of the Grand Canyon from Phoenix because they were just leaving the bar and decided that they wanted to come to the Grand Canyon. Just kooky things like that. And not a whole lot of people came into dispatch. Administration...the only people that came in routinely were the rangers. It was a place where the rest of the staff wasn't supposed to go. It was quiet, it was routine, and then something would happen and you'd be busy for a couple hours.

TM: I would imagine this would give you pretty good training to understand all facets of what was happening in the park, because dispatch was also... Were you also fielding maintenance calls?

CS: Yeah, there weren't that many maintenance calls. Mostly maintenance was dispatching themselves, talking to each other. You received and listened to calls from Desert View on the east end of the park, the North Rim, South Rim, inner canyon. You were talking to the rangers that were stationed all over the park if they needed something. So you're listening to the radio all day long and you become fairly well-versed... Chinook fire helicopter flying over the house right now, I'm gonna close the window.

TM: Has that been happening for a while?

CS: Well there's a new fire out by Palm Springs. Three days ago, it was two-hundred fifty acres, I think it's about seven thousand acres now.

TM: Woah.

CS: And the El Dorado fire is just five to seven miles north and west of us; started ten/twelve days ago. The Apple fire was three weeks, three and a half weeks ago, that was a half mile away. There's a recharge pond that the local water district has. They're bringing water in from the state water project to recharge the aquifer. The large, probably three-acre pond, probably had three or four, three feet of water in it, so the snorkel Chinooks come over and hover above the pond. It takes them about thirty seconds to pick up two thousand gallons of water, and then they head back to the fire where they'll dump it.

TM: Wow. That's impressive to move that amount of water that fast.

CS: Yeah, and there's been lots of retardant tankers flying over, too. They're at about three/four thousand feet above ground level when they're coming in for their approach. They circle around and get a little bit lower. A couple shots of them about three hundred feet off the deck dropping retardant during the El Dorado.

TM: Well, hang in there. Hope the wind keeps going away from you, towards the fire.

CS: Well we're all good. We've been safe through all of them.

TM: Good. Just thinking about dispatch in general, it gives you a chance to know who all the employees are, issues that they're dealing with. Were you guarded with your time off, or did you use as much of your time off as you could to work overtime and do other things there?

CS: I used as much of my time as I could to continue being active in the ranger operations, whatever it was, so that I didn't get forgotten about in dispatch. And also because it was fun. You can go hiking in the Grand Canyon, that's fun. My wife and I hiked quite a bit, day hikes. But I was still—especially as a seasonal—still very interested in getting on permanent. And when I'm permanent, I was very interested in getting back into the ranger series doing ranger work. So anytime I could volunteer for ranger activities, that was what I did. Or, once I was permanent, I shouldn't say volunteer, I made myself available with pay. If I wasn't getting paid, there were probably some times where I just volunteered to do some work anyway just to stay active.

TM: Besides Mike, do you remember who else was working dispatch?

CS: One gal by the name of Jana, I don't remember her last name. Um, was Paul Anderson there then? No. No, I don't remember any other names.

TM: Okay.

CS: Jana Grovert.

TM: I'm sorry?

CS: Jana Grovert, wife of Hal Grovert.

TM: How do you spell that?

CS: G-R-O-V-E-R-T.

TM: And Joanna? J-O-A-N-N-A?

CS: No, just Jana, J-A-N-A.

TM: Thank you.

CS: And Hal.

TM: And what did Hal do?

CS: South Rim Patrol. And he was a Rocky Mountain boy.

TM: Huh, okay. Was he permanent?

CS: Yes. I'm not sure where he got on permanent, but he transferred into Grand Canyon.

TM: Alright. And so at this time Ernie is still there, Ernie Kuncel?

CS: Yes.

TM: And he's still pushing park ranger EMT training?

CS: Mm hmm.

TM: Okay. You mention a couple times you were doing the Lily Tomlin, listening in on the phone thing. What kind of stuff would you learn doing that?

CS: Oh, I was just listening to conversations. I really didn't learn much. I didn't do it that many times. One of the dispatchers showed me how to do it and I was like "You gotta be kidding me!" I figured this probably isn't a really good idea.

TM: Not without a warrant.

CS: "I'm sorry, I just forgot to flip this particular toggle switch." Yeah, phone lines weren't real secure there then.

TM: And who was your... Was Lloyd your boss? Who was your direct boss?

CS: You know, I think Lloyd, on paper, was my direct boss but Swickard was the guy we interacted with. Dave, Dave Swickard. He was also the range master.

TM: What's a range master?

CS: Fellow who takes you out to the range and supervises and qualifies you. He's in charge of safety of the range and training exercises and qualifications. So he was the South Rim patrol ranger, probably supervisor of some sort. I don't know what his actual title was. But yeah, I think he... He supervised dispatch and went out on patrol himself. He was comparable to Ernie Kuncel in degree of responsibility.

TM: Okay. So before you became a dispatcher, when you were doing the seasonal in Rocky Mountain and seasonal at Grand Canyon, you would be able to work in a volunteer river trip in there. Now as dispatcher, did you have to walk away from the river or were you able to maintain a connection there on the water?

CS: I believe that I took one or two, must've taken a couple of partial river trips. I had enough time to take some time off with your days off, and/or you'd just get to go on paid status, which I don't recall that happening very much. So if a river trip launched... And by then the Park Service had converted to oar powered, and so the five-day, six-, seven-day river trip on motors became fourteen days. So, you could leave on day one, ride up to Lees Ferry with the boat crew, launch, and get to Phantom Ranch in the seventh day. And then you hike out. Or you could hike down the Hance Trail or the Tanner Trail and hike out Hermit Creek for a three day...yeah, two or three-day trip. Or you could go Phantom Ranch to Diamond Creek for another seven-day trip. A couple of different times, I did that. Whether it was paid or off, I don't recall. But I became friends with Steve Martin, Sam West, John Thomas, eventually Kim Crumbo.

Also, I mentioned that my wife, Connor, was a seamstress and worked in canvas and leather primarily. She actually designed the bilge bags for the patrol boats, sewed them up. And, of course, you gotta know how things function, so she volunteered for several river trips and saw what was needed in the design to fit the boat, how it was used. She made bilge bags and several other accessories for the boats and boatmen. So she was able to get on the river as well. She also volunteered as a camp cook. I don't remember when Cindy Burns showed up on the river, she was hired as the cook. I don't know if it was '79, '80 or '82, someplace in there. There was another gal by the name of Ruth Ann Murray, who I had met when she was a Bizbee Arizona cowgirl, and I mean cowgirl. [chuckles] She could hold a calf down and brand it, and take a lick of chew, all at the same time. The first time I saw her take a dip, she just opened up her can of chew and licked up a bunch of chew and put it in her mouth, closed the lid, put it back in her pocket all with the same hand. I said, "How do you do that?" "Well, you just do it like this." I said, "Why do you do that?" "Well, when you're out branding, one of your hands is all bloody. If both of your hands are bloody you can't be putting blood in your mouth." I said, "Oh okay, so you can put chew in your mouth and not blood, that's good." Then about six months later I started chewing. So anyway... [TM laughs] So Connor was on the river quite a bit. She learned what was needed as far as equipment, she helped Cindy with the cooking, and then there came times later—this was '82, '81, '82—the boatmen decided that it was time that Cindy Burns became a boatwoman. She said, "Well, I can't cook and row. Rowing is fairly strenuous. Then you want me to get off the boat and then cook dinner."

TM: Right.

CS: I said, "You know, I know somebody who'd be willing to go down there and learn how to cook." So we went over and talked with Ruthie, and she sort of looked at us like, "I would love to do this, but you guys need to know that I don't know how to cook." We said, "Well, we'll teach you." So Ruth Ann became the understudy for Cindy Burns. She would come over to our house and Connor would teach her how to cook some things in a regular kitchen. She became the cook and Ruthie became not the first river boatwoman for us—I forget her name—but Cindy became a fulltime boatman and Ruth Ann became a fulltime cook. She eventually learned how to row, and then she ended up marrying a fellow that ended up owning one of the river companies, the names I don't recall. But just another example of a tight-knit family.

Anyway, somewhere around 1981—1980, '81—the river unit started issuing...I think the management plan was either going into effect or went into effect. And instead of like five or ten percent of the use permits going to private river runners, thirty percent went to private river runners, and seventy percent was reserved for the commercial. Maybe it was eighty:twenty, I don't remember the numbers. But the demand for private river running by then was so high, that they decided that they would have a lottery, and they needed somebody to administer the lottery and keep track of all the applications and make sure people were qualified and there wasn't any shenanigans going on. So a river unit permit management position came open as a GS-7 ranger tech, or technician, I think it was. I was fortunate enough to be hired for that job by Steve Martin. So that was probably '80...I don't really recall, '80, '81? Worked for Steve, Marv Jensen was in charge of the river unit at the time.

TM: Let's back up a little bit. '79/'80, was the river unit... There was a small time in there where they were running dories, is that right?

CS: I think they may have taken dories as an experiment, but as far as I recall, there were always rafts accompanying the dories, as opposed to Martin Litton's outfit. Yeah. Never rode on a dory so I don't

know what the trips looked like. When I was there it was always large rafts. Kim Johnson, another boatwoman, I think took kayaks occasionally, but mostly it was just river rafts, oar powered rafts.

TM: You had mentioned... I was thinking of Kim when you mentioned that before Cindy was a boatman, there was another female boatman before her. If you remember who that is, I'd sure like to know.

CS: I think it was Mary Lou Mower, M-O-W-E-R.

TM: Did you ever meet her?

CS: Yep.

TM: What was she like?

CS: [chuckles] How would you describe Mary Lou Mower? Full of energy. Good boatwoman, could row with the best of them. Yeah, she might've been there one or two years. And most probably, she was a boatwoman for a commercial operation. Otherwise the park... The park didn't go out and hire people that had never rowed a boat, I can tell you that. So Sam West, John Thomas, Kim Crumbo, Kim Johnson, they were the ones that figured out who the seasonals would be, seasonal boatmen.

TM: Well let's...we've been going for about an hour. I'm ready to jump into this unless there's anything else you want to bring in about dispatch.

CS: No, I don't have anything else. I do know that it taught me that...

TM: I'm sorry?

CS: I do know that it taught me that dispatchers carry a lot of responsibility. So when I hear the 911 calls nowadays, and people are so inclined to criticize what's going on in dispatching, I have behind-the-scenes experience to know those people are under lots of stress.

TM: Yes indeed, a lot of stress, and yet they have to be calm, cool, and collected, and, you know, get the job done. And in big parks—in big, busy parks—that's a lot of responsibility.

CS: Yeah and in the police departments and fire dispatch. We just had a firefighter killed here a couple days ago on the El Dorado fire. I would not want to be the dispatchers on duty when that occurred. Full-on rescue operation, went missing. They still haven't announced how he died. Was a hotshot who got separated from his team. They're all going through dispatch, and the dispatchers are probably previous firefighters. All you can do is sit there and dispatch. So anyway, I got a lot of respect for those people.

TM: Yes. So I'm thinking about your career up to this point. Very well-versed in fire and in South Rim road patrol work. How was it that you looked at a river unit permit manager job? Yes, it was a GS-7, but it would seem as though it would be taking you away from being a law enforcement ranger.

CS: Well I didn't view myself as a law enforcement ranger, I viewed myself as a national park ranger. It's actually something that bothers me, the transition that occurred. There'll be a little background noise here, I'm gonna walk out front and make sure a delivery's not here. Yeah, we're good.

TM: Can you speak to this? Because this was happening right about this time, I think, this...

CS: Yep. I think it was '74. I'd have to get the name of the law. But anyway, when I came into the Park Service as a seasonal, rangers were expected to do everything. We did the resource management work, we did the firefighting, we did the emergency medicine, we did the law enforcement, and we did the visitor service and interpretation. Although interpretation had broken out of the ranger responsibility probably in the 60s? We had park rangers and you had park interpreters. Well they're both park rangers. They started becoming called interpreters and they specialized in interpretation. When I worked seasonally at Rocky, I remember '76, '77, '78, someplace in there, there was a big hubbub in the park because the park was getting a Resource Management Specialist, and he was gonna be in charge of resource management. And it's like, "What do we need that guy for?" Well...so resource management over the years—and rightfully so, as it turns out—responsibility for resource management has been taken away from the park ranger. You have biologists, you have botanists, you have a whole range of "ologists", which the parks needed and didn't have up until that time. Maybe if they had, we wouldn't have had—you know, things were different in the 50s and 60s of course, understanding of the environment—but you wouldn't have had all the mountain lions being shot at the Grand Canyon. You wouldn't have had all the wolves being shot at the various northern Rocky parks because maybe there would've been a greater understanding of how the "ecosystem" works, how Mother Earth works. But these were things that we did. Eventually the fire profession split off. Rangers are still doing emergency medical services, but now, if you're an EMT or paramedic, you're stationed at parks and that's what you respond to at Yosemite. And so from '74 until whenever, the Park Ranger title has now become Park Law Enforcement Officer. I didn't get into being a national park ranger so I could be a law enforcement officer. I got into the Park Service because back then, the park ranger did park ranger work, and now they'd been stove piped. Even on the river. I think Mark Law maybe in his discussions with you...

At some point in there, when the river unit patrolled the river, we were just boatmen going down the river, and we had the authority to write tickets. Hardly ever wrote tickets. Didn't carry weapons, didn't have bulletproof—bullet-resistant—vests, didn't have our defensive equipment belts on, and then that occurred. So on the South Rim, even at Joshua Tree, someplace in that fifteen-year period, the park ranger started being called the law enforcement officer. I see it needed. The law enforcement folks get now in the parks is so much more complex and so much more dangerous than what we were dealing with in the 60s and 70s. I forget when, '74, '75...yeah it must've been '74, we were required to wear firearms. Well the big argument in the Park Service at the time, and it was up to the superintendents, was whether or not you could wear your firearm into headquarters. So you're out on patrol, and you're required to wear a firearm, you don't have a bullet-resistant vest, you might have a shotgun, you don't have a semi-automatic rifle, and you pull into headquarters, and before you can go into headquarters at Rocky Mountain National Park, you have to take your clip-on holster off, lock it up in your glovebox, and then you can go into headquarters. Then when you get done at headquarters, you can go back out to your patrol car or your patrol truck, get your weapon out of the glovebox, and go out on patrol. When you're out on hunting patrol, you've got your, at the time, revolver, and eventually semi-automatic on your defensive equipment, and you're carrying your shotgun or your rifle, but when you come into headquarters, all that stuff has to stay in your vehicle. Eventually, the Park Service resolved that and we went away from two-inch revolvers to four-inch barreled revolvers to semi-automatic weapons. It's just that whole progression of law enforcement being accepted. You were expected to do law enforcement in the early 70s, but you were expected to not let it show at headquarters. Just inane, but that's where the Park Service was. I remember, I think it was the Colorado State game wardens went through the same thing.

TM: Interesting.

CS: Mortality-wise—at least in the 70s and 80s, maybe it's not that way now—the most dangerous profession in law enforcement was state game warden. Primarily because during hunting season when you went out everybody that you encountered had weapons and everybody that you encountered—well, some high percentage of everybody you encountered—had been drinking. They would've taken a deer or an elk, and you're supposed to go into camp, make sure they took it legally. When they didn't, or those non-sportsman hunters who are just out hunting because they...well, whatever reason they were hunting, you know, the game wardens ended up getting shot. Finally they adequately equipped them with the appropriate equipment and "appropriate staffing", but I mean, it's just this progression over the last thirty years/forty years of park rangers, forest rangers...we'll skip that story... Game wardens have always been at risk, and it's gotten worse. It's gotten much worse. Anyway, I got off on a tangent. I wasn't leaving the ranger operation, I was gonna be doing ranger work—in my prospective—ranger work in the river unit because I saw the folks that were running the river. They're river rangers and they were respected and that's how they were treated.

We'd pull into camps to inspect the concessioners. Of course they're all good friends. River runners that were working for the Park Service were some of the most respected for their skill in river running. Kim Crumbo who had knowledge of geology and has passion for the park and, you know, going "Hi! Hey, hi Bruce, how's it going? We've got some coffee on." "Okay, we need to inspect your camp." "Okay." "Yeah, uh, Bruce, we just inspected your camp. We know what kind of camp you run." So river runners at that time, by far and away in commercial, took excellent care of the Grand Canyon. It was the private river runners that needed to be looked after, just because they were inexperienced and they took on some challenges with food handling and garbage disposal and whatnot. The commercial river runners, you know, they were on a seven-day trip or fourteen-day trip and three days later you're back on the river. That's your home for six months and you take care of it. Going into the river unit at the time was an opportunity, yeah, to become a GS-7, which was an...well, because you make more money. By that time, I had fallen in love with the entire length of the Grand Canyon. I didn't go very often the first year, but I was able to get on several river trips. And setting up the lottery system was... [chuckles] I wouldn't call it a farse, but we were using a word-processing computer to have it generate random numbers. I'm the one that tried to figure out how to get a word processing unit to generate random numbers. It's about as random as you can get I guess. [chuckles] So anyway, we're in the permit office, and Marv and Steve were dealing with the politics of the implementation of the river management plan, and Crumbo and John Thomas and Sam West and Kim were running the river, and we were a pretty tight-knit bunch.

TM: Nice. So Curt, we've got some out-of-town guests that have just walked in. My wife is yik-yakking with them in the other room and I'm gonna have to run away now, but I would like to pick this back up with how the lottery system worked, what was happening with the politics and the river management plan, and what you remember about Crumbo and Steve Martin and Sam West and all these other people. So maybe we will pick that thread up again.

CS: Alright, sounds like a plan. Good talking to you today.

TM: Alright, yeah, you too. Well hang on a second. So with that, let's wrap up this Part 4 interview with Curt Sauer. Today is September 21, 2020. My name is Tom Martin, and Curt, thank you so very much.

CS: Thank you, Tom.