

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Donna Gebler (DG)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Donna recounts raising a family in Grand Canyon and Mount Rainier National Parks and living in Mill Valley, California. Donna tells about her husband Charles Gebler who was a Parks Service employee.

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TM: Today is Tuesday, April 13, 2021. This is a part two of a Grand Canyon oral history with Donna Gebler. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, Donna, how are you today?

DG: I'm well, thank you.

TM: Great. Glad to hear it. Donna, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

DG: Yes.

TM: Thank you very much. When we ended the interview last time, you and your husband Chuck and your three children had moved to Yosemite where Chuck took the Naturalist Training Specialist position with the Albright Training Center. And then there was a decision made to move that training center to a small bit of land within Grand Canyon National Park. And I think you mentioned you moved there in 1962. Can you pick that up for us?

DG: Yes, I believe we moved late in 1962 to Grand Canyon, but I do not remember the exact date. I would think there would be something in the history at Albright that would say when we all got there.

TM: Okay. And if I get this right, the training center was a brand new facility at Grand Canyon. Is that right?

DG: Yes. They were building it. And it was dedicated in the autumn of '63.

TM: Okay. So still under construction.

DG: Excuse me. They also were constructing housing for the trainees that would come, like apartments.

TM: Okay.

DG: And we lived in the Grand Canyon in a new home. So I imagine that had something to do with the project also, but I do not know.

TM: Okay. I wonder, Chuck, Chuck and the other... Well, let me back up a minute. Who were the other people that he worked with there? Do you remember?

DG: The director of the Albright Training Center was Frank Kowski. The ranger specialist was Howard Chapman. My husband was the interpretive specialist. And then I believe there was a Mr. Moorehead, who was some kind of an assistant. I'm not sure of his title.

TM: Alright. So Howard, and your husband... they would give classes then, is that right?

DG: That's correct. They did the training.

TM: Okay. Do you remember anything about that? Did Chuck ever tell you, you know, we did some training today of such and such or did he talk about that, that you remember?

DG: I don't remember the specifics. But his was interpretive. And part of his work was they would go on field trips to visit other park service areas or related things related to the southwest around the area, to see what was going on in the field of interpretation, how people were leading walks, how they were doing their presentations if they had a museum or visitor center. So that was part of it. I don't know the specifics of what he trained.

TM: Did you get a chance to go on those trips?

DG: At one time, we as a family went with Chuck on his personal survey of the areas around Grand Canyon and the park service areas. And this was not with other students, this was what he was doing as part of his education so to speak. And so we went all over the southwest, was sent with him as a family.

TM: Where did you go?

DG: We went to, let me see if I can remember. We went to Chaco Canyon and to the Gila Cliff Dwellings. We went to Chiricahua... well, however you say that. Yeah, Chiricahua. We went to El Morro. I remember we went to the sand dunes in New Mexico, we probably went by petrified forests. At one time we went to Walnut Canyon, Wupatki. And we as a family went camping at Monument Valley. And whenever we went, of course, he would meet with the parks (?) of his people involved, he would take a lot of pictures. And part of his assignment was to take pictures and bring them back and he was a great natural history photographer.

TM: Chiricahua. Nice.

DG: And so... and he would also take slides of their interpretive programs that he would use for training, he would use this information for his training.

TM: Okay, nice.

DG: That's kind of it. I remember at one place, and I think it was at Chaco Canyon, my children helped the people there milk the cows that night.

TM: Oh fun!

DG: And somehow they had cows there. This is the fun memory. And of course, as a family, we did a lot of the cultural things around the area. We went to the Hopi Reservation and saw the rain dances..... Gosh, my brain just went dead. Other dances...

TM: The kachina dances?

DG: The kachina dances, yes, thank you. The kachina dances. And that was very interesting. In fact, the children remember that, although they were only four and five years old at the time or two. The two year old not. The children were frightened. They didn't... my daughter said that it was both scary and exciting.

TM: Nice, wow. That's an honor to get a chance to go and participate in those, to observe those dances. That's wonderful.

DG: Well, and I do know he took his students to a kiva. Of course, we as a family didn't go with him for that. I think I as a woman could not have any way if I remember correctly. But that was interesting... wishing I could remember more of what he said. But I know they did do that.

TM: Nice. So it sounds like the training of Park Service employees was happening. Even though the A block building and B and C and D and E - those five blocks of apartments hadn't been completed yet in construction.

DG: I don't know. I'm wondering if the construction was pretty much done. It just wasn't dedicated and officially gone through the ceremonial stuff that you do when you dedicate a building. I know that was in the fall of '63.

TM: Okay, thank you for that clarification. That's helpful.

DG: But we were doing all this that I explained during the 1963 during that summer and fall.

TM: Okay. Can you tell me a bit more about the housing? What was the housing like that you moved into?

DG: Our house was a rambler house with three bedrooms, two bathrooms. It had everything a house would have that was built in 1960, '61 or 2. I believe it was a frame home, had a large picture window in the dining room that looked out on the woods, the back of the house, not to the street. I remember that. And it was all woodland in back of the house. And of course, there was no formal gardening. Wouldn't be, we're in a National Park.

TM: Right. Right. Okay. You had your children so you were busy, busy with them. But what else did you do when you were there?

DG: Well, we would go hiking. We would, of course, walk the trails and pass along the rim of the canyon and the overlooks. When I had the children with me that was always scary to me, because I had very active children, extremely active children. I was afraid they'd slip under the guardrails or whatever. So it was very nerve-racking for me. But we did all that. We went camping on the North Rim. I don't remember much. Except there's a lot of trees.

TM: Yes.

DG: We would go camping, the camping trip out of Monument Valley was a highlight. In fact, my daughter still talks about the Navajo lady that came and ate breakfast with us. While we were there, the morning we were there this man and woman, he was on a horse. They showed up, it seems to me like they had a son with them, but I'm not sure. And my children remember that experience. The Navajo couple that came to visit us that morning.

TM: Nice, that's fun. It's funny about Albright. It's a park training center within a National Park. It has its own superintendent and employees that focus on Albright. And it's work. And then not so much worried about the day to day operations of Grand Canyon National Park, which is a completely different service unit. And has its own employees. Did you get a chance to make friends with the people that worked there at Grand Canyon National Park?

DG: Not really. We were mostly involved with the staff and trainees at the training center. So any socials would be with them. And of course, I was involved with my young family and supporting my husband and what he was doing. We did have our medical care though at the Grand Canyon. And so we use the little hospital that was there and the doctor that was there. I think it was Dr. Lacey.

TM: That's right.

DG: And then, of course, we would shop in the facilities at the Grand Canyon because it was a 90 mile trip to Flagstaff where we would often go for major things like Christmas shopping. But other than associating, no, no, not much. Although I'm sure the staff at Albright were very well integrated with the Grand Canyon staff. I'm sure there was a liaison or cooperative agreement there.

TM: Oh absolutely. Yeah. I just wondered, it can be kind of isolating for family, with a small staff as you were, without sort of connecting through work to others around you when there's, you know, there's a lot of other people there. I just kind of wondered about that. What do you remember about the Grand Canyon Hospital, Dr. Lacey and medical care?

DG: Oh, well, our major experience with that was with our young son, John, who was maybe five because he started kindergarten at Grand Canyon that fall. In '63 he became very, very ill. And it was sort of mysterious. We couldn't figure out what it was and Dr. Lacey couldn't figure out what it was. So they hospitalized him for observation to help him and it turned out he had the measles. He broke out with a measles rash in that little hospital. Much to everybody's chagrin, I think. But then, of course, there was no vaccination for measles back in 1963.

TM: Yeah, and so he survived.

DG: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Without any serious consequences. Of course, he came home from the hospital.

TM: Alright, we got it figured out. Take him away.

DG: But I don't think that was uncommon, because we have to remember that the Grand Canyon area, we have park service people, we had concession people, we have Native American people. And not everyone had the same medical practices.

TM: Right. Right. What do you remember about Dr. Lacey himself?

DG: That I don't remember.

TM: Okay. All right.

DG: Well, he was helpful to us though, and actually, I did miscarry while I was there, and it was under his care and in that little hospital.

TM: Okay. I'm sorry to hear that. But I'm glad you got some good care there.

DG: I felt so, I felt so, yes. No, there were no complaints.

TM: What was shopping like? Can you describe to me where you went for shopping there at the canyon?

DG: Well, we probably used the little village store there for most of the common things, like if I didn't make bread or to buy bread or milk, and so on. But we would often go to Flagstaff. And of course it was a 90 mile trip each way then. And the first time we went to Flagstaff, that I remember... and it was probably November or early December, probably after we'd first moved there because we went to do some Christmas things. It was rather embarrassing, because the

children had never been in that kind of environment. And we saw, of course, many Native American people in their full dress and all their jewelry, a long black hair on the man. And the children just stood there with their mouths open staring and started pointing fingers. It was extremely embarrassing to me. So it was a great opportunity to teach these little children about we have all different kinds of people in the world and how wonderful it was to be there and how exciting it was and how beautiful their jewelry was, and so on. But it was a very embarrassing experience that first trip to Flagstaff.

TM: Well, that's a wonderful opportunity to teach your children about the diversity of indigenous cultures and their amazing place in the world. That's really neat.

DG: It was, it was, and we had that opportunity many times as we went through the park service from one place to another.

TM: Nice, nice. So I'm just curious if you remember the road conditions from Grand Canyon to Flagstaff, there's a cut off and a halfway to Williams going south that takes a short cut directly toward Flagstaff and passes the San Francisco peaks. I'm assuming that cut off was there and it might have been paved by then. But I don't know for sure.

DG: Well, we of course did paved road all the way. So I don't know. I have this vague recollection of going towards Williams and then going, making a big left turn to go to Flagstaff.

TM: On Route 66.

DG: But I honestly don't remember exactly.

TM: Okay. And then did you travel into the Verde Valley at all or off to Phoenix at all while you were there, or were you just basically northern Arizona and then the surrounding Park areas?

DG: Well, we actually did go to Phoenix while we were there, because I had an uncle who lived there. But we went to buy furniture. We purchased a bedroom set of furniture, in fact I still have the nightstand in my house that I purchased. The bed finally fell apart about a year ago.

TM: That was good value.

DG: The dressers (?) have gone to other family. But that was the purpose of that trip. And we stopped by Sedona on that trip.

TM: Nice, back in the day when it wasn't quite so crowded.

DG: I don't remember it being crowded. Although I have a daughter who lives in Arizona and she says Sedona is crowded when they go there to hike.

TM: Yeah, it is now but this is 50 years ago, 60 years ago, sorry.

DG: And we have a lovely Navajo bowl, but we purchased that at the museum in the Flagstaff area.

TM: Museum of Northern Arizona?

DG: Yes, yes.

TM: Wonderful. Nice. What else do you recall about Grand Canyon when you were living there? What did you do for exercise and other things?

DG: Well, of course, we were a lot of hiking family but I would take the children and go walking and unfortunately in back of our house was this woodland and of course it was flat and just (?) trees, so I'd be walking the children... I remember one time I honestly didn't know where I was. And it was really rather scary. And in fact a little bit embarrassing for a park service wife in a sense. But I came across a paved road. And then I knew where I was and walked the paved road and got back to where we lived. But also, our son John has a memory of being out in these same woods and getting lost and some man bringing him home. So that was different for me to be in this woodland with no vista and a point of being able to orient where I was. And of course, you could say to yourself, well turn around and go back where you came from. But when you're out there in the middle of all this space, it was confusing to me. And it was scary.

TM: Very much so. From what you described about your upbringing, near Salt Lake City, I would assume that you could see the mountains and you could see, you know, the surrounding geography to know where to go as very different from being in a pinyon juniper forest, where all you see is trees. Very different.

DG: Exactly. And of course, as a family, we came from the metropolitan Washington DC area, which of course you have roads and you know exactly where you are usually. And then we went to Yosemite, which where we lived in El Portal also had a vista. You could see the mountains and everywhere. And so this was very different for me, because I did grow up in the Salt Lake Valley. And you can see across the valley most days.

TM: Well, that still happens today. I must tell you people go for a walk, you know, south out of the out of the village area into the heavy juniper country and without a compass it's a challenge.

DG: Well, I'm glad to hear I'm not alone.

TM: No. Absolutely not, you're not alone, gosh. Yeah, I would assume that would be very, very frightening.

DG: So my life at Grand Canyon was basically supporting my husband and what he was doing, camping and traveling with him whenever. He always liked to take his family when he did his solo visits to park service areas. And also we did some entertaining of park service people

involved with the training center. So I often thought I had the cleanest woodwork in town. Well, had little children and I always wanted, whenever we had people for whatever it was - lunch or dinner or evening get together that the house was clean and presentable. That was important to me.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember... First, as an example, of Frank Kowski? What do you remember about him?

DG: I wish I could remember more specifically, I just remember he was very supportive. And he and his wife Lois were very social and very kind to us. Other than that, I don't remember much. And the Chapmans were also very kind and of course both the Chapmans and the Kowskis were older than we were. And to this day, I still make Marion Chapman's raisin filled cookies.

TM: My gosh, can you tell me what the recipe is?

DG: Well it's just a basic sugar cookie recipe with lots of brown sugar in it that you roll out and then you make the raisin filling and you put the raisins on top and then you put another cookie on top and so... they're raisin-filled cookies.

TM: That sounds yummy.

DG: They are. In fact, they're some of my children's favorite cookies.

TM: Oh, that's nice. I don't blame them. That sounds lovely. Fun.

DG: But one of the last things we did with Chuck and I as we... it would have been maybe after Thanksgiving because we were going to be leaving the Grand Canyon come January of '64. We hiked down to Phantom Ranch and out. Someone took care of our children for those couple of days. And to this day, I don't know how I did it in tennis shoes, but I did.

TM: Wow. Did you get any blisters? Or did you do okay?

DG: I was just fine. We were both a little sore the next day after we came out I think.

TM: Did you go all the way down and all the way back in a day?

DG: No, we spent the night at Phantom Ranch. And came out the next day. And I remember that when we got down to the ranch, it was like it was early fall. The trees still had leaves, although they were turning yellow. I wonder if they were aspen trees? I don't know.

TM: They would have been cottonwoods maybe?

DG: Probably cottonwoods. And I remember how different it was to descend down to the bottom of that canyon. It was like going back in time a couple of months.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Nice. Nice.

DG: I don't know what's worse - going down or coming up.

TM: It's all hard. Oh, my gosh. I'm assuming that you hiked down in '62?...

DG: It would have been in '63. It probably was late November '63.

TM: And I don't think that the waterline construction would have started yet. Or been very close to starting the Transcanyon Water Pipeline.

DG: I don't remember that, anything like that.

TM: And then you would've walked across the upper bridge, the black bridge or the green bridge, got a couple different names... the Bright Angel... the Kaibab suspension bridge.

DG: Yes, probably. It was an interesting night, but the only thing I really remember about spending that night at Phantom Ranch... Of course, we had to have meals there... was that night, the really cold milk I had to drink. And then of course it was reconstituted, powdered milk but it tasted wonderful.

TM: After a walk like that, I think anything tastes wonderful. So yeah. Nice. Very good. And so what job was Chuck offered to lure him away from Grand Canyon from the Albright Training Center.

DG: He, we left there for him to become the Chief Park Naturalist of Mount Rainier National Park in the state of Washington. So we left Grand Canyon in January, in the winter time, but somehow we made it without any catastrophic event. Because we had the drive up through Utah and then go across Idaho and Oregon, and then cross the Columbia River up to Yakima, and then we had to go over the Cascades down into the Seattle area.

TM: Did you stop?

DG: No, no, no. We went to Mount Rainier. I'm confusing when we lived in Issaquah. But it was still basically the same idea.

TM: Yeah. Did you stop in Salt Lake and visit your family?

DG: We probably did. We probably did.

TM: And what was the housing like at Rainier when you arrived? Where did you get lodged there.

DG: We had a house that was assigned to the naturalist and it was basically a frame log house, it was two story. I remember in the wintertime, the snow on the ground would meet the snow on the roof. It was a large home, it was actually a very comfortable house. It also had a great big picture window that didn't face the street but faced the woods. I remember, it was very fascinating, especially in the wintertime when the icicles would be hanging down and the raccoons would look in the window.

TM: Oh my gosh!

DG: But I should tell you a story about Grand Canyon.

TM: Yes, yes, please. I was just thinking I need to make sure we're done with Grand Canyon before we go to Mount Rainier.

DG: It's a Christmas story and it's probably the Christmas of '63. It had snowed. And we got up Christmas morning and looked out that picture window I told you about. And you could see hoof marks from deer walking through the yard. And my children are absolutely fascinated by that. Because, of course, you know the Santa Claus story and the reindeer. It was really a special thing for them.

TM: Well, maybe it was, maybe St. Nicholas came by and with the sleigh and the kids were right.

DG: Well, there were gifts!

TM: Oh, that's lovely. That's wonderful. Anything else about Grand Canyon you can recall?

DG: Not that I can recall other than, of course, well, we did go over to Verkamps', does Verkamps' still exist?

TM: The family no longer runs the store, they sold that out to the National Park. But what do you remember?

DG: Buying Navajo rugs. So we came home with one very large one that had a lot of red and black in it. And a smaller one that was all grey, black, and sort of white. That I remember so of course we did that. We had kachina dolls and that sort of thing. So we did the tourist thing as well as the live there thing.

TM: Did you go over to the Kolb Studio? Do you remember going over there?

DG: I'm sure we did. I'm sure we did.

TM: Okay, and the Lookout Studio and El Tovar?

DG: We did everything possible to do, the only thing we didn't do is the Havasupai.

TM: Okay. Do you know if the train was still coming in?

DG: Yes, yes. In fact, the National Geographic world globe we had came on the train, that's how it got to Grand Canyon.

TM: Oh, you ordered it and it came by train. Okay.

DG: Well, there must have been some way the Postal Service did that. I don't know. But I remember going to the train station to pick that up.

TM: And Sam Turner would have been the station master. Does that name ring a bell?

DG: Does not, does not.

TM: Okay. Is that where you got your mail, would be the train station? Or was this just because it was a big box? It came in by train.

DG: It probably because it was a big box. But I actually don't remember how we got our mail.

TM: So there would have been a post office by the general store. And you might have...

DG: I'm sure we had the post office.

TM:...a P.O. box there. Okay, that makes sense. All right. Those are nice. Thank you for bringing that in.

DG: I actually don't remember much more about Grand Canyon.

TM: Okay. So Chuck is now the chief naturalist at Rainier. And I'm assuming that means he's overseeing the talks and the hikes and the museum displays that are happening at Rainier.

DG: Yes, the naturalist part and while he was there, he did a lot of photography. In fact, it was published in the newspapers. He would talk at the colleges and at conferences and meetings. He was as much a community educationalist as he was a park service educational person.

TM: Nice. Nice. And you stayed year round there at the park?

DG: Yes, we lived in the community called Longmire, which was just where the Park Service headquarters were. And there was a hotel there and, of course, the housing and the maintenance facilities. It was on the western side of the park.

TM: Okay. And so you must have become very familiar with a snow shovel.

DG: Yes. Actually, the house sat really close to the street and the back door went into a covered place with a little walk that went out to the road or into the garage where the car would be so actually, we didn't... no. We didn't do any snow shoveling.

TM: Okay, okay. I just, I think of snow up to the roof and I think hmmmm... I wonder what the snow shoveling was like.

DG: The road was plowed by the Park Service.

TM: Okay. Nice. How old were you at Rainier?

DG: We were there until August of '66. Yes, August of '66. We left there to go to the San Francisco area where he became the regional naturalist. And then a special assistant to the regional director and the Western Regional Office, which was in San Francisco, California.

TM: Okay, we'll get there in a little bit. Let's talk about your time at Rainier. Was it easier to walk around Rainier without getting lost?

DG: Yes, but of course, at this point in time, I had children in school and actually our fourth child was born while we were there. And all the hiking would be on well-designated trails. And usually we would do it as a family. (?). And if I did go out solo by myself, I knew exactly where I was going. And it was not a problem.

TM: And (?) you were getting better at it. That's good. Okay. What's the name of your fourth child?

DG: Her name is Naomi.

TM: Thank you. So getting 'round was good. You got down to the bottom of Grand Canyon once... how far up Rainier did you get a chance to go?

DG: I never did. Well, there's a place in Mount Rainier National Park called Paradise. And that's probably the highest point I ever got and hiking there. But my husband did climb Mount Rainier.

TM: Okay, nice.

DG: In the wintertime, he would take the children up to Paradise and they would go skiing. But I'm not a skier.

TM: Me neither.

DG: Mount Rainier was really an idyllic time for our family, it was kind of a little paradise. And Paradise really is a good name for the place on Mount Rainier.

TM: How so, tell me more.

DG: It was just a very peaceful time, it was a happy time with our family. Work went well. I just don't remember any major problems. Although we lived there during the big earthquake in the Seattle area. I think it would have been in April of '65. I remember hearing the rocks tumble down. It was really interesting. And as a family, we would go hiking as a family.

TM: Who was Chuck working with?

DG: Berry picking...

TM: Berry picking, oh yum.

DG: Two kinds of berries. There would be the little wild blueberries up in the mountain, up higher on the mountains. And then also the blackberries. You maybe have heard of blackberries from the state of Washington. But the kind that grow on the ground that don't have, that aren't so seedy and don't have little holes in the middle. They were, they're really special. But it was always scary because the bears liked them too.

TM: I was gonna say... but I'm thinking about blackberry cookies and wonder did you do them? Did you cook with them?

DG: I made pie, blackberry pie.

TM: Nice, fun.

DG: And of course the blueberries could go on muffins or pie or just eat them. It would be a miracle if they survived.

TM: Survived the walk home.

DG: But we would drive down out of Mount Rainier to go down into the valley and pick raspberries and strawberries to a place called Puyallup. And of course, that was wonderful. Of course we come home and make jam.

TM: Nice. Where did you call for shopping?

DG: We would go down to Tacoma, Washington. Or, well, we would go to Tacoma mostly to do major things or to go to the library and the library there would talk about us for years because we would go in and get a whole big box of books and then of course we wouldn't be back for about three weeks and get another great big box of books. I guess we were so famous, but maybe infamous.

TM: Where did all the books go in the library? Well, those Geblers were here.

DG: And I remember McDonald's was just sort of up and starting during those years, and we would go to McDonald's, the golden arches in Tacoma. It was a novelty, a fun thing to do. But closer to home was a small town called Eatonville. And that was the more common place to go shopping for groceries. Medical care was in Tacoma.

TM: I want to go back to a minute to the library. You are, it sounds like you always have been a very voracious reader. Did your children pick that up from you as well?

DG: Well perhaps, because we started it when, I started taking my children to the library when John was all about a year old. He started walking when he was about nine months old. So when he was a year old, or just going on, like 14 months or so he would walk and I put his little sister Becky in a stroller and off we'd go to the library. And I've been reading books to my children, since they were itty bitty tiny. So going to the library was important. But you realize during those years at Grand Canyon and Mount Rainier, there was no TV, we had the radio. So we didn't have the diversions or the things that a lot of today's children have. We had hobbies, like stamp collecting, and home movies, and library books. And I taught my daughter to play the piano and things like that. And of course always outdoors hiking.

TM: And so now I want to go back to Grand Canyon for a minute. Was there a library that you remember at Grand Canyon?

DG: I don't remember that.

TM: There definitely would have been one in Flagstaff. And there's one at Grand Canyon today, but I don't know its history at all.

DG: I don't remember visiting a library in Flagstaff.

TM: Okay. And so most of the books that went into the box of books from the Tacoma library, were you reading those?

DG: Well, they were mostly books for the children. I'm sure I had some for myself, but they were mostly books for the children.

TM: Great. Okay, how fun. Would the neighbors take use of those while they were up there as well?

DG: I don't know. But one thing that did get started while we were there was a little library in Longmire and I don't remember if it was strictly a community effort or if, you know, the greater system did that. That actually started while we were there.

TM: That must have been a (?) instead of running in Tacoma. You could go to Longmire.

DG: Yes.

TM: Do you remember the people at Rainier that Chuck worked with?

DG: No, I'm sorry. I do not.

TM: Okay. And and it sounds like he enjoyed it there.

DG: Oh, yes. We had a great time. Although our oldest child John kept wanting the mountain to erupt.

TM: I'm with John.

DG: You're with John?

TM: Uh huh, yep.

DG: Of course it did not.

TM: It had to wait until dad got the job at Hawaii. Teasing. Yeah, see the volcanoes over there? Well, volcanoes are a magical thing. What else do you remember about your time at Rainier?

DG: Oh, gee whiz. I told you about the earthquake, I told you about the snow. I told you about the raccoons we'd watch in the winter time out the window. My children were really free to roam about while we were there, and so they had a great time. They loved being there. I don't really remember anything more than what I've already told you.

TM: Where did they go to school, the kids?

DG: They went out of the park down... (?) the community. It was a regular school. In fact, John graduated from Kindergarten there. Becky started school there.

TM: So that's not Longmire?

DG: No, Longmire was the name of the Park Service community inside the park.

TM: Oh I see. Okay.

DG: This is outside of the park where they went to school. I could ask my children if they remember. Or maybe it'll come to mind.

TM: Yeah, I'm just... Eatonville or...

DG: No it was before Eatonville.

TM: Okay.

DG: And there was a school bus.

TM: Okay, was a school bus. Alright.

DG: A school bus that came into the park.

TM: Did you go to one central location and pick up all the kids? Or did it kind of drive around to the housing?

DG: Probably went to one specific location. But you know Longmire is a small little place.

TM: I'm not familiar with it at all. So I'm like, okay, so it will be really tiny. And so it makes sense a bus would go to one place and the kids would all just get on the bus there and then go to school.

DG: I think so, I think so. It was kind of exciting one day when the moose walked down the street.

TM: Wow.

DG: Course then you'd get the kids out of the way really fast.

TM: Was that the first time that you had seen a moose?

DG: Probably. Probably.

TM: Were there elk there as well? Trying to think about... bears of course were out and about.

DG: I don't remember elk. I just remember the moose. I have great respect for bears. I don't care for bears.

TM: You and the rest of us. Yeah.

DG: But I don't remember problems from them.

TM: Do you remember roughly, you know, were there a lot of tourists there? Do you remember there being a lot of people there? Or was it, you know, you and the family?

DG: They would come of course in good weather because then they could go to... well, I guess you could go skiing in Paradise in the wintertime. But in the spring, summer and fall, you could

drive the road all the way through Mount Rainier, to the eastern side of the park. And of course that would be closed during the wintertime. So a lot of people would come during the spring, summer and fall. Of course, climbing the mountain was a big thing. There was a business involved with that. That wasn't park service.

TM: Like a concession.

DG: Yes. And of course the wildflower meadows were famous. And in fact I love the of wildflowers of Mount Rainier. They were absolutely gorgeous.

TM: Nice. Isn't there a trail that goes all the way around the mountain called the Wonderland trail. Is that right?

DG: Yes. Yes.

TM: Did you guys walk out on that?

DG: We could have, I don't know. We did a lot of hiking.

TM: I bet you might have. I wouldn't be surprised that Chuck would have wanted to make that walk around. Just as part of his duties there.

DG: I don't remember him doing that. But we did go to the other side of the park as a family. I remember that. And my husband loved to fish. And on the eastern side of the park is a town called Randle. And he would go with his buddies and they would go there and they would go into a... I don't know whether you'd call it a tavern, a bar, or a restaurant. And he would always be ID'd. Course he didn't use alcohol. But nevertheless going in those places where alcohol was served with his Park Service friends, they'd be on something whether it work or a fishing trip. He would always be ID'd. He always looked younger than he was. Of course when we were at Rainier, we were probably in our early 30s. So it was kind of a fun thing that would happen there. And he would love to go fishing and sometimes I would go with him and take a book and he would fish and I would read my book.

TM: Nice, perfect.

DG: I'm not a fisherwoman.

TM: And it doesn't sound like he was much of a reader or certainly not as much as you so that's a perfect common interest.

DG: Well he was more of a photographer and of course, he would take the children fishing and we have these wonderful pictures of the children holding up their fish. And they would fight over who got to clean the fish.

TM: Oh my gosh, okay. Nice. And then I'm assuming that they along with the berries would get consumed fairly quickly.

DG: All the fish, yeah I guess we ate them for supper. I can't remember.

TM: Nice. What else do you remember about Rainier?

DG: Well, it was just a very beautiful place. And we have gorgeous pictures of Mount Rainier.

TM: Of all the service units that you worked at all across the country, what was the home park for you all?

DG: The home park? Well, I will say Mount Rainier was my favorite. But I don't know that we could say there was a home park.

TM: I think you just kind of captured it. Rainier was your favorite. So that....

DG:...Was my favorite. Was my favorite.

TM: Yeah. Nice. Then with the timeline here, so John is chief naturalist at Rainier. So he's running the entire interpretive division.

DG: Chuck is, Charles. John is our oldest child.

TM: Sorry. I'm confused. Thank you, Chuck is. Then he's offered a position with the regional office?

DG: In San Francisco.

TM: In San Francisco.

DG: We left Mount Rainier in August of '66. To go to San Francisco.

TM: Wow.

DG: And we lived in a community called Mill Valley, which is over the Golden Gate Bridge.

TM: Okay.

DG: And we rented a home. It was on several acres of land and had redwood trees in the backyard.

TM: Wow. I'm just thinking that must have been quite a change.

DG: Well, I think we were beginning to be quite adaptable.

TM: Okay.

DG: But we lived in a very natural place. There was no sidewalk in front of our house, kind of a winding street. We lived not very far from something called the Dipsea trail, which is a famous trail in that area of Mill Valley by Mount Tamalpais. So we were in a very natural environment. It was the hippie time which I didn't like for my children. They had some really good friends that just lived down the street from us with the grand piano and the big picture window. And one time my kids came home... my girls came home telling me about this pipe this family was smoking. That was not very happy for me to learn that. Children went to Mill Valley Elementary School. Mill Valley was a very, in a way, controlled community. There was like no McDonald's there, or anything like that. So my children all took piano lessons. They had a wonderful piano teacher, Mr. Ludlow that was at the bottom of our hill across from the school. So we had piano recitals and we had that going on.

TM: Did you have a piano in the house?

DG: Oh, we've always had a piano. Always. Always. One of the fun things that happened there is the children were out in the woods that went downslope from our backyard and they found these, this baby raccoon that had been abandoned by the mother. So we now had Ricky Raccoon as our family pet. And the children had fond memories of Ricky Raccoon. Of course, when we left there, Ricky Raccoon was taken to Muir Woods.

TM: That would have been sad. Because I imagine he, you know, he was all over the house and here and there and underfoot and always having fun.

DG: I think he was in the backyard. Well, actually, our house on the front faced the street, but everything was down slope in back of us. And in front of us, we had this very large enclosed place. That was fine.

TM: Okay. So Ricky was an outside raccoon, he wasn't an inside raccoon.

DG: Absolutely.

TM: Okay, got it. Get that sorted out. And do you remember... I mean, I just wonder. Kids were adaptable. But gosh, it would be new school. And in San Francisco is a big city, even though it sounds like you really did well to have your home base so far out of town. Much, you know, with redwoods and much rural, if you will.

DG: It was fun to go into San Francisco and do the things that people would do to visit San Francisco. They have wonderful chocolate. And of course, the Chinatown experience and the wharf experience. And we would go hiking. We were always a hiking family. And... but they would be not in San Francisco. They would be across the bay where we were down by the

water or Muir Woods or Mount Tamalpais. So we were still doing a lot of outdoor things as a family. But sometimes it was, you know, city stuff. Museums and Chinatown, fish and sourdough bread, and Fisherman's Wharf, cable cars.

TM: How old were the kids at this time? '66, '67.

DG: Naomi was born in '65. And she was our youngest.

TM: So she was two or three.

DG: Yeah. John was, by the time we left there, was in sixth grade and he was left handed. And his teacher would wonder because he would get things backwards when he was younger. It was like melon water, ranger park. And his sixth grade teacher would tell me he's, you know, don't expect a great deal out of this young man. But you know, he is now Dr. Gebler, PhD in chemistry.

TM: Good for him.

DG: The California school system at that time was experimenting with open classroom concept. And so I was totally amazed come May one year when our middle daughter was probably second grade, and we had gone to Yosemite for some Park Service thing. And we were staying in the Ranger Club there. And so my children had brought their homework and so I sat down with Rachel to do her homework and discovered she was on about page two or three in her math book. And here it was May. And so with this open classroom concept, it wasn't working well for her. So, but daughter Becky was - let's think - when we left there about fourth grade and she was doing all this wonderful artwork. And she would bring home these beautiful paper dolls she had made. They were so gorgeous. And she did some paintings during there. So it was both an enriching time and also a time of a lot of freedom that might have been better curtailed with more discipline in the school. I guess mother should have caught on faster, right?

TM: Well you did catch on. Faster is always an interesting question. But what did you do once you did catch on?

DG: I think we laid the law down. But this was a free spirit daughter. And I learned later she used to climb the fence and leave the schoolyard. But then this is the daughter that would walk, they would walk home. You could do this curving road to get back down to school, or you could walk up what was called the Dipsea Trail, which would be a straight walk up the hill. And she would come home and tell me about the nude people bathing on their rooftops.

TM: As you walked up the...

DG: I was very glad to leave San Francisco. I really was.

TM: It was the 1960s.

DG: Well, we left there in '69.

TM: Did Chuck ever talk about his work there in the regional office?

DG: I don't remember much about that. I was too busy being a mother trying to keep track of all this.

TM: I bet with four children. Yeah.

DG: These active kids. He coordinated certain phases of regionwide research proposals and plans and he coordinated all natural landmark programs which included research proposals for Hawaii, Alaska, California. And he visited areas throughout the region and consulted with superintendents and staff.

TM: So he traveled a lot.

DG: How the interpretive programs were going. And let's see... and he prepared and presented programs on current National Park Service management philosophy. Can you tell I'm reading from his...

TM: I can but it's good that you are. Because it fills in what he was doing. I'm assuming if he worked with superintendents, either they came to him or he went to them.

DG: Well, I know he went to Hawaii while we were there.

TM: Okay.

DG: And actually, I just pulled up his paperwork on special assignments and details. That's what I just read from.

TM: Great. Great. No that's very helpful.

DG: In fact I can go back and read from this for both Albright and Mount Rainier.

TM: Oh, yes please.

DG: Should we go back to Albright Training Center.

TM: Let's start there.

DG: Okay. Development of plans for new facility at Grand Canyon, presentation of certain instructional sessions in resource management. Work with trainees on resource management plans; audit of sessions on all significant phases of resource management in National Park

Service at the time; specific training and various protection subjects: fire, firearms, search and rescue. Visits to over 30 areas of National Park System to observe park operations for background as training center instructor.

TM: Okay, so 30 places, wow.

DG: And at Mount Rainier, coordinated park research program, including production of new research portfolio in cooperation with Protection Division; justification of currently needed research for funding preparation of RSP forms, whatever that is. Supervision of scientists and researchers on projects including elk and deer ecology and management so there had to have been elk. Stream flows and exotic plant control. Establishment of relations for park research with US Geological Survey including beginning studies on geological hazards and emergency studies of Little Tahoma rock fall; establishment of relations with Forest Service; Pacific Northwest forest and range experiment station for sub-alpine ecology studies; individual research on ecological changes and sub-alpine ecology and recommendations for management. Project fire supervisor (Grand Lake) for initial stage; climbing school and Mount Rainier climb; development of dedication and visitor use plans for Ohanapecosh and Paradise visitor centers. Do you want me to have my daughter scan this and send this to you?

TM: No, I think... but I do think that we'll want to get this to the Park Service archives, if they don't have it already so we'll work that out. This is great. This really helps to kind of round out what Chuck was trying to handle and manage and make... duties he was fulfilling while you were raising the kids and taking care of the home there. It's very helpful.

DG: One of the fun things that would happen at Mount Rainier is that some of the people that will come to visit with somehow connect with us and the former prima donna at the Berlin Opera Company and her husband, who was a music conductor in San Francisco would come and they would visit us every time they come. And mostly because the husband in this couple was a great wildflower enthusiast. And that's why they came to Mount Rainier every summer. And so I got to know them very well. And they would come to dinner. And I remember one time I had lemon pie and apple pie for dessert, and I asked, her name was Friedel, I asked Friedel what she would like and she said, Why does it have to be either or?

TM: Good for her, that's a good answer.

DG: But that was one of the fun things of Mount Rainier was some of the people we were able to meet and the opportunities we had to have these people in our home. And they were always people that had an interest in nature. Or like I said, this couple were very connected to the wildflowers

TM: I think it would have been a wonderful friendship because, you know, Chuck loved to play the piano and you love to sing and, and I would think that, you know, having that couple over that it would have been just a little bit of music going on there maybe too.

DG: I just think I remember a lot of nature talk. But that's true. That's true. There was that connection also.

TM: Yeah, very fun. Donna, we've been visiting here for a little over an hour. Maybe this is a good time to put a comma in this oral history series. And we'll pick it up again in San Francisco. In 1967, '68.

DG: Okay, sounds good.

TM: All right. Well, thank you very much for this part two, Grand Canyon oral history interview with Donna Gebler. Today is Tuesday, April 13, 2021. My name is Tom Martin and Donna, thank you so very much.

DG: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.