

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Gary Branges (GB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Gary graduated from Grand Canyon High School in 1976

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TM: So, today is July 7, 2017. It's a Friday and this is the home of Tom Martin and Hazel Clark. Today we are with Gary Branges, spelled G-A-R-Y B-R-A-N-G-E-S. This is a Grand Canyon Historical Society oral history project interview, and my name is Tom Martin. Gary, thank you so much for being willing to come visit today. Let's start off by, maybe you could tell me a little bit about your mother and your father, how they met, and then where you were born.

GB: Okay, my dad was kind of unusual. He was a kid out of the Bronx, New York. Apparently didn't care for the city much at all, so when he graduated from high school, he bought an old Studebaker that had no floor boards in the bottom of it. He graduated in the winter and he took off to Utah. He enrolled in college at Utah State as a freshman there.

TM: What was your father's name, first name?

GB: His name was Robert James Branges.

TM: And what year did he get in the Studebaker and head west?

GB: That would have been...he graduated high school when he was 16. He was kind of unusually young. He was born in 1919, so 1930...

TM: '32?

GB: Or three. Somewhere around there. Yeah.

TM: What did his parents do?

GB: His mother was a seamstress in New York and his father was a barber at a high-end hotel there. That was his stepfather. The older story goes beyond that. His true father actually kidnapped his brother and went back to Germany. His brother, who was born in the United States, actually served in the German Army and my father ended up serving in the American Army. They didn't know it till after the war, cause they hadn't seen each other since they were little, were actually fairly close to each other. His brother, because he was an American citizen and the Germans knew it, never put him in true combat. He was a communications person. Eventually he was captured by the Soviets and was in a Russian internment camp and got

released. My dad happened to go on leave and knew we had aunts in Cologne and went there to see if they had survived the war. At the same time, Eddie had gotten released from the internment camp, he went there. That's how they got back together. Dad was seven when the last time they'd seen each other and Eddie was three. They got it back together. Dad went through a lot of political battlings to get him brought to the United States because policy was Nazis could not come to the United States. The battle was that, hey, he's an American citizen though and this was not his choice to be there. So he finally, through help of a New York congressman, was able to get Eddie brought to the United States. So they finally got back together.

TM: Wow. That's very cool.

GB: But anyway, side note on his history.

TM: Why do you think your dad wanted to go west in the Studebaker?

GB: I think he just didn't care for the city life and maybe his life with his stepfather wasn't that happy. He just wanted a fresh start and liked the woods.

TM: Did he make it to Utah?

GB: Yep, he got to Utah, enrolled in Utah State, forestry major with a minor in engineering and also Army ROTC. That's how he ended up in World War II and Korea. His second year there, he got a summer job at Yellowstone as a summer ranger interp-something position.

TM: 1938-ish? 1939? Just before the war then?

GB: Yeah, it was before the war while he was going to school. I believe he worked three summers there for the Park Service. He had to self-support himself. He was getting no support from home, so it was what he made during summer jobs. That's why he went into the ROTC, to help subsidize the cost of his education. It took him...I think it was six years to graduate and get his dual engineering and forestry degrees. Before he even graduated he had received orders to report to the Army as soon as he graduated. They were forming a new battalion called the Army Corp of Engineers. Was brand new at that point. He was in the, I believe, the second battalion formed. He landed in Normandy on day 3 after the invasion. Spent four years in Europe, traipsing around, doing whatever. He was an engineer, not combat, although he did see his fair share at the Battle of the Bulge. He was with Patton at the rescue there. Lost a lot of his guys at that. And then stayed after the war was over, actually, to rebuild hospitals and some things like that; special projects to get things going again in Europe, basically. As I mentioned, he got together with his brother and his aunts. Because he was an officer, he pulled a little conniving and stole a bunch of supplies. [Laughing]

TM: What was his rank?

GB: He was a lieutenant. He was a lieutenant there.

TM: Okay.

GB: Anyway, after the war, came back. I don't know whether given a job or re-applied with the National Park Service, but got another job with them when he was released from the Army. Went to Sequoia/Kings Canyon and was a ranger there. I'm not sure if Kings Canyon even really existed at that point. Sequoia was there, obviously. But that was his position, whatever it was. I'm not sure what position he had there.

TM: '46ish?

GB: '46, '47, something like that. He was there for a while. That's where he met my mother. My grandparents on my mother's side had a cabin at a little inholding called Kings Canyon Wilsonia, that's located inside Kings Canyon National Park, which we still own today. My brothers and I and my sisters, we own it. We fought the fought against the Park periodically. Right now, they're actually very cool about us owning it, so times are good. My dad and a couple of friends were walking down in front of the cabin and Mom decided to launch a snowball. The story goes she knocked his ranger hat right off his head and that's how they met originally, yeah.

TM: Fun!

GB: From there, my brother was born there, my oldest brother in California. They were there for a while. Chain of events...I get confused on what happened when. Quite a while, actually, there. Dad was recalled back into the Army when Korea happened. Story goes that two soldiers and a Jeep showed up at the entrance gate, 'cause they didn't have telephones back then, and pretty much loaded him up and said, "You gotta go." Korea was quite a crisis there in the beginning. He ended up... He still owed the Army two years on a six-year deal with the ROTC program. So he went to Korea almost immediately, was shipped over. Side note there: his brother ended up joining the Army and went to Korea, too, so he was also at the same time in Korea. Spoke very little English, but he was there.

TM: That's amazing.

GB: When they came back, Dad again...

TM: Was your father a lieutenant when he came back from Korea or had he...?

GB: He was a first lieutenant. Yeah. He was promoted before he even left. He was first lieutenant then. Dad never talked much about it. It was a different engineering battalion. Didn't talk about Korea too much. Never talked about World War II much either, so, very few minor things that he would bring up. Hated Patton till the day he died. He just felt Patton endangered troops, that did not need to be endangered, too much. Once instance is a little valley, there's a town in it in Luxembourg, and Patton refused to send his tanks up there, but my dad's squad had to go out. It's where he lost half of his squad. Where one tank could have taken out the machine gun nests and you're sending engineers to do it, you know. That's why Dad just hated him, because of that. Patten was afraid of losing a tank or two up there. You can get cornered in a very tight valley. Up until my dad's death, every 10 years his battalion would go back to that town that they liberated, the entire battalion that was left. Everything was comped, meals, hotels. He actually went back about a year before his death, with his brother, back there. His brother wouldn't go into the valley, he went somewhere else. There were about eight guys left

in the battalion that made the trip. So he got to do that. That's actually where he had a heart attack, on that trip, and then later passed away from that.

TM: When he was at Sequoia between the two conflicts, end of World War II/before Korea, what were his positions with the Park Service?

GB: I honestly couldn't tell you. I know later he was a district ranger, so he had moved up quite a bit, up the chain. I never saw him as an interpretive ranger or anything like that. He was more administrative in all his positions after Yellowstone. So district ranger or chief ranger through his whole career.

TM: Okay. So then coming back from Korea, back to the Park Service then?

GB: Yep. Yep. Right.

TM: And by this time, had you been born or any of your brothers and sisters? How did that work out?

GB: No, no. When he came back, got his job back, he was assigned to Denali. That would have been, oh, '52, I believe, that he would return from Korea. '53 and he was assigned to Denali, so he packed everybody up and moved up there. Back then...

TM: Everybody being?

GB: All the family. I was not born yet.

TM: You...you have older brothers, older sisters?

GB: I had two older brothers and two older sisters. Okay. One sister Trish was actually born up there, which at that time was not a state. It was just a territory. She was born up there, and I think my middle brother had just been born. He couldn't be six months old yet, because they're only a year apart.

TM: Hang on a second. Let's go back for a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit more about your mother? What was her name and what can you tell me about her?

GB: Okay, name was Barbara May, Mehrten was her maiden name. B-A-R-B-A-R-A M-A-Y and then Mehrten M-E-H-R-T-E-N.

TM: Thank you.

GB: Okay. Mehrten family was pretty prominent in California and in the San Joaquin Valley. They were originally...came around the horn...San Francisco, made their fortunes in gold during the Gold Rush and then bought farmland, or leased in a lot of cases. I've been told by an uncle who in his childhood said he could ride the perimeter of the ranch on a horse but it took eight days if you didn't dilly-dally on it. Basically, the perimeter was...southern was just north of Bakersfield, northern was just south of Fresno and then it ran from about Highway 99 and up into the Sierras.

TM: Wow.

GB: There are a lot of things that are named Mehrten up there. There's Mehrten Meadows in Kings Canyon and a lot of things from the family. The family's kinda split up into different ranges. There were a lot of kids, and some changed their name to Martin. That's a side shoot of the family. But Mehrten is the true name. Somewhere along the line during the Depression, they lost everything. I just heard stories the other day from my oldest brother that apparently my great-grandfather died in jail...in the Visalia jail during the Depression. And he was...

TM: How do you spell Visalia?

GB: V-I-S-A-L-I-A.

TM: Thank you. He died in jail?

GB: Died in jail. He was put in jail because of bills he couldn't pay during the Depression. In turn, rumor that was a set up to justify taking stuff from them to satisfy debts. And that's how they ended up losing all the property that they had. Some family members were able to hang onto certain sections. The amount of land you own...because most of it's leased, it's not true ownership. But they were wheat farmers. There's a big mural in the town of Exeter, where I was born, that shows a 17-horse wheat thrasher, drawn by 17 horses. I've got an original picture of it and my grandfather's on there as a little boy. That had to be in the 1880s, 1890s, somewhere around there.

TM: Central Valley farming.

GB: Yeah, yeah. They ran cattle, lot of different things. My grandfather served in World War I in France. When he came back, he took the money that he'd earned and he bought himself more land and started farming more. He had somewhere around 250 acres at one point, mainly peaches, nectarines and grapes, is what he did. Later, when I remember, he was down to 80 acres is what he could farm by himself anymore.

TM: That's a lot!

GB: Yeah, yeah. He gave 80 acres to the local town to build their VA center on and their community center. They took most of it and subdivided it out and sold it and made a lot of money off of it. But, you know, that wasn't the point for him. But anyway, Mom...she had one sister, Dorie. D-O-R-I-E. They grew up. Also had a brother that I'm named after, Norman. Norman died on his graduation night from high school in a car accident. I got named after him. But anyway, because of the heat, basically, in the valley, Grandpa bought this property up in Kings Canyon. I don't remember the original purchase price on it. I've seen the deed and it's kinda interesting 'cause there's a clause in there that says that if you ever have Asians, Blacks, Chinese, or Armenians on the property for any reason except as servants, the property will revert back to the original owner.

TM: Wow!

GB: I don't know what he had against Armenians. But, you know, it was kinda weird. When Grandpa bought it, it was a two-room shack. It was just a walk-in with one room off of it, kind of kitchen thing. Grandpa...we had a relative had a lumber company, Tulare Lumber, and he rebuilt it. It became a den, living room, dining room, kitchen and three bedrooms and bath upstairs. Big, huge A-frame type. So, it's pretty large.

TM: Nice. And the snow's no problem in the winter?

GB: He built a door on the second story that just walks in from nowhere.

TM: [Laughing]

GB: And that was for, in the day, when the snow was that bad, you dug down to that door to get into the house. First step's dig out the outhouse. We still have an outhouse today. We still have a hand-pump well there, which we're one of the few in the community, so when power goes out in the winter, guess who's the water supplier...

TM: You guys!

GB: ...for those that are still up there. There's not a lot of people, but some stay.

TM: Very cool. So, it sounds like your mother certainly was more exposed to outhouses and hand pumps and the outdoors.

GB: Farming life, basically.

TM: Farming life, yeah, where your dad was more of a city boy, if you will.

GB: To start, yeah.

TM: To start. And then quickly made amends to catch up, if you will.

GB: Yeah.

TM: Okay, so after the Korean conflict then he is back to the Park Service and sent to Denali. What was his position there?

GB: District ranger, I believe. How they...I don't know...I mean, that's early on where they... I think the Park was only about 20 years old at that point, so...

TM: Well 1916... Oh, you mean Denali as a Park...

GB: Yeah, Denali as a National Park.

TM: ...was only about 20 years old. Okay.

GB: Yeah, so... There was still a lot of conflict up there. I remember my dad... The locals didn't like that the Park Service had made a national park up there. I've read a book that, the first superintendent thought he was going to be shot virtually every day he was up there.

TM: Interesting.

GB: Yeah, they... But he was very good at communicating and setting up relationships and that's kinda what my dad continued when he was up there. I have no idea who the superintendent...even if they had a superintendent back in those days.

TM: I'm sure they did, but...

GB: How they did things back in the day. That was Mt. McKinley, it wasn't even Denali back then, or visa versa.

TM: So you mentioned already you were born in Visalis?

GB: Exeter, a little farming town. That's were my grandparents' ranch was.

TM: Exeter. This is in the San Joaquin?

GB: San Joaquin Valley in California, yeah.

TM: Okay. What year was that?

GB: That was June of 1958.

TM: Okay. So, had did your dad come back...?

GB: That's when he came back, that spring. Yeah, mom was pregnant with me when they came back down. Dad took a job in Yosemite at that time as district ranger there or possibly chief ranger. I'm not sure what his position was.

TM: So in 1950...?

GB: '58.

TM: '58. Thank you. Do you recall family stories about Yosemite in the late '50s or early '60s?

GB: I didn't get to stay up there that much because I was so young and I was... I heard we lived in a tent the first two summers up there. I think the family came down to the ranch. Dad would stay year round, but the rest of us would all come down to the ranch in Exeter and stay there. I spent probably the first six years of my life down at the ranch, not too much up in Yosemite. It was just a little too dangerous. There was a lot of bears running around. They tell me a story of me riding a tricycle, running from a bear one time down at the maintenance yard. Down the hill with the feet up, screaming and...

TM: [Laughing] And the bear loping along.

GB: Yeah, coming behind me. Yeah, who knows what was going on. Luckily the maintenance guys came running out with shovels.

TM: [Laughing] Oh my gosh!

GB: Yeah, things were a lot different back then. That's the way it was. I don't remember how long. I think I was there until I was six, and then Dad accepted a chief ranger's position in Everglades National Park. So, he went there. It was kind of a special projects thing. That whole jetport was going in at that time and the Park Service wanted that stopped somehow. My understanding, the jetport the way they were building it was an east/west confluence runway system and it was going to block the water flow into the Everglades. That was the big fight at that time. No one really understood what the Park needed that much. It's just basically six inches above sea level there. If you stop the fresh water flow, you destroy the Park.

TM: Right.

GB: That was the main thing, so they.... It's still there, but it's not used as a commercial airport. They had to dig it all up and put water troughs through to keep the water flow going. And they just couldn't do that as a commercial airport. So, we were in the Everglades for four years. Kinda more laid back there. My parents were always very laid back. We got to play wherever, swim in the alligator pits... I mean, joke in my family was I learned to swim in an alligator pit when the raft my brother and I built sank.

TM: [Laughing]

GB: You learn to swim real fast! You know, tons of snakes around. We had our share of problems. We had a airplane crash up there. Jet went down while my dad was there. We had the Cuban Missile Crisis was going on there. I can remember going to the beach and playing around machine gun bunkers and stuff then. Homestead Air Force Base was basically right next door to the Everglades. So there was a lot going on there. We knew we were a major target if the Russians did decide to do something. I can remember discussions about us going back to California and getting out of there. Decided not to, we didn't do it. Normal operation of that Park. It was a good place to be when you were little. In hindsight, probably very lucky to have survived it. Could have died very easily on a lot of occasions, but that's the way my folks were. You lived outside, you played. It's part of your life to be there.

TM: Where did you go for vacations?

GB: We usually stuck around Sanibel Island. We had a boat and we'd go out boating around. I think we did one trip to New York to see his grandparents that I can recall ever going back. Dad would go occasionally. But, you're living in paradise, why would you go anywhere else? People spend money to go there. But it was a good community, good.... A lot more social, I think, than what I've seen the future come to. We can talk about that later. Everybody was friends. There wasn't real positions and everybody played with everybody, kids-wise. It was more of a small community. All of the national parks were kinda like that. You had nobody else to hang out with. It's tough to make friends with tourists, so your small core base of rangers or even the concession that may be there were very friendly. That continued a lot.

From Everglades, Dad was assigned to a brand new...Fire Island National Seashore was being formed. We were literally the first people there when we showed up. That's a barrier island that runs off of Long Island, which is off of New York State. It's basically, I don't know, about 28 miles long and about 200 yards wide. That's it.

TM: So this would have been 1968-ish, '69?

GB: Yeah, '66 maybe. Were there for four years.

TM: Okay, four years at Everglades, four years at Fire Island both?

GB: Yeah. Park Service is a lot like the military. You do your four-year stint; you move along if you're on a career path or projects, as my dad's case was. Have a project, go deal with it, and then move on to the next project.

TM: Did your dad ever talk about the pluses and minuses, if you remember, about the four-year concept?

GB: No, I think he understood the military concept, and it's... There were give and take with Mom. Mom wasn't real happy about going east. She wanted to stay around her family as they got older. That was part of the deal when we came back west was... Dad had several offers. "Where do you want to go?" We all had a family meeting, but Mom overruled us all. [Laughing] We're going west, no matter what. That's how we ended up back at Grand Canyon eventually.

TM: So for you as a child going from Everglades to Fire Island, I would assume that that would have been an interesting bump in your road.

GB: A little bit. I mean, the education system wasn't the same. Florida doesn't have kindergarten and New York does, so it was assumed I was a year behind right off the bat. So we showed up... Now we spent summers on the island. In the winters, Dad built a house on Long Island. So we went there for winter. You just couldn't winter on the island, there was nothing out there. So for me, initially, it was like summer school right off the bat. They just assumed it, which created a whole fiasco. So Dad had to go out... Park Service bought a boat, Dad went out and hired a boatman and his job was to take me to school every morning. I remember Bob Frieda was his name. Was a college kid who got his summer job. Bob ended up as a superintendent in the National Park Service when he finally retired.

TM: How do you spell Bob's last name? F-R-I-E-D-A? [Note from transcriptionist: A fact-check of the name resulted in a 10/1/2018 obituary in Newsday for Robert Bruce Freda, F-R-E-D-A, who served as park ranger for the National Park Service at Fire Island National Seashore.]

GB: I believe that's correct.

TM: Okay.

GB: He just passed away recently.

TM: So is this were you guys met Jim Tuck?

GB: We never did meet Jim until Grand Canyon. Jim was there after we were there.

TM: Thank you. Because he talked about being at Fire Island but he wasn't there on day one. He was just a bit later. Okay.

GB: Yeah, he came out later. The place we lived at was a resort the year before. It had four houses and a small like 20-unit hotel, all done in Japanese style. Paper walls, Japanese rock gardens. It was amazing. The house we lived in the first year we were told the previous year was Doris Day's house. The second year... We lived in another house for three years. That was Hugh Hefner's house and it had a private swimming pool to it. Amazingly nice, nice place. But of course they decided this is *way* too nice for government employees, so they fenced off the swimming pools. We weren't allowed to use those. We couldn't do anything with it. But still living on an island, who needed swimming pools? You had bay on one side, ocean on the other side. We all had boats to play around with. Fire Island Pines was the next community down, about two miles down, so we'd go down there for ice cream and some shopping and stuff.

TM: My running assumption is that you and your brothers and sisters are really good swimmers and good boaters.

GB: Pretty much survived or you didn't. [Laughing] So, yeah, I mean, we all... Dad taught us how to handle boats. For me, I was so young, it was sailboats. He was not going to give me anything with a motor, you know. So, we had a sailboat and I had friends that had sailboats that lived... There was another little marina right next door on the other side that people come out with their boats all the time. And a lot of people spent the summers there on their boats. Made friends that way. That was part of the Islip Beach there. There were three different sections of Park on Fire Island. Talisman that we lived at, and then there was two others. I don't recall the names on them, to be honest with you, but they were just sections that were maybe about 200 yards wide and a mile long or so. And that's where more of the tourists went to. Our area was really just a housing area. Never saw tourists there, ever.

TM: Were the headquarters there where the housing was or was it someplace else?

GB: No, the headquarters were on the mainland in Patchogue. Sometimes Dad would go to the headquarters across the way, but most times he stayed on the island with us.

TM: Patchogue?

GB: Patchogue, yeah.

TM: How do you spell that?

GB: P-A-T-C-H-O-G, I believe. [Note from transcriptionist: The correct spelling is P-A-T-C-H-O-G-U-E.] Patchogue, Islip, and Brookhaven were the towns across the way. Yeah, that was like 12 miles across across that. So anyway, great place to be a kid, I can tell you, living on the beach. It was like put your swimsuit on on the first day and you took it off the day you had to leave to go back to school.

TM: [Laughing] Fun, very cool.

GB: First, well, all four years we only had power two hours a day. They'd fire up the generators for us, so was no electricity.

TM: So, no icebox. I'd imagine...

GB: Propane ice chest. Propane systems. Yeah, yeah. Mom would do her baking and everything that she needed to do, but nights were all by oil lanterns or candles. Living that. Going grocery shopping was a major event. Take the boat across, spend most of the day grocery shopping and you had five shopping carts when you checked out. Dad complaining, "A hundred dollars for five shopping carts! [Laughing] Well, that's for the month.

TM: And at that point there was no bridge across to the island, is that right?

GB: There was but driving was highly frowned upon on the beach back then. You could but it had to be an official vehicle, so it was a Catch-22. Couldn't do your family shopping in a vehicle, and Dad wasn't going to buy our own four-wheel drive to do it.

TM: So you just used a boat.

GB: Just used the boat, yeah, go across.

TM: Then did you have a car on the other side of the Park somewhere? How did that...?

GB: Yeah, we just left a car on that side for when we got there. We had the house there, so we could go there if we needed to. It was a good area. The 60s, there were some racial riots going on in New York at the time. I can remember some fights. I got beat up once. It happens, you know. That was just kinda the way the late 60s were basically there. Anyway, left New York and Dad was assigned to the Interior Building in Washington.

TM: So he was chief ranger at Fire Island, and then he's going to go to D.C. where they don't really need chief rangers. What's he going to do?

GB: He was again a special-projects guy. Some changes to national parks. They were planning new national parks at that time, which Dad got involved in later.

TM: This was, this was... let me work out the math here. Yeah, this is going to be the late 60s, early 70s when big park expansion and people were getting assigned to new parks left, right and center. And with their limited training there was a ladder to climb.

GB: Yeah. I remember there was a guy named Hank Schmidt who was high up in the Park Service, right below the Secretary of the Interior. For some reason, he and my dad became friends somewhere early on, whether it was in the Yellowstone days or what, I don't know. I can remember going to the Schmidt's house and visiting them. He was like Uncle Hank, that kind of relationship. And so Dad had somebody there that was kinda guiding him through his career a

little bit to what he was going to do in the future. I said Interior Building. Washington was kinda cool. Dad found this little rinky-dink house on 40 acres right outside the beltway.

TM: Wow!

GB: Yeah. You'd climb the hill and there was the beltway. We had three sets of Civil War trenches on it. We used to go out there, dig up musket balls and stuff on it. A little artesian well down at the bottom that pumped our water up to the house. We had ponds and stuff and a creek. It was a very cool place to be. How Dad found that, I don't know. I don't think we could have lived in suburbia. It was a neat place to be. I went to Woodburn Elementary School and then Luther Jackson Intermediate School seventh grade. And that was a huge school. I mean, thousands of kids in one grade. And then when we left there and I went to Grand Canyon, there were 22 students in our class, so that was a bit of a shock.

TM: So it would have been a shock going in and a shock coming out, meaning from Fire Island...

GB: New York was pretty big, too, though. In the Everglades, we went to Homestead Elementary School. We were bused there. So, I'd been in big schools. That wasn't...Grand Canyon...

TM: A thousand kids a class, that's like way big.

GB: Yeah, yeah, and that was not unusual. Each one's a little different. Florida had Puerto Ricans. New York had blacks, and...

TM: What's it like growing up in D.C. as a kid? I mean, did you get into the museums? I mean, did you get into some of the stuff that was happening there, or...?

GB: We did. You know, Dad was more... They didn't want to drive, so he took the bus every day so it wasn't like we could tag along and play. We were too young anyway to be let loose in D.C. And again, it was still late 60s and there was riots going on. I can remember one time the buses were shut down and Mom had to go pick him up. She loaded all the kids in. There were riots going on and Mom put people on the hood of the car. Yeah, she was not stopping. They were burning cars and stuff. She was going to the Interior Building to get her husband and she was going home, and that was it. And all of us poor kids packed in the back of the station wagon. But that's the way it was. We did get to do some very cool things. I was row 2 when Nixon gave the lighting of the Christmas tree speech one time. That was very cool. Went to the White House during Christmas when it was all decked out. Never got any real private tours or anything, but did the Smithsonian and all the monuments, we did that one time or another. For me, it was... I was kind of oblivious to what was going on there. My brother and sister...

TM: But what a great place to be oblivious.

GB: Yeah, you're just looking at everything around. I'd like to go back and see it today. I've got a cousin that I just met with last week who actually lives there right now. We're planning a trip back next year and she's going to play tour guide and show us around. But as a little kid, yeah, I mean, our field trips were to Jamestown and Williamsburg. That's what we did for school trips.

TM: And you learn about the Civil War...

GB: Yeah.

TM: ...and maybe a little bit about politics, and so, yeah.

GB: Yeah. Got to watch the Senate a couple of times. Going in and actually sit upstairs and watch the House of Representatives and Senators do what they do. Up in the upper decks they let you watch that anytime you want.

TM: That's right, yeah.

GB: We got to do some cool things. Never got to meet the President, but you know, that was Nixon back then.

TM: So again, for your father, now in Washington WASO. W-A-S-O, is that right, is the Washington office abbreviation for the Park Service there in Washington, D.C.? He's there for four years sort of as a...

GB: Two years.

TM: Two years?

GB: Two years in Washington, D.C., that was it, yeah.

TM: Okay, as a special projects kind of guy.

GB: Yeah, yeah. Writing.

TM: Must have been seeing how the Director of the Park Service handles, you know, sort of in that loop there.

GB: Yeah, I knew he worked a lot on environmental impact studies and things like that. The finals that would come back after all the studies were done, he would do the official... I don't know if Congress had to approve them or who had to approve all of those.

TM: Internal review, sure.

GB: Yeah, and he would get the final papers done that they were based on. Looking at all the different information that had come in and applying what he felt was pertinent. I think he was doing a lot of that for a lot of different national parks. Not just places he'd been to. They find a guy that does things and gets them done right and gets them done quick, I guess, and that's the way it worked.

TM: Did he want to get out of D.C.? I mean, you were there only two years I'm like...

GB: He was not a fan of the political side of things, so I wouldn't see him thinking of any kind of a continuing career there. He really never had any aspirations to really move up the chain. Things were forced upon him. I know he turned down a superintendency. He didn't want it, didn't want

the headaches that came with it. He was more of an operations kind of guy. Kinda felt the chief ranger *was* that guy. No true political ties, it's just, okay, here's the job, we got to get it done, how do we do it? He was more that kinda guy. Politics did not interest him, just the restraints that came with it, I think, more than anything. Back in the day when logic ruled how you got a job done was more important than whether it was politically correct or not. I think that was more his way of handling things, was that officially the rules and would it get you in trouble if somebody found out? It could be, but this is the way we're going to get it done. Back up to Yosemite, I remember a bear dying in the river there. The rivers not that deep, it's only a couple feet. It's just dead out there so Dad's thing was, four sticks of TNT ought to deal with it. [Laughing] He went out there and stuck it in there and blew that sucker to smithereens. There was bear parts all over the place.

TM: Nobody noticed. It didn't smell good, but no one knew why.

GB: Yeah! Got rid of the problem, it was done. You try doing that today, you just ended your career. But that's the way, in the day, that they dealt with things. Back in those days rangers didn't carry guns. There was no such thing as troop law enforcement. It was negotiated settlement, and then it's strong arm after that. You get two rangers and six maintenance guys and you deal with the problem if you needed one.

TM: Which makes me think of the Yosemite riots, but I digress. So you're in D.C., it's been a couple years, and then your father...was that when he made the decision to go back? You as a family made the decision to move on. How did that work?

GB: For whatever reason, I don't know why the reason to move was. I know Dad came home with offers. "Where do we want to go?" There was some new office opening in Chicago that they had talked about. There was also superintendency of Virgin Islands was open that he could take and then there was chief ranger at Grand Canyon.

TM: What year was this, roughly?

GB: That would have been '72. Yeah, early '72. So anyway, we all had our own opinions. Mom's vote counted the most. [laughing]

TM: As you mentioned earlier, this got her a lot closer back to her family.

GB: Right. And she was pushing for Sequoia or Yosemite again. She wanted to be that close. Grand Canyon was still kind of a compromise. I know Dad had to buy her for an organ for that when we got there. That was part of the settlement, that Mom got an organ because she loved to play the organ and piano. Yeah, we had never had one, so Dad bought her an organ for going to Grand Canyon.

TM: Wow. So, in '72 Merle Stitt would have been superintendent.

GB: I believe I believe it was Bob Lovgren was superintendent.

TM: Oh yeah, I forgot about Lovgren. Oh my heavens.

GB: Yeah, yeah. Then Merle would have been after him. You know, the chain of events. I only remember Bob Lovgren because Susan and Sally were in my class, his daughters, and he had an older daughter that was in my brothers and sisters class.

TM: And that's L-O-V-E-G-R-E-N, Lovegren.

GB: Yeah, I believe so.

TM: Okay. So, here you are, you come from a graduating class of a thousand to Grand Canyon, where the entire school is probably 70 kids, maybe 60.

GB: In high school, yeah. I was eighth grade and I think we were about 22/24, something like that.

TM: And the high school would have just been built? I mean, when did that happen? Because it was only up to eighth grade and then you had to go to either Williams or Flagstaff or the Wasatch up in Salt Lake. A lot of people went up there. 'Cause there wasn't a high school at the South Rim. When you got there in '72, there was.

GB: I think it had been there for a little while 'cause I know they'd had a good basketball team that went to state before I was there. That had to be... Hugh Shevlin is one name that comes to mind. The Hugh Shevlin Award. He was killed in Vietnam, one of the students from Grand Canyon High. My brother won that award. I was nominated for it once. That was back in the 60s, so the high school was there then, but it was probably like '68 would be my best guess is when the high school was built.

TM: Okay, something like that.

GB: You know, it had been around a little while. And we got there in '72.

TM: So again, you were born in '59?

GB: '58.

TM: '58. And so this is '72, so I'm working out the math. You're 14ish, or 14 years old?

GB: Yeah, 12, 11 actually. Eleven when I got there. Yeah.

TM: Right. What are some of your early memories of coming to Grand Canyon in the early 70s?

GB: Well, it was a little cliquey of a community, but was still a small town, is what it was, really. We all knew each other. First day I met the neighbors from around the street, a kid that was in the same class. I remember riding down by the Park Service mule barns on my bicycle and he was on the side of the road and he threw a snake out in the road...

TM: [Laughing]

GB: ...and I wiped out, went off. Snakes to me were no big thing after the Everglades. I came up, "COOL!" and picked it up and..."Oh, I guess he's cool." That's how I got in with the group right off the bat, that I'm not going to be chicken about anything. And they'd been there for years. This is Jim Horning is who I'm speaking of. His dad ran the sewage treatment plant, Charlie Horning, back in the day. But all of us were all very cliquey, very, uh, just a small town community, is what it was. You had to be because, again, you don't make friends with the tourists. Policy was kind of you leave the tourists alone. You don't ever really interact with them. You don't harass them in any way, shape, or form. The reason why we're here and we have jobs is to make sure these people have a good experience. My dad was always big on that. That, you know, never get in trouble. If you get in trouble, fine, but don't get in trouble involving a tourist! [Laughing] It's the way, it's one thing. Dad's policy was if you got caught, they were to push it to the full extent of the law, whatever any of his kids did. Luckily I don't think the rangers quite believed that [Laughing] 'cause there was plenty of opportunity. We got in trouble but it was never destructive trouble.

TM: Like what?

GB: We never damaged anything. There was a little beer drinking that went on. Drugs had not swept the neighborhood and not happened in my day back then. That was nonexistent back then. Just wasn't a lot to do. They had the rec center for locals, for kids at the time. Dime pinball machines and stuff. That eventually became an employee pub for Fred Harvey and it was taken away from the kids. Whether that correlates to kids starting to get in trouble because they just didn't have anything to do anymore. If you weren't involved in sports in the high school level, you were out of luck. There was just nothing to do at the Grand Canyon. You could be a hiker, which I was. I was big into hiking, spent probably 10 percent of my life inside the Canyon. That's where I'd go during the day on weekends when I wasn't working. Luckily, back in the day, Babbitt Brothers was real good about giving kids jobs. Whether they needed the employee or not, you could have a job, just to keep you out of trouble. My first boss was Harry Cobasky.

TM: K-A-B-O-S-K-I?

GB: I think it's with a C. C-O-B-A-S-K-Y or K-I. And then later Fred Diumentti took over up there. I got my first job when I was 11 years old, and it's technically illegal to work when you're 11, so they held my time for a month and a half. I got my first paycheck, was \$100! Minimum wage was a buck-sixty an hour.

TM: Wow! That's big money for a kid back in the 70s! Gee whiz!

GB: Yeah, it was. You know what I spent it on? I went and bought a calculator that added, subtracted, multiplied and divided. That was \$100 for that one calculator.

TM: Wow. That was a big deal.

GB: Yeah, it was new technology...[Laughing]...back then. So blew 100 bucks on that for almost two months of work.

TM: So who else was in your class in school?

GB: Jim Horning, I mentioned. Joe Thompson, his dad was law enforcement. Beth Fields, who...his...Jack Fields was law enforcement, also. Jill Shaw, whose father was an assistant superintendent. Initially, there were the Lovegren girls, Susan and Sally, the superintendent's daughters. Oh...Jerald Torivio, Larry Torivio, their mom worked for Babbitt's in the deli. Had a few people that would just come for a year or so that, you know, you don't really keep track of. Ed Romano. Muir Madison was in our class, he was Park Service, I think his dad was interp. I'm probably missing several, but uh...

TM: Jerry Dickey?

GB: Don't know that name.

TM: Okay, he's probably older than you. Was Bud Dunagan still around?

GB: No.

TM: No, okay. Older, must have left then.

GB: There was Josephine Bustillos. Her dad ran the gas station out in Tusayan. Remember her.

TM: Josey...yeah.

GB: Josey...yeah. Later on there was other people come and go. Most of the...

TM: Ann Wren?

GB: I went to school with Frank Rotter. Frankie, Frank Jr. Ann was two years behind us. Frankie and I are very good friends to this day. He's my best man at my wedding and I was best man at both of his weddings.

TM: Cool.

GB: We're still pretty tight.

TM: So a small group of kids...

GB: Mainly we worked. I mean, we all had jobs at the store. Some had other jobs, but most worked at the store, actually. It was kind of a babysitting job for them, too, but we did a good job. Harry was great to learn. He was a former marine so he taught you how to be a good employee and the orneriness was there if he needed it. But rarely did he ever. Then I think Fred Diument, when he came in, he was just a good guy all around. Just a good guy to work for. You wanted to please him.

TM: D-I...

GB: D-I-U-M-E-N-T-I.

TM: Yeah, Diument, yeah. How did your mom handle the transition coming from Washington? Closer to her family, but now sort of back in the isolated...

GB: A little more boonyish. How to word it... We were told when we went to Grand Canyon that Dad was being sent there to fix some problems, mainly personnel problems. Dad warned us that could be we may not be very well liked. Because his orders were to fix the problems or end careers. How to elaborate on that, I don't know specifics, but he mentioned once that Grand Canyon was known as the Peyton Place of the West. Question of who's sleeping with whose wife and it just was not going to be tolerated and to square things up, either get them on the straight and narrow or send them elsewhere. I don't think Mom ever had a real good sociable life with other Park Service wives, but Fred Harvey is another matter. Like I'd mentioned before, it was much more tight community. That there wasn't any of 'them and us'. They would come to parties from Fred Harvey at our house. You'd get a case of wine and a ham at Thanksgiving. That would not be tolerated today. Whether they were... I don't think they were buying favoritism in any way, shape or form 'cause those decisions aren't made at this level. Concessions were made in the Washington level. But people would come to each other's houses and stuff and socialize. Bridge club and all that, where that over time just kind of went away. That was kind of in the mid-70s that it became more of a 'them and us', that Park Service didn't socialize with the concessionaires so much. My parents best friends were the Verkamps until the Verkamps were all gone. Those were the people they hung out with. More old history. Dad had history up at Yellowstone with, I think, the Curry family up there? That was way back in the 40s and 50s. They've lost their concession. They're gone, too, now. Another Delaware North buyout. But those days were the way it was, and that's not the way it is anymore, that I know of anyway.

TM: Bob Lovegren did not spend a huge amount of time at Grand Canyon.

GB: No.

TM: A number of superintendents came and went. They were there for a year or two at the most and then moved out.

GB: Merle Stitt. There was Dick Marks, I remember up there.

TM: So Merle was there for most of the 70s, and then Dick came in for most of the 80s. What do you remember about Stitt and your father working for Stitt at all?

GB: Seemed to get along fine. That seemed to be no problem there. Best I can say was he may have had an understanding that my dad had instructions that came from Washington. In some instances he was my dad's boss, in other instances he wasn't. I imagine that's a tough position to be in.

TM: Were more peers, more equals.

GB: Just on who you're answering to. Both of them were answering to Washington in certain ways, fixing certain problems. And then dealing with the day-to-day operations of the Park are another matter. Back in the day, I mean, Grand Canyon, North, South, Inner Canyon was chief rangers' job. Plus they got involved in Marble Canyon and had some say in Lake Powell and even a little say down in Lake Mead on what was going on.

TM: Yeah. Grand Canyon National Monument, John Riffey's Toroweap site until 1975, so everybody was kind of all...

GB: Yeah, but ultimately, it all came back to Grand Canyon Village. I know Dad wanted that broken up a little bit. That's why they have different North Rim District rangers, South, Inner Canyon rangers or district rangers. You still have the ultimate superintendent, it's the superintendent, but a little bit more direct...

TM: Local, on the spot.

GB: Yeah, being able to keep an eye on things a little bit better. And then the idea of trying to supervise Lake Powell and Marble Canyon was just a joke to him. They have two different worlds' of issues to deal with. Some of them do blend over. Marble Canyon obviously blends into Grand Canyon. Certain policies can handle both but other things are specific to your problem. You got to figure out what to deal with it with your policy.

TM: I'm trying to remember some of the other people that worked in the Park at the time. Certainly Steve Martin was there. And George Von Der Lippe. Trying to remember some of the other people that were there.

GB: Steve was a boatman, right?

TM: Right.

GB: And his wife was a teacher at the school.

TM: That's right.

GB: He took us down on... Our senior trip was a river trip down the Grand Canyon that the Park Service did for us.

TM: What year was that?

GB: '76.

TM: Okay.

GB: Yep, 1976. So, we had to split it up into two segments, upper river and lower river, 'cause 24 people graduated that year, so they split. I was lower river mainly because that's where the majority of my friends were going. Unfortunately, my girlfriend ended up upper river, and that was the last time we were girlfriend and boyfriend! [Laughing] That put an end of that 'cause I switched to lower river to be with my buddies. Yeah, that was, I guess, fairly unusual that the Park Service allowed such a thing.

TM: What do you remember about that? Who were the boatmen? What kind of boats did you have?

GB: It was...Steve was the boatman.

TM: Okay, so just one motorboat?

GB: Yeah, just the one boat.

TM: What it a snout or was it a larger boat?

GB: It was a larger boat. It was a big boat. Officially the trip was we were digging up camel grass on the beaches to clean that up. I guess that was considered an invasive species. We were also doing a study on... Up until that point they'd been burying their human waste on the beaches down there. So we got to dig up all the places they had marked from previous years. That's where we discovered that the microorganisms were actually growing and getting bigger and bigger. The beaches were pretty much a cesspool from all the waste that had been built there over the year. It was right after that they initiated the 'you haul it out' policy. No more burying it anywhere. So that was part of that. When we got down to lower river, it got more into the mule dung that was all over the place.

TM: The burros.

GB: The whole western end of the Canyon. Yeah, the burros had just destroyed plant vegetation. You could see a color difference down there. Nothing was green in the western end of the Canyon. There was burro dung on every beach everywhere. First thing you did was clear the beaches of dung, it was so bad. That actually was one of my father's projects were to get the burros out of the Grand Canyon that he had pre-setup. They had tried in the past and it hadn't worked so well with guys with machine guns hanging out of helicopters and that kind of stuff. They needed to find a kinder and gentler way. They hired the wranglers to go down there and catch them and corral them and then sling them all out of there and find homes for them through some adoption agencies. That was one of my dad's plans actually. He wasn't there to see it end because it hadn't really initiated when he left in '76.

TM: Did your dad talk at all about the cleanup of the TWA v. United that happened in the 70s under Stitt? There was a cleanup of the airplane wreckage.

GB: Of the airplane? No, not too much. I can remember as a kid seeing... you could still see reflections and stuff of metal pieces down there and you can spot it. I always kind of wanted to go over, but that was quite the major hike to get there, so couldn't quite justify that as a day trip that my mom would overlook.

TM: Let's go back to your river trip for a minute...senior class. Any pictures from that, senior pictures?

GB: I glanced around through some slides and I don't have anything here. I have one at the cabin of us loading the boat, everybody getting on. It's everybody but me, 'cause everybody was on the boat except for me taking the picture.

TM: I'd love to see that.

GB: Not that big a deal. It was a great trip. We had a good time and a couple of things that weren't so great. I remember cutting other commercial tours' beer bags and then picking up beers as they floated down the Colorado River. [Laughing] Every time we did a rapid we were allowed to have a beer split between the group.

TM: You were clever kids.

GB: [Laughing.] Yeah! We'd just slice their little burlap sacks and there'd be beer floating down the Colorado. That was a great time. I remember wiping out in Lava. We lost the engine in Lava. Steve Martin? His wife was running the boat, which was probably a no-no. She was a schoolteacher with us. I'm trying to think. Bobbi Roland was on that trip. She was a school counselor, was one of our chaperones. Then our football coach, I can't recall his name, was there. It was a great time. That was once in a lifetime. I remember they almost canceled it two weeks before because some senator wanted to go down the river. The next boat that was available for him was our trip and they were just going to cancel us. We all ended up in the superintendent's office, all 24 of us kids standing in there.

TM: In Merle Stitt's office.

GB: Yeah.

TM: And what did Merle say?

GB: He said, "Sometimes the real world hits ya, but let me see what I can do." He did something 'cause we got to go on our trip. I don't know whether he told whatever senator it was that wanted to go no, that we don't have anybody available, or...

TM: Or he would have said, "Senator it's either you or the 24 kids in my graduating class. What do you prefer?"

GB: Yeah, who knows how it was worded.

TM: Who knows? Interesting.

GB: That was a gray area for me. I'm standing in the back of the group. With my dad being chief ranger, I didn't want...yeah...that was pretty much Beth Fields was the vocal one there, kind of phrasing it up. What do you do two weeks before graduation? It's not like you can plan another trip, you know. We had to pay fees to the Park Service, the launch fee. It wasn't a free trip, we paid. Was it what the trip would have cost? No.

TM: So, this was in '76 and you had been to the Park since '72, so did that run from Phantom...I'm assuming you guys went to Diamond or out to the lake.

GB: We went to Diamond. Yeah, we got out at Diamond.

TM: What did that do for you as far as helping you understand a little more of the Canyon? My running assumption is you were hiking in the Canyon, but on days off that kind of stuff...mostly in the core or, say, from Bass over to Tanner, or something like that.

GB: Right.

TM: Did that help you kind of understand a little more that the place was a little bigger than you thought?

GB: Yeah, a lot bigger. I mean, at that time I'd never flown major flights. The flight to Vegas you see so much more of it and get a little bit more idea how massive it is. To us, it was just a big ditch. A run to the North Rim was nothing. We'd do that all the time, run over to the North Rim, come back the next day. Jack Fields, a buddy of mine, his dad was law enforcement on the North Rim during the summer. So we'd book over and spend the night at their house and then book back the next day 'cause we had to be to work the next day. So, it was...that was commonplace.

TM: And 10 hours across, something like that?

GB: Yeah, even less sometimes. You just run it most of the way, take a couple of bottles of water and go. Stop and see Bruce Aiken on the way and refill. See if the daughters were there, visit with them for a little while and then head on up. That was just...that was normal place for us to be in the Canyon. Day trips to Phantom were all the time. We'd just run down for the day, swim for a few minutes in the river, and turn around and go back up. That's just way of life. It was our backyard, basically. Sometimes you get in a little trouble, but it's 'cause we're always running and nobody else...they're all hiking and you're winging by people and scaring them.

TM: What else do you remember about some of the other people that you were either going to school with or working with there?

GB: Oh, not too much. The Babbitt crew, the younger ones were all us locals, but they had their own permanent crew that been with the Babbitt family usually forever. The Babbitt's to us were...they were great people. Fred Dimini specifically. He'd more than once said the number one thing here is the employee, number two is the visitors' experience, and somewhere three or four we're going to figure out to make a profit somewhere down there. And that was the way it was set up. Really it was the visitor experience was number one. Go beyond, do whatever you needed to do to help them out. When I ran the camping division years later, that's kinda the way we did things. Don't mean to criticize current, but it's not that way anymore. I prided myself on if you brought me a stove and it was broken, I'm going to fix your stove for you. The new theory seems to be "Let me sell you a new stove."

TM: Exactly.

GB: I had so many parts and pieces, I always called it job security because I was the only one knew where all the crap was.

TM: So after you graduated in '76, did you stay in the Park? What did you do then?

GB: I left. I went to NAU for one year. I thought I was going to go into the hotel business. I majored in hotel/motel management. Did that for a year. Didn't really care for it much at all, so I ended up joining the Navy, went into the Navy. That was more of a joke. My brother is a

submariner in the Navy, 30 years. So I went in anti-submarine warfare, just as more of a “alright, you do that. I’m gonna do this.”

TM: What do you do...I’m just curious...what do you do on submarines for 30 years?

GB: Uhhh...it’s still classified.

TM: Oh my gosh. Okay. All right.

GB: Several presidential citations and he won’t even... I know several of them just from figuring it out, but yeah.

TM: My research on Marston and his days as submarine commander at the very end of World War I, into the 1920s then...talk about a risky business.

GB: Yeah, yeah. He was on the U.S.S. Halibut, which had no weapons. It had self-destruct, that was it. That’s all it had and that’s what he spent quite a while on. So one of the first Trident missile submarines, but there was no missile on it. He did quite a bit on that.

TM: So, how long were you in the Navy?

GB: I didn’t last very long because I ended up passing out during a formation one time. I had a cut on my arm and I was bleeding. For some reason I passed out. Because of that, they would not flight qualify me, which meant basically they could do anything they wanted to with me. I had a contract that said what I could do. I got hold of my brother real quick, and he said, “Get out, ‘cause you will not enjoy the Navy without a contract. You’re gonna get the worst of the worst jobs.” So I just said, well, I’m done. I want to leave. Anyway, got out. My folks then had retired and moved up to Santa Cruz.

TM: When did your father retire?

GB: ’76. Two days after I graduated from high school, he was packing the truck.

TM: Were you the youngest of your family?

GB: Last. Yeah, last of five.

TM: Okay. So, in a way, he really wanted to see you get through high school.

GB: Yeah. There was other things going on. The Park had become more and more political and he just had a bad taste in that. Like I said, he’d told me before the policies of Park Service were written in stone years ago and they shouldn’t change every time the linen changes in the White House. That was his big pet peeve that we have a plan, let’s stick with the plan. You fine-tune it for... Times change but you don’t change master plans. And that was a lot of his... He just couldn’t do things. I think a lot of it was the old good-old-boy way of doing things were also gone. Things were more political. You got approval from Washington for anything in those days. People he knew in Washington were gone. They had retired out. It was just easier to get out. The rules were also changing on retirement some. My dad never took vacations hardly ever. I

guess back in the day, you banked all that. Never took sick pay, never anything and they paid him out on that. He literally said he took almost a two-year salary to walk out the door. He said I can work for two more years... Then they were changing those rules where they couldn't do that anymore, so it was take it now or not.

TM: Use it or lose it, essentially.

GB: Yeah, so it was smarter for him just to retire, say forget it. He bought a place in Santa Cruz right on the beach and we had the cabin in the Sierras, so they would summer in Kings Canyon and winter on the beach. Dad got a little bored so he got involved with a couple of groups that actually sued the Park Service. He was involved in benefits mainly for Park employees that he felt were not fair.

TM: Meaning employees were not getting their full benefits on retirement or...?

GB: Correct. For say a firefighter, you have your base salary, then you have hazardous pay. Well, your retirement never was based on any of the hazardous pay. It was only on the base salary and he felt that should be an average of everything. That was one. Another one of his pet peeves was the...uh...continuing to hire summer help on a 10-month appointment and just repeatedly, year after year after year, never giving them permanent status and benefits.

TM: So it was seasonal...kinda seasonal ranger position with no possibility into a permanent...

GB: Right. He was involved in a lawsuit there to make them put a cap on that. That you could only do it a certain number of times and then you either had to offer them permanent status or tell 'em no and make them look elsewhere, which some people didn't like. They like that come work for nine or 10 months and take three months off. Dad understood that. He said I feel like I'm their father sometimes, but you get to be 60 years old, you got no medical, you got no retirement, and where are you? So he said, "I need to force the issue and at least make you change your job, go somewhere else to a different position or something."

TM: Interesting.

GB: That was one of his suits that he was involved in, but I think they still found a way around it somehow. I think the benefits part, the retirement pay, is better than it was initially. At least for the guys who had to do hazardous stuff. The guys hanging off the helicopters doing rescues and firefighters and even the law enforcement level so that their retirements were a little bit better than they were initially anyway.

TM: To the extent that you're willing, can you tell me some about some of the more difficult issues that your father dealt with when he was there at Grand Canyon as far as chief ranger, as far as management issues, et cetera?

GB: Well, not too much there. I know the burros was a big deal. That was a public...because of the *Brightly of the Grand Canyon* book, you could do no...there was no win there at all. I can actually tell you a story when I was going to NAU and had a girl come into an English class and get up and do a big spiel. She had a petition to save Brightly of the Grand Canyon and gave this big, old spiel. And then "any questions?" I raised my hand and I said, "Well, let me tell you first

off, my dad's the ranger who's removing Brighty from the Grand Canyon. My second...have you ever been in the Grand Canyon? Have you ever seen the mess they are creating and the damage they're doing to the vegetation? And on top of that, that's a Disney show. Brighty's not from the Grand Canyon! You know, that was just a show." I think that was probably one of his worst, just because it was so politically, you know, such a political hotspot nationwide.

TM: A public relations mess.

GB: And there was a "no-win" to it. The image of the Park Service was a pretty good image, yet suddenly now they had this thing they're the bad guy, which is not what they were after. But they had a major problem to deal with. Beyond that, they didn't do a lot of major change. There was some fine-tuning in personnel and some people went and came and went. Dad located a few specialists that he knew from other places and brought them in to do certain things, you know, certain positions. That was kinda his bringing along somebody like he was brought along in the Park Service. He felt he could trust them, he knew them, knew they'd do a good job. Okay, this is your new job. You're going to deal with this. And whether the good-old-boy thing is good or not, who knows? But if you're hearts good in it, I think it's alright, as long as that person you're bringing in is good for the job. That's the key.

TM: And I think there's a lot of that today in the Park Service is, you know, people that you know... If you can pull together a team of people you know you work well with and do that.

GB: Right, right.

TM: But you can't, you don't...

GB: The early 70s was kind of the start of the whole overflights in the Grand Canyon. They were still trying to figure that out, what was good, what was bad. How to control it, keep it from going crazy. The whole boating permit system was in an uproar back then, who should get permits. A lot of that was who you knew, trying to make that fair. I understand it better now, but it took 'em a lot of years to get there. You probably know better than I do on the current system. Personnel... The Canyon just hadn't hit that big growth. I don't know what visitation was in the 70s. Maybe in the under two million range.

TM: It was a million in 1955. '56, I'm sorry. And from there to the five million resting heart rate going to six million when they're very energetic today. I would assume two million, two to three million actually in the 70s.

GB: Yeah, not near the five that they're dealing with now and how to plan for that is just... I don't think there was a win situation there either. People don't like to leave their cars so the whole idea of the tram, you know, my dad brought in the shuttle buses. Originally they were supposed to be the same as Yosemite had with the double-deckers. That's what we were supposed to get. At the last minute he vetoed that because the weather was just too bad so much of the year that what was the second deck for? He just saw people falling down and tumbling off of them. So he said, "No, we're not going to do that. We'll go with a single level." Then that was all initiated I think in '74 is when the shuttles actually started there and that was brand new then. Trying to get people to park their cars and get out and do things. But they

really hadn't locked anything down. You could still go anywhere you wanted in your car if you wanted to back then. That was a new project that he did.

You know, it's all plans. A lot of it is trial and error, unfortunately. I go to the Grand Canyon today and I don't even recognize the road system up there anymore. The whole development in the Mather area, just not quite sure about all of that. I like the old. My brother just passed through a few months ago, he remembers it from the 60s and 70s. It's not the same place anymore. It's totally different. Who knows what the answer is? Parking is what they need more than anything and get them out. Got a find a way to spread it out or something where people just don't come in a three month period. That was an old joke that it takes a special breed to work up there in the concessions area where you bust your butt for three or four months, you twiddle your thumbs for the rest of the year.

TM: And starve. If you're lucky, you can get a full 40-hour week in.

GB: Right.

TM: Cut way back on your hours and it's really difficult to get by.

GB: That's even worse today with bringing in foreigners to work and all that. That's something I've been following. It was one of my pet peeves when I left Delaware North finally in 2001. The corporate opinion of running a business was not near the same as the family opinion of running a business.

TM: So who was your boss in 2001 Del-North?

GB: Well, Fred Diument had quit. He walked out the door one day, said he had had enough. The only reason I was there originally was... I saw the writing on the wall, honestly, when Babbitt sold out to Delaware North and I was not intending to stay. Fred asked me to, so I did. I think Fred lasted less than two years. I was about three. I actually did not quit. I was fired. I was fired the day after 9/11 happened. Delaware North fired a thousand employees nationwide in one day.

TM: Because they knew that tourism was going to tank?

GB: Tourism was going to crash. In my case, I was already building a house here in Flagstaff. The writing was on the wall that I was leaving. My wife had moved down here, was living at a friend's house. She had taken a job and, but...

TM: So Dave Salazar was working in the meat shop for a long time. I'm trying to think of the name of the guy. It's a big guy.

GB: Mervin...Mervin Paulaquiva that was in the produce department.

TM: He was a very thin man, very petite guy, Mervin.

GB: No, that's Melvin.

TM: Melvin! Thank you.

GB: Melvin Johnnet.

TM: That's right. Johnnet.

GB: I believe, yeah. Melvin just passed away recently, just a year or so ago.

TM: And I'm trying to remember who else was the crew, the Babbitt's crew that was taken over by Del-North.

GB: Yeah. Well, Joy Torivio in the deli.

TM: Jim Stickler?

GB: Jim Stickler was there for a lot of years.

TM: S-T-I-C-K-L-E-R?

GB: Mm, hmm. Fern Farley was the ready-to-wear manager. She'd been there for a lot of years. She came over from Fred Harvey in the day, but had been there for years and years.

TM: Okay. But it did seem like there was a huge corporate shift in, as you mention, employees are first, the tourists are second. Somewhere third or fourth, we'll figure out how to make a buck. Instead of the buck comes first, then maybe the tourist, and then somewhere three or four down the line is the employee.

GB: Even beyond that sometimes. Employees, we were considered country bumpkins by corporate. That's the feeling we got, that we didn't know anything. The only reason we even got jobs was they needed us through the transition until they got their own people in there. Probably my biggest peeve is the big push recently for bringing Middle Eastern employees in to work for the summers and stuff. That's a huge push.

TM: The J-1 Visa, sure.

GB: Yeah. Well, 'cause they don't have to pay all the taxes and all that.

TM: Or benefits.

GB: Yeah, or benefits.

TM: Or any number of things. Sure.

GB: Initially we were bringing those people in and we were told to cut back our permanent employees hours. Then I got a memo one day to put pressure on this one employee who was bouncing checks to the company. I said, "Well, he's got a trailer payment. He's a car payment. He's got a couple of kids to feed. And you cut his hours to 20 hours a week. Yeah, he's bouncing checks, and yet you're giving all those hours to these foreigners who don't even speak English."

That was the final straw for me. My wife and I decided we need at least, one, we need to build equity in something. Let's look at building a house in Flagstaff. So we bought property down here and we were under construction that last year. And I said, my wife had moved down here. She got a job offer she couldn't refuse so she moved on down here.

TM: How did you guys meet?

GB: I went to college down in Tucson for a little while.

TM: University of Arizona?

GB: No, it was a private school. Tucson College of Business. My degree's in accounting, actually. We met in English class. The first date we went out on, I said, "I gotta tell you, I graduate I'm going back to the Grand Canyon. I'm outta here. I can't deal with this city life." And I did. When I graduated I headed up back to the Canyon and two weeks later she showed up in her Chevy Chevette. She had called Franz Rotter, Ann Rotter actually, and said, "I want to come up and see my boyfriend, and can I have a job?" Ann gave her a job out of the blue.

TM: Oh, my gosh! How cool is that?

GB: She worked at the Red Feather, lived in the dorm for a while.

TM: She know Rosie, Rosie Acosta?

GB: Rosie? Yeah. Rosita Acosta. Yeah. Rosita was actually in my class. Rosemary was her mother that worked there.

TM: Yeah. So Rosie Junior, Rosita.

GB: Yeah, Rosita was in my class and Rosemary worked at the Red Feather back then, back in the day when Rotter was running it and the whole... He was at the Squire, then he was at the Red Feather, and then somehow he owned part of the Squire.

TM: He went in with Halvorson and Seibold. S-E-I-B-O-L-D.

GB: Seibold. Yeah, and then to buy him out, they gave him property they had up behind the Red Feather and that's how he got the Quality Inn.

TM: Let's go back to your dad for a minute. Was your dad in the Legion?

GB: No. No.

TM: So he wasn't in the American Legion.

GB: No, he was Lion's Club. The war was not something he talked about, wanted to live/relive or anything.

TM: Right. Because it was a time certainly in the... I want to say 30s through the 50s, maybe into the early 60s, that the John Ivens Legion Post was a real hub of the community.

GB: Sure. Remember when Josie Lopez had a Mexican food restaurant in there.

TM: That's right.

GB: Yeah, that was the place to go and hang out. That was a cool place to go. You didn't have to be a veteran to be in there. Very laid back. They are here in Flagstaff. My son's a veteran in the Marine Corp, I go in the VFW all the time and hang out here. You don't have to be... As long as you know somebody.

TM: Yeah, that's right. No, I was just thinking did he participate in that.

GB: No, no, he didn't. He was just Lion's Club was all he did.

TM: And then Dan and Terry Ashley?

GB: Know the name but I don't know why.

TM: They were managing Verkamps for quite a while before the Verkamps let the contract go. Let the concession contract go.

GB: No. I knew Mike Verkamp very well and his son who was killed in a car accident. Those were the people I knew. Different names with different people, unfortunately. They get married and they're still around but they're a Verkamp or whatever. The tie between the Verkamp family and the Babbitt family is real tight by blood, a lot of marriages there from back in the day.

TM: Right. Right. We just had the hundredth anniversary of the National Park Service and in a couple of years we'll have the 100th anniversary of Grand Canyon National Park. Looking forward the next hundred years, what are your thoughts on Park management, on how the Park should handle continuing population increase in America, continued global population, continued demands on tourism and tourism visitation? Any thoughts on that...as an accountant?

GB: I would hate to see a reservation system, but there comes a point where saturation...nobody's having a good time. Either that or you expand the Grand Canyon Village area. There was talk of that years ago with putting a highway in down over to Supai and then down and join back to 40. That's a possibility. Reservations would just be not even fair. A few years ago I went to Yosemite, though, and I've got an interesting picture of going up to Yosemite Falls with me on top of a rock, and it's just a sea of heads going up that's 10 people wide and it just goes. It's something you would see in Manhattan on a busy day. Just a sea of heads. At what point is the experience lost for that. Luckily we get to see it in the off seasons, and that's why I don't go back. I've been back to the Grand Canyon four times in 15 years. It's just not what I remember it, and I don't care to see it the way it is. I prefer what's in my mind. I don't like to go back in any national park that I was at. Just, I don't like to see the change, to be honest with you. I understand things have to change, there are some variables. Kings Canyon doesn't change. It's always the same. Fourth of July weekend you can show up there and get a campsite with no reservation. Why can't that be the... I hate to even talk about Kings Canyon because we don't

want people to know about it. They're all going to Sequoia right next door! But they don't go to Kings.

What the answer is, I mean, you've got to expand it somehow one way or the other, whether... West is really the only way to go on it. You can't go east, done that. Give people more area to spread out into. The whole thing with Babbitt selling out and all the old family concessionaires... I think that was part of the depreciating asset law, basically, that caused all of that. When Congress took away what you owned and it became zero value, you forced "Well, I can sell it today while it's worth something or I can wait for eight days and it's worth nothing or in eight years." A family run operation instead of a corporation is such a better thing to deal with. One is, a family will listen to you if you tell them to do something. Corporation will just take you to court. Look what happened in Yosemite Valley with all the licensing of names and all that. That is just beyond me that the Park...I don't know the total intricacies of that...but even put up with it. You know, how can you license...? That's my national park, I own that! How did you license something I own? I would have given them the big finger and told them get out, see you in court and you can spend the money in court. Why the Park Service didn't stand up to them and then just turn around and renamed everything. That's stupid to me.

TM: My take on that is the concessionaires realized it was a loophole and they jumped in there. And the Park Service did take them to court but the laws were such that...and businesses are smart that way. They say the concessionaires don't look for...they look for the loopholes if they can find them.

GB: Well, in my opinion, I hope they committed national park suicide, though.

TM: Yes, unfortunately.

GB: In the future, when concessions come up for renewal, hopefully somebody in the Park Service has got a long memory. But I would love to see them go back to small operations again where somebody really cares, the way the Curry Company was. In all the national parks, they were always little family run operations. They don't need to be corporations. I just think in the long run it's just better across the board. You get responsiveness out of a family run operation. They're more willing to give because they are part of the community. Like the Babbitt's history since 1889 in this country. They're part of it.

TM: What are your thoughts on the development of the west end of Grand Canyon with the helicopters and the skywalk, and the east end of Grand Canyon with the proposed tramway?

GB: I can understand the skywalk. I've never been there, I've looked up at it from the river, but to me it's a scar on a natural thing that didn't need to be. But I can also understand it businesswise. They can now do a \$99 tour out of Las Vegas. Bus them out, do the little tour, and take them back. Where it's an overnight, it's hundreds of dollars to come from Vegas to the Village and a lot of people can't afford that. That market was pretty much the Japanese only, 80 percent of it probably. So it opened that door. Unfortunately, there's very little control there. They're going to do what they want. That little section of land going out to the Bass trailhead, Pasture Wash area that they gave, and now they sit out there and collect \$20 to drive 100 yards across. Whose idea was that? What did they need that for in the first place? It didn't make sense. Back in my day, the Park boundary of Supai was way down. It wasn't where it's at now.

Not to criticize, I have some very good friends that are Supai's, but that hasn't been managed very well to the ultimate goal of the Park Service to maintain it and preserve it. It's just become a moneymaking thing there. It's fine if you want to charge to go walk through the res, fine. If you're going to do the campgrounds, then empty the toilets out once in a while. Spend the money back. Don't just pocket it all. I just question why that happened in the first place. Treated Native Americans a little badly in the past. My wife's Cherokee, so I understand that. I get it. But you can't make it all up at one time. That's not... It's still the people's national parks.

TM: Well, it was interesting because we're kinda thinking ahead a hundred years. You were talking about maybe we can build out a little more and then suddenly occurred to me Grand Canyon West is a build out. It's closer to Vegas. It's mining Vegas. Probably decreases some of the visitation at the South Rim, for better or for worse, and you can argue that both ways. But again as the population goes up and up, at what point are we paving Paradise to build a parking lot, kind of question?

GB: In the same philosophy, you could improve the North Rim facilities to accept year-round visitation if you wanted to, but to me, that's the get-away place that is relatively unknown. It's a little tougher to get there. You've got to put some effort into it. So I kind of like it the way it is. But sacrifice one for the sake of the other, or you just kind of balance it out? The proposed development in the eastern end of the Canyon with the tram and all that, that to me is almost sacrilegious. The destruction that will be incurred to the Park itself. You've got to put the pads in and all the stuff that you've got to do. They did that stuff years ago, okay, and now it's part of it, but we should know better than to do that now. Especially that. I'll go along with that's a sacred area out there. For it to be right down from the salt mines, that's just way too close. Just doesn't make sense. Goes back to the days of them wanting to put a hotel in the cliff face there just west of the village area, when the Orphan mine wanted to do that. Again, my dad was involved in all that negotiations when they finally got rid of them. I've actually been down the elevator in the Orphan Mine down there a ways. I've never gone all the way to the bottom where it comes out. I understand it does, but not anymore. I think they blew it up. I think they dropped some TNT down there.

TM: You can certainly go in the glory hole, but I think a lot of the material in the shaft, something's, there's contam...

GB: Messed up in there.

TM: Yeah.

GB: I think those were just idle threats back in the day.

TM: When uranium trucks were hauling uranium out of the Park, that was a very contentious issue in the 1970s. Was your dad...had your dad left by then?

GB: He left in '76. I don't recall them hauling any ore back then, not while we were there.

TM: Okay. I'm trying to remember when that was, but that was very contentious. Well, I'm really sorry because I would have loved to sit down and chat with your dad.

GB: Yeah, a lot of tidbits. Now the current uranium, they're talking about the mining out there, I just don't get that. The demand isn't that great that. They've got it elsewhere. It's not like they need to be there. I don't know what they're going to do with it. I know the Navajos didn't want it hauled across the reservation.

TM: Exactly.

GB: So how are you going to get it up to Blanding for processing then? That means driving it down here through Flagstaff and then looping back up and around and way up and over. I don't know how that's financially feasible.

TM: Do you remember the names of any of the deputy rangers that worked under your father?

GB: Park rangers? Well, there was Jack Fields, Ernie Kunzel was law enforcement and he was one heck of a medic.

TM: Is he still alive?

GB: I believe he is. My sister's in communication with him. I think he's in Utah somewhere.

TM: Can you please connect us up? I'd love to talk to him.

GB: Ernie? We'll see. We'll see if my sister's still talking to him. They dated at one time. And then Joe Thompson, his dad was a senior ranger, one of the head rangers. Lloyd Hoener, I think he was chief of law enforcement. He lived up on Park Circle. His sons Kirby and Stan went to school with us.

TM: Lloyd still alive?

GB: Wouldn't surprise me, he's such a healthy... He was always running, always running. I know I saw him like two years ago.

TM: Are you in contact with his kids?

GB: No, I'm not. I know one of 'em's in the FBI and the others back east somewhere.

TM: Did you see Lloyd here in town? Does he live in town?

GB: He might be somewhere around, maybe like Payson or something. I don't know what I saw him for, but...

TM: H-O-E-R-N-E-R?

GB: Yeah, I believe so. H-O-R-N-E-R, maybe. [Note from transcriptionist: Obit for Lloyd Hoener in AZ Daily Sun, March 16, 2012, shows H-O-E-N-E-R] Should have brought my yearbook from high school, who were there. A lot of the other rangers, I don't remember too much. Again, back in the day, the rangers were all pretty much there all the time. Then Grand Canyon became the place where rookie rangers came to after law enforcement school. That was their first... They

would come there, Yosemite or maybe Yellowstone for getting their feet wet, which could be a gray area. Some of them were a little too gung ho, you know. Luckily, the old timers would tone them back just a bit.

TM: South Rim road patrol.

GB: Yeah. I remember, I think it was Stitt getting a ticket one time for... and it was a stupid ticket by some rookie ranger. That came down to my dad and my dad passed that down to the senior road patrol guy. Tickets are tickets, but stupid tickets will not be tolerated. Stitt accepted the ticket, didn't tell him who he was, but things changed after that. You don't have to prove anything to keep your job. You got a job, we're not on a status system or quota system for tickets. For a long time, it was leave the locals alone, do the tourists. And then it kind of switched. Leave the tourists alone, they're just stupid sometimes and they make mistakes. Leave them alone, but come down hard on the locals. There was a lot of favoritism there, though. Fred Harvey employees were really jumped on hard a lot. Babbitt employees were kind of in a gray area. Everybody liked to eat in the deli and they had to get their groceries there. You didn't mess with a Babbitt employee unless you did something really bad, then you had the sheriff's department on top of that. You're dealing with... It's a dual-administered Park, as far as law enforcement goes so things were a little different.

TM: Tell me about that. How do you mean?

GB: Well, in a lot of national parks, the county sheriff has no authority inside the national park, where Grand Canyon, they do. The sheriff's department had regular patrols.

TM: That's right.

GB: Jack Judd was, I think, one of the deputies back in the day when I first got there back in the 70s. I remember riding with him on an OJT thing one night. I got to patrol with him one night. Then he ended up on the North Rim after that. But he was one of the deputies. I was fairly tight with the deputies. I was part of the sheriff's department search and rescue. Their opinion... Normally, we would handle everything outside the Park in the woods, all that. A lot of times, if it was inside the Park and there was a death involved, that became a sheriff's department issue, not a Park Service issue. Park Service is life and death. We can save their life, we're going to do it. If it was a dead body found, that became a sheriff's department issue. I was involved in quite a few of those. Where go haul bodies out, take pictures, because I ran the photo lab. Also, I did a lot of the photo work for both the Park Service and the sheriff department until digital came around. Back in the film day, that was a lot of what I did for them. It was all my eyes only, kind of thing.

TM: Do you still have those pictures?

GB: No, I never.

TM: Oh, you would develop them and sent them back.

GB: I would and give it to them. I never...officially, I never made a copy of anything!

TM: Did you take your own photos?

GB: No. Not of anything that was law enforcement.

TM: Just of the Park or people or places...

GB: Oh yeah. I've got boxes of slides and stuff.

TM: Do you?

GB: I'm more of a scene guy. I never shot people pictures.

TM: Faces.

GB: Yeah. I wasn't into that. I was more scenery. Did a lot of that and even had a little side business going for a while up there that the Park Service kyboshed. No official concessions permit, so they put an end to me doing that.

TM: So, were you selling photographs?

GB: No. I had a contract with a tour company, Contiki Tours. What they would do, they'd travel all around the country and they're mainly known for young tours. You have to be 18 to 35 to be on a Contiki Tour, out of Australia and New Zealand, so they're all partiers pretty much. They would come in. The way they did it originally, go to Mather Point, they'd unload sixty people and then they'd be out there for an hour handing cameras back and forth, taking pictures. So I thought I was kind of doing the Park a service. What I would do is I would meet them and just up from Mather Point, they would all walk out there away from the viewpoint, form them up, I would be there. I had a very nice system, the professional system with a big flash and everything. Get up on a ladder with a nice background and wham bam, two pictures, we're done, you're out of here. I looked at it as a service. I was opening Mather Point back up. Then I would go develop the pictures. I had a guy in Durango, I would next day air the negatives to him. He would print them. They would arrive in Durango the next day and their pictures would be there.

TM: Oh, that's cool.

GB: So, they'd be waiting for them. Anyway, it worked well for couple of years and then the Park said no, this is a gray area. We worked out, okay, you can have the bus driver push the shutter on the camera, but you can't push the shutter. So we did that for a little while. Then they came back and said, no, that's not going to be good either. So we moved out to the airport, the entrance gate, Grand Canyon airport sign. We did them there for a while.

TM: But people probably wanted the Canyon.

GB: They wanted the Canyon as a background and they were destroying that sign climbing all over that sandstone and stuff. So I kinda put an end to it there, that this just is not good. I tried to move back to the Park visitor's center gate and that was just as bad. No, we can't do it there

either. I just shut it down. Forget it. We can't do this anymore. It was nice little side money there. It's not like we're well paid at the Grand Canyon, but it worked. It worked.

TM: Cool. Gary, thank you very much. I have one more question for you. Fifty years from now, someone's going to listen to this interview. Is there anything else you'd like them to know?

GB: Not too much. I'm still pro Park Service. I don't always agree with everything they do. I don't understand the workings of it sometimes. I hate the political side of it. I just don't think it has a place with something that... The mission is set in stone or should have been and should just stay there. Hopefully that's what they'll figure out and stop playing around so much. I don't think big business has any place in our national parks either. I don't think they bring anything to the table that's beneficial, and there's too much that's detrimental to what they bring. Obviously, I'm a little sour with what happened at the Grand Canyon, but unfortunately I've seen the same thing in other Parks I've been at, too. The old family-run mom and pops are still the best way to do things. I hope they figure that out and go back there, to letting them do things. I'm still in the outdoor industry. I run a camping store now for a few more years before I retire. I intend to go to Kings Canyon for my summers and kinda do what my dad did and travel the winters around for a few years anyway till I can't do that anymore. I might just do summer jobs somewhere in national parks or associations or something or other. Don't know if I'll ever end up at a major national park. I like smaller scale, small stuff. Like I said, Flagstaff's even getting a little big these days, so it might be time to part company here before too long.

TM: Gary Branges, thank you so much for participating in the Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History Program. Today is the 7th of July, 2017. This is Tom Martin, and this completes this interview. Thank you so much.

GB: Thank you, Tom.