

**Transcription:** Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History

**Interviewee:** Eugene "Gene" [GS] and Florence Sopko [FS]

Part 1

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin [TM]

**Subject:** Gene recounts time growing up at Grand Canyon and working for Babbitt's store

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TM: Today is the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2017. This is a Grand Canyon Historical Society oral history interview. Today we are with Eugene and Florence Sopko, and my name is Tom Martin. We are at my house at the kitchen table where a lot of these interviews have happened. So, Gene, what year were you born?

GS: 1949.

TM: Where?

GS: In Medford, Massachusetts.

TM: What were your parents doing there? How did they meet?

GS: Okay. My father was from Carbondale, Pennsylvania and they met in the Navy. My mother was a WAVE, she was in the Navy. My father, he was one that joined the Navy right after Pearl Harbor, there was that flood where everybody went. He was in the Navy. He stayed in there till the end of the war. I think he got out in 1947. He had met my mom there while he was back there in Massachusetts and New York and stuff. They ended up getting married after the war, after he got out of the Navy, and then I was born in 1949.

TM: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

GS: Yes. I'm the oldest of the family. I have a brother Michael. My oldest sister's name is Peggy, she's the third in the line. My youngest sister is Kathryn.

TM: Nice. So did you guys stay there then in Medford?

GS: No. We moved to Billerica, Massachusetts. That's right near Concord. It's a pretty old town. In fact, a lot of the Minutemen that fought at Concord came from Billerica. They have a big memorial there in the city square and stuff. It's a real old town.

TM: What did you parents do there?

GS: My father was working. At first he worked at a meat packing plant and then he got a Civil Service job working at the Hanscom Air Field, which is located in Bedford. He was working there. He was working on the runways and he drove snow plows and stuff.

TM: What's the name of the air field again?

GS: Hanscom, H-A-N-S-C-O-M, Airfield. It's still there. They've still got it. He worked there for Civil Service for a number of years, quite a while. At that time, when we were living in Billerica, my mother was working in Raytheon. She worked in the Wayland Plant, and Waltham Plant. She worked for both of them the whole time. Before she started working for Raytheon, she worked for Howard Johnson's a lot. She worked at the model restaurant plant in Lexington, Massachusetts. Her and my aunt both worked at that plant restaurant. They even knew Howard Johnson and had been to his house personally. So they did that there. We all went to school. There was a elementary school in Billerica. It was Parker Elementary and that's where we all went to school during elementary school. Then in middle school we kind of went to different ones. I went to Pollard School. It was named after one of the Minutemen that was killed at Bunker Hill. That school's gone now. Then I went to Vining School for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

TM: Did you guys get outside on weekends? Were you out in the forests there, were you out in the woods, were you out walking the fields and the neighbors' farms?

GS: Oh, yeah, we did a lot of stuff like that. One of the things I liked a lot living there is the Concord River ran right behind our house. It used to terrify my father because he was afraid we were either gonna drown or get run over by the road that went in front of our house.

TM: [laughs] Oh, my gosh.

GS: My friend there that I grew up with, his name was Carl LeDoux, his family owned a little neighborhood store there. It was three houses down from my house. He had a boat and it was a mile down to the old North Bridge and the Minuteman statue so we used to go down there a lot and go traveling all around like that.

TM: Was it a rowboat or a motor boat?

GS: Motor boat. Yeah, he had a regular motorboat. It was an aluminum boat with a regular little motor on it.

TM: How old was he?

GS: He was the same, he was one year younger than me. He would have been born in 1950. So he was like 10 years old or 9 years old. [both laugh] Everybody had boats around there.

TM: This is wonderful. So at 9 or 10 the two of you are in your own little motorboat checking out the river.

GS: Yeah, we'd go all over the river, just have a blast. Go fishing, we used to love to fish, we'd usually run down there. One of the things about living in Billerica was it was connected to Concord. They bump right up against each other so it was a real patriotic part of the country. Every April 19<sup>th</sup> they'd have the big Patriots Day Parade there in Concord and stuff and we'd go down there. They'd have a big thing, kind of

like there'd be some vendors there and everything by where the Minuteman statue is now. So as far as the Revolutionary War history I was really up on that cause that's where we lived, I mean, in that area.

TM: Were you a good swimmer?

GS: Yeah.

TM: Aha. Okay.

GS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I was looking at these river movies and thinking of the things we used to do on the Colorado River. I was kind of like a fish, being in water was just as good as being out of water. [laughs]

TM: Okay. Okay. I've met people like you before. [both laugh]

GS: I mean, yeah, I was always swimming, we was always doing stuff. For the family weekends a lot of times my parents would take us to Nantasket Beach down there. Then there was Revere Beach, named after Paul Revere. It was kind of like Coney Island and stuff in New York. They had all kinds of games there and restaurants and places to buy hotdogs at these two beach things. So Nantasket and Revere was where we went a lot. My parents also loved to go to Vermont and New Hampshire and Maine.

TM: What would they do there? I mean, just like to hike or boat or...

GS: They loved it. We'd stay at all the parks. They loved to look at stuff. One of the things that broke my heart, I've got all the quarters I can find, is the Old Man of the Mountains up in New Hampshire. Erosion caused it to go away and it doesn't exist anymore. So all those coins, I keep collecting them, the quarters of the Old Man and the Mountain. But we'd go there. We'd go up to Bar Harbor, Maine and we used to like to go to Kennebunkport. We'd go up there and camp out and just go... It was kind of outdoorsy. My father and my mom loved to camp outside and we were always outdoorsy. We had all the J. C. Higgins from Sears tents and stoves and stuff.

TM: Did they like history as well? Were they...

GS: Yeah, they were... Believe it or not, my mom was more into... That's where I think I got it from. My mom was really history oriented. I just love anything to do with history. I don't miss nothing [laughs]. We'd go up there a lot. In fact, this was one of the things that amazed me. When my mom passed on, she died, what was it, July 2007. She had Alzheimer's and died. She died in July 2007. When she passed on we got all the family pictures and thankfully she made some annotations on some of them and other times she didn't. But it's funny, I've got baby pictures of me and my grandfather and grandmother. I've messed with those pictures enough, where I'm in a little baby carriage but I know where those pictures were taken.

I actually found the actual sites. Oh, I know where this is. Every time I look at one, more stuff pops in and they all kind of connect. It's really been interesting doing that. We used to go to them places. I always had a feeling, even when I was a little kid, 8/9/10 years old, that my grandfather, who was my mother's father, his name was John Harrison King, he came from a French Canadian family... I always had a feeling that he was looking for somebody or looking for information. I wish they had the internet in those days. I wish they had it because of that. There was a rumor that we also had an Abenaki Native American, and that there was one of them women in the family. I believe I know who she was even

though the guy that I'm looking at, his name... I might have to explain that a little bit more. My grandfather's name was John King. His father's name was Nicholas King, whose father's name was Pierre Roy. It's pronounced Wah instead of Roy. Pierre came here from Quebec, Canada, St. Ours up in Canada. They changed their name to King, so he became Peter King, which Roy is kind of associated with the king. That's where that name comes from, Roy, Lee Roy, that's all kinds of stuff like that, and he became Peter King. Well, then he had all those kids when he came here. He had my great-grandfather Nicholas. I kept hearing as I was growing up that Peter King lived in Vermont and when it became a state they changed their name to American because they were already in the United States then. That's not what happened because of my ancestry. Checking on ancestry.com I figured it all out. That was during the Industrial Revolution and they lived in the Blackstone River Valley in Massachusetts. It runs from Worcester, Massachusetts, follows the river all the way down to Providence, Rhode Island. There was textile mills all along there and the whole families, Peter King's family, they all worked in these textile mills. At one time or another they started in Oxford and Holden, Massachusetts is part of Worcester. They started and they moved along and they were working on all those mills all the way down to Providence, Rhode Island. There's a lot of interesting stuff there, but that's how my family got here was because of the Industrial Revolution. They went to Quebec to get people to work in the textile mills, French Canadian people.

TM: What did your dad do at Hanscom, at the...

GS: He was a truck driver. He did stuff with the trucks, plowing snow and doing all the different stuff that truck drivers do on an airbase.

TM: So how did you all get out here, out west?

GS: Okay. My brother Mike, he's a year younger than me, he was born in 1950. He was born with severe asthma. I mean, it was really bad. His asthma attacks when he was a little kid... I've got the baby pictures of him even. He had eczema and asthma and my parents were always taking him to the doctors in Boston to see if they could do something for him. Well, they said that they couldn't do anything and according to my mom they told her that he probably wouldn't survive past maybe being a teenager and that he would probably be deformed. That's how bad it was. His asthma attacks were something you didn't want to witness. Well, some of their friends told them, "Don't listen to what the doctors are saying." At that time, according to my mother, chiropractors weren't allowed to practice in Massachusetts so they told us to take him to a chiropractor up in New Hampshire. New Hampshire wasn't that far away from Billerica, it was only like 15 miles. We'd go up to Nashua, New Hampshire. There was these seven brothers. Their last name was Behan, and they were all chiropractors, all seven of them. They had practices in Nashua and practices in Salem, New Hampshire. We'd usually go to the New Hampshire one. What was funny was they never charged a penny when you went in. They had a box near the door and it just said "Leave whatever you can afford to leave."

GS: I would see my brother, he would be wheezing and just terrible. His right leg used to kind of shorten up when he'd have an attack. It was really bad. I'd see him go in there and he'd be almost, it looked like he was gonna die, and when he'd come out he'd be fine, he'd be ready to go shopping. Them guys were amazing. They told my parents to move him out to Arizona. They said, "Take him to Arizona because that will help."

TM: What year would have this been roughly?

GS: 1957/'58/'59. I say that because in 1960 we came out and did one with the old big, brand new 1960 Ford, what was that, Country Squire station wagon. We made one of those Queen Family Truckster things, but we didn't go to Wally World and Disneyland, we stopped at Grand Canyon. That was where the trip ended. We turned around and went home.

TM: So let me get this clear. This was a family vacation to sort of see what the west was like. The chiropractors had said...

GS: You got it.

TM: ...go west and your mom and dad were like, "Well, let's just throw the kids in the car and we'll do a road trip, just to see."

GS: Yes, exactly.

TM: 1960?

GS: Yeah, 1960, in June and July.

TM: So five of you, no, six of you in the station wagon?

GS: Okay, there was my... Plus there was two others. A friend of my mom and her teenage daughter.

TM: Oh, my gosh.

GS: We were all in that Country Squire. We traveled Route 66 and came out, just had a good time all the way out.

TM: What do you remember about that?

GS: Ah, there's a lot of stuff. I remember going to Tombstone. I remember we went to Mexico.

TM: So it wasn't just coming straight out 66, you guys went south into Southern Arizona and...

GS: Yeah.

TM: ...and off into...

GS: Yeah. Oh, one of the things... What do I remember about that, you can ask her, she knows what it is. My dad, even though he was born in Pennsylvania, he was a cowboy at heart. My name is Gene because of Gene Autry. That's no lie. We were coming out, when we got to Texas he wanted to go see Judge Roy Bean's house, Langtry Texas. Oh, man. [both laugh] There's nothing between Route 66 and Langtry, Texas in the summertime and it was hot. In them days cars didn't have air conditioners. It was the windows. Like you said, we had eight people in that station wagon, but dad got to see Lillie Langtry, the law west of the Pecos, the actual house and stuff. But that almost killed us. [laughs]

TM: Did you have one of those canvas bags that you hung out the...

GS: Exactly, and I tell her about that. Yep, I had one of them hanging on. My dad was so proud of having that bag on there and all the bumper stickers. He drove around Massachusetts when we returned, he left that on the front of the car [both laugh] cause he was so proud of that water bag.

TM: In the winter.

GS: I mean, and that... He was wanting to hit Texas because he wanted to have a Dr. Pepper. He had heard about Dr. Pepper and they didn't sell that back there.

TM: Really?

GS: As soon as we got into Texas he was looking for a Dr. Pepper Coke machine.

TM: So what happened to Michael on that journey?

GS: He started improving all the way along. When we got into Arizona it was amazing. He stopped having asthma attacks. That's what was weird. We stayed at Grand Canyon for about a week and then we turned around and went home.

TM: How did Grand Canyon end up on the list of places to go?

GS: I don't know. I think he just wanted to go there, he wanted to go to Grand Canyon. In fact, that was planned or something because he was waiting for his government check. He got the postmaster in Massachusetts to send that check to Grand Canyon Post Office. The old Grand Canyon Post Office is close to my heart. I've had so many memories of that place. I love that place. Every time I see a picture of it on the internet I just get all excited.

TM: I'll start making a list here of things to ask you about in the future. This is good but let's stay on the track here.

GS: Okay.

TM: It's 1960. Way too many of you have piled into this station wagon and headed west.

GS: Right.

TM: What do you remember about that first visit to Grand Canyon then?

GS: Just how much... We just fell in love with that place. We stayed on the East Rim Drive at Desert View by the top. We stayed there for a long time. We just had a blast. To me it was a whole new life, it was a whole new experience. It was so different than Massachusetts. Massachusetts, everybody had their little homes and stuff all around and there was not really nothing to do. Well, then all of a sudden we're dropped into Grand Canyon and here's mule deer walking through the campground and stuff and we're looking at the rocks and everything looks different. There's not houses and stuff everywhere you look. We're like, "Look at this place, this is so awesome." I mean, it was something I'll never forget. We stayed there for a while then we moved back in and we went camping at the campground in the Village. We was waiting for dad's check and once we got his check then we went down to Tombstone and we went to Mexico and stuff and then we headed home. We took the southern route coming home.

TM: Got it. And what months was this roughly?

GS: June and July.

TM: June and July? Hot down there.

GS: Yeah. I think it was like a three-week trip and it was just great. I mean, we just loved it. All of us fell in love with Arizona. I don't know much about anything else about that. Maybe my parents were trying to see what my brother...how he felt, how it improved, and they found out, yes, it does. When we got back to Massachusetts they started writing letters, my mom and dad, trying to find a job in Arizona for my father. They wrote all the Civil Service places and everything, the Parks and everything. The first answer they got back was a letter from Senator Barry Goldwater. Senator Barry Goldwater told my father, this was, I think they got that back in like, it was June or something of 1961, they told them, "You go ahead and get to Arizona and if you can get there by September," and that was gonna be the beginning of school here at that time, then they've got a job they're holding for you. Cause my mother and father explained to them about my brother, how we went to Arizona, we found out that it does improve his health and, believe it or not, when we came here all the asthma stuff quit. Believe it or not, it just quit. In fact, right now he's healthier and he's about my size and we're both the same almost exactly.

TM: So two questions. Do you still have that letter from Senator Goldwater?

GS: No, I wish I did.

TM: Wouldn't that be fun?

GS: I know.

TM: And then second question, Senator Goldwater said that they would hold a job. Who was gonna hold a job and what was the job?

GS: Grand Canyon Park Service. He was gonna work for maintenance. What he was doing, it was like a janitorial job but it was more than that. He did different things, going in all the buildings and doing things like in the...

TM: I'm sorry because I'm thinking, all right, the family has gone back to Massachusetts.

GS: Yeah.

TM: Kids are back in school, it's another year there.

GS: Right.

TM: Mom and dad are writing letters. So here comes a letter that says there's a job for you at Grand Canyon. Now, that means you can sell the house, you gotta load up furniture and family and say goodbye to friends and...

GS: That's why coming to Flagstaff brings back so many memories. We came here... What we did is my father got a little old trailer. It was a wooden trailer, like a cargo trailer, had a tarp on it. We brought most of the essential stuff while my mom and my two sisters stayed back in Massachusetts to sell the house. They stayed there, we came here. Me and my brother started school in Grand Canyon. I started 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he started the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

TM: '61?

GS: Yeah, '61 or '62, I wish I could remember that date for sure, I think it was '61. I know it was like a year. But anyway, we started school. My dad was working for the Park Service, had a nice little house there. That was when we learned all about... In the village we had the little house there that they put us in.

TM: Do you remember the address of the house?

GS: I think it was 60, or I don't know. I'm gonna have to look at the map. I think it was like #62 or something. When you go up the hill you kind of, let's see, you go up from where the old Park Service ranger headquarters is, you take that left, go up the hill, and then you keep to the left and you go around the old nurses' dorm was here and then you come around. It's either 62 or 52, the house number. What I remember about that getting here was it was a bumper piñon crop that year. It was unreal. Here we are coming from Massachusetts and I find out I can wear Levi's to school. That was awesome. And everybody's eating these dang piñons. I'm like what are you doing, what is these things? And they showed us. Well, the tarp that we used to cover the trailer, me and my brother found out, you put that around the bottom of the tree, climb up in the tree and shake the tree. We just loved those, I still eat them to this day. I love them. But, yeah, then we started school. Now my mom got here, they got here about the middle of December. They rode the bus out from Massachusetts, my mom and my two sisters. That place where you turn to get on 180 to come up this way off of old Route 66, you turn at that road, there's a motel there on the corner, that's where they stayed in that motel. I think they were on Trailways bus. The bus station was right on the east side of that and that's when we came and picked up them and brought them up to Grand Canyon. Before Christmas my mom and my two sisters, the whole family was together there again. You know what that house number was? 25. My mind works even when I'm thinking about something else. It was house #25.

TM: What do you remember about that first fall in Grand Canyon school? Do you remember who your teachers were, who your classmates would have been?

GS: Oh, oh, yeah. Teachers... Well, I remember a lot of classmates. There was a guy named Jimmy Chambers. It was because his father was doing the same job my father was gonna do so we got together. Then my closest friends became... There was a guy, Jimmy Arkie, Jimmy and then A-R-K-I-E, and then Gilbert Ortiz. Those were the guys that I mainly ran with. My teachers... Mrs. Wilcox was my English teacher. She was wonderful. She was an older lady, really great. Mr. Roberts was my math teacher and Mr. Hancock was the shop teacher. I haven't thought about him in a long time. Mr. Hancock was there. At that time the science teacher was Miss Bartlett. She left that year. She was a nice lady, too. She was a real good teacher. I always had good teachers at Grand Canyon. I'm trying to think of anything else. The principal was Bob Pavlich. Coach at that time was a Mr. Dave Clark, but he left that first year. When I went, there was a new coach came in. I can cover him later. But, yeah, school there was just tremendous and the teachers were so help... They were the best people in the world. One thing I can do is I can always remember teachers. They've just something that stays with you your whole life if



they're really good teachers and most of mine were. I was always lucky getting good teachers. But, yeah, it was just so funny and so different. When we moved here we loved the mascot. It was the Grand Canyon Phantoms. I loved that, that was awesome. We was playing on the sports teams and stuff like that. My mom later on... We weren't here very long when she got a job as a secretary there at the school. She worked for Bob Pavlich and the school superintendent, who was Carl Guthrie at that time.

TM: Back on track here, eventually you were going to start a band and you've told me this already, so I'm kind of interested, did you start playing a musical instrument back east and bring that skill with you?

GS: Yeah, because of my father's heritage of Czechoslovakia and Polish and stuff, he wanted me to play the clarinet. Everybody that's Czechoslovak, gotta play the clarinet or the accordion. He played the accordion and the guitar. Well, I got the clarinet. When I came out here I got a little bit different. I didn't really like the clarinet so I talked my mom into buying me a tenor sax, so I played the tenor saxophone in the school band. I've even got a picture of me in my school band uniform here. The thing that got me into guitars is I started working some little jobs around the Babbitt's General Store. I worked putting up Nabisco cookies. The salesman and the distributor was out of Williams. His name was Oscar Skaggs. He was one of Bill Williams' mountain men. What he would do is he would pay me five dollars a week to go in there and keep the... Because the tourists come so much, I would get paid five dollars a week to keep the shelves full. I did such a good job at that that later on the guy that was doing the milk, the Meadow Gold milk, for the distributor out of Williams, his name, I don't know how to spell his first name, but it was Cauchi, I think it might be like C-A-U-C-H-I, Gonzalez. The guy who was doing that job was Harvey Terry. He got paid twelve dollars a week. So, wow, that was big money in the '60s. Well, Harvey was gonna do something else so they picked me up to do the milk. It got where I was 14 and 15, I'm putting up cookies and making seventeen dollars a week putting up cookies and milk. But I had to always keep the Babbitt's General Store's shelves and the milk stocked. Believe me in the summertime that's a job. You spend a lot of time down there.

TM: How would that work? How did you have, I mean, the cookies I can understand they have some storage place somewhere or was it stored in the store?

GS: They had a warehouse behind the store. There was a warehouse right immediately behind the old general store. And that's where they kept them all in there.

TM: Where was the milk cause that...

GS: The milk, they had like the coolers like you go into Circle K. You got the things, there was a room behind there and that was where all the milk was kept.

TM: Why didn't Babbitt's have their own people stock that?

GS: I don't know. They must have had a contract with these two vendors, with Nabisco and with Meadow Gold.

TM: I see. And a contract said they would do the stocking and Babbitt's didn't have to deal with it.

GS: Exactly, exactly.

TM: Well, it was good for you.

GS: If I didn't get down there all the time, if them things got empty, man, they would be mad.

TM: Well, Babbitt's would be mad at you then?

GS: Yeah. The guy running Babbitt's was Jack Settles at that time. I went to school with his son, Phil Settles. Jack was the guy that ran the general store and he had a manager. The manager of the store was Bill Manis. Now, what's interesting about Bill Manis? If you read *Death Below the Rim* the kid that rode the bicycle off the rim, that was his son, Tommy Manis. I've talked to people that witnessed that [laughs]. He was coming down the West Rim trail along the trail and he had one of those little bikes, the small wheels and stuff, and he came flying down that thing. From the people that I talked to that witnessed it, he came off, he went around, he went flying through the air off the rim and they said he was still pedaling like the kid on ET when he went flying through the air. They said he went down about a hundred feet and landed on a big flat rock down there. They said that was bad cause they could see the blood coming out of his head. He rolled over and rolled down another hundred feet. The kid lived. I mean, he made it through, survived that, but that was Bill Manis's son. You can read about that in that *Death Below the Rim* book if you ever seen that. But that's pretty interesting. That's a good deal. But that was his son, and Bill Manis's wife worked there. Her name was Althea, and they ran that store. Well, Bill Manis was more or less my boss. Even though I was being paid by the guys in Williams, Oscar Skaggs and Cachi Gonzalez, Bill Manis was the guy that more or less supervised me. If I didn't keep those shelves and them milk thing, especially the milk thing, if I didn't keep it full he really let me know about it.

TM: Was that a one a day sort of stocking or twice a day or how often?

GS: Sometimes I'd have to go down three or four times. It was a big case that they had, about like a Circle K. But they would sell... I stocked the milk, I stocked the cottage cheese stuff, and they had orange and chocolate stuff all from that same company. I had to keep all that stocked in there and that would sell like crazy.

TM: And then would you report back to Williams and say, "I need more of..."

GS: He would make a trip up like every two days. Oscar would come up once a week when he paid me. He'd look at the cookie stock on the shelves and in the warehouse and then he'd make an order.

TM: Got it.

GS: When it came in with Associated Grocers... Associated Grocers used to deliver a lot of groceries in them days to like Babbitt's and stuff. Them cookies would come in on the Associated Grocers truck. They had a certain place in the warehouse where they put all the Nabisco cookies.

TM: So this building eventually burned down.

GS: Yeah, and that's sad.

TM: So let's go back and tell me how you remember the layout of the building. Let's assume I've never seen it. How would you describe it to me? Where was the parking lot, how did it work out, what was it like on the inside?

GS: Okay. That's neat. I can show you some pictures in my school annual that's of the inside of that store. I loved this place. When we moved there, okay, there's a big parking lot in the front. The post office was to the, let's see, that would be the west.

TM: To the west a little bit.

GS: Cause the Grand Canyon's behind me. Okay, it was right across the street from the old Park headquarters. It was right across that road. It was to the east of it. Then you had the general store and the post office, and it had a big, huge parking lot in front of it.

TM: Okay. And there's still a parking lot in front today?

GS: Yeah. When you go in the store this is now... This started changing about a couple years after I moved there. If you took a right you would go down to the, there was like a, not a delicatessen, like just a bar where you sit on bar stools and they have coffee and donuts and they sold different things in there. That was run by Elizabeth Arkie, my buddy Jimmy Arkie's mother. I got a picture of her, too. But she ran that thing and they made homemade donuts. They had a donut machine in there and that was awesome. You'd go in there and get coffee and hot chocolate and all that stuff. Later on they changed that where they had a delicatessen built on the front. As you came into the right there was a nice delicatessen. Oh, they had the best sloppy joes in the world. They don't make them anymore [laughs]. But that was a great place. They had a lot of pastry in there and stuff, bakery goods that they brought from Flagstaff up to Grand Canyon. Elizabeth Arkie ran that also.

TM: Was that a open floor plan so you could see out the rest of the store?

GS: Yeah. Even though there might be like a dressing room right here, in fact, if you went and sat at the snack bar thing there on them stools, behind you was all the Levi's and stuff, where they sold Levi's, cowboy hats and stuff. If you went straight toward the south from there you'd come onto where the customer service office was and just to the left of that, if you're looking at that, that was where a lot of the women's clothes were in that thing. There was a dressing room in the middle, you could kind of walk around that. So they sold a lot of clothes and stuff there. Now if you head back toward the Park Service headquarters inside the building, the first thing you gotta go by is they had two cash registers there and that was where you cashed out. Straight back, toward the back of the store from there, was where all the produce was.

TM: So let me make sure I get this right. As you headed to the east, toward the Park headquarters, was where the cash registers were and so there must have been a door that headed out onto the street onto what would be Center. Is that right?

GS: No, there wasn't no door in that end. The only doors was the doors in the front that opened toward the Grand Canyon.

TM: Oh, toward the Grand Canyon, to the north?

GS: To the north.

TM: Okay, so the cash registers were down by those doors?

GS: If you walked in the first thing you'd do is them cash registers were right there.

TM: Got it, got it. Okay.

GS: And then the produce. Then they had like five or six aisles of different food from there on all the way over to this back part that was to, that's north, that would be east, right?

TM: Um hmm.

GS: Okay. Back toward the east was where like they had the sundry items, you could buy aspirins and stuff like that and the records, they sold records back there. That's where Josie Lopez worked. She ran that department back there.

TM: So tell me about Josie.

GS: I knew Josie for a long time. She was running that store. I bought a lot of records in those days, plus I knew her husband and her son. Her son was a little younger than me but we played.

TM: So that's Dan?

GS: Huh?

TM: That's Dan?

GS: Danny, yeah. Yeah. We played Little League at the same time, him and I, His father... They had a Little League team thing that they set up there and it had three... The first year they set it up, Danny's father, Ray Lopez, he was the coach of the American Legion team. I'm so embarrassed, I played on the Lion's Team and I can't remember the guy's name that was our coach. Then there was a team from the western village, the Western Equities.

TM: I'm sorry, back up a minute. Danny's dad's name was?

GS: Ray.

TM: Ray? Thank you.

GS: Yeah. That's Josie's husband.

TM: Right, right.

GS: I wish I could remember that guy's name that was our coach. I can't remember.

TM: Okay. So Josie worked, ran a cash register there or did she actually run a... Were there departments and were there employees that would work the departments?

GS: Yeah, you worked in different departments, but, she more or less handled that whole back corner. It kind of angled off a little bit. It was the counter like this. The records were over here and then there was

all the like drug store items and stuff. She kind of ran that part all by herself. She might have, maybe now and then, had one helper like when she was gone, she was taking a day off she had somebody else. But Josie ran that thing. The whole time as long as I can remember she ran that thing.

TM: It sounds like the store would be better classified as almost a mercantile, meaning it had everything.

GS: Yeah, cause instead of going back in that part that angled out where Josie was, you go this way, is a meat market. They had all kinds of fresh-cut meat there. Somehow I ended up working, because of working for the milk and that, doing a good job with the milk and cookies, I ended up working for Babbitt's. They had a good deal that the guys that they hired in the summertime would work full time. In the wintertime they would let us go and work specific hours. They'd say, "Okay, work four hours this day, two hours this day." I ended up working in that meat department, too, even one time and I don't know how I got that. [both laugh] I just showed up in there one day, I guess. But I worked for Babbitt's for a long time.

TM: When did you start first working for them then?

GS: For Babbitt's?

TM: Yeah.

GS: I think probably in, when did I say my first, they took out my first social security when I was. Well, I was 15 when they took out my first social security. So that would be '63/'64? Yeah, probably '63 or '64.

TM: So within two or three years of coming to the Park, you came in '61?

GS: Yeah.

TM: So two or three or four, pretty quickly you were there working for Babbitt's?

GS: In, yeah, in Babbitt's. I worked for them for quite a while. Even when I started up the band. Well, I didn't start the band, Virgil started the band. I just ended up being in it.

TM: Let's finish up with the Babbitt's with the store.

GS: Okay. That even gets better. That one summer, the last summer I worked for Babbitt's...

TM: Which was?

GS: Probably '65, '65 or '66. I worked the night shift. They put four of us and what we would do... It was so busy during the day we would work all night stocking the store. So every morning when that door opened that store was completely stocked. We would work all night, turn on a radio and listen to "I Got You Babe" and stuff. That's what it was all about [laughs] them days. There was four of us on that night shift that worked all night long. There was myself, a guy named Roger Talley, Bill Acheson, and I had that written down. And the other guy, I think it was, yeah, it was Hugh Shevlin. He was another of my top friends, old Hughie Shevlin. The guy was amazing. He got killed in Vietnam. That guy was amazing. I mean, when we took state champs he was a freshman and he was first string. That guy could play some basketball and foot... He was our quarterback, he was our lead guard. I mean, that guy was amazing. He

was a real good friend, too. That's a story, too. He left and moved, I was still at Grand Canyon, and he left I guess in '66. His father was the superintendent there. He left in '66 and they moved to Tucson. One night on the news we heard that Hughie Shevlin got killed in a car crash. The next day they said, "No, we reported the wrong guy getting killed, it was the other guy." A year later we found out he got killed in Vietnam.

TM: Wow. What do you remember about him?

GS: He was a great guy. I remember a short...

TM: Was he tall, thin, short.

GS: Oh, yeah, he was like six foot and he had kind of a thin build. I just really liked the guy. I remember I used to play basketball with him all the time cause I wasn't real good at basketball. I'd go over to his house over at the superintendent's house... He broke his hand and that's how that guy got so good. He broke his right hand and he had it in a cast for a long time. Well, the guy started writing and doing everything with his left hand so he was completely, when he got that cast off he was ambidextrous. If he wanted to when we rolled, he was our quarterback, if he rolled to the left he could throw with the left hand. He could do everything. That was amazing. The guy was real smart, too. I mean, he was honor roll student, A in everything. I'll tell you what, I really think a lot of that guy. Me and him had a lot of fun growing up. It was really tough when he got killed, you know.

TM: I bet.

GS: Yeah, he was a good guy.

TM: You mentioned the post office so let's bring that into the equation now because clearly as you've given me a good education here that Babbitt's was the place to shop, the post office would have been the place to connect with family across the country. Not just for the tourists that were trying to send out postcards, but to locals that were trying to connect with family far away.

GS: Exactly.

TM: So tell me about the post office.

GS: Okay. When you first walked in the post office on the right hand side was the movie poster of the movie that was playing at the community building on Saturday or Wednesday night. They changed that poster all the time. They'd show the movie twice on Wednesday night and then they'd have a new movie Saturday night and they'd show it twice. I can't remember, it wasn't very much to get in, \$1.50 or something. Then you'd go inside. The guys name, the postmaster's name I don't remember Mr. Metzger, but the postmaster was Metzger. The other guy that worked in there, his name was Fred Bart, Fred and then B-a-r-t, really nice fellow. It was really sad, I forget what year it was, it was probably around 1967, Fred was going down Ashfork Hill. He had a blue and white Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. He was going down Ashfork Hill at night and he had his mother. He lived with his mother, she was elderly. She was sleeping and she woke up in the middle of the night and said "Look out for that truck," and grabbed that wheel and off they went. She got killed and he had to wear a neck brace for like six months. That was a sad story about them because everybody liked Fred Bart. They were the two that worked in the post office and they were really good. They would really help you. You come in the post

office they had two big counters over here where you could write, you know, fill out stuff and everything on this side. The windows were on this side.

TM: And they had boxes?

GS: Regular boxes. You got your little key, mine was Post Office Box 143. Funny thing I love about this story, we went back to Massachusetts in 1965. My father died in 1964, in September. He died of stomach cancer and we went back to Massachusetts cause my uncle died. You know what was really funny? The zip code came out that year when we were back in Massachusetts. I've seen on the news or something, I was just a little kid, you know, I'm thinking I'm gonna get bad here. They came out with the zip code. I sent a postcard from Massachusetts to Gene Sopko, 86023 and that's all that was on there. When I got home it was in the post office box.

TM: Wow.

GS: That was awesome, man. I got to check the zip code out right now.

TM: So this must have been terrifying to have your father die in 1964. Had you graduated from high school yet?

GS: No.

TM: And your mom, she's figuring out what am I gonna do?

GS: Exactly. The Park Service was really nice. Later on we moved up to the... They built two new houses up, if you go down that main road that we lived on there's a loop on here, there was two new houses built on the corner. We were living in there when my father ended up... He stayed in the VA for like six or eight months before he died, in Prescott, Fort Whipple, and then he died. That was when we started having to move somewhere else. They let us stay there for a while in that house because of my father dying and then my mom ended up moving out to Western Village which was a trailer park out at Tusayan. She lived out there for a while, her and the kids and everything.

TM: Well, let's talk about that because this goes into housing. If your mom was working for the school, she wasn't working for the Park Service when your father passed away. They would have lost their housing, the Park Service supplied housing.

GS: Right. Yeah. They kind of let us stay there for a few months.

TM: Her kids, your brothers and sisters, were all in high school or school there.

GS: Exactly, yeah.

TM: So I can appreciate your mom didn't want to take you out of that. But she needed a place to stay somewhere.

GS: Yeah. They finally rented a trailer out there at that Western Village. Western Equities was that mining company that had the mine shaft up by the [?] up there on the West Rim.

TM: The Orphan.

GS: Yeah. The Orphan Mine, yeah. They had a trailer park out there in Tusayan.

TM: Now, was that where the miners were staying then?

GS: Yeah. That's where they lived.

TM: Okay. So every day they would drive in to mine, shift change, etcetera.

GS: Right. That's where she moved out there. She rented a trailer out there. There was a doctor, my mom got breast cancer also. They ended up, I think they did a mastectomy on one side or something.

FS: Biopsy.

GS: But anyway, she ended up surviving that. The doctor's name was Dr. John Lacy at that time. I went to school with his...

TM: Sorry. Go ahead. You went to school with his?

GS: With his daughter and son, John Lacy and Jennie Lacy. I don't know whether you know them. They used to live out there. Is that called Hart Valley where that old, that chapel is?

TM: Hart Prairie. Yeah.

GS: Yeah. They used to have a ranch back there, Lacy did. They lived down the steep hill that comes down from the village, comes down through there. I went to school with his kids. What was funny, 1979 or 1980, I was a drill sergeant at Fort Sill, kid came in, he was a recruit. I'm looking at his birth certificate and Dr. John Lacy, he was born at Grand Canyon and he lived out at the Western Village, one of my recruits. That was pretty funny, I thought, cause I was telling them, "I know this guy, me and this guy..." [laughing] I went to school with his daughter and son." That guy was like, "Hey, you must be old." But yeah, that was pretty cool. I think Jennie Lacy might live around here. She worked at Flagstaff Medical Center last time I seen her, but that was like in the '80s or '70s, I think.

TM: Okay. So the clinic, or the hospital at the time, it was a hospital was further east from park headquarters.

GS: Exactly, it was up on that little hill right there.

TM: In the building that today the Grand Canyon Association has their offices in.

GS: Really?

TM: Yeah. What are your first memories of the hospital, going in there?

GS: It was a nice little hospital. When dad and mom went both in there I just remember going down there. I remember Dr. Lacy. I know the rooms were on both sides of a main hallway there. Behind it was the dorm where the nurses lived, right behind that. I thought it was a pretty nice little hospital and stuff.



Up until I went in there when my mom was in there, the only time I ever went in there was like for a physical for sports, to play sports and stuff.

TM: Did your mom ever talk about how hard it was to lose your father?

GS: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. She had a rough time with that. That kind of just blew the family completely out of the water and stuff. He's buried and mom's buried both down at Fort Whipple now in the cemetery down there cause they were both veterans, both Navy veterans. So they're buried down there. My dad was really well liked. He had a lot of friends. He was liked a lot, and so was mom. He liked everybody he worked with up there, it's pretty neat.

TM: Yeah, yeah. So you were playing clarinet and you gave that up to play the sax and then you started getting into guitar along the way.

GS: Yeah. That's a good story I like to tell. When I started working with Nabisco and Meadow Gold I had an Alden's catalog and the British invasion was starting. In fact, I don't even think the Beatles was out yet.

TM: What kind of catalog?

GS: Aldens. It was a big dealer like Sears from Chicago and it was Aldens. I went in there and I found me a guitar and an amplifier in there [laughs], a Harmony guitar.

TM: Electric?

GS: Electric. Yeah. I sent away for them and I got them from Aldens. They came in. I was using the money from the cookie/Nabisco and the milk job to buy these things. Well, my buddy Jimmy Arkie, he had a guitar. He came to me one day and he said, "Look, they're having a talent show. My buddy Virgil plays guitar pretty good and he was wanting to know if you want to play. We could just get together and try it out and see what we can do." We got together and learned some songs, found a guy with a set of drums and played in the talent show.

TM: What was Virgil's last name?

GS: Pedro.

TM: And who was playing the drums for you?

GS: This guy named Keith Miller.

TM: And that was it, just the four of you?

GS: Yeah.

TM: So three guitars and a drum?

GS: And a drum, yeah. Well, let's see. Virgil, Jimmy, me, and, oh, Steve Smith also. Steve didn't last too long. He kind of did the talent show and then he was gone. He was a lot older than us. But that was what

got us going. We kind of said, "Hey, this is kind of neat." We started learning more songs and more songs and started playing for school things and for kids that are having a birthday party.

TM: Were there any other people at the South Rim at the time that had a band going? Did you have any competition?

GS: No.

TM: Wow. Okay.

GS: It was awesome. Garage bands were just getting big and that's what we were doing. We formed that up and we got going. We had like three drummers while we were together. Steve Smith and then Hap Maxwell, the one I told you his mother, I think, is buried, well, I know she is. I just gotta find out what her name is. And then Gilbert Ortiz. We had them three drummers. It was me and Virgil and Jimmy were kind of like the core of the band.

TM: What year was that that you guys started this, the first show?

GS: I think it was '63 or '64.

TM: Was it easy for you to get into the guitar? I mean, you clearly understood music well.

GS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. In fact, once we got going and had a real good band... I got so many stories I can tell you about. Once we got going and had a good band, Virgil said, "You know what, we don't have a bass guitar." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, we'll go down to see Mr. Lloyd down at Flagstaff Music on the corner down there." It's like a little hi-fi coffee place right now on that corner, on San Francisco Street, straight across the tracks. There was a guy named Mr. Lloyd. We bought all our instruments from him, everybody in northern Arizona. That was the greatest guy in the world. He was an old man and he had all the Fender stuff. We were buying all of our Fender guitars and stuff. So I went and bought a bass guitar from him. That little old man, he taught me the life's lesson. I didn't need a credit check, I didn't need to fill out an application or nothing. I showed him that, hey, I play in this band. He said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "I need that Fender Precision Bass right there." It was \$277. I said, okay, but he knew... He kept like when you go in a restaurant they have a little tablet that they write on, the waitresses? He kept one of them and that's all he had. He let you on your word have the credit to buy that. What we would do is like we played all weekend. We played a lot of northern Arizona or we were always playing in the community building, our band. We had a cigar box [laughs] and we'd take a few bucks out for ourselves and bring the rest of it down here. One of us, either me or Virgil or his father, would bring it down to Mr. Lloyd and just dump it out on the counter, he'd take what he needed for all the different instruments we was all paying for. The guy was awesome. He had the best stuff. He taught me a life's lesson, you know, you're as good as your word and if I can trust you... He died here in I think 1999. Believe it or not, I look stuff up on the internet all the time. He was living in Kingman, but he was a great old man and he taught me life's lessons. Just something that... That guy really trusts me.

TM: So how many instruments did you play? Would you play the sax with the band on some of the songs?

GS: On some of the songs but I was playing bass and then we... Then kind of the Moody Blues era and stuff came out and the Blues Magoos, so I went and bought a Farfisa organ and then learned to play and

played the organ on all those things [laughs]. I was the lead vocalist at all the time, too. So I went from starting on guitar, to bass guitar, then to the organ, and that's what I was playing when I grew up, or when the band broke up.

TM: What was your most favorite instrument?

GS: I think the bass guitar. I loved playing that. Yeah. They all came simple. That's what I tell anybody. People always say, "I'd like to learn how the guitar." You gotta get in a band, you gotta get with some people, other people that can teach you stuff cause your learning curve... If you're just fooling around trying to learn the guitar at home your learning curve's flat line because you get tired and it gets boring. You get in a band, your learning curve takes off and it's unreal. I mean, one of my favorite memories of the band, I always tell her about it, one of my favorite songs, the Rolling Stones' Jumpin' Jack Flash. I came down to Flagstaff, down to the little record store that used to be down there near the Orpheum on that block there. I came there, Jumpin' Jack Flash just came out. It just came out and you hardly ever heard it on the radio. I went, took it and gave it to Virgil. We were gonna play a Lion's Club street dance that night at the parking lot in front of the general store, Babbitt's General Store. We learned that song,

TM: Right there?

GS: Yeah, just right now. That's how good our band was and that was our learning curve. We learned it that day. I got all the words memorized and we were playing on a flatbed truck, the band was. It was a street dance for the Lion's Club and they would not let us play anything else. We played that song almost all night long cause as soon as it ended, "Hey, play that new Rolling Stones song." I told them it was the new song. [laughs] At one time we must have played it for 45 minutes without stopping because they wouldn't let us play nothing else. That's all they wanted to hear. It was pretty fun. That was a lot of fun there. But, yeah, that band was something else. We were a decent band. We used to play in Page and Tuba City and Williams and all around and stuff, Kayenta.

TM: So who would you play for?

GS: A lot of places were forming teen clubs at that time. In Page they had a teen club. What they were trying to do there and that was what was weird... We were really a flexible band. We would play for one of our classmates for nothing if they were having a party, but when we were playing at Tuba City at the Center the next week we'd be getting \$750 to play there.

TM: That's a lot of money.

GS: I know. We would kind of more or less kind of figure out how much can we get. The Navajos were funny. You had to sign a contract. If you didn't show up you owed them \$750.

TM: Oh, interesting. Okay.

GS: That's why they do it that way. But now at Page, we would just, okay, we'll just take 90% of the door or 75% because they were trying to build a teen club. They had like the shell of it there and that would give them money with these dances. They would raise money to buy more stuff for that Page teen club.

TM: Cool.

GS: So we did a lot of that kind of stuff. We was really flexible. Like I mentioned to you one time, too, once we were really well known and everything, the guy that ran the American Legion there in Tusayan, he asked us one day, well, he asked Virgil, he said, "Virgil, would you guys play for a New Year's Eve party? Would you consider doing that for us?" That was Buford Belgard and Virgil said, "Yeah, we'll do it." He said, "How much would you charge?" He said, "We ain't gonna charge you guys nothing." After that first year, every year after that, we just automatically played New Year's at the American Legion for free. That's the way our band was.

TM: Okay. So today at the South Rim community the Rotary runs a dinner dance right around Christmas and there's a band typically that comes in for that. The Legion has really taken a back seat, if you will. They don't have a dance at all. Neither does the Lion's Club. So the Rotary has kind of picked up to carry that tradition on. Was there any other service organization besides the Legion that was doing a Christmas party/dance type event?

GS: Not around the holidays. The two places to be when I was there was either at the Legion or at the Tusayan Café and Grill. Tusayan was across the street there from the road that went back to the American Legion. Tusayan was on the other side of the highway on, what is that, 180. There was a Shell station there and right next to that was the Tusayan Café and Grill. They would have a band in there. Sometimes they might get somebody from Flagstaff, but mainly they normally never did. People would go in there and just drink and stuff and everything. So if you wanted to go to a band, everybody knew that the American Legion was the place to go at that time. Nobody else, I never heard of any Christmas stuff or anything like that.

TM: So were you guys playing once a season or once a month or once a week? How often were you playing at the Legion? This was at the Legion who...

GS: Mainly just once a year for New Year's.

TM: Okay. Okay.

GS: Cause we were so busy with all the other places. We would play on Friday nights at the community building in Grand Canyon and usually take off... On Saturday we'd be playing somewhere else, Monument Valley, Kayenta, Tuba City, or Williams, or somewhere. We were there playing instead.

TM: Did you get a door percent for playing at the community center or were you playing for free and fun there? How'd that work?

GS: At the community center at Grand Canyon?

TM: Yeah.

GS: We got the whole door.

TM: Wow.

GS: That's how we paid off all our instruments. We had great instruments. I mean... We'd charge \$1.00 to get in, that's all. In fact, later on they made that a community... About the last year we were together,

which I think was '68 or '69, they made that a teen club thing where it was kind of, they got a percentage of it. The Grand Canyon Teen Club got a percentage of the door.

TM: So your band, it seems like the anchors of the band were Jimmy, Virgil and you? Is that right?

GS: Yeah, we always played together.

TM: Were you all in the same grade in high school?

GS: Jimmy and I were. Gilbert was a year behind me and Virgil was a year ahead of me.

TM: So when Virgil graduated then what happened?

GS: He would still come up. What he did is his first year... Well, I don't think he left for a year, cause he went down to Yuma to the junior college down there and he came back up. He would come back up a lot. I don't think he went anywhere else before he went in the Navy. He stayed about 10 years in the Navy, then he got out and he went to college here. He was a professor here at NAU for a while. Now he's in California, that's where he is. Jimmy... I did 22 years in the Army. Just to explain about what happened to the kids. When I came back, I tried to get ahold of Jimmy cause my brother had seen him, but I couldn't. We were really close friends but I never could get him to respond to anything. Now, Gilbert, the drummer, we met up and we got to see each other and we called each other a lot. What was it, about five years ago, he was working at Bearizona and he had a heart attack and died. Those were my best friends. Jimmy, I don't know why he's kind of standoffish. What my sister told me was, after Jimmy got out of the Army he was back at Grand Canyon and he had been drinking and he had two girls with him. I don't know whether you are familiar, they used to haul water from Williams to Grand Canyon to the Village. That truck, this is what I was told by my sister who was there at the time, the truck was coming back in the middle of the night and for some reason on 64 it was turning around, it was crossways in the road. Jimmy and them two girls were in that Ford Fairlane he had and it hit underneath the trailer. The two girls, my sister said, were decapitated and Jimmy just had a lot of head damage and stuff and everything. I think that really wrecked him after that cause both the girls died and he was messed up. My sister said he had a lot of problems with his brain and stuff. My brother has gone over to Laguna, he's from Laguna. Virgil was a Yavapai Apache. Jimmy Arkie was a Laguna, from Laguna, New Mexico. Gilbert was from Acoma, and he was Acoma. Gilbert was living over there. In fact, it was real funny. Was we out of the Army yet? We stopped to get some cigarettes there at that, what's the name of that place?

FS: Sky..

GS: Sky City, that Casino. There was a little store there, a convenience. The guy that was ringing us up, it was in the middle of the night, I looked at him, he was squinting at that cash register and I knew right away it was Gilbert. I said only one person does that. I said, "Are you Gilbert Ortiz?" He looked at me like, "Who are you?" I'm like, "I'm Gene Sopko." We didn't even recognize [laughs] and that's how we connected when we were coming back. We was coming back from...I think we were coming back from Albuquerque when we stopped there. Maybe coming from Fort Hood, but anyway, that was how I reconnected with Gilbert.

TM: So this is in the '60s and from what people like yourself have taught me, the Grand Canyon community, certainly in the school, there was very little prejudice against people of color, different

racess. There were Hispanics, there were Native Americans, there were white folks, there were all different shades of people...

GS: Yep. Yep. Yeah.

TM: ...and everybody got along very well.

GS: It was like a family. There was none of that up there. In fact, I didn't see it till the Army.

TM: Did you see it when you guys were on the road with the band at all?

GS: Nope.

TM: Okay. So when did you become aware of that, that people would even think that way?

GS: When I was in the Army. Vietnam was winding down and there was a lot of problems between the Caucasians and the Blacks and Hispanics at that time. It was uncalled for. To me it was uncalled for. I just don't like that stuff.

TM: Well, yeah, I'm thinking about you and your band. I mean, this is almost a bunch of Native Americans and the White dude which was really cool.

GS: I know. Yeah. That's what it was but, man, them guys could play the guitar. [laughter] Virgil was one of the best guitar players. I mean he listened to a song and... Virgil Pedro, he was a nice guy. I just loved him. His father helped us out a lot and stuff.

TM: How so?

GS: Doing stuff for the band like taking the money down and paying Mr. Lloyd down here at Flagstaff Music Company or he made these beautiful... He worked for Fred Harvey. I think he worked on like the furniture cause he made these beautiful canvas cases for all of our amplifiers. I mean, beautiful. They were padded and everything. So our amplifiers, going up where we always was going, they never took a hit because we had these beautiful cases that his dad made for us.

TM: Nice. Well, that must have helped just for the dust, the road dust.

GS: Excellent. I mean, they were awesome. Our stuff stayed brand new all the time, you know.

TM: Wow. Nice.

GS: But, yeah, he was pretty interesting. Like I said, I was in a whole new world. They took me from Massachusetts and dropped me in Arizona and we were loving it, all of us, man [laughs]. It was like we was at McDonald's, man, just loving it. I don't know, I just took to them, to everybody and it didn't... I guess I could see some of that back in Massachusetts before I left to come out. When I started going, I did like a week in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade back there before we left.

TM: Did your sisters, Peggy and Kathryn and Mike/Michael, did they all embrace Grand Canyon like you did?

GS: Oh, yeah and we're all still stuck on it, you know. I mean, my brother, he was just up there two weeks ago and I'm like, "Mike, why didn't you tell me? I would have went with you." The last time we went was Christmas of 2015 when my son came out. I love going up there. We go to the reunions. But lately they've been... The older people, they just don't want to have us around the reunions anymore. That's kind of sad. What makes me proud is... My brother, that's all he talks about is Grand Canyon. He still knows some of the people up there. Does the name Sue Hovey ring a bell to you?

TM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

GS: Okay. He talks to her a lot.

TM: Nice.

GS: She was in his class. And let's see...

TM: Sue and Eric. Sure.

GS He goes up there a lot. My sister that lives in Cottonwood, my youngest sister, she goes up there a lot. Now, my other sister...

TM: Does Mike go up for, what is it, Swiss Independence Day, when everybody gets together at Sue and Eric's house out on at Rowe Well.

GS: I don't know whether he's ever did that. He has gone out there when they have 'em out at Rowe Well.

FS: Has he?

GS: Yeah. Cause he said that one time. So, yeah, he does. But him and Sue Hovey are in constant contact. Right now he's a big wheel and he runs that distribution center down there for Revlon down in Phoenix, but he's got a house in Munds Park. I'd give anything to have his house. I always knew... Munds Park since I lived here, to me it was a swamp. [TM laughing] In the winter time when all the snow would melt there'd be all the ducks and stuff out there next to people's houses so when he said, "Ah, man, I bought a house up in Munds Park," I'm like, "Man, you're crazy, too. You're gonna regret that," till I saw where he bought it. He's all the way up on the top of the hill and two houses down is the Forest Service boundary line.

His house is awesome. He's got a nice place up there. I'm kind of jealous in a way but I ain't gonna spend that money that he spent on it. But, yeah, he was one of those guys. You talk about Revlon and wonder, well, what that is. Back in the '60s when they had the movie *The Graduate* the guy says one word, plastics. My brother. He must have watched that movie because he got into plastic extruding big time. He worked for a lot of places down in Phoenix. They were actually stealing him from one another because they were teaching him all the different machines, the extruding machines and he was doing everything. Finally Revlon got ahold of him and he was making all their stuff. Their bottles for like shampoo and stuff and everything. Then they sent him back to Oxford, North Carolina for a while. Then they found out that this distribution center down here in Phoenix, there was a lot of problems there and the guy was kind of a good ole boy thing going on. They sent him there and he's cleaned it up. But I think

he's gonna retire this year or next year. He's really good but he's running that thing down there now. He bought this house out at Munds Park cause he's gonna live here once he hangs it up in Phoenix. He's got a house on 91<sup>st</sup> and Bell Road down there.

TM: Sounds like somebody we should interview.

GS: He would do it. They usually come up here every weekend.

TM: Hmm, okay.

FS: Yeah.

GS: That's my brother, the one that was sick. You can see the guy right now, he's kind of like me. He's a good brother.

TM: Nice. Nice. This is fun. We've been at this now almost an hour and a half, and I'm thinking maybe this is a good time to wrap this interview up. I would like to pick this same thread up, talk a little bit about high school and then your graduation and going to work for the Park Service. So if that sounds like a plan...

GS: Oh, yeah.

TM: Before we wrap it up for good, turn the machine off, is there anything else that you want to add about what you've told me that you think is important, I wanted to tell him that? If there's not, there's not, but if there is let's capture that.

GS: Not really. I think we're at that point right there where went along and started getting... Like right now I've kind of brought you up, even though I did work a couple jobs... I lived in Flagstaff for a little while, not very long. I worked at Greenlaw Shopping Center over there, at Babbitt's over there.

TM: This is after you left the Park Service? This wasn't during high school?

GS: No, before.

TM: Was during high school or after you graduated?

GS: After I graduated.

TM: Okay. So hold that thought and you'll bring that in then.

GS: Okay.

TM: Yeah, yeah. That would be good. Okay. Well,

GS: Cause you wouldn't believe. My sister, you might even like to talk to her. She was a Harvey girl, my mom and my sister.

TM: Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely.



GS: They were Harvey girls with the black...

TM: Was this Peggy or Kathryn?

GS and FS: Kathy.

TM: Okay, Kathy.

GS: Both her and my mom.

FS: Kathryn.

GS: Now I told you about my mom being Emory Kolb's only employee.

TM: Now we need to go back and talk about Kolb, too.

GS: Yeah. Well, my mom worked for Verkamp's, too, and knew Peggy Verkamp, Steve Verkamp. I went to school with Jane and Susie Verkamp.

TM: Okay. So we definitely want to pick that up as well.

GS: Okay.

TM: Okay. I'm just writing some notes here about where we want to pick this up again because I'd really like to capture these stories as well. Okay?

GS: I got a real Grand Canyon story because...

TM: Okay. Well, hang on, hold that thought. Now, unless you want me to write a little note about...

GS: Just Fred Harvey. I worked as a Harvey man at the El Tovar for a little while [laughs], until... Have you ever heard of a guy named Jay Goza?

TM: Yeah. Mary's talked about Jay.

GS: Yeah. Great guy. Awesome guy. The Marlboro Man, but he didn't smoke. He was a great guy, him and his family. He came up. I'd went from busboy to waiter at the El Tovar.

TM: Okay, hold that thought, hold that thought because we're wrapping this up now. Gene and Flo, thank you very, very much for this wonderful interview. Grand Canyon Historical Society, this is an oral interview with Gene and Flo Sopko and this is the end of Part 1. Thank you very much.