

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History
Interviewee: Gene Sopko (GS)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
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Keys Warren Hill, Everett Robertson, Larry Waymire, Lloyd Horner, Jack Fields, George Wendt, George Von der Lippe, Noel Pacht, 1968 Grand Canyon river trip, river sanitation, river cooking, Jim Arkie, Virgil Pedro, Steve Smith, Keith Miller, Hap Maxwell, Gilbert Ortiz, Wayne Lehrn, Norm Browning, Marty Robbins, Harley Robertson, Charlie Robertson, Emery Kolb, Walter Uquala, Jay Goza family, Eagle Smith, Verkamp family, Steve Luckeson, John Glodis, Catherine Wilcox, Peggy Bartlett, John Snyder, Joe Lee, Bob Pavlich, Scott Rousch

TM: Today is November 30th, 2017. It's Thursday. We're at the home of Tom Martin and Hazel Clark. Today this is part three of an interview with Eugene Sopko. When we finished up the interview last time you were talking about the people that were on your river trips in '68. One of them was Warren Hill.

GS: Right.

TM: I got excited and I was like what can you tell me about Warren?

GS: Yeah. Warren was one of the more enjoyable and knowledgeable people that we had. He was one of the ones that I loved to talk to. Being the young guy, I was only 19, I liked to listen to older people tell me stuff and everything. He was a lot of fun to have with us, have along. He was really interested in what we were doing. He wanted to know everything as far as what was going on along the river, what we were doing about everything. He was a good guy. I think it was Glade that came up... We'd given everybody that would come on the boat nicknames, and we called him Warren Hubs [both laugh]. He was a real good guy. I really enjoyed having him. I can still remember him. He was a good guy to have along with us.

TM: Hmm. Who else was on those trips that you remember?

GS: Okay. I remember Everett Robertson from sanitation from National Park Service. Everett Robertson was head of the Sanitation Department. He was with us. I think he was on the first trip. Some of the more memorable was Larry Waymire, who was in charge of maintenance. He was in charge of maintenance stuff. He was an interesting guy to have with us also because he was really interested in what we were doing. It was neat that they sent all these people with us, I thought, because they could actually see what was going on and understand what needed to be done down there. They could see the trash on the beaches and stuff like that so they understood real good when they had to do certain things and what they recommended that we could also do. We had Lloyd Horner, he was a law enforcement ranger. He was kind of one of the head law enforcement guys. Had Jack Fields. Jack also worked for maintenance up there.

TM: What do you remember about Lloyd?

GS: I liked him. He was a big, old, tall, skinny guy. My favorite memory of Lloyd was when I became 16 years old they used to do the driver's license testing down at the community building. I went in there one day and Lloyd was standing there and he saw me in there and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm getting my driver's license." He looked at me and said, "You been driving around the village for two years." [laughs] But, yeah, he was a good guy. He really took his job seriously. He did everything by the book. He was just one of those by-the-book guys. He was always around, he was always there and he was always helpful to people. So I remember him that way. I went to school with his kids, Neal Horner. They're a good family. So I remember him. We had that George Wendt fellow. I don't know, I think he worked for Park Service. To me he was the smartest guy I ever seen. One of the things I think I might have told you, I had gone to a Doors concert and Jim Morrison was singing "Light My Fire". People were lighting sparklers and he was throwing them back at the people and they were trying to catch them (laughs). They were giving them sparklers. When I told George Wendt that he looks at me and he goes, "Those things burn at 1500 degrees." I was like how does he know that. To me it was pretty interesting. But he was a good guy. Who else did we have along with us down there?

TM: Did Von der Lippe get on your trips?

GS: I don't remember him ever coming, no. So he must not have ever did. Warren Hill, I remember him. I don't remember Von der Lippe. And then that guy, Kim, I think he's in some of my boat pictures, the one that was the archaeologist that we went up to Nankoweap. I forget what his name was. I think I only knew him as Kim. But on the report, I'm pretty sure he's one of the guys that's in the movies with the white helmets on riding in front of the boat. So I remember him. Who else would that... Noel Pachta. Noel Pachta was the overall supervisor of road and trails. He came down there with us. I'm trying to remember who else was... Oh, we had that guy, Ted, from National Geographic, he was on with us. He mainly was just filming the river. I can't remember his last name, but I remember his first name now was Ted. He was a nice little old guy. He was filming all the river and stuff. But as far as that, I can't remember anybody else that we had along with us.

TM: Is there anything else about those river trips, that you think we haven't covered?

GS: Well, I don't know. As far as some of the good stuff, as far as like... I think Woody and Glade did most of the cooking. I very seldom did the cooking. It was those guys that cooked all the meals for us cause everybody pitched in their, what do they call that, per diem. They would give us them. We'd buy all the groceries and Glade and Woody would cook. I'd usually be the guy doing the stuff with the boat. I'd be blowing the boat up during breakfast and stuff. One of the things I thought was pretty funny was one day Woody and Glade were taking some leftover pancakes and were spreading peanut butter on them and folding them in half and putting them in their pockets for later on [laughs] in the day. They was pretty tiny pancakes, they didn't crumble or nothing. That was pretty good.

TM: So did Glade ever tell you any extra stories about funny things that he had seen in his boating?

GS: Yeah, he did. He told me once about when, I forget who he was working for, but he said they went in the first big hole they hit in Lava Falls...there was a different guy driving the boat, and then when they hit that hole Glade said it was like they hit a tree. The next thing you know he sees the guy laying next to him who had been driving the boat and he's got the whole handle of the motor in his hand [both laugh] Glade's like, "oh, no," and from there on out it was, they were just at the mercy of the river gods.

Another one he told me about one time, too, he was telling me a story about Bedrock. It was a Hatch boat and they had the pontoon boat with the floor in the bottom, it had that rubber floor. I guess it was when he was working for Hatch cause he was there and he saw it happen. He had a name for the pilot of the boat that I can't say, but it was what he called him. But anyway, the boat got sideways up on the rock and started pushing, the water was pushing up on the rock. Well, everybody scrambled out and got on the rock in the middle of the rapid. One of the things he said was they were watching him and the boat started coming loose. Well, the boatman, the guy that was driving the boat, he saw it coming so as it started around the side of the rock he jumped in. Well, the floor was torn out of the boat, it had ripped off when they hit the rock. Glade said it was funny because he just went and got the Maytag treatment down the river in the rapid because the boat, there's nowhere to stand in there. That was a couple of the real funny stories that Glade had told me. I'm trying to remember if there was anything else like that or... Not really. I can't remember anything else about...

TM: I'm thinking that Glade would have been a good cook...

GS: Oh, yeah.

TM: ...cause he was a Hatch boatman and typically they become good cooks.

GS: Right. And he knew all the correct things to take on the river.

TM: How was it that Woody was a good cook?

GS: I'm not really sure. I think he just kind of worked along with Glade on that stuff. He never said anything. Him and Glade would get together and they'd do the cooking and I'd do the other stuff, the boat stuff.

TM: Did you do the dishes?

GS: No. I think everybody kind of washed their own dishes right there in the river. In those days we did that a lot, as long as the river was clean, you know, cause we'd drink right out of the river, too.

TM: Did you have a cup for that? Did you just reach over...

GS: Yeah, I had me one of them aluminum boatman's cups that would hook on your belt. I had that. One thing all the river guides carried at that time, too, we had a leather pouch with a pair of pliers. So we always had a pair of pliers with us. We kept it on our belt. So we had that and the aluminum cup that we had, or steel cup, whatever they were. We'd drink out of the river with that.

TM: Do you still have your pliers?

GS: Nah, but I still got the cup. I didn't keep the pliers. I don't know where they went. They disappeared. They disappeared along with my ammo box that I used to take down there to keep my cameras and stuff in, keep it waterproof. I don't know where they went.

TM: So you guys were thinking about sanitation in '68. Clearly it was a problem.

GS: Yeah. Right.

TM: Where did you go to the bathroom at that time?

GS: We always had to dig a hole. We had a little army entrenching tool, one of the old ones like the GIs had exactly. One of the first things we'd do when we'd set up camp was we'd stick that thing in the ground and slide a roll of toilet paper down over the handle cause it didn't have the d-handle, the one we had. We bought that at that 4th Street Farmer's Market that's over there now. It was called the General Store at that time. But we had that and what we'd do is have to dig a real deep hole. That was just the way we did it, and made sure it was covered up. So that was how we took care of that hygiene stuff in them days.

TM: Okay. And you would build fires to cook with right on the beach there?

GS: Right, right. We'd build a regular fire just like you always see. We also had some propane burners. We had two of them. They were just the frame, a metal frame, a rectangular frame, with legs. Each one had two burners. We could put like a flat griddle on there, one of the ones you could put right over a fire, and we could cook our bacon and stuff like that on there. Or we used Dutch ovens. We'd cook in the fire pits with Dutch ovens, the fire pits we built, and stuff like that. We usually had everything to cook all of our stuff that we needed. But those two, they were run by the propane. Those were pretty good deals. All those were, was metal frames with two burners in each one of them and we could use them to cook. Like heat up corn in a pan or something like that.

TM: So clearly there was already a conscious awareness that, hey, there was another way to make fire, there was another way to cook food, where you didn't need to build a fire on the beach?

GS: Right, right. Yeah. Sometimes we wouldn't even build a fire. It was dependent on what we were gonna have for dinner. Maybe in the morning for breakfast, we'd cook our coffee and cook the eggs and bacon and pancakes on the butane things, so we'd use them. We didn't always really have a fire. It depended on what we were cooking. If we were gonna cook something in a Dutch oven we'd usually build a fire. So we didn't always have one.

TM: Do you ever remember, you talked about the boats getting hung up high and dry when the dam water would drop.

GS: Go down.

TM: Did you ever ding any props or anything on rocks at any other time?

GS: Yeah, we kind of hit some rocks sometimes with them. We never had any serious damage to the blades. We had two engines, they were both Johnson 20-horse outboards. One of them, the number two engine, we didn't use that that often that summer. We used the number one because it seemed not to miss as much. It just seemed to be a better engine and ran better. So we used that one more than we used the number two engine that was kind of like standby. Fact, I don't even really remember using the number two. I know we did, but mainly we used the number one engine cause that was all of our favorite engine. We knew it was reliable and it was a good engine. We had the other one onboard with us that we took with us. Kept it just in case we lost an engine, lost a blade or anything like that. That was pretty interesting.

TM: Well, I can't think of anything else about that, but if something comes up don't hesitate to go back and say, "Oh, yeah, hey, I remember about that."

GS: Right. Yeah.

TM: So you brought today a CD jacket with a photograph on the cover of the jacket. There are four gentlemen, look like teenagers, and they've got musical instruments. They look like a bunch of electric guitars here and it says "Gecko and the Squids, Take One." And on the back there's a list of ten songs. Number one is "I Ain't Had No Lovin'"; number two, "I'm Cryin'"; number three, "Don't Let the Sun Catch you Cryin'"; number four, Whine, Whine, Whine"; number five is "Louie, Louie"; number six is "I Can't Get No Satisfaction"; number seven is "Kicks"; number eight "It's Only Make Believe"; number nine is "Little Latin Lupe Lu"; and number ten is "La Bamba". This is Gecko and the Squids, recorded July 1966 at the community building, Grand Canyon, Arizona. You told us, I think in a prior interview, that you guys cut this, I think, at the community center, you had one take to try it.

GS: Right. We were kind of in a hurry so we wanted to get this done.

TM: On the back here there's a list of the people that are in the band. Can you tell me again, I know you told me some about these people already but just make sure you've got me all filled in on who these people were.

GS: Okay. We started this, I think I was a freshman in high school. What happened was I was working for Babbitt's at the time stocking milk and cookies for Nabisco. We covered that in an earlier thing. What I did is I ordered from Alden's out of Chicago, Illinois, it was a catalog warehouse, I ordered a guitar and an amplifier. I was kind of fooling around with it, just messing around with it. Well at the time, Jimmy Arkie was my best friend. Jim Arkie. He was in the same grade as me. Him and I always ran together. We was really close, both of us. Well, he had a guitar and an amplifier also. I didn't know Virgil Pedro very good at that time. He was a class ahead of us. Jimmy asked me, he said "Hey, Virgil Pedro wants us to come over and see if we just wanted to mess around a little bit on the guitars." Well, Virgil was a really accomplished musician as far as even guitar playing. He played the trumpet, but he also played the tuba in the school band. Believe it or not, we used to have music festivals every spring down here. It was ASC and then it became NAU, Northern Arizona...

TM: Arizona State College here in Flagstaff.

GS: Right. They'd grade you on your individual talents and on your band talent. Virgil was playing the tuba one year, he came down and he did a tuba solo. The name of the song was "Dew Drops" and this guy got the highest score you could get for a rating on his performance of "Dew Drops." So for a while there Virgil had to live with the nickname Dew Drops. That was pretty good. Yeah, Virgil was a class ahead of me and Jim. So we got together. Then Virgil brought in Steve Smith. He's also on this CD. He was also in Virgil's class. Steve played a little bit of guitar, too. So Virgil decided, there was a talent show coming up, he wanted to get in there. Well, there was another guy that was a couple grades ahead of Virgil named Keith Miller, and he had a drum set. So we decided we're gonna play in this talent show. We got together a couple songs and played in the talent show in the community building. Everybody came out and did different things from Grand Canyon Village. Steve sang one song and I sang one song. Then we decided well that went over pretty good, why don't we just try to start a band. We did that and we just kept practicing an awful lot. Steve was kind of on and off with us. The main guys, when we started the band going, Keith... Let's see, back up. Keith Miller only played with us a couple times. Then

there was a friend of mine named Hap Maxwell. He played drums. His brother had a drum set and he took them over. So then the band became Virgil and me and Jim Arkie and then Hap Maxwell. Hap moved away from Grand Canyon after about six months or so and he sold his drum set to Gilbert Ortiz, who was one grade behind us, and then he became the drummer. So when we got together to record this we had Virgil and me and Steve Smith and Jim Arkie and Gilbert Ortiz playing the drums.

Gilbert, we remained kind of in touch over the years. He just passed away here a few years ago. What was funny, I was just talking to my brother over Thanksgiving weekend and they're still trying to find Gilbert's daughter because Gilbert Ortiz, that's how close we were, gave my brother all of his military records for safekeeping. So my brother has all of Gilbert's military records. He wants to give them to Gilbert's daughter but he's still trying to track her down. He believes she may be living somewhere in Flagstaff. So he's gonna still try to do it, but right now he's got all Gilbert's military records. That's how close we were. He was close with Gilbert. I was close with Gilbert, too.

We played together till about 1969 when people started going away. Virgil went to Yuma College for a while. He left. Then he went in the Navy. Gilbert and Jimmy went in the Army, and I went to Phoenix to go to college. I went to Phoenix College down there for two years. So that more or less just kind of ended the band playing as it was. Virgil was in the Navy on submarines. I was in the artillery when I went in. After two years of college I joined the Army. I was in the artillery and later on to go to flight school and became a helicopter pilot.

TM: Any stories there of being a helicopter pilot?

GS: Well, yeah, I've just always been fascinated with helicopters as a machine. A lot of people say, "Do you like to fly?" I always say not really and they say, "Why do you do it?" I say because I'm fascinated with helicopters cause they're not supposed to fly and I can make them fly. I've talked to a lot of helicopter pilots over the years and they feel the same way as I do about flying helicopters.

TM: You know, I've got a question for you here. Before you went to Phoenix and then got into the services and got into the ability to fly helicopters...when you were at Grand Canyon, by 1968 the park had realized the utility of helicopters. Did you ever get a chance to fly... You did, you told me you guys flew over when you were doing the trail work. Did that play into your fascination with helicopters at all?

GS: I believe it did because I rode so many. So many times they took us in and out and I saw what they were doing with them. Wayne Lehrn had this other pilot that worked with him, Norm Browning. I flew with them all the time. I really did, I thought it was cool. I remember the first time I flew off the rim with one of them. It was what we called in the Army a H-13. It's like the ones you see on M.A.S.H, that's the easiest way to describe it. It's a Bell Helicopter, it's got a big bubble, and everybody sits in one seat. There's the pilot and then two people can sit next to him. I'll never forget coming from Tusayan and busting over that rim the first time and then there's nothing below you. That was awesome. Then I over the years working for the Park Service, I was always being flown in and out on helicopters. I just found them fascinating because of just what you can do with them. I really believe that made an influence on me because I was just fascinated with them. They were just a different kind of machine.

Over my years in the military I did a lot of different stuff. I started out in utility helicopters, I was flying them, that's UH-1, they call them Hueys, like you always see in Vietnam. Then in flight school I also became a scout. They sent me to the scout course where I flew the Bell OH-58s. It's a little, small four-person helicopter. Mainly everybody calls it a Bell Jet Ranger, it's a Bell 206, and the Army used them. I

loved the scout mission because in the Army you fly that helicopter all by yourself. Even though it's got two pilot stations, usually the scout pilot flies it by himself. I had a lot of missions. My first place when I graduated from flight school they sent me to Alaska. I went to Fairbanks, Alaska, and I loved it, flying up there. I did a lot of stuff. What they had up there was when we flew Hueys they allowed us to work with Alaska Fish and Game because in the mountains the flying is so difficult. It's the best training you can get. Well, they would dart grizzly bears from our helicopters. I got a couple funny stories about that, but what we'd do is they had a guy up there in the Super Cub flying around and a lot of the grizzly bears would have collars on them with radios so they could locate the ones that they wanted to... They would give them like a complete physical. I got a big kick out of that. First time I ever went out I was a Warrant Officer 1, which is a brand new helicopter pilot. The guy that I was with, he had gone a few times before, he was a Warrant Office 1. We darted a female grizzly and she took off running. They didn't get enough into her so we were kind of chasing her or going around behind her trying to watch her. She wouldn't go down so they darted her again. Well, they got so wrapped up in it they thought, oh, man, she might overheat. So me and my partner there, we ended up, well, let's take her to some water. [chuckle] That stuff there doesn't really knock them out, it just immobilizes them, the stuff they were using. The bear's awake and it's looking at you and growling but it's not doing... We threw it in the back of the helicopter and flew it down to this little place where there was a little pool of water. Drug her over there and put her in the water to cool her down. A little bit later both of us were looking at each other and [chuckle] what would we have done if she had come to and started moving around? We would have been in big trouble. That was one of the funny things with the Hueys, that was one story.

I had another one one time that really made me proud of my piloting skills. The guy said, "I want to get this collar somehow." This was a huge grizzly bear and he said, "Somehow he got this collar off and I want to retrieve it if we can." He had the radio thing. Well, come to find out it was up this real thin canyon, I mean real thin, not very wide. What I had to do was go up and try to come around and then I put my right skid on the rock so he could jump out and get it. I had to kind of balance the helicopter there. He went and got the collar. But what fascinated me about that whole story... He was happy to have his collar back. I wasn't as big as I am now, I was kind of big...but I could take that collar, it hadn't been ripped off, it was still together, I could take it and just go like that all the way from my head to my knees without it touching my body. That was a huge grizzly bear, huge. But he was glad. They don't know what happened to it, why that collar was there, but obviously the bear didn't die. They thought maybe the bear died, but obviously he didn't, he just took the collar off somehow and got rid of it.

But, yeah, I did all that flying up there and then later on I went to Fort Hood, Texas to Germany. I was in Desert Storm and Desert Shield. I was a scout in an Apache unit, Apache attack helicopters. It was a interesting job. One of the good things that I lucked out about, and I always found this was one of the interesting things, I was in Germany in an Apache unit in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. I was like, well, I told my wife, I said, "We've got to go to Berlin." They have a corridor you have to drive between. Checkpoint Alpha is where you get in the Berlin cirrodor at that time. You have to watch a movie... What it is, you go through a Russian checkpoint after you hit the American point at Alpha and you watch a movie of the road trip all the way to Checkpoint Bravo in West Berlin. Well, Russian soldiers check you in and then they check you out, and you can't take any longer than what it would normally take a person to drive there. Once you get to Checkpoint Bravo then you walk to Checkpoint Charlie and go across. I always thought that was interesting cause I was in Germany and I was... We were over there hitting the wall with chisels and hammers, knocking pieces of the wall off. I thought, you know what, this is the end of my career because the Cold War's over. Then we got called to Desert Shield and Desert Storm so it didn't wrap up as quick as I thought it was.

I was really glad that I was so interested in helicopters. I don't know whether you want to hear that story, how I got there. I was a Sergeant First Class as a drill sergeant in the artillery. I was at Fort Sill and working as a drill sergeant, Sergeant First Class E-7. They came out at the time and they said, "We've lost too many pilots from Vietnam, we need helicopter pilots." Somebody came up with the idea we'd like to see if E-7 drill sergeants could do it because you had the discipline and the knowledge and stuff. So I just applied. I passed the physical, applied, and went to school. The Warrant Officer Flight School has a real high attrition rate. We started with 69 and graduated with 19. That's just about how bad it really is. If you really want to get through, you can get through that school but you gotta really put your mind down to it. I attribute that to my upbringing at Grand Canyon, really. The schools and the teachers I had.

TM: How old were you then when you went through that training?

GS: Let's see, that was in '82, so I was 23. 23.

TM: Okay. Those couple extra years might make you a little more focused on what you want to do than if you were 18. I don't know. I mean, I'm not sure.

GS: No, I was older than 23 cause I did 10 years. Let's see. I went in in '71 and then '81 I went to flight school. So I would have been 33.

TM: Then that even carries more weight cause as the older student, they typically are more, if you try something like that and you want to do it you find a way.

GS: That was the key to it, you'll find a way. You want it? How bad do you want it? And then you'll make it through. As an older guy, it was a little tougher for me [laughs]. I'm running with these gazelles, you know, six miles and stuff [laughs]. If you wanted it you could make it through. That was a good deal. But I got to fly helicopters and I flew helicopters for twelve years. I got to fly Hueys and OH-58s. I loved the scout mission. It was more fun because it was always by yourself. That's kind of the way I work.

TM: Nice. Let's tie this back to Grand Canyon then. You've talked about Gecko and the Squids. One of the people that you mentioned the other day that I missed catching the story on was about Marty Robbins.

GS: Right. My father, when we moved out from Massachusetts, he was a big Marty Robbins fan. He loved Martin Robbins. We came out like in September, me and my brother and my father came out in September. One of the first things he did, he went to Art Malone's Shell station out at Tusayan. There was a guy in there named Chuck Robertson. He come home and he told me Marty Robbins's brother, Chuck, works out at that gas station at Shell. He was just so happy. I was kind of like raising my eyebrows, like I don't know. Then a little bit later on I found out when I was working for Fred Harvey, there was a woman named Lilly Nevitt. Well, she did look like a young... That's Lilly, L-i-l-l-y, Nevitt, N-e-v-i-t-t. Later on I learned that that was Marty Robbins's sister. You can look her up online now. They've got a website to her and everything. She actually is. She's passed away now, too. Clyde Nevitt, her husband, was kind of a family friend of ours. He was real close with my mother and my stepdad, who is Bob Mitchell. His name was Bob Mitchell. After my dad died she married this guy named Bob Mitchell. Anyway, to stay on the track as far as Marty Robbins goes, Marty Robbins had a twin sister. It wasn't Lilly, it was another one. I forget what her name was, Helen or something like that. Lilly was at Grand Canyon and Chuck Robertson was at Grand Canyon. Now, Marty Robbins had a twin sister but then his mother also had two boys named Harley Robertson and Charlie Robertson. Charlie Robertson was Chuck

that worked at the gas station. Then down the road Lilly and Clyde Nevitt had a set of twins. They also named them Harley and Charlie. So there was two Harley... Course her twins were named Harley and Charlie Nevitt, but they lived at Grand Canyon for quite a while. She's passed on now. I follow her, you can find her information on the internet. In fact, now I've heard that both Harley and Charlie have also passed away. I knew them when they were in their 20s and everything. It's kind of bad cause they were kind of fans of Gecko and the Squids, our band. So there was a big tie with Grand Canyon and Marty Robbins there. It was pretty neat.

TM: Would you see Marty at the rim every now and then?

GS: I never saw him, not ever. He never come up there that I knew of but everybody knew who these people were, Chuck Robertson and Lilly Nevitt.

TM: Marty was a big country western...

GS: Country western, right.

TM: Can you name a song or two that he was good for?

GS: Oh, all of them—Big Iron, El Paso, Running Gun. I just found all three of his first gunfighter albums on CD. I'm tickled now I've got them all cause I love his music. I'm a big Marty Robbins fan. Plus he was also in NASCAR. He used to drive in the Talladega 500 a lot. That was the only race he ever ran in every year, but he was a racing fan, too, stock car racing.

TM: Okay. You mentioned that your mom worked for Emery Kolb for some time.

GS: Correct.

TM: Can you talk about that?

GS: Yeah. She worked for Emery Kolb up at his shop on the Rim that's still there now. I don't know what it is now, it's something else. That was in the days when they used to take the pictures. She was there just to run the curio shop, but there was a lot of times she took the pictures or would turn the film on. Emery Kolb used to show that film there. You paid, I don't know what it was, a dollar or something, to go in and watch the film. You'd sit down like in this little small auditorium. He'd come... There was a balcony on the stairs that came down. He'd stand up on that balcony and he'd talk to the people, describe to them what they were getting ready to see and getting ready to watch and then he'd be gone. Mom would turn it on and turn it off and stuff to watch the films. It was really good. I seen it a number of times when Emery was introducing stuff. She worked for him for I don't know, quite a while. In fact, he had a house out behind the trailer village out there. He had a little brown house that was also out there. They lived in there for a couple years so she must have worked for Emery Kolb for a couple of years. I had an autographed book of his and my first wife got it [chuckle]. I missed out on that. Dang it. I wish I still had it.

TM: The mule guides would bring the mules down with their people, how did they notify the studio?

GS: There was a little buzzer. Believe it or not there was a buzzer there. They'd ring that buzzer and either her or Emery would come out and take the pictures of the people.

TM: Open the little door and take the picture.

GS: Right, and then when the people came out, they'd tell them you come out here and you go into there and you can buy your pictures. They could look at them and get the pictures that they wanted. That's the way they did it every day.

TM: Did your mom learn how to develop film then? Was she part of that or did Emery do that?

GS: Nah, she didn't develop it. He always did that himself. Yeah.

TM: All right. Any other Kolb stories you remember?

GS: I don't know whether you want me to tell you that one that Lorenzo told [laughs]. I don't know. Lorenzo was telling me one day... Him and I were working on the garbage truck, this was after I had ran the river. He had told me that he had been out the night before, and it was cold and it was snowy. He said that he seen Kolb's daughter, she was drunk and she was naked laying in a snow bank. I couldn't believe it. I was like, "You gotta be kidding me," and he said, "No, I'm not lying to you." That might be a true story, might not, but that came from Lorenzo Uquala that used to do that.

TM: He would have saved her life then if he'd gotten her out of the snow and gotten her back home.

GS: Yeah, cause believe it or not, I don't know whether he... When I was there, when I was like a freshman, we had a senior, Walter Uquala, they might have been related. He was a real good basketball player. He was on our team when we took state champs, Class C State Champs. He came down to NAU and that's how he died. He was going to NAU and he got drunk, he was on a basketball scholarship, and he froze to death. So in a way that's kind of sad that that happens but, yeah, Walter was a good guy and a good basketball player, really good. Good football player, too.

TM: You mentioned your mom remarried to a man named Bob Mitchell.

GS: Bob Mitchell, yeah.

TM: What did Bob do at the park?

GS: He worked for the forestry industry and believe it or not, he had a neat job. It goes to show you that the forest industry did take care of the forest in a way. One thing him and his buddy did was they would go through the forest and remove all the mistletoe from the trees. That was all they did was climb up the trees and remove mistletoe. He had those climbing boots and stuff, and they'd go up there. That's what he did for a job. He was working for, I think it was Western Lumber or whatever it was. That's all they did all day was go through the forest removing mistletoe.

TM: Did he work for the U.S. Forest Service?

GS: No, he was working for a lumber company.

TM: Really. Worked for a lumber company cause I wouldn't think that the lumber at the South Rim was, was lumberable outside the park.

GS: I'm pretty sure that's where he was working out there.

TM: Okay.

GS: Yeah, and that was all they did was take care of the forest. I don't know whether they were cutting down as much but that was his main job. Him and that other guy, there was two of them that would go around and they'd just look for the mistletoe and remove it and get it out of there. I asked them, "Well, why do you guys do that?" He said because it kills the trees. I thought that was a pretty cool job.

TM: Hmm. Yeah.

GS: But, yeah, she married him and that's what he was doing.

TM: By that time were you and your, you had a brother and a sister, were you all out of high school by then?

GS: No, we're still all in school at that time. Yeah.

TM: Okay. All right. Now you told me this already, your housing ended up being out in Tusayan then.

GS: Yeah. She moved out there to Tusayan and then she moved to Williams, I think so Bob could be closer to the forest. They all went down to Williams, Arizona and lived down there. This is where Jay Goza comes into the picture. I was playing for the football team and stuff and I just didn't want to go to Williams. I wanted to stay at Grand Canyon and play for the Phantoms. Jay Goza and his wife Ellen took me in and my mom paid them so much every month. I lived there with Jay and his... He had two boys, Wes and Little Jay Goza, and then a girl, Bernadette. Me and Wes stayed in the same bedroom. That went on for about two years I lived with them and I stayed with them the whole time. So I could stay at school plus I had the band going and all that stuff. At that time, then, my mom and Bob had moved to the forest over at Ruidoso and they were doing that kind of stuff over there, Ruidoso, New Mexico. So, yeah, I lived with Jay and them for two years. Real nice guy. Jay was really well known and really well liked and loved in that town. Everybody just thought... Him and Ellen both, they were really great people. Jay worked for Fred Harvey, he ran the whole mule operations, and John Smith was like his assistant. That's Eagle Smith's husband. Then Ellen worked as a school nurse. She had worked at the Grand Canyon Hospital for a while, then she was the school nurse and worked there. Jay, you used to see him at all the school and community activities, everything. He dressed like... They used to call him the Marlboro Man cause. I've learned a little bit later that sometimes he did smoke, but he didn't smoke, but he always had a real nice cowboy hat. I remember every Christmas Ellen would buy him a new Silverbelly cowboy hat. That's what they call them. The first thing he'd do is go and get in the shower with it on, get it soaking wet so he could fold it just the way he wanted it. His hat always looked nice. I worked for Jay for a while cleaning the mule barns and stuff like that. I forget what time period that was, but it was after I had worked at the El Tovar. I was working the El Tovar as a bus boy, then they made me a waiter, and one day Jay come in and told me he had a job for me that was a lot cleaner and stuff [laughs]. Me and a fellow named Mac Latham, we were the guys that kept the mule barns and the grounds clean, hauled that stuff all out to the dump. I'm trying to see if I remember any stories. I remember somebody died up there. My sister was talking about it this last Thanksgiving weekend. I can't remember who she said it was. I thought it was some guy. She said it was a woman. I had gone to Ruidoso to visit my mom and my brothers and sisters, and Dan Blocker, Hoss from Bonanza, was there.

He came to the funeral because that person had died, he showed up at the funeral. That was pretty cool, and Jay was pretty tickled about that.

When they filmed Brightly of Grand Canyon, Jay Goza plays that Arizona ranger guy in there that's riding the mules and stuff. He told me some stories about it. He said one of them they wanted him to come down off this kind of like a little mesa thing and ride right up to the rim. Well, Jay just come flying down there on the mule and they didn't take no pictures because he was coming so fast, when he stopped the mule everybody scattered. They thought he was gonna go over the rim. He had to shoot that thing and he was really getting frustrated because they had to shoot it three or four times before them guys could... Cause they thought he was gonna go over for sure. He told me about one scene where they kept telling him, "You gotta be really angry, you gotta look mad and angry." He said they shouted about twenty-five times because he couldn't be angry. That's just Jay Goza. He was not that type of a guy to look mean and angry. But that's pretty cool he was in that movie there. He was pretty happy about that. I remember my sister was telling me, I forget what year it was, she couldn't remember either, but something happened. The woman that was running Phantom Ranch, the restaurants and everything down there, she quit and my sister and her girlfriend, her father was Mark Branham, Mark. His wife's name was Nana, N-a-n-a. They had a daughter whose name was Nellie, and my sister and her were real close friends. They lived out at Yaqui Point in the Fred Harvey house out there. He was mainly a packer. He packed the mules in to carry groceries and stuff down into Phantom Ranch. They were over there one night when Jay Goza came out and they needed somebody to run Phantom Ranch because that woman had left. They got my sister. My sister said her and Nellie were down there the whole summer. They never came out that whole summer. They were down there running the Phantom Ranch, the restaurant and all that stuff down there. [laughs] That was pretty cool. I hadn't heard that till I was talking to her a couple months ago and she told me about that. She said Jay came out in the middle of the night and got them cause they were right there at Yaqui. He rode up the Kaibab Trail and came and got them and took them back down. [laughs] I thought that was pretty cool.

TM: And then they were down there the entire summer?

GS: Yeah. Entire summer. That's what I asked her, I said, "Well, how long you guys stay there?" She said, "The whole summer. We worked that place the whole summer, me and Nellie."

TM: 1966-ish?

GS: It was probably about... That would be a good one, '66 or '67 I would say. Yeah. Because that would be about a right timeframe. She never told me, I don't think she could remember herself. I thought that was a pretty good story when she was telling me that cause I had never known she did that. That was pretty funny.

TM: You had also mentioned a couple stories about Susie and Jane Verkamp.

GS: Yeah. When I was a freshman, Susie was a senior and Jane was, no, Jane was a senior and Susie was a sophomore. Both very smart girls. Both of them played in the band. Jane played the clarinet and Susie played the baritone horn. We all played in the band together and stuff. They were straight A students, really smart, really good. I didn't know their brother, Steve. He was ahead of me. I knew about him and everything. At one time my mom worked for Verkamps so that's how we knew them also. She worked for them for quite a while when Peggy Verkamp was there. I knew Peggy and her brother, Jack Verkamp, Jack. That's the two Verkamps that I know real good, the older Verkamps. Mom worked for them in their

curio shop for quite a while. She pretty much did everything. They were both good people to work for. She liked Peggy and Jack both. Susie and Jane, I can't remember, they were always at the football games and the basketball games, sporting stuff and everything. But mainly they were in school to gain the [chuckle] intellectuals. They were really 'I'm here for this and that's it'. I don't know what they went on to become. I would have liked to know but they were really smart girls, both of them.

TM: I think Peggy was a voracious reader so they would have been very smart kids.

GS: Yeah. Peggy was just the nicest person. I used to like to go up there sometimes and talk to her in that big thing. I think they still got that big painting in that place there. The Verkamp store, at that time back in the '60s, it was full of Kachinas and stuff. Old, old, old Kachinas that they had made. I used to love going in there and looking at stuff. That was my favorite place to go. When Mom was working it was pretty nice cause I could go up there. But yeah, Peggy and Jack... That was the thing in them days, you always seen them people everywhere. Like if I went to Babbitt's there's a good chance that Peggy or Jack would be in Babbitt's or Jay Goza or something. Everybody knew everybody. Grand Canyon was so small at that time there wasn't that many people there, so everybody knew who everybody was. I think that was one of the great things about it. It was like one big family, one big family.

When we took the basketball state championship, I think I was like a sophomore so that would have been '65. We took the basketball C championship. We were real underdogs. There was a guy that worked for the *Flagstaff Daily Sun*, I think his last name was Sweitzer. He wrote the sports. For some reason he latched onto Grand Canyon that year. He was predicting at the beginning of the season, that Grand Canyon was gonna win the state championship. He started naming it the Fabulous Phantoms and stuff. I was playing JV basketball, I wasn't good enough to play the varsity. He followed every game, every game, right till when we met down here at NAU when we were playing Pima. Grand Canyon was a small school and Pima was a pretty good size C school. They had a lot of good... We were the underdogs and we ended up... It was just like that movie Hoosiers, it was tie score and there was like fifteen seconds. I was sitting up in the bleachers at NAU stadium watching that stuff. This guy named Stormy Hoskins, he was a senior at the time, H-o-s-k-i-n-s, Stormy, he got the ball with fifteen seconds left and he come dribbling down the floor, he crossed that center line and just like in Hoosiers, took a big jump shot and that ball went through that net just when the buzzer went off. The stands were packed and everybody just, I remember it just was like there was a magnet down there, everybody just went (sound effect). Anyway, that newspaper reporter, he was so tickled, that guy Sweitzer, he was writing in there, he said, "Even the night park ranger was at NAU stadium. There was nobody in town. Everybody was in Flagstaff watching the Phantoms play that game against Pima." That was pretty cool, and it was, man. That was really something else. The town was pretty happy. We were such a bunch of underdogs there was no way that they were supposed to win that game and they pulled it out.

TM: Interesting, because one thing that Grand Canyon has is the altitude advantage...

GS: Exactly.

TM: ...and it just helps a little bit.

GS: It does a lot because I ran track. The only thing I never lettered in while I was there was basketball. I just wasn't that good and I wasn't that tall. I lettered in football, baseball, and track. When we'd go down into the valley or down to Camp Verde and some of these places, you could tell the difference. We could run. I had a coach when I was playing basketball, an assistant coach, his name was Dave Rogers, he

was the biology teacher, and he would run us to death. When we'd get down there we were always doing full court presses because we could run, I mean, we weren't out of breath. We got to go to state champions in track and I was running the mile relay, which you have to run 440 to run that mile. It's one time around the track for a mile relay. We ended up going to state on that. I always said it's because of that altitude. When we'd get down there and play football we wouldn't have no problem with the oxygen cause we was like overdosing on oxygen [laughs], it was so different. That was a big deal. It made it different for the basketball players and everybody, football and track especially. Yeah, that was quite a neat deal. I loved going to school at Grand Canyon High School. We had the most excellent teams.

TM: What do you remember about your teachers there?

GS: I didn't have one teacher that was bad. My favorite I had was Mr. Roberts. I think his name was Bob Roberts. I heard he had a brain tumor, my sister told me, and he ended up dying. Him and Dave Rogers, who was the biology teacher, those two were my favorites. Every one of those teachers, you could tell they really wanted you to succeed. I mean, that was it. They cared about every kid in the class no matter how bad they were. I got a funny story. You might even know this guy cause he was Coconino County sheriff for a while. We had our own Fonzie in that time. His name was Steve Luckeson. He drove a Harley. He was a good guy but he was always in trouble. He did everything that he could do wrong. He wore the motorcycle boots like Fonzie. In fact, they used to have a Harley Davidson thing up by the school every year and they'd pick best Harley and stuff. He got a brand new one like two days before they had it and he won the trophy [laughs]. Back to school, Mr. Rogers, that guy was serious as a heart attack. During the off school year he'd go back to ASU. I don't know what kind of degree he had. By then he was probably a doctor. Very, very smart guy. You didn't mess around in his class. You did not mess around because [laughs] he just wouldn't have it. I used to sit right up at the front on the left-hand side, right in the front row, because I didn't want to get in trouble because he would do...

I could always tell when Mr. Rogers, was getting mad or something was going on behind me because he'd start getting a twitch in his eye as he was writing on the chalkboard. I seen him twitching real bad one day and all of a sudden...he never used to clap, what they called clap the eraser to get all the powder out of them...he took off and he threw that eraser. I turned around and Steve Luckeson's face was completely white. He hit him right in the forehead with that eraser and all that white powder was coming down on his face. That was funny. He just told him, "You get out. You go see Mr. Pavlich," who was the principal. Bob Pavlich was the principal at the time. "You go see Mr. Pavlich and explain what you was doing." Another time Luckeson got in trouble, Mr. Glodis, John Glodis, he was the coach and he was teaching us civics. [laughs] One day he picked old Luckeson up and Luckeson had them heavy boots. Mr. Glodis's classroom was up the stairs. It used to be the shop went in here, there was some stairs going up and it was up there. He threw Luckeson down those stairs and you could hear those boots hitting all the way down the stairs [laughs]. Oh, that was hilarious. Then, I was in the Army and I come home and I'm watching the news and a helicopter crashed up at Grand Canyon. They had Coconino County Sheriff Steve Luckeson and he's standing there holding the altimeter. I'm like Steve... That's what he did, he was a Fonzie all through high school and he went into law enforcement.

TM: Because of these good teachers.

GS: Yep. And that's it. I was reading, what was that guy's name, Kern Nuttall, I was reading his book and it shocked me even though I'm glad to see it, Mrs. Catherine Wilcox, our English teacher, she lived to be 101. What a great lady. I probably never would have survived high school if she didn't get me through English. I was having a hard time with all the structures of sentences and all that stuff. She helped me

out a lot. Then she gave us, you could either write your book report or you could deliver them in presentation orally. I always did it orally cause I was playing in a band so I wasn't afraid to get up in front of people and just yack. She always let me do it that way rather than write it, but she was great. I remember the day Kennedy got killed. I was in math class, in Mr. Roberts's class, and Mr. Pavlich come on. We were getting ready to go to lunch. We used to go out to eat at lunch, they didn't have a cafeteria. It was five minutes to twelve and Mr. Pavlich comes on and he said, "Some nut just shot Kennedy." We're like holy smokes, the president. He said he's dead. Well, then we went to lunch and we came back, I had to go to Mrs. Wilcox's English class. We just sat in there and everybody just kind of moped around in English until they finally just said, "Everybody go on home, it's just too much to continue on the day." I remember that stuff.

Another thing, she was no get-over, Mrs. Wilcox, either. You didn't mess around in her class. Course in Grand Canyon in them days, you didn't mess around. You went to school and you learned. I mean, that was it. You respected all the teachers no matter what. One of the things that I remember in her class, it was really funny, is when she lost it cause the class got out of control. We were all writing and there was this fellow, he was one of my classmates, his name was Scott Rousch. He was kind of a quiet guy, he was a nice guy, calm and stuff and everything. We were all bent over and we we're writing and everything and a plane came out of the canyon, one of these tourist planes. It came right over the top of the school and it went (sound effect). As it was doing that noise Scott started going (sound effect), like a machine gun. The class just fell apart and even Mrs. Wilcox, cause it sounded like we'd just been strafed. Even Mrs. Wilcox, she couldn't hold it. As strict kind of as she was and as disciplinary (laughs), she just lost it. We lost the whole class right then. It was timed perfectly cause it goes (sound effect) and he goes (sound effect). That was funny. I'll never forget that part in Mrs. Wilcox's class.

Had Mr. Negrette, he was our Spanish teacher. That was interesting because we had a home economics... Well, to back up a little bit, a lot of us used to think that he wasn't kind of the woman type...he was our Spanish teacher, big, tall, skinny guy...until he got the home-ec teacher pregnant. She had two little children, she was divorced [laughs], and they just kind of went away. We never saw them no more. What was funny is during that time period the guys in shop were working in home-ec learning how to make lemon meringue pie and stuff while the girls were doing whatever it was in shop, making trellises in the wood shop. Well, we all were sitting there, I forget how old I was, I was probably like a sophomore, and my buddies and everybody's going, "Look at her, she looks like she's getting ready to have a baby." That was it sure enough. They got married and went on to somewhere else.

TM: Hopefully they lived happily ever after.

GS: Lived happily. That was the talk and the scandal, that was the big scandal in Grand Canyon. There you go. I had another biology teacher that was there only one year. I've seen her in some photographs with the rangers. I think she works for the Park Service during the summer. Her name was Bartlett, Mrs. Bartlett. I've seen her in an old photograph.

TM: Peggy Bartlett?

GS: I think that was her name. She was the biology teacher. She was outstanding, too. I really liked her. She knew a lot about Grand Canyon. Yeah, I think that's it. I'm pretty sure that was her name. She was good. She had a lot of knowledge about Grand Canyon. Mr. Rogers, who replaced her, was more or less... He was interesting, too, because he taught us at a college level in Biology 1 and 2, freshman and sophomore. They had a book in the bookstore you had to buy and it was twenty-five bucks. That was a

lot of money in them days, a big old fat book. He would tell you the first day of school you can buy that book if you want to or you can buy these three paperbacks that are a \$1.50 apiece that he would get from the bookstore out of ASU, cause that's what they were teaching down there. He wanted to teach you mainly like the cell, the Krebs cycle and stuff. You buy these three books that's all you're gonna need, and take good notes. I think that's why I liked that guy so much. I mean, he was really putting it into you. He was an awesome teacher.

Mr. Roberts, the math teacher, he used to crack me up because if he caught you messing around in there... He had a big college ring, one from the University of Kentucky. He'd be walking up behind you and if you were messing around he'd just [laughs] hit you with the back of his hand with that ring right on the head. A lot of times you'd see a guy sitting there going like this, well, he was doing something he wasn't supposed to be doing.

One of the things, aww, that's my favorite thing. There was a bumper/huge piñon crop the year that we came here in September of, what was it, '62. Huge. Everybody was walking around eating piñons. All those kids at school would have piñons and they'd be eating piñons all day long. So the pockets behind where the bottom of the curtain was taken up, that was full of piñons, piñons all over the floor. It was just amazing. I thought that was gonna be like that every year, but that was just a really bumper huge crop. Fact when I was working down at Babbitt's the Navajo guys would bring them big gunny sacks in full of piñons and be selling them to Babbitt's. I don't know whether they still do that or not, but it was pretty cool. But there was a lot of 'em. Me and my brother, we had a piñon tree. House #25 that we lived at when we got to Grand Canyon, there was a big piñon tree right out in front of the house. When we moved out, we had a tarp over the trailer, me and him would take that tarp and put it underneath the tree and get up there and shake the branches [laughs] to get all those piñons out. But, man, I'll tell you what, to this day I still, I love piñons, man. There's something you get when you're eating piñons and you go out and the air's kind of cool, there's a taste that comes in your mouth. You really don't even taste it when you're eating them till you go outside. I don't know what that is, but I love piñons because of that. I always buy them and I'm always eating them and stuff. Fact I got my wife putting them on salads and stuff for me and everything. That's pretty cool.

So, yeah, that was cool. John Snyder, he was the bus driver and the janitor. Got a good story about him and Joe Lee was the other one, there was two of them. Joe Lee. John Snyder, one of the stories I remember, well, two, let's give both of them. We were coming back from Seligman, we were playing basketball [laughs] and we're coming up Ash Fork Hill, that's a big hill, coming up that hill. John got pulled over by the cops on the bus [laughs]. John's outside the bus talking to the policeman, cause he was speeding going up Ash Fork Hill in a school bus full of basketball players, and the coach goes, "Don't say anything until he gets back on the bus and I'll go 1, 2, 3 and you go 'John, John, he's our man, if he can't do it no one can'." John was kind of an older guy and he always grumbled (sound effect). It was so funny because it was real quiet when he came back up and you could hear him grumbling about the ticket and all that, speeding ticket coming up the hill. Then they did that and we started our chant— 'John, John, he's our man, if he can't do it no one can'. That was a funny thing cause getting a speeding ticket driving a bus up Ash Fork Hill, that's awesome, man.

TM: That's hard to do. Yeah.

GS: But another one I remember that's really funny, really funny. We're coming back from Tuba City basketball game. John was driving the bus. We had a white and red bus that was, it had the Grand Canyon Phantoms on the side and everything. They got a real neat one now, I think. But anyway, it was

an older bus. We're coming back and it started snowing. We came down the hill from Tuba City, there's a big hill coming back toward Grand Canyon. There's only one road out there and we're going along and the ride's getting pretty rough. We're like what in the heck? I was sitting up behind coach Glodis and coach Rogers and I heard them say, "John, what are those lights over there?" They're like, "John, it looks like it's a car." [laughs] I don't know how he got us out there but we're driving out in the middle of the desert and the road is over there. It was about a half a mile away from there. He stopped the bus and I could see, I was looking, they had a flashlight. I'm watching out the window and they're scraping and there's dirt underneath there. We're driving across the desert in this snow storm [laughs]. The snow was about six inches and he's got that bus. I don't know where we were going but thank goodness that car was coming down that road and they saw those lights. That was another time old John, we're kind of like, whoa, man. That was pretty cool. Lucky we're not stuck somewhere and the tires spinning. But he kept going. It was unreal. I'll never forget that, too. It was at nighttime, it was dark. But we saw them lights on that car and they're like, "John, what are those lights over there?" [laughs]

TM: I'm assuming he couldn't see real well and in the dark and in the snow.

GS: Nah, couldn't see. Nobody was plowing the snow and he couldn't see and we're just driving off across the desert. There goes the Grand Canyon Phantoms out there. [laughs]

TM: And the snow must have gotten worse as you drove back up the mountain.

GS: Yeah, it did. Yeah, it really snowed a lot in them days up there at Grand Canyon. Well, it snowed a lot here, too. I don't know, the weather patterns and stuff, it's just crazy now. It's one of the things I'm disappointed in coming back to northern Arizona, because in the '60s I remember all that stuff, the cold. I was here during the big blizzard of '67 and stuff when that was going on.

TM: Do you have any Joe Lee stories?

GS: I wanted to tell you a story about him that he didn't tell me till I ran into him in Prescott at a Sambo's restaurant back in 1975 or something. He was in there with his family eating. He was our janitor. All of us kids used to loved to play basketball and go in the gym, it kept us out of trouble. Everybody in the village, the adults, knew that we were in there on weekends, even though we're not supposed to be. We'd leave paper in the doors, do something to keep it from locking. There'd be times when Joe would show up to clean the place, he'd start whistling and making a whole bunch of noise outside. He was telling me one time, "Yeah," he said, "I knew you guys were in there. I seen the paper in the door and stuff but everybody wanted you guys to just stay out of trouble and that gave you guys a place to go." There'd be eight or nine of us. He said, "I remember one time I was making all the noise. I came in from Mrs. Wilcox's," she had double doors by her room, "I came in that way and I started making noise and I could hear you guys in the gym bouncing the ball." I was there, we scrambled into the locker room when we heard him coming, he made enough noise. He said, "It was really funny because I went in the gym, I opened the door, and all I could see was that basketball rolling down the middle of the court." [both laugh] He said, "I knew you guys was in there. We always knew." The principal, Bob Pavlich, he said just let them in there as long as they don't tear anything up. We always left that gym spotless. We had a lot of pride in our gym, Grand Canyon students did. We wouldn't walk on the floor with our shoes on or nothing. We had to have basketball shoes that were only used in the gym. We'd leave them in our lockers, you couldn't wear them outside. Anything that would damage that floor, you didn't do it. That's all that was to it. Joe, we had a lot of good laughs. He said, "I always knew

when you guys were in there cause I'd find this stuff in the door that you'd leave in there so it wouldn't lock and stuff." [laughs] I'm like, "Well, okay."

TM: But you guys went to state.

GS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

TM: So, I mean, there's a reason to invest.

GS: Exactly. It was keeping us out of trouble. We'd be down there... If there was nothing going on on Saturday we'd be there in the gym. Or on Sundays, cause there's nothing that goes on on Sundays, we'd be in there playing basketball. We'd stay in there all day, but we wouldn't hurt nothing. We wouldn't touch nothing. We'd just go in, get our stuff out of our lockers and go in the gym and play basketball. It was awesome. I was lucky to grow up in an atmosphere like that. That school, it was something because it made a good atmosphere. And I'm talking about every kid. They cared about every kid in that school, everybody there. They wanted you to do the best you could. That's why I remember those teachers, I really feel good when I remember them because they cared about me and they dedicated their lives to me. That means a lot to me. They made me what I am.

I went to flight school, I became a Chief Warrant Officer 3 and stuff. It's because of those teachers right there. That's just the way I feel about it. It was really great. I was lucky cause I wasn't getting that kind of an education back in Massachusetts where I came from, but when I came to Grand Canyon it was a whole different ballgame. I mean, you found people that knew who you were. Everybody knew who you were and they cared about you. Like that time, I don't know whether I told you this or not, it was a really bad snowstorm and I had been roller skating over here in Flagstaff. I was driving my mom's '64 Mustang that she had bought brand new. I was coming back from Flagstaff, didn't have a driver's license [laughs], I was driving real young. But anyway, the hill that goes down when you come over 180 out here and you go down that big hill, this is how it was... I had spun out and everything and the guy pulled me out. I don't know whether I told that story or not. Over there by where that chapel is there was a little A-frame gas station with one pump. Never saw a soul in there, and had a Shell sign, never saw anybody in there. When I was coming back the snow was already like a foot deep, it was a real bad blizzard. The banks on the side were probably about twelve feet high on both sides of the road and when I came around that corner I started sliding. I wasn't going fast, but I hit the brakes and it was the worst thing. I sped up and it turned me back facing toward Flagstaff. All the snow fell down on the car so I had to push the snow away to get out the passenger door. I looked down there at that gas station, there was smoke coming out of the chimney. I'm like you gotta be kidding me, I've never seen anybody there. I go down there and there's a guy sitting in there and I said, "I just spun out. Can you help me get out?" He goes, "I got a tractor right here, I'll pull you out for five bucks." I said, "Okay," and he went down there and got my car out. I was like I don't believe that. I don't believe that there was a guy there. I've never seen anybody there. Anyway, I go to that hill where you start climbing up and here's Phil Settle's father that runs Babbitt's, Jimmy Arkie, my buddy's father's there. There was like four or five people from Grand Canyon and what they were doing was... The bottom of the hill there was no snow, the top there was all snow and on the hill. They were taking chains off and putting them on people's cars and letting them get up the hill and then taking the chains off. For a while there I was transferring chains.

They'd put their chains on, people would get up the hill, I'd go up behind them and I'd come down and take the chains back down to them and they'd put them on another car. That's the way people in Grand Canyon were, they cared about you. They cared about everybody. They cared about the kids, they

worried about the kids. The kids didn't get in trouble like you see nowadays. Those kids up there were great, everybody liked everybody. Everybody liked the kids and stuff.

TM: There's a bunch of dedicated teachers there.

GS: Yeah. Oh, they were awesome. Yep. I think all of the adults at that time were. I was just lucky. I feel really lucky that I was there during that time period. It was just a nice place to live. I can't believe it. Just a lucky deal on my part, I guess.

TM: We've been at this about an hour, twenty minutes. Maybe this is a good time to wrap this up. Now, you're heading to Texas.

GS: Yeah.

TM: So let's wrap this up with this interview and we'll talk that out. Is there anything else you'd like to mention before we finish this up about what you've talked about, I forgot I wanted to say so and so?

GS: Hmm. I can't think of anything else that I really haven't... A lot of times I just head off on things.

TM: So what let's do, let's wrap this up and then we'll go from here.

GS: Okay.

TM: So this concludes then Part 3 of Oral History Interview for Grand Canyon with Gene Sopko. Today is November 30th, 2017 and, Gene, thank you so very much.

GS: Thank you.