

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

**Interviewee:** Robbie Evans (RE) and Lora Pitsinger (LP)

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin (TM)

**Subject:** Robbie was the Fire Chief at the Tusayan Fire Station and Lora was Second-in-Command

**Date of Interview:** September 19, 2014

**Method of Interview:** In person at Tusayan Fire Station 1

**Transcriber:** Susan Seibel

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**Transcription Reviewers:** Sue Priest, Tom Martin, Robbie Evans, Lora Pitsinger

**Keys:** Tusayan EMS, 911,

TM: Today is September 19, 2014. We're at the Tusayan Fire Department, Station 1, with Robbie Evans and Lora Pitsinger. Robbie, can you spell your name for us, please?

RE: My last name? Evans.

TM: Thanks. And Lora?

LP: Pitsinger.

TM: And my name's Tom Martin. So, Lora, I'll ask you first. How long have you been here at Station 1?

LP: Since 2001.

TM: And how long have you been at Grand Canyon?

LP: Since 1985.

TM: Okay. And Robbie, how long you been at Grand Canyon?

RE: 1992.

TM: Okay. And started at Station 1?

RE: I started at the Grand Canyon airport. You mean at this station?

TM: Yes.

RE: I started here as a volunteer in 1998 when they started it. I became the Fire Chief in June or July 1st of 1999.

TM: Okay. What was it like here before this fire station was built? Where were you guys stationed out of?

RE: I worked at the Grand Canyon Airport.

LP: I was in Cottonwood, Arizona, working for the police department.

TM: So, if there was a 911 call here in Tusayan, how would that be responded to?

RE: It would be responded to basically by the Park Service. They used to do the transports and provide the EMS out to Tusayan.

TM: Okay. And so when did it become apparent that Tusayan needed its own EMS?

RE: When the park started having budget problems, they decided that in the future that they wouldn't be responding to Tusayan. We were warned, when we used to respond from the airport to assist for stuff in Tusayan, that they were getting some grief from up above about responding to Tusayan. There would be days, like when we worked at the airport as EMT firefighters, that we would request an ambulance, you know how it is here in the summer, where we could be on scene with a patient for over an hour.

TM: Waiting for the Park Service to bring out an ambulance?

RE: Right. Because they would be overwhelmed with the volume of calls just in the park. There's days they'd get hammered. And there was no other ambulance service until I took over, I think in 2000, we made an approach to Guardian Medical Transport out of Flagstaff to get an ambulance up here, because at that time there was no advanced life support providers outside the park and there was no ambulance service. Everybody came up from Flagstaff. The only one that came up was the guy from Williams, Excel Ambulance. In all the years I've been here previous to 2000, I could probably count on one hand how many times I've seen Excel come up to actually transport a patient, and it was patient transfers from the clinic.

TM: Going out, not coming...

RE: Yeah. No, not to come help us.

TM: Right. Right. So, then this facility here, Station 1, was built when? When did it come on line?

RE: We started across the street in the old Papillon hanger right over there where Big E's is so you can't see it, which you'll remember. We had one or two bays in there and a little teeny office. I think they started somewhere in '99 where they hired a full-time person and we had one fire truck. Then I got on board, and me and a deputy chief worked part time and another gal who was the EMS Coordinator.

TM: Who were they?

RE: Tim Crocker, which you probably remember from back in the old Park Service. He worked for Fred Harvey, Fire and Safety. One of the few gray hairs that still, remember that.

TM: Okay.

RE: He worked there and his girlfriend, actually, used to be a nurse at the clinic.

TM: Who was it?

RE: Rendi.

LP: Her last name was Banning I think.

RE: Yeah. I think maybe it was Banning.

TM: Doesn't ring a bell. So, this would have been 1996/7-ish?

RE: Yeah, somewhere in that neighborhood. I don't know how long she was at the clinic for because I barely knew her. When Rick and Susan got married, is, I think, the first time I'd ever seen her.

TM: Okay. So then eventually you moved from across the street over to here.

RE: Right. Ann Wren was are board chair person and Clarinda Vail represented Red feather. There used to be an old dormitory here and the old gas station out there in the parking lot. Ann and Red Feather Properties worked together. We got this property. We had to tear down the old dorms that used to be here and they started building this. When did we get here?

LP: I think finally moved in like 2004. It probably took like a year, I think.

RE: We kind of miss our old wild squirrel that used to live in the file cabinets and the one computer we all shared. And our station dog. (chuckling)

TM: I forgot to tell you, I was getting a little ahead, two things: If you see me doing hand signals, moving my hands apart like this, tell me more. Tell me more about the squirrels in the closets and this and that. And then if I make a T, that's time out, let me ask a question.

RE: All right. Hand signals...remind me. (Lora chuckling)

TM: So, tell me more about the squirrels.

RE: Well, in the old station, we just had this little teeny office. What was it? About four or five foot wide.

LP: Yeah, it was really small.

RE: And about as wide as maybe 12 foot long. Lora and I had desks in there. We had a little black dog that somebody threw out of the window of a car. We tried to give it away and nobody would take it. That's her in her prime. [showing photo] Right now, she's 14 years old. We called her Crash. Nobody wanted her, so we ended up adopting her. She was a station dog. Then I started taking her home and then Lora ended up having her. We named her appropriately because I think she's on her fifteenth life in 14 years. We pretty much raised her from a pup. She's been on head-on collisions with us in the truck, cardiac arrests, plane crashes. It was low key and fun back in those days.

TM: So, what would the dog do when you got to the head on?

RE: We'd leave her in the truck.

TM: And she would just sit there happily?

RE: Mm, hmm.

LP: She just watched. Yeah.

TM: That's great!

RE: She was a fire dog. She had a little white on her. We called her our Dalmatian in disguise. And to this day if you go all the way to Phoenix or you put her in the truck, even though she can't see anymore, she won't lay down. She has to sit up in the passenger's seat and look straight ahead the whole way. She's like the Budweiser dog on the wagon. She's still that way. You can go all the way to Phoenix and she will never, ever lay down. She's sitting right in the passenger, looking out the front window.

TM: Wow.

RE: And she's got cataracts. I don't know what she's seeing! (Laughing) But she's still that way. She won't sleep. She'll never lie down.

TM: Oh, my gosh.

RE: So, anyway, we had squirrels in the office, one old fire truck. To try to get the fire department going, we used to socialize. After training we'd have a beer or two afterwards and try to build some camaraderie and get everybody together. Those were good old days.

TM: And this was a volunteer crew except for one or two paid positions?

RE: I was paid part-time, for two days a week. I think they paid Tim Crocker, maybe for one day a week or something like that.

TM: What were you doing otherwise?

RE: I was still at the airport. I was operations supervisor/EMT/fire fighter training officer.

TM: Okay, so that position was easily known to you as far as what needed to be done. So, was it a fairly easy transition segue over to here then, full time? How did that work out?

RE: It's a long time ago to remember, but I think it was a fairly easy transition. Trying build the numbers up in Tusayan because... My personal opinion is, seeing as nobody can own anything here, there's no buy-in by anybody. Versus a little town like, say, Williams, where you can have a volunteer fire department because their parents lived there, their grandparents lived there, they live there. Here, come October or when the tourist seasons gone, adios! You lost your job and your housing. So, we continually had a problem keeping volunteers. I think if I go back in and look, I bet we've have in 15 years or whatever how long this thing, 16 or 17 years, even before I got here, I think we have something in the neighborhood... I bet we've anywhere from 3[00] to 400 volunteers.

TM: Is that normal for a normal rural volunteer fire department?

RE: I grew up in upstate New York, in a small town, smaller than this. 150 people in the 1960 census. When I left in the '70s, I think we had 86 members. The fire department was a social function. It was the

old days. We had beer in the station, we played euchre after training night. We had a hall, we did bingo, we did weddings. But it's kind of like every volunteer organization. Ten of us did everything and worked everything, and all the rest brought their cousins and aunts and uncles out of the mountains when there's free beer and hotdogs.

TM: How is that different from here in Tusayan then? Like you say, a huge turnover of people.

RE: Well, see, there, I mean, it's like my dad was on the volunteer fire department. He actually went exempt at some point. Like, here's a patch, you are still a member, but you're exempt. When I was there, the guys that are now my age or a little younger than me, that are all, God bless their souls, are all gone now, they were all part of the community you lived there. Your family was there. You owned your home. I mean, everybody knew each other.

Here, you don't...Tusayan's not like that. So, anyway, Tusayan is such a transient community. Even working at the airport, I think how many people... In my years there I think we had, I'm going to say there's probably been over 100 employees in the 15 years I've been here. You come here... You're either made to live in the Grand Canyon or Tusayan, or you aren't. You can come here and go, "Oh, it's beautiful, it's nice." And then they find out how remote it is. Your wife goes, "Get out of here! There's no theatre, you got a drive 150 miles to the grocery store! Where's a doctor?!"

LP: I think with that being said, it's also hard because people come here, and then it's a training ground. They usually want to get training here and do a few calls and then move on to where they can get a real job doing it for real pay. So we see a lot of that. We'll help people get started, help them get their training, and then they move away and then we're starting all over again.

RE: Yeah. I think we've trained hundreds. We're both certified instructors through Coconino Community College for EMS. I'm a certified fire instructor. The old Park Service fire chief, Kent Mecham and I co-taught quite a few Firefighter I and II academies. Lora and I, Nancy Mecham, we've done a whole bunch of, five or six EMT classes through Coco. You get them trained. I bet we've trained maybe 150/200 people in EMS. They get it and they're gone. Same with fire.

LP: I think that's what the difference is. From being back East, being on a volunteer fire department is part of doing the family thing. Its tradition and you want to help people and that's why you get into it. And here, it's a little bit of that but more, I think, it's just becoming/getting trained and moving on because people don't seem to be as dedicated into helping people. It's not like it to be in the old days.

RE: Right. Right. Well, it's not like... If your neighbor's house in on fire, you're going to go maybe help. Where I grew up, the guy I grew up next to is still there in upstate New York. I stopped and seen [sic] him when I was... me and my mom stopped and seen [sic] him. He used to be the chief of the fire department I was with. My next door neighbor there, Cliff London. My dad were always out hunting, and all my brothers and sisters were born during deer hunting season, so Cliff London took my mother to the hospital so many times when she was pregnant and in labor that he said, "If this one's a boy, you better name it Cliff!" You're never going to get that here.

TM: So, it sounds like in rural communities, the fire station becomes the hub of the community, if you will. Then where is the hub of Tusayan, or is there one? And there may not be one. I don't know.

RE: I don't think there is a cohesive anything here. The transient nature of the community. Basically Xanterra, Fred Harvey, whatever you have here, that's changed over the years where we start having J1, 2, 3, whatever they call those students, which are kind of a little bit better crowd than back in the old days where they'd be bringing them out of homeless shelters and stuff like that. You're never going to find good employees that way.

LP: I think internally we have had that with our people because you kind of become like a fire department family. You go on stuff that's bad and you learn everybody's family and wives and kids.

RE: We've seen one of our guy's little boy, first day home from the hospital, little Daniel Cockrum I don't want to say this, is he fifteen now? (Laughing) We have a picture of him sitting in our fire truck, his dad holding him. Now I see Daniel, he's taller than me. I don't know if he's a freshman or his last year of junior high school. Their little baby. We've seen our people get married, the kids grow up. We have a pretty tight little core here. Mike went to school at the Grand Canyon. He graduated from Grand Canyon High School. I think his dad was a maintenance guy up there or something. I don't know what his dad was. Mike, you go up there and he's in all those pictures in the high school, that early '70s or late '80s big pompadour hairdo. So, we have a lot of pretty close knit... We've been best man and bridesmaids in our people's weddings.

LP: And pallbearers at funerals sometimes.

RE: Pallbearers at funerals for some locals that have went early.

TM: Well, it's a question I do want to ask you at one point is your remembrances of services at the Grand Canyon Cemetery. Tell me about the people that you've had to say goodbye to. But if I back up a little bit, it sounds like though it isn't necessarily what a typical rural community would be, there is still, like you said, internally a very tight knit group of people which I think would be very, very helpful. The question I've got for you is how did your relationship with the Park Service... how does that work? You mentioned Xanterra Fire and Safety or Fred Harvey Fire and Safety. How does the Park Service work into all of this? You mentioned Kent and Nancy...

RE: In this day and age, it's not the same as it used to be back in the '90s. We do picnics and cook together and have a beer. It was a Yogi Bear/Ranger Smith thing. They were all friendly, neighborly. You didn't get pulled over for having a license plate light out or for smoking crack cocaine, that you weren't. It's not that anymore. There's really a dysfunction between government/the big government and the public, I think. The Park Service has become this self perpetuating government agency, They can skew their facts whatever they want to skew them, saying, "Oh, we have all these visitors." If you think about it right now there's more rangers on duty on the South Rim than there are sheriffs on duty for all Coconino County. Coconino County is either the largest or the second largest county, it's bigger than Rhode Island/Connecticut. So right now, north of the Grand Canyon National Park on the North Rim, there's probably one deputy. We've seen the one just walk through while we're getting interviewed, and he's probably the only guy north of Williams right now. That's 58 miles. Not to say it's bad, but I think it's indoctrination into the Park Service mentality now where it's not Ranger Smith any more Everybody's either lesser than you 'because you wear green pants and a big Smokey Bear hat. But we still have good rapport with some of the wildland guys and the interpretive rangers and a lot of those people. I really don't know what has happened, but they have a 19-year-old girl who's carrying a gun come up and tell me how to run my scene. I could be her grandfather and I've been doing it longer than

she's been alive. That's what I always tell everybody, "I've been doing this since you were a gleam in your father's eye."

TM: So, help me out here because it seems in the early 1990s, there was no EMS in Tusayan and the Park Service was doing the providing of the ambulance service and law enforcement as well. And then slowly Tusayan basically grew up with what we have today, which is this nice station. And the law enforcement now, of course, is as you say, one gentleman comes in as a deputy for Coconino County Sheriff's Department. But now the Park Service has moved away again, back to the other side of the boundary, if you will. Is this a fair approximation of what going on?

RE: I would say so. I call it the invisible Ponderosa fence. Like, right now, if a bus was on fire right north of that invisible line, we're closer, but they wouldn't call us. If there was a cardiac arrest right now at the parking lot right beside the entrance station, Guardian's sitting here. So are we. We're, what, a mile and a half away. They're eight. They wouldn't call us. That's their property.

LP: I think, too, years ago because we were just starting out and we were going on calls with all the Park Service back then, they knew us. They knew what we were struggling with and what we were trying to get started, so they were very supportive. We all knew each other and got along. It was kind of like we're all in the same business. There was no, I don't know what the word is...

RE: Disconnect?

LP: Yes, disconnect. But now...

RE: And the other thing is, the other thing she's trying to say...Sherri Collins who was the EMS coordinator or whatever, ECHO 1 or whatever they used to call her back then, she's the one that taught us EMT. Her, Nancy, Tammy Keller, Dave Brennan, all those guys.

LP: They were a good group. They were supportive.

RE: Yes, everybody was supportive. We all knew each other. We used to have this little group that lasted for a while where we all trained together. It was called the emergency service provider thing. We'd meet every couple months and all talk. You'd go on scene of a plane crash and you would know everyone. It's all first-name basis. "Sherri, man, I'm glad you're here. This is what we've got." Boom, boom, boom, boom. It's not that anymore. I think what's happened up there is that's more of a training ground than a People used to be there, like Sherri, retired from Park Service and became the emergency management coordinator for Coconino County. You go there and she'd give you a hug, "Robbie!" That's what you'd see. Everybody would... know each other. Ken Phillips, retired, bought a house in Flagstaff. That's what these people did. You retire from here anymore, you move from here How long you been here? Now the park superintendent, you get a two-year gig and then you go someplace else. It's just boom. It's all a training ground for everybody.

TM: So, in the past, and I certainly remember, when there would be a plane crash, everybody would scramble. Tusayan, it would be the airport fire people, it would be the National Park Service, it would be Xanterra Fire and Safety. Everyone would pile out. So, are you telling me now that if there was a plane crash outside of the park that they would not respond?

RE: No, they would respond.

TM: They would respond. Okay. But you might not know them

RE: I would know the new chief, Van Inwagen, and maybe a few others. Brandon and some others, just going through, but it's not like it used to be where we did. When I worked at the airport, we'd do tri-annual exercises from the airport together. When we first took this over, we'd all do a mass casualty incident. We'd have a bus supposedly flip over and they all come out, and we'd do all these pre-meetings. It's not that way anymore.

TM: So, there's no cross training then, or very little?

RE: Very little.

TM: Okay.

RE: We tried to structuralize, we tried to get with those guys and do some stuff. When they did that, what was that called? Operation something or other?

LP: The Angel Drill?

RE: Oh, yeah. The Angel Drill, we went in when they had the scenario of an earthquake and the bus flipping over there at whatever that is, Yaki Point or something. We worked with them on that.

TM: So, what do you think was the cause of this?

RE: Probably me (laughing) No, I just think it's just possibly disrespect on both sides. Part of the Park Service rangers treating us as "Oh, that podunk little fire department." I went to school for two years to get my paramedic certification and so did their guys. We've been on bad stuff. I've been doing this 19 year We were on the LVA crash out here, me and Lora and a lot of the old park service rangers. I've seen dead, bad, bruised bodies. I've been on bad stuff. I've been on hotel fires. I've been on giant wildland fires. I'm medical unit leader qualified. I'm not a freaking hillbilly for coming in with beer between our legs on the fire trucks. We do everything at best of our ability within the budget to do NFPA standards and OSHA stuff. I just feel sometimes it's disrespectful. I will call them if it's something big, but I try not to.

TM: So, as an outsider looking in, I wonder before Tusayan was built up with its own station, the number of runs that the Park Service made would have brought in a certain amount of funding because they could show we do this many calls. And now if that's all changed, they may be desperate to handle what they can, because otherwise they'll have to turn away their whole shop because you guys can clearly do it. Is there any of that happening? Does that make sense as a question? Because I'm not so sure it's a personal thing more than it's a territory for budget thing. Could that be a part of that?

RE: It might be. It's really small. I don't know how many calls they actually get out here, but I know they don't come out much. Some of their numbers are we get paid 90% on all our transport calls. And some of the things they do, I think, are ethically and morally wrong. They'll bring a patient eight miles in their ambulance and charge him money, drop him off here, put him in Guardian's ride. Guardian goes halfway to Flagstaff, another 40 miles, and meets another ride, and they take the patient. So that's three different patient transfers. It's all about this, the cash. They say, "Oh, we get paid 90%." Guardian's tied

in with FMC. They don't even get 60%. I don't know how they're getting 90% unless they're picking people up by the ankles and shaking the money out of their pocket. You been here long enough to know that, just like in Tusayan and every other place, minimum-wage workers, if you offer them insurance, they ain't going to pay for it. IF they offer them insurance.

TM: So, how do you think the lack of insurance for the community impacts the operations of your shop here?

RE: Well, we really don't charge because we're tax based. But, in this day and age, money talks. You grew up in the same generation I did, pretty much. You had a doctor as a child that probably birthed you, and you might have had him till your probably late teens, early twenties. And then his son took over the practice. It's not that way anymore. It's like you go to the clinic, you don't know the doctors, you're lucky there might be a doctor there. They may have a buffalo head on and some blue corn pollen, but.... What are you going to do, fire me? But it's not like it used to be. I think the people that basically use most of EMS resources are frequent fliers. I always tell these guys, "I'm going to get a trophy and for the guy we transport most that year, I'm going to give him a trophy for most runs." Because you will have the same people over and over and over. Alcohol addiction, drug addiction, mental problems, they're the ones that use the system. The people in the Mexican American community won't use the system. They will go, "Well, I got this medication from my cousin and I will try that first" That's how they do stuff. They are so afraid of getting in trouble or being deported and the money costs, they are afraid. You always get them [saying], "Oh, we won't go. My cousin will drive me to the clinic." Four hours later, "I took my cousin's medications." "Did you go to the clinic?" "No." That's just the nature of the beast. You go on some people four, five, six, seven times. Mexican Americans, if your leg's hanging off, they'll just put your pants back on and drive you to Flag. That's just how they get by the system they aren't going to pay that money.

TM: What do you remember about... What are some of the calls, looking back over the last ten years, that went well? Or maybe we should talk about the stuff that didn't go well first and then stuff that did go well.

RE: Lora talks about calls or I talk about calls and will look at each other and go, "I don't remember that." I think its all perspective on where you were and what happened. It's kinda like when you see your brothers and sisters, and they're talking about being a kid. "Remember that time we drove your car real fast and you hit the tree and you went in the ditch? Man, me and my friends were so excited! We were in the car with you!" I'm like, "What? Me? That wasn't me! Were you dreaming?" (laughter) I think the first really big incident we did as a crew together and with the Park Service was the Las Vegas Airline crash where we had all those people go down back at the Forest Service compound. Blinding, pretty much a snowstorm. Plane lost an engine and we lost, what was there, 12 people died in that?

LP: Twelve or 13. I think we had two survive. Fireball, mud, technical stuff.

RE: Yeah, that's all we could hear, "Power gone. He's down. We have a fireball," is all I can remember. I remember we tried to get out there to the airport and the snow was three foot. What was it February?

LP: Yeah. 13<sup>th</sup>.

RE: What time?

LP: (Laughter)

RE: She's got all that. She might not remember anything else, but she can tell you time date and names.

LP: No, it's like you said, it's a difference, because we went out there a few years ago. We didn't really know the coordinates where the wreck was, but we wanted to go back out and walk it. Neither one of us really remembered, but he remembered enough and I remembered enough, and then all of a sudden we look down and I'm like, "Oh, we're here." Because we were walking around on broken glass...

RE: Broken glass and then we started finding pieces of the aircraft. But we had driven out there like four or five different times, trying to remember.

LP: And we just... It changes on how you remember stuff in your head. Then I took pictures and comparing them with the newspaper clipping, it was like, "Oh, yeah." As soon as we looked down, I was like, "Oh yeah, we're here."

RE: She kept going "No, it's by a little cedar tree." And I go, "No, it was a big Ponderosa pine tree they hit."

LP: We were in the middle of the woods arguing about it.

RE: Well, see, her perspective is... When I went in, I had a truck that got buried right after the Ten-X Ranch when we're going back up. So me and another guy both grabbed jump kits/little medical bags and started hiking in with our bunker gear on. Papillon helicopter landed in front of us and picked us up and flew us to the sight.

LP: AirStar, AirStar

RE: AirStar didn't get me. I went in Papillon. No, I think Dan Tobin went in AirStar.

LP: Oh, I thought Ron Williams took you.

RE: No. We flew in on Papillon and, I'm a brand new EMT going (sound effects). We're flying over this wreckage and all I can see is busted up airplane, smoke, pieces of debris everywhere. I'm thinking, "Why in the hell am I flying in an aircraft to an airplane crash?" Anyway, me and Joel Rosenberg, who is now... Is he a captain with Verde Valley Fire? A lot of us old timers out there. We land, we hike up this hill. We get there, there's just aircraft parts strewn all over the place. I walked up and there's a little Taiwanese girl. Where were they from?

LP: Taiwanese.

RE: Taiwanese girl. She's jabbering at me and smokes coming out of her mouth and her skin is just sloughing off All she has on is a pair of cotton panties 'because all the rest, through the fireball, burned off. They were in the tail section. It shot through it. Her and one other girl.

LP: Her sister.

RE: Yeah, her sister. Still shakes me up to think about it to this day. She was probably hypothermic when we got there, so Joe and I started trying to work her, but all we had was a thermometer and some old Band-Aids in these things. So basically what we did is kind of stabilized her. Still freaked out about it. I tried to cut the burning clothes off 'because that's kind of what you were taught back then. So, I started trying to pull what was left of her spandex, whatever she had on, it probably wasn't spandex back then. But her skin was just sloughing off with it.

LP: Then we tried to get a set of vitals.

RE: You weren't there yet.

LP: No.

RE: All I can remember is Sherri Collins in a big orange jumpsuit showed up with you guys and I was never so happy to see... 'because, you know, it's like trying to stop an invasion with a ballpoint pen.

LP: (Chuckle)

RE: Well, that's what it felt like. You're trying to stop a flood with nothing. There's nothing you can do. You in the middle of the woods, it's cloudy, you hardly have any air resources. There's me and Joe. I'm like, "What are we doing out here?" Then my good buddy, Alex O' campo, flies back over with AirStar. Old Ron Williams, God rest his soul... Him or Bob Bowker, I don't know who. I think it was Ron... We needed backboards 'because we knew we had at least two viable patients out there. There's another one Dan Tobin was with, I think, on the other side. My buddy Alex, I always guessed, him and I still hunt together to this day, but I always give him grief. We always laugh about it. I go, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?" He goes, "What?" I said, "When you dropped that backboard." Because it came out of the helicopter and went [swishing noises] coming right down at me, we didn't know where to run. I said, "You tried to make me a casualty!"

TM: (Laughter)

RE: But we did get out of the way, and we did get our backboard and stuff. But it was pretty chaotic. She was burned over 85% of her body. The good thing about all this is, she ended up in the burn center in Maricopa County and she now is a burn unit nurse at Maricopa County. A very good success story on our part. I don't know how well we did out there. But Lora and Sherri and Joel I remember Paul Simpson was there and Rodney, but that's all I can remember.

LP: We were having a hard time because we were trying to go in and kept getting stuck in the mud, so we were hiking with backboards and all this equipment. Then finally one of the sheriff's deputies showed up in his pickup truck and he had four-wheel drive. He had us all hop in the back of the pickup truck and we drove up on scene and we were able to... I remember seeing Robbie and Sherri, the three of us were there.

RE: I so glad you guys got there because I was there by myself for, like, a day and a half. I was getting hungry. (Laughter)

LP: It seemed like forever, yeah. I felt like trying to get to it because we knew... It was so frustrating and you couldn't get there.

RE: Oh, and there was no radio communications. I remember that. Our airport radios were junk We didn't have a repeater. We didn't have park frequencies. I kept trying to go over to NIMS and nobody's answering me. There was just no way to relay information.

LP: If you ever want to see pictures or the story that Mike... What is his name? He does [lostflights.org](http://lostflights.org). [Transcriber's note: The website is [lostflights.com](http://lostflights.com)] Does all...

TM: Um, Mike McComb.

LP: McComb, yeah.

RE: Yeah, yeah.

LP: He came and interviewed us about the wreck and then he went out there and took pictures and wrote a bunch of stuff up about it.

TM: He's now working for the FAA.

LP: I know! That's perfect for him.

RE: That's a good gig for him. It's right up his alley.

TM: Absolutely. Absolutely.

LP: He's so good at that. I'm amazed. He did a big story on that flight.

RE: But that was our first call. I went back. My buddy, who's now the chief of Highlands Fire, I called him when I got home because it was my first post-traumatic stress syndrome thing before anybody called it that.

LP: I don't remember exactly who said it, but they wanted us to go put snow on the bodies that were still burning. To try to extinguish it.

RE: I didn't even know they were bodies. We worked this girl beside an engine. There was a pile of airplane and a fire. At some point through all this somebody said, "Throw snow on that fire to preserve the integrity of the bodies." At that point, I'd been right beside them, within 10 feet the whole time, and I never knew it was human flesh burning.

LP: You're so focused on what you're doing, you don't even realize your surroundings.

RE: It still shakes me up. I feel all glitchy up here.

LP: I'm sorry!

RE: But it was, I mean, I think that either makes us stronger or shakes us to are core. In this business, sometimes we go on calls, and I have a probie with me, and I'll go, "Don't look at the body! Don't look at the body!" "Oh, I want to look at the body!" "Don't look at the body!" But they all have to. It's like,

alright, here goes your carousel, because you're going to have this the rest of your life. Every time you go, it's going to be, 'Hmm, the smell of grilling red meat!' LVA crash, 1992. Diesel, smell of blood, bus versus car with decapitation in front of the airport, 1994.

LP: Or the sage... What is that sage on the side of the road?

RE: Yeah.

LP: Every time I smell that, I think of plane wrecks.

RE: It's just memories and smells.

LP: What you associate.

RE: But they won't listen to you.

LP: A good friend of ours told us, Jim Coffee, that your brain basically will take a polaroid of those pictures, and whether you want to or not, sometimes you get a slideshow. And you start collecting, collecting, collecting...

RE: Mm, hmm. And then every time you go, "Not again! I'm trying to sleep. I'm tired." 1992 LVA crash, "Oh no, not the one in front of the airport! No..."

LP: There's so many now, you know, even...

RE: I still think they get to me, get me.

LP: I think they'll last a couple of days or something, but...

RE: Not like it used to be where you would just really shaken up.

LP: When you're first starting out, I think it's a lot harder. That's what I tell people. Your first year, if you're starting to see a lot of dead bodies, it's really hard. Because you're seeing the worst things ever. Not a stable setting, usually. If you can get through that first year and you can get with it, then...

RE: You might be able to do this job.

LP: You might be able to. Yeah. It's just how you have to find a way to deal with stuff. Whether it's spiritually or whatever your beliefs are. As Robbie and I say, you have to have a place to put it, but you also have to have people that you can talk to about it. That's why Robbie and I have been such good partners and friends all these years. Because for 20 years we've been on so much together and we know each other, we've been partners that we just...

RE: Oh, we don't even have to talk. It's like we go out on scene, or we'll be doing even a junkie medical call and I'll go, "I'm going to do this," and she's like ok I don't even have to worry about she's going to do because she's already doing it. Even if we go to an accident right now, I don't have to worry about what she going to do I don't have to tell her what to do because she just going to do it. But there's this old story... We did a head-on, 105 miles-an-hour with this car versus a pick-up truck. We walk up and it's

what, 11:00 at night. Shaun Shields, DPS guy, is there. This brings all your little movie thing together. I walk up, take one smell, and I go to Lora, "Oooo, that smell! Can't you smell...?" That Lynyrd Skynyrd song. Shaun Shields looks at me, and she just loses it and starts laughing.

LP: (Laughter) Because we were extricating this poor gentleman.

RE: We're cutting this dead guy out of the bus.

LP: Nobody wants to help us...

RE: Because nobody wants to look at it.

LP: So Robbie and I are like, "Let's just get it done." It's just him and I on the extrication. We grab some equipment and...

RE: This guy took a B post to B post and his head was, like...

LP: Yeah, he was broken everywhere, so we pull him out and Robbie starts singing this song. I just start losing it laughing. I mean, it's dark humor and you shouldn't have it, but unfortunately...

RE: Well, but just the smell. It was just the smell of it surrounds you.

LP: Yeah, it's very true.

RE: Like she said, faith. I was raised Roman Catholic. I don't know what I believe anymore or anything, but I mean, you have to have faith to... It's like last week or the before, we did that gal that got killed on her bike on 180, got hit by somebody we knew. I was telling somebody, and I went, "You never know." I said, "When God opens the door, you're going." "I'm not ready yet!" "Oh, yeah, you are." 'Cause it could happen to anybody. When it's your time to go, hook crook, there's no getting out of it. I mean, how many times have we all driven this highway and been that close.

LP: Yeah. Very true.

TM: Has that affected how you think about life and caring and kindness?

LP: Yes, I would say yes. I think sometimes in this business, people lose that, but I think that... Robbie and I know that we have empathy. We care about... I think that's why we're still here. If Tusayan Fire goes away and Guardian goes away, who's going to be here? The closest hospital is 80 miles away in Flagstaff. I care who's out on that highway. Us to not be able to respond when we don't know if it's friends, family, loved ones or even a tourist that we don't know. We're all people. We all have bad days.

RE: Every call you should do, you should be respectful and mindful of its that person worse day ever. Everybody that you go on, if you walk out this door every person should be treated like its you family. If we get paged out right now and we go to a hotel room, those people should be treated like it was your mom.

LP: Or your dad or your brother or sister.

RE: Alan Brunacini used to say that from Phoenix Fire. Every patient should be treated like you'd want your family to be treated.

LP: I think we try to do that. It does get hard sometimes if you have somebody being combative or belligerent, but you try. We had a lady in here this morning that was in tears. You just put your arm around her. I don't know her but she needs some TLC. I think people either have it or they don't it seems like.

RE: Yeah. I think some people like the idea of the blue shirt as a super hero cape and 'I'm a firefighter' thing. You won't see any firefighter stickers on my truck.

LP: To us, that's not what it's about. It's about helping people.

RE: It's not the blue superhero cape.

LP: Maybe it goes back to both of us being raised back East because the fire department was the core thing, you know, that we talked about. You just, you want to help.

RE: Yeah, and it's like me. Michael Ort says, "There's somewhere you got to take that stuff, the bad juju, and stick it in that locker and make it go away. Lock it up till the next time." My personal feeling, I grew up in a very large Roman Catholic family. Just pray to God every Christmas and think, how can there be a God? You get all these presents and you have to go to church! (Laughing) He's not there!

I lost a brother that got hit and killed right in front of me by a car when he was three years old. I had a sister who was 13 and... I'll go away from that. But anyway, she got hit and killed by a car by a guy two doors down. That's where I get 'When the door opens'. We lived in the country, slipped on a piece of ice. We walked down that road thousands of times. The guy two doors down went by and the bumper caught her in the back of the head. She would have been braindead. So my mother was an organ donor I'm an organ donor... My mother always stressed that we were to help each other and then help other people to. That was the first kidney transplant, or one of the first kidney transplants in America. My mother always said, "Somebody can have my eyes. They're bad, but they can have 'em. They're better than none." Not anymore but... I think I've been able to take stuff. I know when we did the bus versus car and the decapitation. Everybody was out there, it was a hot summer day, and all I could smell was blood and death and I just kept doing my job. And we had to clean up. There was internal parts all over the road. We had to sweep it up and wash it down. All I can remember is telling everybody, "It's a dead elk, boys, it's a dead elk. Just treat it as a dead elk. They aren't here. It's a dead elk." That was one of those eerie calls working at the airport. Just like the LVA crash, whatever could go wrong on a big call, did go wrong. They go, "There's an accident in front of the airport." Alright, I'm going to go over in my ops truck. I'm thinking, "Oh, somebody hit a deer, as usual."

LP: (Chuckles)

RE: Get up there. Drive up and go, "Oh my God! We need everything you got" What'd I do to dispatch?

LP: 'Send me everything you've got!'

RE: Yeah, Sherri used to put that on all the MCI fliers. 'Send me everything you got'. I got there. This car hit a bus. Family's... The whole thing's peeled. The roof's peeled back like a tuna fish can. There's one, I

think, fire security guy happened to be driving by on... I can't remember his name anymore. That comes with age. I go up, I have the same jump kit as I had last time, a rectal thermometer and an old Band-Aid. The passenger's alive, the driver's DRT, Dead Right There. I go over to the backside and the kid is dead to of his head's gone and he has the death card from a tarot packet in his hand, still there. To this day, that gives me the willies. Then the park showed up. That was one of those airport calls And Lora is the admin secretary

LP: (Laughing)

RE: She had to pull her skirt up like this 'cause she was actually the secretary at the airport with an EMT. (Laughing) Had to get her bunkers on.

LP: The supervisor's like, "You go!" I'm like, "Okay!"

RE: Yeah, that was a nasty scene. I'm like, "Lora, look at this!" It's like your hairs are standing up.

LP: I didn't even know until the next day that it wasn't a convertible. I thought it was a convertible the whole time. He was like, "no." I'm like, "oh." The bus won.

RE: So anyway, all the fire trucks broke down. We couldn't get Charlie II started. It broke down just going out the gate to get out there with the extrication tools. Once again, Sherri, Nancy, Ken to the rescue. It was quite something. Oh, those were the ones you didn't eat dinner after.

LP: We were out there for hours because the highway was shut down.

RE: The highway was shut down, so we were directing traffic We had people directing traffic through the airport. I think the heliports weren't even open then, were they? Or just opened?

LP: No, I don't think so.

RE: But we were directing them in one entrance and out the other

LP: It was different, north and south entrance was different.

RE: Yeah.

LP: We directed traffic through, and we then went from being initial responders to taking people to the clinic, because we also had a whole bus full of, I think, Taiwanese again. After everything was said and done, then they put us on traffic control. Finally the sun started setting and we finally cleared the call, finally got the bus moved. We were out there for like the whole day. I think it was like 11:00 or something when the accident happened. It just shut down the whole highway, basically. We get to wear a lot of different kind of hats. (Laughing)

TM: Fifty years from now, the chief of this station is going to find this recording. What do you want to tell her?

RE: I'm sorry! I tried to do a good job! They hired me! I was actually eating pizza and drinking beer with the board, and we were looking at all the applications. I went to the bathroom and when I came out, I

was the fire chief! I'm sorry! (LP & RE laughing) Here's what I'm gonna tell ya: I hope the community, I hope the Grand Canyon and this beautiful national forest isn't surrounded by commercial development. I know there will be some development in 50 years, but, you know, it's beautiful country and I hope it stays that way. I hope if there is any kind of development or growth that it actually is minimal impact to the infrastructure, the water and the animals up here and the forest.

LP: And that you have the budget that you can get the things that you need with it.

RE: Yeah, you can't dance with angels on the head of a pin trying to protect four hundred and five million people on a paltry budget and two people. Today we might put gas in the fire truck.

LP: (Laughing)

TM: It also sounds like there's a comradery here and a lot of fun with what you do. I think you would want them to know that, as well. Am I wrong with that?

LP: No... yeah, it's....

RE: It's Fire. You're not going to find this in any other profession. Firefighters are a brotherhood. Wednesday – International Association of Firefighters motorcycle rally. We have two hundred motorcycles? Two fifty? I don't know, we had about 500 people because all their wives are with them. Most of them all retired. All shaking hands, we're hugging. Tell them the story Lora, A guy from FDNY comes in, he was on 9/11. She starts talking to him. By the time they're done, she's crying, he's crying. I mean, it's all one big family.

LP: Yeah, he was showing me pictures of his friends that passed away on that day. All I could do was give him a hug because what do you say? His wife was nurse in one of the hospitals that day. Then we all went outside and started talking. We're all just crying. You know, what do you do? You just give them a hug and "stay safe out there."

RE: Even in Arizona, it's family. We all started together. Paul Simpson, fire and security... Oh, not fire and security, it was called Fred Harvey Fire. I don't even know if they did security back then. Back when Dan Nichols was the fire chief? Paul Simpson is now the PIO captain for Summit Fire. Dirk Foreman worked with us at the airport. He just became the chief a month ago out at Highlands Fire. Joe Rosenberg at the airport, he's a captain with Verde Valley Fire. Jim Stout, captain, Gila Bend Fire, or no, Casa Grande. Another guy I worked with, Danny Parker, retired Yavapai Central. His son was one of the kids that got killed on the Yarnell 19. I can't remember his name, but their squad boss, who I can't remember his name right now, he taught some of my classes at Wildland Fire. It's a community. It's a family. Dirk's kid, when he was working with us at the airport, three years old, he's running around in a little dress up fire outfit. August Foreman is now on the Bear Jaw crew wildland firefighting out of Highland fire. They were up in Idaho when I was down at Dirk's and Susan's here a month ago. I mean, it's just this big family and community

My dad did it. I got into it. I think I got into it for the beer and the comradery of the little town. You'll see it everywhere. It's like, you go to Heber-Overgaard. Mike, we went to IEMT school with, now works at Mesa Fire. Mike and I were at the Wildland Fire Academy, having some beers, just BSing. We walked the hill together every day for PT. He'd kind of jog, I'd walk. I don't know if he's assistant chief at Heber-Overgaard now. It's this big, giant community thing. I mean, it's like families. It's back East, if you grew

up back East. My grandfather was on the Boston police department, or my grandfather was a Boston “fiah fightah”, my dad was a Boston “fiah fightah” out of Station. I’m a Boston “fiah fightah”. And that’s how it is. That’s the family. If you look on the 9/11 thing, you’ll read stories. Guys’ sons, guys were captains or lieutenants with NYPD, their sons were killed in that or their dads were killed in that ‘cause it is multigenerational thing. It’s like the military thing for a lot of people. It’s just a big brotherhood. It’s like right now, you notice while you’re here, you see people wandering out front cause this isn’t really a working fire station. We have tour buses full of firefighters come through. We’ll have days where we’ll have like 60 people on a tour bus. They want to try on your stuff ‘cause they’re from France Hungary or they’re from Japan.

LP: What kind of equipment do you use?

RE: My daughter, ‘yells at me because I get so tired of dealing with these guys, ‘ My daughter, “You need to talk to him on Facebook. She’s been trying to get a hold of you. His daughter contacted me and he’s come to America for the first time. He’s from Hungary. He’s a firefighter.” So, I got, like what, 40-proof vodka and a bunch of shot glasses and a hat and a shirt. I made Lora take it because I had another meeting, but I mean that is what its all about. She had a like a German helmet with the thing on it. I don’t know what they used it for, to ram it through the door or something. I mean, all that stuff. You look at all the patches, everybody, t-shirts. It’s just this collection and or past time. It’s like the motorcycle thing. We’re done, we’re all hugging, shaking hands, thanks for what you do. It’s the only job in the world. Right now, Lora and I can go over to We Cook and take you and have lunch, and somebody we don’t even know will go, “Thank you for what you do.”

LP: We even had a firefighter come that time from Ireland. He was from Dublin. We could hardly understand him ‘cause his accent’s so thick. But before he left, he was hugging all of us. It’s like a brotherhood even that far away. It’s really wild.

RE: Last year we had a bus, the Western Fire Chiefs Association sent a bus here with 30 Japanese firefighters. I have a kimono somewhere. It’s too short, so I don’t wear it.

TM: (Laughing)

RE: And some fans. It’s just this weird, different thing. I’ve never seen anything like it. You can always say, “I belong to the union, I’m a union electrical worker.” But hey nothing like this. You’d go right now and just knock on a fire station door and know they’ll treat you like family. It’s like here. It’s hunting season. I know every year the guys from Tucson, if they get drawn for elk up here, they’re up here. Steve Winnicki, with Flag, he’s our hazmat guru, he gets a bull elk tag up here for archery. “Hey, me and my brothers are coming out from Pittsburgh for this hunt. Mind if we come and use the shower once in a while?” “Oh, go ahead.” I’m mean that’s just how the whole thing fire fighter community is If you need a hand I will help you.” Oh, come on out to the camp. Have a couple beers tonight.” The whole thing is just so, it’s just a whole different mindset, I think.

TM: So, it’s interesting because that collegiality makes to me a lot of sense, and yet what’s missing is that community foundational “my grandfather, my father, I am a...” So, the people that come here from a far, they don’t see that that is missing here. Because you guys aren’t missing that per se, but you are. But they don’t see it.

RE: The community doesn’t see it.

TM: The community doesn't see it.

RE: 'Cause nobody has a clue what you do. Nobody has a clue. We've been talking about TFD and family she mentioned something about money woes and trying to let people know just how hard it is. Nobody knows. We incorporated a few years ago, wherein we've lost 3 million dollars of our assessed valuation, which was a quarter of our budget, in the last five years. So, we're really struggling to keep our head above water. Going to the political regime, it's you beg, beg, beg and then they make you jump through another hoop. "This time we want you to dance on the head of a pin with a kilt on!" They serve two hours at a meeting, two days a month. Gee, what do we do? Oh, at two o'clock in the morning, I have to get up.

TM: 24/7.

RE: 24/7 'cause we still come back for everything. We have duty guys, but if it's something big and bad, we come back. We are there on the people's worst day of their life. "I'm on vacation, we came to the Grand Canyon. We're gonna be on vacation We wanted to come here all our life." [Simulating chest compressions] One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight... Wife's crying. They've saved for years to come here and her husband has a cardiac arrest in a hotel room. They don't deal with that. We deal with that, and the worst day of there lives. Like we were talking before. You're out there. It's bad, it's nasty. We just don't go up and go, "Tom, sorry for your loss." We get her a different hotel room without her husband's body in it. "Is there anything we can get you?"

And this is what we get letters for. "That nice girl got me a cup of tea." That's what they remember. They don't remember you busting your butt, working on their husband or their loved one. They'll remember they all gave me a hug. A girl got hit on the road. I knew the gal that hit her. Nothing she could do. All I could do was try to console her. I saw her two days ago over at Anne's, she's a tour guide up here. She came up and gave me a great big hug and said, "Thank you so much." "because I felt inadequate trying to console anybody 'because, you know, blue-collar Robbie telling jokes. She gave me a hug and just went, "Thank you so much for what you did." She couldn't even dial her phone, I called her husband for her, told him what was going on. Sympathize with her, and that's what people remember.

TM: But you just trained me. It's what you would do to your brother, or your mom, or your sister, or your dad, or your son, or your daughter. It's what you do for family.

RE: Worst call I ever did and this wasn't even a nasty call. Paged out for a rollover on the Willaha Ranch Road where the powerlines come across Me and Lora roll in with two, pretty much, probies on board. We drive up. It's my best friend, him and I have been hunting together here and been next door neighbors and drank and ate since I got here in 1992. His wife's in the passenger seat; we think she's dead. So, it's the same thing, just like everything. What can break today, Lora! We're trying to get the door off, and my buddy, he's rolled the truck over. He's immaculate. I think he might have had, what, a cut on his hand? Alex never gets dirty. He goes, "I don't think Rose is doing good." We go in and Lora's like, "We need to get her out of here and get her out of here now." So, we're trying to get the door open and it's one of those days where the door, it's like the metal's ripping but the door won't pop. Lora and I are like, "Just throw the tools away. I'll rip the freaking door off!" We got a helicopter. We were all freaked out. I mean, I was freaked out, and everybody's says to us afterwards, "What? I don't know why you guys were so up." I was like... You know Suyann that works up here at the gate? She used to come to

our house when my wife was alive, when she was like in fourth grade. I mean, I've known this family. I've seen them grow up, I've seen them have babies. Alex and I made a pact sometime in the early '90s, we'll keep coming to the Grand Canyon area and hunting together until we can't do it anymore. Even if we both move away and Alex is retired. I mean, him and I have seen some shooting stars, drinking mescal. Like I said, I'm going to retire here pretty soon, and I'm going to really miss this area. I'm going to miss a lot of people. I have a lot of second thoughts I have a lot of regrets about going, 'because like my mama told me, she says, "Where are you going to go after this, 'because there's no place to live here?" That's why I'm deciding to make a move. I was like man its been twenty years. God, her and I have been together 20-some years. These kids we got volunteering in their 20s, I mean. Little Cody Bettencourt, I remember getting here and going to a poster roll [for the Grand Canyon Music Festival] and he was in Pampers.

LP: (Laughing)

RE: Now Cody and Heather are having a baby. They're having a baby shower this weekend. I mean, it's just time keeps going by. I Taught Cody fire. Taught him in ET. Heather was working at Papillon. She took the EMT class. She went to school for nursing, and got out of it and got into business, thought it would be too hard. Soon as she got done with her EMT, right into nursing school, working at, what, Tuba City now.

You know that thing 'pass it on'? My personal opinion is that's what I'm here for. I take what I know, pass it on. 'because that's what you're here for, is basically my feeling. Give them the knowledge you have, try to pass on what you have. Don't take what you have and go, "It's mine and I'm not going to hand it out." Because what you're here for is either to give it to your kids, which I really don't have any except, which I call my daughter who is actually my sister's daughter who me and Debbie raised. Pass it on. Give it to the kids. They're the ones that who are going to be here running the place. This morning, on the Facebook thing where I put I was retiring. Kellee, Kell she's all upset about me leaving here because she grew up and went to school here, graduated high school here. I went, "Hey, I have to move on. It's my generation's turn to move on." I said, "Please, it's your generation's turn to take over and you better do a better f'n job than what we did."

TM: I'll step in and say they never taught us in physical therapy school how to leave. And I bet in firefighting, they never taught you that either, meaning they sort of retire, you go, but you take so much with you. So, ponder that one. We never get that training. It's like, how to get things in place, how to make things work, and when you have to step out of that, what do you do? How does it happen? How do you...

RE: Old fat man doesn't know. Old fat man, I think, is going to either work or enjoy the down time. I've got some things, I've got some apps in back East. I'm actually thinking of volunteering as a firefighter. My uncle, in this little town I'm going to, is kind of a big cheese. I'm either gonna go see about doing the volunteer thing I'll have to get my paramedic transferred over, but either go volunteer or work part time' because New York versus Arizona, if you're a volunteer like firefighter or EMT, they give you breaks on your taxes every year! What a concept!

TM: Wow! How cool is that!

RE: If you aren't a big business, you still get a break on your taxes versus Arizona where, oh, we'll let these guys come in here for free! Oh, you people, we're going to charge ya!

LP: I don't think you ever lose it, though. We were talking to a lot of those guys that came to the IAFF and there were some that we talked to that just retired or have been retired for 17, some 16 years. I said, "Do you miss it?" and he's like, "I do and I don't." I think you miss the people and the comradery. That's what he misses, but he doesn't miss the calls. I think anybody in this business, that's probably what you miss is the people.

RE: Well, I think a lot of it, too, it's just like here. There's people that have your back. At least you feel they that have your back. Like, hey, if you go down in a burning building, they'll let the building burn but they're going to get you out if it kills them. That's how you should feel about everybody you're working with. It's just a weird, weird... It'll be weird for me to go, but I also thought, you know what I could do, even if the colleges don't teach EMTB or fire stuff, I have all my certs. Do like they did at Wizard. Start my own little company and go, here's what we're going to do. Instead of having your crazy work shift it's September, time for school, you got three months. Do something different. Go out and start teaching fire and EMTB and charge the students money. It can be done. There's all kinds of different ideas.

LP: He's retiring, but he's not. (Laughing)

RE: I don't think I could ever retire. I plan on hunt and fish and Hike do the things I never got to do because I was working.

LP: Having more time where you're not on that flippin' pager where you...

RE: Well, it's kinda what with money problems. This used to be a pretty tight-knit, cohesive community. It's gotten better since the incorporation, but it's still a lot of promises and no delivering. And it's a company town. It's always going to be a company town. The people that have money are going to have money, and a little guy like me is never going to be able own anything here. Even if they do allow commercial development outside of Tusayan, you're never going to be able to open a pub or a pizzeria, 'because what will happen is all that will go to the people that still have the money and the power. It's just simple as that. I mean, I love some of these people. I truly love that sign my paycheck and earn my board, but there's a big disparity between "Ah, I'm off work. I'm going to have some drinks." and Lora and I, "Oh, we can't drink tonight. This guy's mother's sick, so he's taking care of his wife. And, oh, this guy's got EMT refresher. Oh, we gotta listen again tonight. Oh, Tim's late-man at the airport. We gotta listen till 8:00 tonight." It's like last night, I found out I was going to close on my house. I was going to have beers, but Ray gets here late on Thursdays, Tim doesn't get off till 8:00. Even though Cockrum said he would listen for me

LP: We're always listening.

RE: I know, but it's just hard It'd be nice to have a day where you could just go, "I'm going to have a beer!"

TM: Some down time.

RE: Yeah.

LP: We don't get a lot of down time. And if you go to Flag, you think, "Oh, maybe I'll go to the movies, but now I've got to go to Walmart and PetSmart and I gotta go to the grocery store. I gotta go to two grocery stores..."

RE: Yeah, the guy interviewing us needs a CPR card.

LP: (Laughing)

RE: But he did give me two books. By the way, great, both of them.

LP: I got a go to the pharmacy, and you know, you spend a whole...

RE: And then you got to drive 70 miles home.

LP: Yeah! And you're already tired. Then you get home and you got to unload everything. Put everything away.

RE: Hit Late for the Train, get a Rail Bender, so then you can't sleep when you get home 'because you're like... (wired, garbled speech and laughter)

LP: And then I've got all the laundry to do tomorrow. Then the pager goes off, and you're like, "Can you come?" Okay, I guess I'm going.

RE: It's bad, real bad.

LP: You really don't get that much days off. People think when you're off, you're off, but we're really never off, unless you do have a beer because then you can't go.

RE: And then you always feel guilty when the pager goes off for something bad 'because you had beer.

LP: And it's something bad, because then we're listening going, "Oh, crap, (laughing) do the right thing!"

RE: "You're going to kill somebody." It's one of those things you feel that about

LP: You're always the mother hen.

RE: You're babysitting. You always feel like you got to babysit, even though I think that's probably one of our faults is not being able to go, "They've been doing it for 15 years, they should be able to damn well handle it."

LP: And I always feel like a mother hen, too, because I always worry about the guys.

TM: In your defense, I'd say in this community, given the small number of people that you have here to draw from, everybody helps. It's like when you saw Sherri walking through the snow, you were like, "Thank heavens." So my sense is everybody else sees you guys show up... When you don't have a lot, somebody else shows up with more experience than you, it is a big deal.

LP: That makes sense. I never feel like I'm that person though. (Laughing)

RE: Well, you are.

LP: I always feel like the person at LVA going, "Sherri! Yay!"

RE: There's no place like home. There's no place like home.

TM: Yeah! But I want to thank you guys for your service as well. One thing you said, Robbie, really struck me. The community hasn't a clue except for the people that volunteer here, and their wives and husbands and daughters and sons and mothers and fathers, because they tell the stories, too. They know. But third person removed will not know. So, thank you.

RE: It's a perfect example, at a town council meeting I did a presentation and they asked about how to make the crosswalks safer. Being the big mouth I am, I couldn't not talk and I said, "I don't know how to make the crosswalks safer." And I said, "After being on one where the girl went through the windshield of a car, something needs to be done. They're not safe as they are, having all those crosswalks in the street. I don't know what the answer is, but you guys need to fix it." Because there's nothing... It's dark. They've been driving 75 miles an hour till they get to the roundabout, they've done enough Evil Kenevil jumps over the roundabouts because they're going too fast. Those crosswalks, people got a false sense of security. Back in the old days, you'd look for cars and then run like hell! Now, it's like these people think they're going to step out there in the evening when you got 7,000 cars leaving the park right after the sunset, and they think people can see 'em. You can't see them.

TM: Well, the Brits, if you put your foot on the crosswalk, they have to stop. Here in the states, its like, "Are you testing me? Let's find out." It's different.

LP: Yeah. We've done three pretty bad ones already and that's not even all the, like you said, the roundabout accidents and so forth that we've done. And all the near misses we see every day.

TM: One wonders if a walk over or tunnel under or somehow just get the people...

LP: Yeah.

RE: Or the guy just going like this in the dark...drunk, stumbling out of a bar.

LP: Even the town council asked us, "What exactly do you guys do all day?" And it's like... they must think we just sit in here and watch TV or something.

RE: No, on the days we haven't slept all night, if you go out there and sit in the Barcalounger, I guarantee, it never has never failed to happen... If you go out there and you've had like one hour's sleep... You're like, "Oh, shit, we were up all night. I going to stay out here and take a little siesta." Guaranteed...

LP: "Is this all you do all day? Must be nice."

RE: "This is what you do all day?" Oh yeah!

LP: Or "How come you weren't in the office at 8:15? I called and called this morning." Its like, "I was out till 5:00 all the way in Flagstaff helping deliver a patient and I've had no sleep, which isn't safe, so I'm going to go home and get some sleep." "Well, you need to get this done and this done in the office, and there are people calling, and..." It never ends. That's why I say, hopefully in the future we'll have enough money to have people and you're not having to wear all these different hats.

TM: It reminds me of why Dr. Wurgler and Dr. Myers left the clinic. Two guys, running 24-hour call, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, begging for another doctor. They couldn't get it because it's a money equation. Well, then you burn people out. Good people leave. Other good people come in. They leave. It is a big revolving door because somebody's looking at it from the financial line.

LP: Robbie and I are salaried, so we try to just look out for each other.

RE: We make about a quarter an hour some months.

LP: So we take an extra day off here or there, but you're still kind of on call, 'cause even if you're at home, you're home listening. But you've got to have some kind of break. You can't be here all the time. You've got to have down time. Even if you're home listening, it's better than being stuck here all the time.

TM: You've got to have down time for this job to be able to have the compassion that you have. You have to fill that well back up again, which means you need time away. If you don't get that, that well gets dry awful fast.

LP: It does.

RE: And see and that's the problem

LP: The burnout.

RE: With Wurgler and Myers and just like us. You *live* where you work. It's not like I can get off at 5:00 and I drive home. My neighbor's a truck driver and his wife is something else and we can all sit down and say, "Hey, come on over. We're going to barbeque some burgers and have a couple beers tonight." Not how it works here.

LP: I'm sorry. I was going to say Dr. Myers even told me that it affects you. It affects your sleep. It affects your health. You can't do it. That him and Wurgler tried. That you can't keep that pace up without it affecting you. I already know it affects my sleep because I don't sleep good when I'm on, but man, when that weekend comes, I'll sleep for 12-13 hours straight, trying to play catch up, you know.

RE: I think it's the alcohol you consume. (Laughing)

TM: Well, at least you have that availability. When you lose that ability to get that sleep on your time off, because if your workload hasn't...

LP: But it's hard because then your days off are messed up because now you've slept till noon and you just feel like you're dragging all the time. You've still got all this stuff to do. It never ends. He can go home and sleep like a baby, and I'll be just always on the edge waiting for...

RE: That's because your nature is to worry about everything.

LP: I'm a worrier.

RE: It's not like me. The pager goes off. I just get up, say some cuss words, and off I go

LP: I'm a worry wart!

RE: [scenario] "Well, I think I'll go to the bathroom before I get dressed." Stumble out the door, going, "I wonder who's on duty." Someone is in front of me. "I hope I'm going so slow that whosoever on duty beats me there and they cancel us!" Yeah, yeah yeah!

TM & LP: (Laughing)

TM: Well, thank you so much for your time today and thank you for your service.

RE: Thanks, Tom. It's good having you here today.

LP: Definitely. I don't have to do office work.

TM: That's good.

LP: (Laughing) That's always good!

TM: Wonderful.