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Interviewee: Sharon Buck

Interviewer: Tom Martin

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TM: Today is Saturday, March 19, 2022. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Sharon Buck. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, Sharon. How are you today?

SB: Good morning, Tom. I'm fine, thank you.

TM: Great. Sharon, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

SB: Yes, you do.

TM: Thank you very much. Sharon, what year were you born?

SB: 1945.

TM: Did you have older brothers and sisters?

SB: I was the oldest of three.

TM: How did your mom meet your dad?

SB: They lived in two little connecting towns, Snowflake, Arizona, and Holbrook, Arizona. I think they're about 25-28 miles apart. And so, of course, they were combatants in sports teams' stuff. And then sometimes towns got together for dances and stuff, and it was just one of those natural progressions.

TM: Okay. What were they doing there? What was your dad doing at the time?

SB: Well, when they met, my dad probably was still in school. But once he got out of school, then he worked for Schuster's, a grocery store, in Holbrook, Arizona. And my mom, when she graduated from high school, she came to Holbrook to work. And so, then that made dating possible. That's probably when they really started dating. They knew each other before that.

TM: Were you born in Holbrook?

SB: I was actually born in Snowflake because my dad was overseas, and when my mom was on her own, she went back to stay with her parents in Snowflake. My dad's home was Holbrook, and so we were in Snowflake when I was born.

TM: Okay. And your father served in World War II?

SB: He did.

TM: What did he do?

SB: Well, he was a tail gunner for a while until he figured out that he got really airsick. Even though he was a good shot, he was not a good flyer. And so then, jobs just changed. He was one of those crews that ended up on Tinian Island, waiting to guard the Enola Gay. Had to clear the island. He did various different jobs. I think in the military, you did whatever they said needed to be done.

TM: That's right. But he was in the Air Force then.

SB: He was. Well, actually, at that time they called it the Army Air Corp.

TM: Thank you. And after the service, he came back to Holbrook.

SB: He did.

TM: And your mom brought you back from her folks in Snowflake.

SB: Right.

TM: You guys grew up there in Holbrook.

SB: We did. I was born in Snowflake, but of course, like I said, close to Holbrook. My brother and sister were both born in Holbrook.

TM: How far younger are they from you?

SB: My brother is three years younger, and my sister is— Whoa! Eight or nine years. I need to do the math. She is significantly younger.

TM: What do you remember about Holbrook in, oh, gosh, you know, when you were five or six in 1950 through 1955? What was it like there?

SB: See, my experience was so different from a lot of people growing up because I'm from two really big families. So, between Holbrook and Snowflake, I literally had 48 first cousins, so I did not need to make friends. I was born into friends.

TM: Oh, wonderful.

SB: So, it was amazing. Not to say that I did not have friends out of the family. But if I did, they were mostly because of church or home because the people that I spent the time with were cousins.

TM: Okay. That makes sense. Can you paint for me your earliest recollections of Holbrook? Route 66 went right through town.

SB: It did.

TM: And the Little Colorado River is just south of town. What do you remember about the town then?

SB: Well, it was, it was really a very— Even young, I was smart enough to realize it was a very vibrant town because Route 66 brought a lot of business, and the town was thriving. It is struggling now, and they're working really hard to make it good again and making improvements. But at that time, it was so vibrant and even though it was so busy, I just remember always feeling safe. I lived next door to three

cousins and across the street from four cousins, and so our parents allowed us to walk to school along the main road, which actually was Route 66, and nobody worried. We never felt unsafe. We never felt the Boogey Man was going to get us. You know, it's a different experience now for young kids.

TM: How far did you have to walk to school?

SB: Oh, maybe, I don't know, three quarters of a mile?

TM: Okay, so a good little bit of exercise going and coming every day?

SB: Absolutely.

TM: Did you go home for lunch, or did you have lunch at school?

SB: I had lunch at school, and I can't remember if there was a cafeteria. I think we all took our lunch because I can remember taking a lunch in a bucket, so I think that was the only option was to take your own lunch. There wasn't a school cafeteria. And we were too far to walk home.

TM: It's a little too far to walk home and come back again midday. Do you remember roughly— This would have been first grade, second grade, third grade. How many kids were in your school at the time?

SB: Oh, man. I probably shouldn't even make a guess on that. I think our classes were very normal size. But that wasn't to say that there were a ton of them. In some grades, there were only one, like only one sixth grade. You know what I mean?

TM: Okay. Yep.

SB: But it seems to me that we had classes of 25, somewhere in there. But being that young, I'm not sure I even paid attention to that.

TM: That's right. I'm just trying to get sense of the size of the community. Were there any teachers that you had at that time that you still recall today?

SB: Names, yes. Only one that visually I can still bring up. Obviously, there were some that were more favorites than others along the way, but I can't say that I ever had a teacher that was a bad teacher. I just had some I liked more than others, which is very normal.

TM: Yes, absolutely. Sometimes, as small children, people will have a teacher that they remember that really inspired them.

SB: Right.

TM: So, I kind of want to ask that question. So, your father worked for the grocery store there in Holbrook. Was that the only store there?

SB: Well, it started was the only store that was there was Schuster's, and it was just across the train tracks from the main part of town. It was a nice, big building. And then Babbitt's came into Holbrook and had a store downtown just about where Route 66 made its big turn and headed toward New Mexico. That's where he worked then for a lot of years before he came to Page.

TM: So, your father left Schuster's. Do you remember anything about the Schuster's store?

SB: Not really, other than it was really big. And in the center— Well, to me, okay. I was young. And right in the center of it they had the biggest potbelly stove you've even seen in your life, and it kept that store so nice and cozy. In the winter, they set the wood all the time.

TM: Nice. So, while your mom was shopping, could you go sit by the stove and warm up?

SB: I did! Yes. A lot of people did.

TM: Were your parents cooking with wood at the time?

SB: No. My grandmother still did some.

TM: Okay. And she would have been over in, um—

SB: Snowflake.

TM: —Snowflake. Okay. And then the Babbitt store, the Holbrook Babbitt store. Can you recall that?

SB: Oh, yes. It started, just like I said, downtown just about where the stoplight was where you stop to make your left turn to go to New Mexico. Then they moved out on the end of town, closer to Winslow, on that end of town.

TM: Okay, to the west end of town.

SB: And it was a nice, big store. A new store built just for them.

TM: Did it have a potbelly stove in the middle?

SB: You know, I don't think so. I don't remember see— I don't— In my mind, I can't see one there.

TM: And your father left Schuster's and started working for the Babbitt store.

SB: He did. It was just a way better financial offer.

TM: Was he a manager, or did he work a certain department?

SB: No, he was the manager.

TM: Okay. The layout of Holbrook to the south, I think of the Little Colorado River, which really defines the southern edge of town.

SB: Right.

TM: Or at least back in the day. And then was the railroad tracks and then the downtown, if I get this right, going north.

SB: You have it right.

TM: Do you ever recall any flooding of the Little Colorado River?

SB: Well, I know there even today they talk about in the hundred-year flood plain and everything like that, I never in my lifetime saw the river go over the banks. I saw sometimes when the river was roiling pretty good, but I never saw it at flood stage.

TM: Would you go down to the river and play down there?

SB: No, not too much.

TM: Where would you play with the many cousins that you had there in town?

SB: Mostly up in the hills behind our house. Holbrook has a lot of houses that back right up to the big sandstone buttes, and we'd go up in there and hike and between, you know, the balancing rocks, underneath we'd build our home and build a little fire and boil water. I'm not sure what for, but we boiled water.

TM: Oh, what fun!

SB: You know, just played in the hills the whole time or just played in people's home and games and ball and, you know, all the stuff that kids do.

TM: Did you like sports? Were you good at sports?

SB: Um, I liked sports [*Laughs*] I'm not very good at sports. No. I could do a lot of things fairly but nothing extremely well.

TM: All right. Holbrook, that geological rock type there might have some fossils there.

SB: It probably does. I don't remember even looking for them.

TM: Occasionally, I'm assuming you might take an outing and go all the way to Flagstaff. Was that the case?

SB: You know, if we really took an outing because we needed things— Before Christmas, I can remember my mom would always make one trip to Phoenix to shop rather than going to Flagstaff, because that way, in one trip, you could literally get anything you might want. For most of our outings, if it was for a big deal shopping, we went to Phoenix.

TM: Then to get there, would you go south on the highway through Snowflake and down—

SB: Yes, down the Salt River Canyon.

TM: Salt River Canyon, yeah. What do you remember about that drive?

SB: How horrible. Made me carsick every trip.

TM: Oh my. Well, it's interesting because your father was airsick easily in the Air Corp, you mentioned. I wonder if [*laughs*] brought along to you.

SB: Yeah, I think so. [*Laughs*]

TM: Because it is a switchbacky road and goes way down and up the other side. Did it then go to Globe?

SB: It did. Partly that way because, I mean, I think that there was a shorter way of doing that, and I don't really remember that well. But we also had extended family. My aunt's family was in Globe, and so sometimes just as a stop along the way we would go there and— She wasn't my aunt. But Aunt Nellie lived there, and we'd stop and see Aunt Nellie and, you know, just everything. We shared everybody's relatives.

TM: Nice. Okay. And that was once a year, that drive.

SB: Yeah. Pretty much.

TM: Do you remember traveling to surrounding areas? Winslow or the Petrified Forest National Park, which was just further off to the east there?

SB: We went to Winslow quite a bit because Holbrook, at the time, didn't have a dentist, and so my dentist was in Winslow. Winslow had a little bit better shopping than Holbrook had. Mostly we were just kind of hanging close to home. My parents both worked hard, but neither one made much money. And so as far as

outings were concerned, they tried to have a nice outing, like, once a year when my dad had vacation time, and we would just make it real special. And that was most of our outings.

TM: Where would you go during his vacation time?

SB: Any place. I mean, my parents were wonderful about saving money to make the trip special. I mean, one year we went to Yellowstone, and they made them into nice trips. And like I said, it was once a year. But that may have been the best way for me because that way I was able for the whole year to anticipate this trip that was coming up. And that allowed my parents to save the money they needed to make that trip.

TM: What kind of car did you guys have?

SB: I honestly don't know. I know we had one, and I'm going to say, a station wagon. Both of them seemed to have some kind of an open back area that we could load all of our stuff into.

TM: Well, there were five of you, and that would make sense.

SB: Yeah.

TM: Yellowstone's a long drive. Before the—

SB: We didn't always go that far, but we did.

TM: Okay. Before the interstate highway system, it would have taken days to get there.

SB: Right.

TM: When did your parents first take you to the Grand Canyon? Or did they?

SB: I have pictures of myself at the Grand Canyon, and it appears that I am probably 2, 2 1/2 when I went the first time.

TM: So, your parents were out exploring their world, I don't want to say, regardless of you, but they weren't taking you there for you to see the Grand Canyon. They were there to see the Grand Canyon.

SB: Of course. Yeah.

TM: That's lovely. I'm just curious to know. Did they take you down to Tucson or maybe up to Salt Lake City, even west off to the California coast?

SB: We went to, only one time I can remember as a child, and I was an older child, we went to California for just like two days. Like I said, we took road trips different places. We went south. I can remember being in— Oh, my goodness, what's the really hot desert place? It was ugly as sin.

TM: Yuma?

SB: Never going back there! Yuma! I don't know why we did this, Dad, it was flaming hot and there was nothing here for us to do or see, but we did it.

[*Laughter*]

TM: Yuma in the summertime! Oh, dear.

SB: Yeah, it was pretty awful.

TM: Well, you were adventurous, I'll put it to you! What else do you remember about— You know, when I think of Holbrook certainly today, it's struggling, and I wonder, besides the highway, besides a place to stop and shop, what was the industry in Holbrook that kept it there, you know, back in your day in 1950?

SB: After Route 66, you mean?

TM: Well, no. In 1945, '50, '55. During that 10-year time period.

SB: Oh, Holbrook was thriving then because they had so much 66 traffic going through that we had a major bus depot that had, well, a restaurant in it. We had a drugstore with a soda fountain. We had two grocery stores. We had, probably four that I know of, gas stations that were very successful. Quite a few trading posts or something similar to that. We had a Penney's store. We had a car dealership. Obviously, banks. I think we had two. I know we had one for sure, and I think there were two. Had a theater. Had a jewelry store. Well, had a small mercan— No, a small furniture store. A mercantile store that my grandpa actually ran that did clothes and shoes. I can't think of more.

TM: I'm trying to think, besides the tourists, which might have been, you know, the trading post and people needed gas, and they would need their cars worked on if they broke down. And that was the main east/west corridor connecting Los Angeles with points further east. You know, logging. There was logging going on, but that was further south up in the high country, up on the Mogollon Rim. There wasn't a sawmill there. There wasn't a university there. I'm just thinking about businesses that would cause a community to gather around and then have all the ancillary services there.

SB: Well, a lot of it simply was having the major, the highway go through because you had to cater to all those people who wanted to stop along the way. And of course, we had the regular things, like the people who maintained the roads and quite a— Well, I shouldn't say quite a large because I was too young to really know. But I'm assuming there was quite a few people involved in having the train station there because we actually had a major depot where people could get on and off the train and, you know, so we had that there and that was a support staff that came with that. Being young, I'm not sure I paid that much attention to why we had so many businesses.

TM: Well, you might have hit upon it because Holbrook would be a jumping off place for the train for anyone traveling points south. You know, the Holbrook, Pinetop-Lakeside communities, Payson, that part of Arizona. Again, thinking sort of before the automobile, the train would have been there and then the automobile slowly came along. Was there a roundhouse or a switchyard for the Santa Fe Railroad?

SB: We did not have a roundhouse. Winslow did. And I don't think we— I think there was one place only but something could be pushed off to the side, you know, on siderails, waiting for something to happen for it to be picked up later. We did not have all of the railroad stuff that Winslow had. I can remember my parents took us over two or three times to watch what happened there when the trains came in and they had to turn the engines around and had to get some of the cars off and some of the cars on. It was super, super interesting.

TM: Fun. But that was over at Winslow.

SB: Right.

TM: Now the trains— You mentioned a train station. Was there a lot of train traffic at the time?

SB: I think— Okay, this is me guessing with my kid's memory. It seems like there was three sets of tracks that when I walked across, I had to cross three sets.

TM: Did you guys do any train trips? Did you go east or west on the train?

SB: We did not. In fact, I didn't really take a train trip until I was grown. It was just extra money that we didn't need to spend, and I guess I didn't see the importance of it at the time because I sure didn't work to get there.

TM: And that makes perfect sense because you had an automobile.

SB: Right.

TM: And your parents clearly used it. So, 2 or 2 1/2, your first time to Grand Canyon. Do you remember your next time to Grand Canyon?

SB: You know, I don't. That one, I mean, we have all the photos to show it. I know we went back because there's a picture there when my sister, like I say, who's considerably younger than me, was probably a year and a half old, but I don't really remember very much other than that picture about that trip.

TM: What else about Holbrook do you want to mention?

SB: Well, I don't really know what I need to mention. I mean, Holbrook was a pretty, a pretty well-built, progressive town. We had a nice swimming pool. You know, this was all before it got bypassed, and then of course, financially, a lot of things had to go away. My thing about Holbrook wasn't so much the town. It was just the people, all my cousins and family members. And I had Grandma and Grandpa in that town. So, I was more into the people than what the town had to offer me.

TM: Okay. You mentioned a swimming pool. Is that where you learned to swim?

SB: Actually, I was just getting good with swimming, because it wasn't there my whole life. That came in about the time that we left. I was just learning to swim, and I was not good. And then we moved to Page and had no swimming pool. But we did— The— I don't know who. I started to say the government. The people building the dam, I don't know who, dug out a big pit, a dirt pit, and filled it with water for people who wanted to swim. But I had to cross a swinging bridge to go over there, and I was too coward. So, I am still not a good swimmer. I could save myself if my boat capsized, but I would barely be able to dog paddle and sidestroke to the edge.

TM: So, like me, we both like our life jackets.

[Laughter]

SB: Yeah. Yes, I do.

TM: Well, how was it and when was it that your family left Holbrook with all that family support?

SB: You know, it was a huge, huge, really big decision for my family, for my mom and dad, because that was home. That was family. They both had brothers and sisters in Holbrook, in addition to Snowflake and Taylor, my mom's other family. But the year before we came to Page, my dad was hurt in an accident at the grocery store. They had cases of canned goods and stuff. You know, the trucks come in and they unload them, and they had them stacked high, which, because the small backroom, they would do that. And something happened one day, and I don't even remember. And I'm not sure my parents ever told me, which was probably the best. But something caused the cases to fall. And some fell on my dad and crushed a lot of stuff in his back. He was in a body cast from right underneath his arms to just below his knees—

TM: My!

SB: —for the better part of a year. And so—

TM: The better part of a year?!

SB: Yeah, for the better part of a year. Those were the days, there wasn't a lot of workmen's comp and stuff like that. And so, my mom did what she could. She cut hair for people, sewed dresses, made wedding dresses, babysat. She did a lot of things to help financially, but at the end of that time period, they were— They managed to make the house payments. We still owned our home. And Babbitt's offered my dad this job in Page, and the deal was that we didn't, you know, we didn't have any place nice. Everybody lived in a trailer, that they would provide a trailer for us, all of our groceries. All we had to do was write down what we took out of the store. You know, if you took out five dollars' worth of groceries, you made it on, like, a charge slip that went to the main office. They paid all our utilities. And so, it was an opportunity for my mom and dad. Initially, that's all it was, was an opportunity to be financially okay again. Because I don't think either one of them expected to fall in love with the town. Then all of that plan changed, and it was no longer just an opportunity to get ahead. It was a great place to live.

TM: But you guys didn't know that when you went there—

SB: Exactly.

TM: —because there was nothing there. *[Laughs]*

SB: There were not even that many rows of trailers. We were on A Street, which is the first row, because we were early there.

TM: Hey, Sharon, I'm sorry. Let's back up a little bit.

SB: Okay.

TM: Do you remember the year of your father's injury.

SB: Well, we moved in '57, so it had to be '56.

TM: And it took a while— If I get this figured out. It took a while for the Bureau of Reclamation and the state of Utah and Arizona and the Navajo Nation to figure out where the City of Page would be. It was either going to be on the Utah side or the Arizona side. They finally figured it out because the Navajo were able to do a land exchange were agreed to do that. So, then the town grew up on the Arizona side. 1957, you guys would have been first in. Was the cut even finished by that time?

SB: Oh, no. We came across the res on a fair amount of dirt road. Not all, but part of it. Yes.

TM: The main way to go north from Flagstaff or Winslow or Holbrook would have been to go on Route 66 to Flagstaff, and then north on Highway 89, which then crossed the Colorado River at Lees Ferry at Marble Canyon on the Navajo Bridge, and then headed up toward Kanab. The dam was 15 miles, roughly, north of there. So, one way to get there would be to turn off at the gap and go east and then north on some dirt roads.

SB: That's how we came.

TM: Okay. It would have taken, I think, from Holbrook was that like a two-day drive? One-day drive?

SB: No. No, it's a day drive. It's a pretty— Well, being a kid, I didn't pay that much attention, but I'm sure for my parents it was a pretty ugly drive. Because the roads were rough. You know, things were— You could barely in some places pass a vehicle. I remember that. Everybody would slow down to about five miles an hour and kind of pull to the side when we were on a dirt road then. Yeah. Initially, it was very difficult to get stuff here.

TM: So, that was a one-lane road then from the gap, the dirt road from the gap north?

SB: No, it was actually two, but sometimes they weren't both fully open with sand blowing or whatever might have happened.

TM: And, of course, you would be behind the slowest vehicle and have to pass.

SB: Yeah! You mostly had to stay there.

TM: I also wanted to ask you that year, 1956, the year of your father's injury, did you do any work as well? Were you trying to do anything to help the family, workwise, to raise some money, babysitting or something?

SB: You know, there was— I did babysit, but they— My parents did not take that money. They had started a saving account. They called it my college fund. Neither of my parents went for higher education. And it was super important to them that their kids have the opportunity, if they chose to do it. And so, anything that I made, they made me put in there. I did have this little token job, which probably I shouldn't even tell you about, probably shouldn't be in. But Babbitts would let me come in every evening and clean the meat shop. That was in the days of the sawdust, and you rake it to take out the chunks of stuff, and then I got 50 cents or whatever. And I don't even think, looking back on it, that I did a good job. I think they were just trying to help me.

TM: That's lovely. It might not have been fun, but it would have been something.

SB: Well, you know what, I didn't even think it was an awful job. I thought it was fine, and the fact that I was going to get 50 cents, that was a big deal.

TM: And this was, roughly, 1956, it would have been.

SB: Yes, or close to '57. Somewhere in there. Early '57.

TM: What are your earliest memories of Page in 1957? You would have been 12.

SB: Yes. I will tell you what my parents told me. They came up to check out Page. They wanted Dad to come see, come see the trailer so they knew what they could take and what they had to leave. And they came home and told me it was a little town on a hill. Well, the only town I'd ever been to on a hill was San Francisco.

TM: Oh, my! *[Laughs]*

SB: I had kind of a distorted image of what coming into Page was going to be.

TM: I bet you did! Oh, my gosh.

SB: She did say a little town, though. So, you know, San Francisco, I wasn't thinking the numbers like San Francisco, but I wasn't thinking in the middle of the desert, either.

TM: Like streetcars and lots of people and up and down and it would be fun.

SB: Yeah.

TM: So, you mentioned you guys were on a trailer on A Street. Can you describe that? Was the street paved at the time or was it still dirt?

SB: Sort of. We were— It started as a— We had some asphalt down the center. Most of them were not, but most of them ended up paved fairly quickly.

TM: Okay. And can you describe the store that your dad managed for Babbitt's?

SB: In Page?

TM: Yes, in Page.

SB: It was a tin building. It was not real big. It was probably no bigger than our living room, so it's pretty small. It didn't have a lot of variety. People could actually ask for stuff, and they tried to bring things in. That tiny store wasn't there real long, though, because the one thing that the city fathers tried to do was to make Page as normal as possible as soon as possible. And they built the building that was the, if I can remember correctly, a gas station, a bank, a beauty shop, and Babbitt's store. And then it was still a tin building, but it was a bigger building. And able to stock a lot of variety, as well, for that size of building, a lot of variety.

TM: Okay. Still tin but bigger.

SB: When the wind blew, the sand just filtered through.

TM: Let's talk about that for a minute because the wind does blow quite a bit in the northland here. And there is a lot of sand there and sand dunes. Did the sand get into your trailer? Let's start at home.

SB: Oh, there were times after bad windstorms that you would sweep the sand into a pile and use, like, the flat shovel to scoop it out of your house. It was awful, but you have to also remember that they had torn everything up with all this construction, so, there would have been sagebrush and the prairie grasses and stuff like that holding the dirt down. Page had these great big trucks in there, tearing things up to try to put in roads and build the stuff they needed to for the town, and the work for that needed to be done for the barracks for the dam workers. So, it was exceedingly awful because we were trying to have progress.

TM: Right. But, you know, when I sweep up in the kitchen, I get the little broom and pan for the tiny little pile of dust. I don't get the flat shovel, which I use for, you know, snow.

SB: *[Laughs]* Right.

TM: So, the tin buildings, I'm assuming that they had the same problem with the blowing sand.

SB: Oh, yes. It was, it was pretty awful. Often times, after a bad wind, if you took a can off of the shelf, you turned it upside down to knock the dirt off before you put it in your cart.

TM: Okay. Oh, my. That's a lot of sand.

SB: That's a lot of sand. We have pictures of, um, it looks almost like it's a blizzard, but it's not snow. It's sand, and you can see a figure of a person out in it, but you can't see them clearly.

TM: So, at 12, you would have left, as you mentioned, four dozen family members there in Holbrook and then, you know, further south up at Snowflake. Did you know anyone in Page from Holbrook?

SB: No one.

TM: And 12, what grade were you in?

SB: I was going into seventh grade.

TM: Did you all move to Page in the summer then of 1957 or the spring? When did that happen?

SB: We literally moved, because my parents wanted to be sure we were here for this, we literally moved here the day before school started. And then school was starting in August, but I can't tell you the date. It was very late August.

TM: So, August 1957. And you're starting the seventh grade. Do you remember how many kids would have been in that class, roughly?

SB: No, I don't. It seemed like a regular-sized classroom to me, so I'm guessing there was at least 20.

TM: Okay.

SB: I'm just guessing.

TM: All right. So, that would have been a lot happening for you right away. New town. New kids in school. New landscape. The small city on the hill there.

SB: Yeah! *[Laughs]*

TM: What else do you remember about that first fall into winter of 1957?

SB: You know what, if I can even birdwatch here again, I want to explain to you kind of how things happened that first day.

TM: Please.

SB: Which is part of my love story with Page right from the start. We pull into town, and we have a station wagon that's got the people and, of course, whatever stuff we can jam in it, because we're coming to a trailer, so you don't bring that much. And we brought a small, little travel trailer, like the U-Haul stuff you put things in. And we pulled up in front of our trailer, and the people from both sides of us and across the street, it was on a Sunday, they came out of their house and offered to unload everything. And the women asked my mom, "Have you ever lived in a trailer before?" And my mom said, "No." And they said, "Would you like us to just put stuff in because we know the best way to put a lot of stuff in a small space."

TM: Oh my.

SB: My mom was amazed, and she said, "I would love it." And they said, "Just tell us what goes where." Well, in our trailer, we had a living room, kitchen, dining room off one area, not big. Then in the master bedroom, we had a double bed, and then a little bathroom – little bathroom – and then there's two what they call in the back Jack-and-Jill bath bedrooms. And my bedroom, I could reach from one side to the other with my arms out because the trailer was— We had one of the wider trailers. It was 10 feet. But making a long story short, while my mom directed where things went, and I did nothing, I got to meet the neighbor kids. They had us unloaded, unpacked, and cardboard boxes crushed and ready to be hauled away in probably an hour. And then those three trailers and two others all brought food, and they set up two tables right in the middle of A Street, and we all shared their dinner. And the very next day, when it was time to get ready to go out to go to the bus that took us across that little patch of desert, the kids from A Street were waiting outside our trailer to walk with me to the bus stop.

TM: Nice.

SB: So, it's right from the start. I mean, I missed my cousins, but it wasn't this lonely time. The construction kids that had to move a lot knew how to make friends. Otherwise, they would have just died on the vine. And they were friendly, they were considerate. They were just amazing.

TM: Nice. So, from your trailer on A Street, where did the bus take you? Where was the school?

SB: The school was actually out kind of on the other, on the edge of town, on the Flagstaff edge of town, right at the edge of the mesa. And it started off with one tin building and a couple little Quonset huts and then we ended up with three tin buildings and more of the Quonset huts.

TM: So when you started in August of 1957, there were just two tin buildings?

SB: I think there was only one right then.

TM: One tin building.

SB: The Quonset huts under construction, or under— They don't under construction. Under hauling in, whatever.

TM: [*Laughs*] Okay, yeah. Others were arriving soon.

SB: Yeah.

TM: Can you describe that tin building for me?

SB: Oh, geez. So, it's really nothing to describe. It was a rectangle. It was tin. Had a peaked roof on it, had double doors. It was just a tin building with rooms partitioned off with sheets of plywood. Teachers had to be very considerate that you talked loud enough that your class could hear but not so loud that you were interrupting the other teachers. Classrooms were used by more than one teacher. You know, if you had a prep period, somebody else was in your room because we didn't have that many rooms. But it was only a short time before the second building came. My mind is just fogging on how long that took to happen.

TM: Okay. And then the wind. How did the wind handle that tin room with divided sheets of plywood?

SB: Well, if it was super windy, it was also dusty, but it was also really noisy because you would have some rattling of the tin more than the plywood. If it rained, which wasn't very often, you almost couldn't hear anything because it's like rain on a metal roof. You know, it was really hard for a teacher to teach. We had teachers that were just, I think, they all should have been pioneers. They were tough. They were ready for a challenge. I never heard them complaining. More likely, to laugh about something that was going south by not being able to hear. My experience was just so good here.

TM: That's really neat. So, it sounds like you made some immediate friends.

SB: Immediate.

TM: Who did you meet?

SB: Oh, my gosh. I mean, I can't even list them for you. I didn't end up with a best friend because there were, like, 20 all at once, and then more than that. The construction kids, like I said, knew how to make friends. And so, I didn't have friends because of my efforts. I had friends because of them being welcoming.

TM: You've mentioned a swimming hole, if you will— I don't know if it's called a swimming pool because it sounds like the Bureau of Reclamation may have just dug this thing and then filled it up with water—

SB: That's it!

TM: —as a place for people to go and go swimming or hang out at the lake, I guess. The little town with the little lake. But that was on the Utah side of the Colorado River—

SB: It was.

TM: —which meant that it was on the other side of Glen Canyon and would have been over a thousand feet across and maybe eight hundred feet down, or something like that. Can you describe that bridge for me?

SB: It was the scariest experience of my life, and that's why I didn't learn to swim. I crossed the bridge exactly one time and was scared to death to do it again because the bottom, as you're walking, it was a creepy feeling because this was before the dam was in and there was still water rushing underneath there sometimes. And it was messing up, if you could see that movement and you were trying to walk. And, of course, the *[laughs]* kids that were my age were evil, and I was halfway out on the bridge when two or three of them decided they were just going to start bouncing that bridge.

TM: *[Laughs]*

SB: And I ended up sitting on my fanny in tears and they stopped and helped me across. So, I went to the swimming hole one time, and then I came back home, and I never went again.

TM: Oh, I can't blame you. I'd never thought about that. I'm sorry. But what fun as a kid. Boy, somebody's out there and you start jumping up and down on— And the bottom of the bridge that you walked on, the surface, can you describe that?

SB: I can't. I was trying to remember earlier when I was making some notes for myself. If there were solid places, it wasn't just all wire, but there were open places. So, I don't know if there was a track, like two tracks with an open middle that you could see through the— It was heavy wire, not like chicken wire. But you could see the water moving underneath it and that's what created the unbalance for me is that I had a lot of movement going on, trying to figure out where to put my feet, and I wasn't comfortable with it.

TM: Right. The photographs I've seen, it appears as though the tread surface is what I would call hog wire.

SB: Yeah.

TM: It's an eighth-inch diameter wire that's in a grid, a square grid pattern, and the squares are maybe an inch by an inch or a little bigger so your foot can't go through, but your eyes sure can see right through the stuff. And that's it from— There were two cables, one on either side of that, and then there were the overhead cables that the whole thing hung from. And I think there was horizontal cable, kind of, for a handrail, but there was nothing between that horizontal cable, you know, at hip height you could put your hand on and your feet. I mean, it was like wide open. So, it was—

SB: Yeah. There was a handrail, I can tell you, because I had a death grip on that thing.

TM: Am I off on that description? And if I am, please correct me.

SB: No, I think actually your either research or your memory is way better than mine. You described it perfectly, and I could not have described it to you.

TM: It looked challenging in today's concept of a ropes courses. It looked like just simply for the distance it traveled, it was mind bending.

SB: It was! It was. Yes!

[Laughter]

TM: People who handle that kind of stuff would just have a good time, but for the rest of us mortals— I never saw it. Of course, I was a few months old in August of 1957, far, far away. But the photographs I've seen of that thing are, my, my! I do not blame you at all for making one trip over and calling it good. I'm surprised you even got back. I guess you had no choice, huh?

SB: Yeah, you have no choice. Once they, you know, they quit bouncing and they were okay. They were helping me get across, and everybody— Nobody was weird coming back. But I was smart enough to know I didn't, I didn't like it. Coming back, they walked right by me, and I held the handrails, and I didn't look down at all, and then I was able to get across without my knees kicking in.

TM: Good. So, that was the end of swimming lessons. [*Laughs*]

SB: That was it!

TM: So, that's the swinging bridge. Was there two of them or one? Do you remember?

SB: I think there was only one.

TM: As a 12-year-old, were you interested in looking at the dam down there and watching what they were doing?

SB: Well, I'm not exa— Yes, and I'm not sure. I don't know if I can give myself credit for being real inquisitive about the dam construction, but it was something that we did. Like, in the evening at shift time, we would just run off the mesa, down through the desert, and sit on the edge of the cliff and watch the shift change, because the guys were coming up along the edge of the canyon on the Page side in what we called a monkey cage. And it was fun to see that happen. It was fun to see the dam being built, but I didn't watch it the way my dad did. My dad would go down almost every day and then at dinner talk about the new thing that he'd seen and how they couldn't get the river to stop with the bales of hay. I looked at it as more of a little carnival that I got to watch. Dad really, really watched it as a learning experience.

TM: So, let's talk for starters about your experiences about watching that construction happen. What do you remember about the monkey cage? It was kind of made of— How did it work?

SB: All I know is that it was big. You could probably get— Well, and again, it's my youth's memory, five guys, six guys in it. It was kind of like a basket with all kinds of big cables. It wasn't dangerous. But it was close to the edge of the canyon. It went up. That's how people got out of work on that thing. We just— When you don't have places to go, you make places, so you go down and sit and watch the shift change. Most people would think I didn't have all my oars in the water.

TM: [*Laughs*]

SB: It was a fun thing to do.

TM: Yeah. And I'm assuming it was sort of as the bridge was an open-air experience, that the monkey cage was an open-air elevator—

SB: Yes.

TM: —that had some sort of a platform that you could go all the way down to the bottom, to the dam site, and all the way back up to the top again. And so there would be people getting in the thing to go down, and they would step out, and people leaving for the day might have a word with them and then get in the cage and come back up.

SB: I'm assuming you're right. And I don't even really remember that part that well. Just how much we loved to go down and watch that happen.

TM: And at that time, the cofferdams, the two dams that were put in, one above the dam site and one below the dam site, so the dam site could eventually be drained of water, they had not been built yet in the fall of '57. Is that right? Okay, so you would have seen the Colorado River moving through the dam site at that time.

SB: Well, and that's why the motion underneath that bridge when I was walking on it was so, just messed with my brain so much because there was all that water motion down there.

TM: That makes perfect sense. And there would have been tunneling happening on both sides of the river for the bypass tubes, and so they would have been bringing trucks out full of spoils, the tunnel spoils, and they were dumping that into the river there. Is that right?

SB: Well, not — A lot of it came up. Once they decided that it was time to try to stop the river, I only saw the efforts that didn't work. And even I could have said it probably wasn't going to work. I think the first thing they tried was these giant bales of hay to try to slow it down so they could get everything dried out. My dad would go down and watch that all the time. I never really saw successfully how they stopped that river. I just know that they did. I wasn't there then.

TM: You know, Sharon, we have been yik-yakking for just about an hour. I'm really getting excited because I've got a bunch of questions to ask you moving forward. But maybe this is a good time to put a comma in this oral history, and we will pick this up again in part two the next time we meet. Does that sound like a plan?

SB: It works for me. Yes, it does.

TM: Okay. Is there anything that we've talked about so far that you're like, "Oh, I want to tell Tom about something, x, y, z."

SB: No. There are things that I would like to tell you, but it doesn't have to be today if we're going to have another time. There's a few things that I would like to share with you, but it does not have to be today, for sure.

TM: Okay. Excellent. Well, with that then, let's go ahead and conclude what we'll call Part One of a Grand Canyon oral history with Sharon Buck. Today day is March 19, 2022. My name is Tom Martin. And, Sharon, thank you so very much for your recollections today.

SB: Well, you're welcome! It was nice talking with you.

TM: You, too.