

**Transcription:** Grand Canyon Historical Society

**Interviewee:** Dr. Steve Storck (SS)

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin (TM)

**Subject:** Steve recounts his studies of outdoor recreation and his river trip in Grand Canyon in 2017.

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**Keys:**

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**PEOPLE:** Alan Hale, Attila Szilagyi, Bill Pisner, Charlie Walbridge, Chris Spelius, Dave Costlow, Dragan Brothers, Ed Gertler, Fred Seargent, Glenn Carlson, Greg Elliott, Imre Szilagyi, Lou Matacia, Marcella Wells, Noel Losen, Randy Robinson, Randy Smith, Ross Cloutier, Sidney Gunst

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TM: Today is the 24th of July, 2017. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History recording conducted at Galloway Camp on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon, and the roar you hear behind us is the roar of Dubendorf Rapid. Today, we are with Steve Storck, and my name's Tom Martin. Steve, what year were you born? [Water roaring and cicadas chirping in the background.]

SS: 1964.

TM: And where were you born?

SS: I was born in Washington, DC.

TM: What were your folks doing there?

SS: My dad is a lifetime federal employee. He was working for the Civil Service Commission at the time, and my mom was a school teacher, elementary school teacher.

TM: Brothers and sisters?

SS: I have an older sister. She's two years older, and a younger brother who's eight years younger.

TM: So, did you grow up in Washington, DC?

SS: I grew up in Alexandria, which is just a little bit south of Washington, DC, for the first four years. Then we moved out to Loudoun County, Virginia which is about an hour west of Washington, DC. A rural area.

TM: And did you go to school there in Loudoun County?

SS: Yep, went to school. Went to school at Round Hill Elementary, Blue Ridge Middle, and Loudoun Valley High School.

TM: So that was rural? Rural country?

SS: Fairly rural, yeah. Some people commuted to DC, but most people – a lot of farmers out in that area. Dairy farms, large farms. We lived on a mountain called Short Hill Mountain which overlooked a beautiful valley, and then the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Mountains were on the opposite side. It's about 30 miles from Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

TM: Wow. Did your dad commute?

SS: He commuted every day. Started at 5:30 in the morning. Two-hour commute and he was home by 6 o'clock every night. Long day.

TM: Yeah. Did he ever talk about that? I mean, did he want that quality of life, then? Is that why he did that commute?

SS: Yeah.

TM: 'Cause in the sixties that wasn't a normal thing to do, was it?

SS: Ah, probably not. He wanted that lifestyle for us. For the family. He had fond memories of his grandmother's farm in New Jersey. I think that's what he wanted. We had 10 acres. 10-acre farm. We had cows. We had chickens. Great stories of growing up. It was a great place to grow up. Winters we got snowed in. One winter we had 15-foot drifts. We had a neighbor pull in food for us on a sled. It was paradise for me. I spent time just wandering in the woods most my childhood.

TM: Were you milking cows and getting eggs out of the chickens and plucking chickens?

SS: Yeah, my dad, he grew up raising turkeys and slaughtering his own turkeys when he was a kid. We had chickens. A couple years we slaughtered our own chickens and watch 'em flop around and pull feathers, but yeah definitely eggs. My sister had a small business selling eggs, and she

raised rabbits. We were in 4-H, active in 4-H. I raised pigs and beef cows, and she had horses. You know, it was 10 acres. Just a small farm.

TM: Compete in the county fair?

SS: I was always in the county fair. My pigs didn't make it. They got pneumonia right before the fairs. They didn't make it, but my cows. I was in there three or four times with cows and had vegetables and photographs. One of the trips I did early on was a trip to the Everglades, and I took photographs in the Everglades and won a couple of prizes with my photographs then.

TM: How old were you?

SS: I was probably 12, 13 maybe.

TM: Were you into photography then?

SS: That's where I got my start, yeah. I think my sixteenth birthday, my parents got me a nice Nikon camera. I took pictures. I've taken pictures ever since, but the biggest influence – in 1977, my dad had a conference in San Francisco. For some reason, he decided to drive the family there. We visited national parks all along the way. That was my first visit to the Grand Canyon, was on that trip.

TM: In '77?

SS: '77.

TM: So, you would've been all of 13?

SS: Yeah, but we visited the Smokies, we visited prairies, Canyon de Chelly. Went to the San Diego Zoo. Did the coast, Yellowstone, Yosemite, and all the way back. Devils Tower, all the way back. So, that was a big influence on my career, yeah. Just – I fell in love, and I was a rural kid, so I loved the outdoors anyway. I loved being in the outdoors. I was always in the woods. I was different than all my friends, and then I had this experience where I got to see the national parks and interact with them and see black bear and the Smokies and see just these incredible expanses of wild places.

The Grand Canyon was certainly prominent, but even the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest. My parents were in a tourist shop there, a giftshop, and they couldn't find me. I was outside just wandering through these petrified logs, just fascinated. I was probably gone an hour. They thought they'd lost me. Yeah, I just, ever since wanted to be outdoors and doing different things and wandering the woods. I'm sort of a solitary person, so I do a lot of things on my own. It's the place where I feel most at home.

TM: Did you camp a lot when you were a kid? Did you guys get into canoeing or were you into birds or botany or anything like that?

SS: You know, we always had a bird feeder, and my father knew the birds pretty well. When he was a kid, I've learned later in life, that he had kind of a mentor when he was young that introduced

him to – it was a naturalist – introduced him to snakes and birds and different things. I think I kinda got that. My mom grew up in New York City. She, oddly enough, the sort of funny part is, I'm pretty sure my dad wanted me to be an engineer. I had erector sets, my own drafting table. I did things. My mom – our neighbor, our eighty-year-old neighbor – had gone whitewater rafting on the Shenandoah River. She was a wonderful lady. My mom goes, "Well, if Ms. Baker can do that, we can do that." So, my mom – I was probably, at the time, eleven – took me and my sister whitewater rafting on the Shenandoah.

TM: How was that?

SS: It was heaven. [Tom laughs.] That, and a good friend of my dad who he grew up with – or he didn't grow up with, but was a mentor to him in college, Jim Howie. He was a dairy farmer. He was very prominent. He was a leader in the Mohican [correction: Mohawk] Canoe Club, which was a very prominent kind of forward-looking canoe club on the East Coast of New Jersey. He wanted to take the family. He had been wanting to take our family canoeing for quite a while. I got to go canoeing probably at age 9 on the Shenandoah with them, and then later bought a kayak. His daughter took me to some of the roll sessions with the Canoe Cruisers Association in DC.

TM: The DC Canoe Cruisers Association who like got the first kayaks into Grand Canyon in 1968 or something like that?

SS: Yeah, that's in my history too. Yep, I started canoeing with them just doing kayak roll sessions in an old fiberglass River Runner kayak.

TM: How old were you?

SS: I guess I was 15 or 16 at the time I started kayaking.

TM: Were the kayaks still 16-foot-long fiberglass things or had they started to shorten up?

SS: They were a little bit shorter. It was – actually my first kayak was interesting. I bought it. It was the first plastic kayak that was made. I can't remember the name of it, but it was white with yellow interior in it, and that's where I learned how to boat. We did a couple of little rivers there with that as well, and then another name – can't remember the name. There were two gentlemen that had another – there was Canoe Cruisers and there was another canoe group. Can't think of his name. He wrote the – Ed Gertler was one of the gentlemen. Ed Gertler had written the canoe guide to Virginia. Lou Matacia. If you've ever heard the name Lou Matacia. Lou was one of the founders of the Canoe Cruisers Association and started his own group to the side.

I talked our scouts – or excuse me – our 4-H club into sponsoring a rafting trip on the Lower Yough [Youghiogheny]. I think I was 11 or 12 at the time. Went with Lou Matacia and Ed Gertler in the Princess, his blue hole canoe. We paddled down early on. I remember I was in blue jeans and a flannel shirt. They go, "You gotta swim this rapid!" It was fall. It was probably 50 degrees out. The water was dam release. It was cold, and me and my friend, Andy and I jump in the water. Freezing, and then the rest of the trip we were miserable. That was early on.

But, related to the Grand Canyon, the most memorable event in my life related to the Grand Canyon was there was a member of the Canoe Cruisers Association invited to our school to show a home movie of their trip to the Grand Canyon. I was in second grade probably. I was 7 or 8. They showed this one, a kind of comedic movie of going down the river, and riding insulite pads in the Havasu, the blue waters of the Havasu, and it just struck me as something I always wanted to do and stuck with me.

I'm 53 now I guess, and it took that long to get to come here. I told my mom not too long ago that – I teach a class, and we talk about life lists, bucket lists. Can't think of the gentleman's name, but there's a pretty famous person who sort of started the bucket list, and he had all these lists. That was a great video, and I sent it to my parents, and she goes, "Well, do you have a bucket list?" I said, "I've had one since I was 14." I used to wake up in the middle of the night just write lists and lists and lists, I said. But for me, I finished almost everything on my bucket list by my late 20s except the Grand Canyon. So, this was the remainder. This was the lifelong dream to come to realization.

TM: What do you remember about that film besides the Havasu swimming?

SS: You know, it was – I remember big neoprene rafts. I kinda remember some of the comedy. They did some fun things where, you know, a car would drive towards a tree and it would disappear into the tree and then it would come stretching out the other side. Seen some really fun things. I remember a little bit of the whitewater but not so much. I just remember, I remember them going to Phantom Ranch. I remember that aquamarine water, more so than the muddy Colorado. Just the adventure of it. Just the fun of it. The experience of it, and everybody else kinda was not that interested in it, but I already knew I was different.

TM: Did that impact your thoughts then about what you wanted to do in college?

SS: I think it planted the seed. Between that and the rafting that my mom introduced me to and the wandering in the woods, and then getting the club started. That kinda planted the idea. Between my uncle and aunt taking us canoeing and getting something started. That was my first opportunity with the 4-H to actually do programming, where I talked somebody into starting and doing an outdoor activity that just happened to be whitewater.

TM: And again, you were 14 when you did this?

SS: Yeah, yeah. I think that really planted the seed for me that I could organize activities. I always did that and then when I got in college – well I guided. I raft guided two summers on the Shenandoah River.

TM: What's that like? What kinda river? How would you describe it?

SS: It's a class – I'd say a class II, III river. We were running twelve-foot bucket boats at the time. Do two trips a day. I learned how to guide. I started learning the responsibility, learned how to interact with people and organize things. I was never a trip leader, but I did that off and on. I also worked at a camp that used that same outfit. River & Trail Outfitters. Lee Bailey still owns it. In that region, Lee's kind of a leader in the industry. His daughter, Natasha, now runs the business. It's neat to go back and see that a lot of the seeds are planted.

That started me – I think that was the second stage where I sort of had the idea and then, “Oh, I can raft guide.” I washed dishes at a restaurant at night, and I raft guided during the day. My hands were a mess, but it was a good life. Then I got together with some friends. I met my future wife at the time, and she had a good friend who liked to do outdoor things. So, we went canoeing down the Shenandoah in aluminum canoes. Ah! I forgot the aluminum canoe story.

My dad had gotten an aluminum canoe. We had a pond in our backyard, and we used to fish there all the time. But he got this aluminum canoe, and I used to go out and pretend I was on rapids. I would solo-paddle the canoe to one end of the pond, stand up on the gunwales, and rock the boat back and forth, get big waves going, jump back in and paddle down to the other end, and ride out the waves. That was my first whitewater, I guess.

But yeah, the raft guiding was good. Then when I went to college, I’m not sure what inspired me to start a club. There was not an outdoor club. I think I had this idea from the 4-H that I could organize things, so I started a club called ODAC: The Outdoor Adventure Club. I organized people and we started doing rafting trips every year on the Lower Yough River. Got a bunch of wildlife majors and folks involved.

It was all fun and games and then – I wasn’t on the trip, but a group was rock climbing, and the nephew of the owner of Hudson Trail Outfitters, who was also a student at Frostburg where I went to school, his uncle had given him a bunch of climbing equipment. He was taking some friends climbing near us, near our group. A student, friend of mine who was teaching, he told the guy, he said, “Don’t climb over there. It’s loose rock” and such. They finished their climbing and they left. Unfortunately, the rock collapsed on those students, and one died, one broke his femur. The student who had the ropes wasn’t injured which is usually the case.

I had just sent out a letter the day before, the week before to all faculty saying you know, “We would like to learn how to be outdoor leaders. If you could come offer your expertise, your ideas.” That had gone to everybody. The next day I was in the president’s office of the university, and they wanted to close down our club which had gone from a few people to we had about 30 at the time. They wanted to shut us down. I was like, “Well, don’t shut us down. We want to teach people how to do this right so that doesn’t happen or the likelihood of that happening is a lot less.”

That’s really where my professional career started in outdoor recreation because I researched all different kinds of leadership training models, liability issues. I went and sort of sold this to the university to let us continue and then got some faculty involved and brought some people in and did workshops.

TM: So, this was all the while you were trying to do a degree in what?

SS: My degree was in biology. I seriously thought about a minor in recreation. I did some other things. I worked at camp during that time which was all adventure stuff. I met a good friend of mine, bunch of British students that were there too. One of ‘em and I had gone out to Colorado and did a winter ski activity in Rocky Mountain National Park. We camped for two weeks and did back country skiing and really just taught ourselves different skills. So yeah, that was there, and I

got a degree in biology. I thought I wanted to be a biology teacher, but I didn't like the education classes, so I just got a regular degree in biology. I did go on to teach.

TM: When did you graduate?

SS: I graduated from high school in '82 and college in '86, and that was kinda interesting 'cause I didn't know what I wanted to do after college. I had an offer from Outward Bound. Outward Bound – yes?

TM: You know, hang on a second Steve. Can you tell me more about the program you developed at the university? Is that still going today?

SS: Until recently it was still going, and they ran trips. We ran caving trips, rock climbing trips, rafting trips.

TM: Did the school use it as a credit course? Did that develop or was it simply like a club kinda thing?

SS: No, it was a club. We had a – the gentleman who ran the recreation department, DeLuca, Gene DeLuca. Gene was this older fellow. He had Parkinson's, but he loved what we were doing, and he had all this old, you know, canvas tents and Coleman stoves. All this old school stuff. He would just light up when I would come and talk about the activities. He was just so excited about it. Then I had another, sort of our advisor, Fred Seargent. Fred had done a bunch of adventure stuff. He had climbed the Pyrenees and done some different things. He was a gymnast. Fred was really kind of our mentor, and there was also another teacher there that taught cross-country skiing, and then just a couple of enthusiasts. We did cross-country skiing trips in the winter. The club lasted for a long time. I think it migrated into the Recreation Majors Club, sort of merged there.

I misspoke. A funny story with that, we were trying to do fundraisers. We were talking about bandanas and t-shirts, and I have my ODAC t-shirt. I ended up having – I said a pocketed bandana instead of a pocketed t-shirt, so I have this wonderful pocketed bandana that they made for me that I used for years. Exactly a shirt pocket bandana that one of my friends made. It was a great time. We shared a lot of great experiences with them.

TM: So that would've taught you how to be a trip leader, how to organize a trip, put it together, but then the safety aspects of it – I mean, were you trying to teach people to be leaders or just conduct successful trips?

SS: We really want, well, to me those go hand and hand, so we really – we really wanted people to consider the – I'm a very detailed person, and I like lists, and I like to know what the professional standards are, so I went out and found what the professional standards were. I had a really good friend who I later worked for at a camp, Gary Tublin, who had been involved. Gary's worked for Outward Bound, but at the time he was working with Inner Quest and this Camp Airy that we had worked with.

He was the director of Camp Airy and I worked for him. Camp Airy was in Thurmont, Maryland right near Camp David, and it was a Jewish boys camp. We also had Camp Louise which was a Jewish girls camp. We did a lot of activities together. The summer I worked for them we did river

trips with River & Trails where I used to work. We did a marathon hike on the Appalachian Trail. Ended up doing 40 miles in a day with these young kids. That was a great summer. It was really a great summer.

But Gary had worked with a fella, Randy Smith, who was the founder of Inner Quest. Randy was also one of the founders of the Virginia Council of Outdoor Adventure Education, which was one of the first organizations in the United States for adventure activities that wrote standards. So, they had things about first aid. They had things about ratios of instructors and clients. They had standards for different activities.

They had incorporated some of the American Canoe Association standards into that, so through that process, Gary and I had written the charter for our club together at the college. So, through that process, we had sort of learned, and we wrote standards for our own trips, and we helped people get first aid training and that. So yeah, it was semi-professional. It was all a club, but we were probably a lot higher standard than a lot of clubs at the time.

TM: What were you looking to achieve? What did you hope people got out of the journey?

SS: You know I guess that sounds a little more altruistic than it was. It was more selfish I guess that I really wanted to organize something that enabled people to – Western Maryland is a wonderful place, and it's surrounded by West Virginia, the Dolly Sods area, the Potomac River, Monongahela National Forest, Canaan Valley. Monongahela! [Steve spells Monongahela] Monongahela, Indian name. But there were all these natural areas. I had a friend, same friend who taught that climbing class I taught. I am not a climber. I really don't like heights, but for spring break we all met down at Seneca Rocks and we climbed.

Seneca Rocks is a pretty famous eastern climbing area, multi-pitch climbing area, and I multi-pitch climbed with another friend. There's a gunshot [correction: Gunsight]. There are two peaks, kinda peaks. It's a fin. It's only about 30 feet wide, but it's about 1100 feet tall, and there are these two sort of fan fins, the one that attaches to the mountain, and then it goes down into this gunshot [Gunsight]. There used to be a rock called the Gendarme. G – I don't know how to spell that one, but the Gendarme was the sight in the gunshot [Gunsight], right, and then it would go to the south face. We did some climbs, Old Man's Route up there, but the one that I remember was climbing the Gendarme.

It was an easy climb, except you had to step out and the exposure was four or five hundred feet after you stepped across. You were on a rope, so you know it was alright, but the end of the climb – it was only like about a 25-foot climb – you had to stand up on the top of the Gendarme. I never was so scared in my life, but I did it. About maybe 15 years later the Gendarme fell, so I can say I climbed the Gendarme. But all that was in college, and we did some climbing. We did some ice climbing which was fun.

TM: And you met your wife in college?

SS: I met my wife in high school.

TM: High school. Her name is?



SS: Cindy. Yeah, we actually met – so sort of my biology track, my environmental science and biology track. All the high schools in the county – she went to a rival high school. All the science advanced biology classes went to Wallops Island. Now you hear about Wallops Island because NASA has a facility there and they launch rockets there, but there was this marine science consortium there that did marine aquatic science. That sort of advanced my interest in outdoor science.

Outdoor recreation for me has always been a conduit to get into the environment, to get into the outdoors. I love plants and the animals out here, just the ecosystems, so those were sort of the other parallel track that I had. I had the adventure track, but I had this science, biology track I did. My mom also sent me to Florida Institute of Technology. They had a summer science program there in aquatic science. We did a freshwater science and we did a coastal science, and they had a really excellent biology education program there, so we had some really fun instructors.

TM: What year was that?

SS: That would've been my – that was in high school, so that was my junior year of high school. Between my junior and senior year, so would've been '81. I kinda consolidated my interests in pursuing biology and the science. The adventure field, the outdoor adventure really allowed me to combine the two. You know, be able to get people in the outdoors to appreciate the natural settings and the natural processes.

TM: When did you become aware there was an outdoor adventure field concept even?

SS: It was really in college. It was really that trigger of having a fun club, but then almost getting shut down because of those injuries. And then really just all of a sudden it opened up the doors to me about there are ways people – the National Outdoor Leadership School. One of my club members was going to Outward Bound, so I went in the archives and I found the original Outward Bound promotional movie, and we rented it. It was the local library or something.

We got it from the local library, and I got the auditorium and we showed the film. It was pretty scary actually because they were all inner-city kids and the instructors were you know big hobnail boots, kicking the kids off the edge of the cliff, going “Yeah! Get out there! You can do it!” The kid’s crying. My poor friend, she was about to go, and she’s like, “That’s what Outward Bound is?” We also got the original NOLS, Paul Petzoldt’s original film that I’ve shown to students for years going on, and I started to realize that you could do that.

So, at the end of college, Baltimore Outward Bound. It was a spinoff of Hurricane Outward Bound that had started in Baltimore. They were doing trips in Western Maryland. They were doing canoe trips in Western Maryland, and my friend, Gary, who had worked with Inner Quest had done some things with Outward Bound. So, I applied to a job and they said, “Well, we’re just getting going. You can come out and kinda hang out with the staff and see how things go,” ‘cause most Outward Bound at that time only hired people who had been through Outward Bound, and I hadn’t been through Outward Bound.

Sounded a little vague to me, so I skipped it. I didn’t do it. I got a job at Hudson Trail Outfitters in Owings Mills, Maryland. It was an outfitters store. Well, the first one was in Columbia. They

were building a brand-new store. One of the members of my club had already gotten a job down there, and she sort of connected me to it, so I got into outdoor gear and learning technical aspects of all kinds of outdoor gear.

Bought another kayak at the time. Started kayaking some more, and got cross-country skis. I did that for about – I did it from May through December. I told him, I promised him I'd work through the Christmas season. Worked through the Christmas season, and then I did a NOLS class. National Outdoor Leadership School in Lander. It was a winter outdoor educator class.

TM: In Lander, Wyoming?

SS: Yep, Lander, Wyoming.

TM: In the winter?

SS: In the winter. Yep, in the winds. Well, I had done that college experience with my friend in Rocky Mountain National Park for two weeks. I actually found I like winter camping. As I said, I'm a bit of a soloist. I don't dislike people, but I like being in the outdoors, and I find that in the winter, not too many people like being out there, so winter camping appeals to me.

Yeah, so I said goodbye to my girlfriend for a little while, my future wife, and I drove out to Wyoming. It was my second time out west, first time by myself. Third time, actually. Anyway, and did a 21-day course in the winds and winter camping. My dad is an administrator. He's a project manager. I always kinda look at the outdoor stuff from that perspective. How to organize and run, manage the risks, and get the logistics right. I thoroughly enjoyed that course.

Another decision-making point in my life was all the people I had been on the course with, they invited me to go to Mexico to go climb volcanoes. I went back east. I went back to see whether I was gonna continue my relationship with my wife, which I did. Went back to grad school. I went to Virginia Commonwealth University, and I pursued a degree in leisure services management.

TM: So, this would be a master's then?

SS: Master's degree. I became the manager of the sort of the – the master's degree for me was the absolute best of my three degrees. That was the one that meant the most to me. I did all kinds of research projects that I wanted to do. Yeah.

TM: I mean when I think of leisure services, I think of how to run a hotel or how to run a Red Lobster. You know, some sort of restaurant or hotel management.

SS: Yeah.

TM: But clearly you know leisure services can also include outdoor recreation. So, what were you thinking? Did you have a vision that the master's program could be the venue you wanted to study what you wanted to study?

SS: Yeah, because what I wanted to do to that point, through the clubs and through NOLS and through different experiences, I wanted to run and organize programs. I wanted to be the

administrator. They had – I went there – I didn't go there to go to grad school. I went there to be near my girlfriend. She was in college at Randolph-Macon. She was about to graduate, so we decided to stay in Richmond. I worked temp services. I actually worked as a science educator in a local science museum as a temp, and I did yard work and different things and kayaked on the river there. And then she found out, or we both kinda found out that in order to get an apartment, you either had to be full-time employed or you had to be a full-time student, so we both became full-time students so we could get an apartment.

TM: So that's how it happened!

SS: They had this recreation program, and I said, "That looks like something I could do." I did that, and some wonderful people there who were historians. Charlie Hartsoe was the historian for the National Recreation and Park Association. Was a wonderful guy, just knew all aspects of recreation, knew outdoor recreation, and they had been involved in the president's commission on outdoor recreation. They had helped write some of the chapters of that.

TM: Did you know he was there or did you land under his mentorship?

SS: I landed in there, yeah. Yeah, exactly. It was pretty wonderful. So, I was taking those classes in administration. There was another lady there, Marcella Wells, who was pretty active in interp. And interp was a nice combination of my biology background and my love for the outdoors and the outdoor recreation, so I got pretty interested in interp at the time too. But I also brought all my skills to the outdoor club there. It was a student life program. Greg Elliott was the director. He was an old Vietnam War vet, good guy, and there was an active council, an outing council. The students actually planned all the trips and the locations where they went.

Greg had organized – we had the – Alan Hale. I've been very fortunate. I've had some amazing opportunities with people who were leaders in our industry for a long time. Alan Hale had something called the National Safety Network. He would do leadership training and risk management training. Greg brought him in and we did that. We did all kinds of – I got involved in the leader training program of the undergraduates, and I did that, and then I became the president of the outing council, and then I became the manager of the rental center.

I incorporated all those things into projects into my classes, so that's why I really – we looked at leadership. We looked at different leadership models and what other schools were doing. We looked at permit systems. Even back then we looked at permit systems and how a college program could get permits in different rivers. We were using the James River and doing different trainings for guides and they had some credentials for training, so we incorporated those into our program. It was a magical – I'm not a city guy, but the saving grace for Richmond for me was the James River. It was an escape.

Then another meeting point. I met a guy, forget his name, terrible. Glenn Carlson. In part of my training, I saw that there was a Swiftwater rescue class. I took this Swiftwater rescue class. Was a guy, Glenn Carlson. Glenn had started a business called Adventure Sports, and he and I hit it off. He was just an incredibly excited guy about the outdoors. He had guided in Patagonia, and he was a racer. Glenn and I became pretty good friends, and a contract opened for a raft guide company on the James River. The city finally was offering a concession for raft guiding, and

Glenn had applied for the concession license. There was some backdoor politics going on, and they gave the concession to somebody else, and Glenn wasn't happy.

He called me up one day. He said, "Steve" – I had done some real estate research. I don't remember why but I was a little bit familiar with real estate research. He said, "Can you find me a legal put-in and take-out on the James River so I can run my business?" So, I started working for Glenn and I found a little place, somebody's historic family access point right above the park. We put in there, and then I found a container truck storage area on Mayo's Island at the bottom. It was a steep, muddy climb. We paid 500 bucks. So, we had a legal put-in and a legal take-out, but we couldn't get out and scout any of the rapids. [Tom laughs.] Every time we got out and scouted, we got a letter from the city attorney saying, "Hey! You're not allowed to be on city property. You don't have the concession."

But anyway, so I became his onsite manager, and a guy, Sidney Gunst had Innsbrook Corp. Was a large corporate development. Sidney loved paddling. He and his brother, they would paddle, and I think they actually had run the Grand Canyon too. Sidney said, "Well, I want you at our place. I got a fitness center, and I'm gonna call it the Innsbrook Outdoor Center, and you guys are gonna be here, and I'll give you an office in my corporate office, and I'll give you a warehouse for your rafts."

Glenn actually went on to West Virginia, and he helped organize a purchase of the original raft company on the New River, Wildwater Expeditions from – I'll think of the name, but the original brothers, the Dragan brothers. John Dragan was the original raft company on the New River. He and his brother Chris, and I can't remember. Dave, I think is the other brother. Four classics for all his folks, and they had done western rivers and such, but they had a wonderful base camp. Right when the park was forming, right when the national park had come in, he sold his base camp to the national park for the New River National River. It was an opportunity for him to get out of the business, so Glenn organized a buyout.

So, Glenn was up in West Virginia running that. I was in Richmond running their business. We taught some climbing. We taught some winter stuff, but I was – my office was in the corporate office, so I'd come off the river in Texas and, you know, baggies and a wet t-shirt. I'd walk in and these guys would be in three-piece suits kind of looking at me like, "What?" You know, I'd go in the back room and do my thing. We did that. We did adjudicated youth programs. We did military programs.

TM: Was there any thought at that time about do-it-yourself people? Were they out there? Were they even on the river? What was happening in the do-it-yourself world? People with their own boats just out there doing it themselves. Were they just – they were there and you'd see them on occasion? Or you, you know, you were trying to run your business. You were trying to get people in your boats. How was that working?

SS: Yeah, I mean, you know I had been a do-it-yourselfer up to that point, so there were a number of people in Richmond. There was a – Coastal Canoeist was the Richmond club, and I paddled with them a little bit too, and then the school had been doing things. I met some great people with Coastal Canoeists. Some of the original people who ran the Gauley River.

TM: Wow, who?

SS: Had this one guy. I was trying to think of their names. Chris, I can't think of his last name. I just remember he – we brought him into the club and he showed his movies, home movies running Sweet's Falls in an aluminum canoe. He had gone over Sweet's Falls and bow pinned in Sweet's, and the aluminum canoe had folded in half, and he couldn't get out. He was pinned in the boat. He uses this story a lot teaching. Ended up, he had a throw bag on his thwart, and he basically self-rescued. He was able to reach it. He let out the throw bag. Tied it off of the thwart. Let it out, and they saw it downstream, and they hooked to it and completely submerged another 17-foot aluminum canoe in the water in the current, and that pulled him off.

So, those are some of my early memories, my early experiences and shared vicarious experiences that kind of got me thinking. I went on to teach Swiftwater Rescue with Charlie Walbridge. Was my mentor for teaching at Swiftwater Rescue, so I just had these incredible people in my life.

TM: When did you meet Charlie?

SS: So, Charlie, Charlie Walbridge – a number of years later. Well, another funny story. So, when I was in Richmond and doing adventure sports, my dad somehow – my dad had retired from the government at the time after many years and then started as an administrator in a local community college in Garrett County, Maryland, where I live now. A local group of paddlers – the Canoe Cruisers Association were involved in this – wanted to run. They used to run whitewater races on the Savage River in Western Maryland, and there was an opportunity to run the World Championships on the Savage, but they needed an administrator. They needed an organizational person to help put together a bid to do that.

Somehow, they connected to my dad. Actually, my later boss, Mike Logsdon. Mike had been a raft guy in the local area, and he was doing some outdoor classes. I think he helped connect my dad to the group that wanted to do this. My dad also had an interest because of me, because of my interest, and I had sort of fed him. He became the director of the Adventure Sports, ASCI Adventure Sports. It was the World Championships Inc. It was the group that organized the World Championships, 1988 World Championships on the Savage.

So, I would come up and volunteer for that, and Charlie was the chair person for the safety. So, my dad – my uncle, back to my uncle's connection with Mohican [Mohawk]. I knew Charlie through his original Wildwater Designs, his catalog. You know, he was one of the first outdoor – he was one of the first whitewater catalog order companies online. You know, mail order equipment. I had a wetsuit from him and a spray skirt from him, so I sort of knew of Charlie as this person. I had taught my dad about Charlie, and my uncle with Mohican [Mohawk], Charlie had also helped form the Mohican [Mohawk] Canoe Club. Said that "This is the guy. You got to get him." Charlie was wonderful, so that's how I met Charlie.

My dad – my dad knew nothing about outdoor stuff, but he was an organizer, so I came up and volunteered and worked with them. So that's how I got to know him, and then later when I was in Garrett, Charlie was the main Swiftwater rescue instructor for Garrett College. I had worked with Charlie, under Charlie teaching some classes. Then he kind of mentored me into being my instructor-trainer for my own Swiftwater, ACA Swiftwater instructor certification. Yeah, that was

that was another great connection. Charlie's just a wonderful man and wisdom, and he's seen so many different things, shared a lot of stories.

TM: So, did you do a thesis for your master's?

SS: I did. It didn't have anything to do without outdoor rec. It was a thesis of convenience. I ended up working with another fellow who worked a lot with Jewish community centers, did a lot of community parks and rec, which was which was a good experience for me. I had to do – well, I'll finish that thought. My thesis ended up being how to set up a volunteer support system for our community public parks and rec in the city of Suffolk, which is down near Virginia Beach.

That was also where Glenn Carlson was. I'd connect down there, but it's peanut capital of the US, peanut and pork capital of the US. So, I got to, you know, interview lots of different people and find out what the level of volunteerism was. Was mainly church sports, church athletics. The local parks and rec wanted to see if they had enough capacity for volunteerism to support their program, so it was good. I did a demographic study to see what typical demographics of that community were volunteering. So, it got me into research a little bit.

I also did it because I didn't have a recreation background, because I had a biology background. I took it upon myself to take some leveling courses, and I met some people. It was a community parks and rec program. I worked with Chesterfield County Parks and Rec. They had an active outdoor program there. This fellow Noel Losen – Noel was big into ropes courses. I can't think of the company.

TM: What year was this?

SS: This was during college, so it would have been maybe '86, '87.

TM: Ropes courses? This would have been like cutting-edge kind of stuff.

SS: Yeah, yeah, we were early on. So, Randy Smith in Inner Quest and the VCOAE had written some of the early standards that actually became the foundation for the standards for the current ropes course. There are two ropes course associations now, but the current standards that are the ACCT standards, that was the foundation. They use the standards for ropes courses for VCOAE, later to become the standards for ACCT. Randy was one of the founding members of ACCT as well. I later became a board member of VCOAE and helped organize some. We did a conference every year, and we did different activities, but – I'm not sure. I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought where I was there.

TM: You were talking about ropes and rope courses.

SS: Oh, Noel Losen. So yeah, so I did my leveling. I took it upon myself to work with Chesterfield County Parks and Rec because I wanted to know about parks and rec. I worked with Noel, and we taught – the Adventure Sports, who I'd worked with, we taught kayaking for his program and we did some rafting trips for his program. I got trained as a ropes course facilitator through his program. Got to work in the treetops. He had built his own ropes course. So that was sort of my interest, my introduction into public parks and recreation, where I knew that there was a

growing segment of that. That you could be an outdoor recreation programmer in a public parks and rec setting, so that's why I did it.

I ended up doing a lake study too. They wanted to know what water bodies were there where they could teach, do canoeing trips and teach rolling and those types of things, so I did that. I was always into mapping, so I actually did some mappings, a little bit of GIS there, and did some mapping of the of the lakes and their county. We did some we did some really fun trips. That was all during that same time, just so fertile. I was doing the outings club at college. I was doing the Adventure Sports. We would do trips up to the Yough which was about four and a half hours away, and I got to guide some up there, so it was it was a pretty special time of my development.

Really the reason I guess I say it was the master's that was the best was there were all these things that, you know, the seed had been planted back in 4-H and back in the movie. And all of a sudden, I was able to express all those ideas that I had, and do programming, and start to make organizations that did outdoor stuff. And then I was done with college, and I worked – Adventure Sports lasted about another year and a half, and then they had so much debt up in West Virginia that they decided to move everything up there. So, I was kind of – didn't have a job for a little bit, so I moved back to Western Maryland. I was a boomerang kid. My wife and I, we got married, and we moved back to my – we had an apartment at the barn, and I started looking around, and I got a job with Imre Szilagyi.

Imre was one of the pioneers in the northern part of West Virginia in rafting. He and his brother Attila – Attila ended up making the super inflatable kayaks. He had some of the first inflatable kayaks. The Thrillseeker was one of the first inflatable kayaks, and they would run waterfalls and stuff, and that was Attila. Imre had a rafting company, Appalachian Wildwaters, and I became a northern operations manager for Imre, and Imre developed kind of a competition to his brother, something called the SuperDuck. My interview was running Tygart Valley Falls. He had a commercial product on a waterfall section of rivers. There were like a series of four, you know, 10- to 14-foot waterfalls. Some were slide, one was a straight drop, and that was my interview.

TM: Like, "Could you survive this?"

SS: Could I survive it? What did I think of how it was run? The guides were kind of eyeing me, you know, "How's this guy doing?"

TM: Wait a minute, you mean they want to sell that trip with a 14-foot drop in an inflatable kayak?

SS: They had people running, doing it. Yeah, it was unique, you know. [Tom laughs.]

TM: Is it still going today?

SS: That product didn't last, but [Tom laughs] the SuperDuck, he actually designed –

TM: I can't imagine why not!

SS: He designed the SuperDuck just for it, so when you went over the waterfall, this thing would scoop you out of the water at the bottom. You barely even get wet, and the 14-footer, you

know, the guide would set up a safety line, and they would repel down to the bottom of the waterfall and hang out there, and you just go over. They line you up at the top. You go over the spout, and it would scoop you up at the bottom. If you fell out, they were there to grab you, so it was a unique product.

So, for that season I was northern operations manager, and I helped with Gauley Season at the end of the season, but I had also applied for a job at the University of Virginia. I was the outdoor program director, and after about four months, I was offered that job and I said – I went to Imre. I said, “I got offered this job, and it’s, you know, it’s a salary position. It has benefits,” and he said, “Sounds like you already made up your mind. Enjoy.”

So, my wife and I moved to Charlottesville, and I had my first real director’s job as an outdoor program manager, and man what a job. I did that for three years. We did everything, canoeing kayaking, but it was interesting because I always came from the leader-led model as opposed to the sort of, you know, group-led common adventure model, and I had done some research on this as part of college. It was the different leadership models within college programs.

So, there was a guy. I was the second director there, and the first director was more about common adventure. He had come from Utah, and so I had to kind of convert the trip leaders there. I kind of had to sell myself and my ideas to the student trip leaders and converted over to a leader-led model where we had more structure, and we had instructional progressions, and we did fly fishing classes. We did kayak instructor classes. We developed a curriculum on top rope set up climbing with a guy, and we probably did 30 to 40 trips a year.

We did a trip. That was my first multi-day raft trip. A little sketchy in terms of – I hired the old director, which was kind of not on good terms with the club or with the school, to do a co-op trip at the University of Utah, but they allowed me to do it. The guy took me, the director took me into his office. He laid out the rules. He said, “You want to do this? This is how it has to happen, and here’s the background on this guy. We don’t want this happening.”

So, wonderful. I work with Rob Jones who’s still there. Rob Jones who’s still at University of Utah. He’s the director of the outdoor pursuits program, and their assistant was actually one of our trip leaders on the trip. They gave us a van. They gave us all the equipment. It was like 200 bucks, and they took us shopping. You know, like our trip, took us shopping. The guy took us shopping. We helped the store, and we did the Deso Gray on the Green, and that was my first multi-day rafting trip.

TM: What year was that?

SS: That would have been in probably 1990. Yeah, probably 1990.

TM: Okay, and what were your thoughts of that multi-day – actually Deso could be a multi-week. I mean, depends how long you want to take for it.

SS: Yeah, I think we did a six- or seven-day trip.

TM: Summertime?



SS: Summertime, a little bit lower water. I rode a boat the entire time. I really had never rode before, and it was magical. Yeah, I'd done a little bit of – I never was a big backpacker. I didn't like carrying the weight. I have bad knees. I'd done some, you know, winter ski backpacking which you put on a sled, which is a little bit better, and I had done some canoe camping. One trip canoe camping. But being able to load everything on a raft and float it down the river, and we had a paddle raft with us, and I rode the raft. I was in heaven.

That was – it was a great trip. Great whitewater, bigger whitewater than I'd seen in some places, and I knew that was something I was gonna do again. I didn't know it was a stepping stone to the Grand Canyon, but I knew I wanted to do it again. We did trips to Okefenokee. Magical trip to the Okefenokee, multi-day on chickees. That was another trip. I did a trip, took students in the Adirondacks in a winter trip. We did some stuff up there, and one of the – yeah, but that was a western trip and that job lasted, like I said, about three years.

TM: Were you doing any research at that time, or was it simply just running the program?

SS: Just running the program. Yeah, I was – I became a board member of a new organization. There was a – it was a second year of a group called ICORE, the International Conference on Outdoor Recreation and Education. Their first conference was in Bozeman, and their second conference was in Calgary. And Calgary had an amazing outdoor program, climbing wall, and they did all kinds of backcountry skiing and rafting.

So, I was able to go up and participate in that conference, and at that conference, the foundation of, you know, ORCA was there. It later became America's Outdoors [America Outdoors]. I'm sorry. It didn't become America's Outdoors. It became a different organization that does all the research on – the Outdoor Industry Association, OIA, and they do all the research on market.

So, Dave Secunda was there, who's a mover and shaker, and all of the leaders of all of the Texas A&M program, the Utah program, the Calgary program, Oregon State. All the big outdoor programs. All those leaders were there. So, I got to join that club basically, and we formed AORE, which was the Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education, which still exists today, and it's the leading organization on the programming side for outdoor recreation, primarily in college student life and intramural programs. At that time, we were about 50. Now it's about 900 members, and it's the leading advocate for outdoor recreation for college programs.

So, I went to their conference every year, and I also went to NIRSA, the National Intramural-Rec Sports because that's where my program was at UVA, was under intramurals, and I met some great people from Nebraska. Can't think of his name. Peg Dutti from Oregon was a friend. Everybody at NIRSA would go. The second conference was in Reno at a casino. Like, "I'm an outdoor guy. What am I doing here? You know. They don't have clocks on the walls! It's dark!"

So, all the outdoor folks went up to Truckee and Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Area, and like five of us would go up there and cross-country ski every day and network, you know. One day I was going out with my skis on my shoulder and walking out there with all the other outdoor people, and I saw my boss coming back from his run. He's kind of looking at me like, "Aren't you coming to the conference?" I said, "Yeah, I'm coming to the conference, the outdoor part of the conference!" But made great friends there who were again leaders in the industry and that.

We talked about vehicles. 15-passenger van rollover issue was going. We talked about, you know, whether people were getting Woofer [WFR]. That's when Woofers first started and what medical training and backcountry, and so that was what I had worked towards. And honestly, from the time I was 12 writing those lists of things, it wasn't just lists of trips. It was, you know, running an outdoor program and doing these kinds of things until I was in my late 20s. I had checked off everything on my lists, you know, and I got kind of stalled out there a little bit because all my dreams had been realized. Like, "Oh crap, what do I do now?" You know.

I became a board member on VCOAE. Excuse me, that was in college. I became a board member on AORE. I served on AORE's board for a couple years as well. And then things went a little bit sour at UVA, and it was time for me to leave. My director told me, he said, "Not everything will turn out as a beautiful butterfly." He said, "Sometimes you develop things, you work, and it's a moth," and I said, "Well, what if you want a beautiful butterfly?" I'd say, "Why settle for a moth?" And that was really the telltale for me to – it was time to leave.

And my wife said – we had my daughter, Sarah, who's with us now, had been born. And she said, "Well you can't just quit. You got to go to something." So, the something was a Ph.D. program, and I'd done a bunch of research, and I skipped one part of my story. I apologize, but we'll get to the Grand Canyon at some point, I guess.

When I was working at the camp, Camp Airy, one of the British fellows had gone to British Honduras, which was Belize, and had told me about it. And also, a friend of my father-in-law had just bought a piece of property down there, so I kind of got, for some reason, got this inkling to go to Belize. When things were – when Adventure Sports kind of closed down, and I had finished my college degree, I put a trip for three on my credit card, and we went to Belize during the Gulf War, the first Gulf War.

And another connection there was River & Trails. I was interested in rafting down there, kayaking and rafting, and maybe starting an eco-tourism business down there. And ended up hearing that River & Trails, another back connection, had actually started doing some research down there on some of the whitewater. And so, we went, and rented a car and had our one-year-old daughter Sarah with us. And she was a great introduction to people because nobody had ever seen a one-year-old. You know, well, Cancun – a white, blonde-haired one-year-old.

And we went Playa del Carmen. We went to all these little tiny towns in Belize City and way out into the Ignacio, way out into the Mayan areas. I was researching. I found a guy out there at the Red Rooster Inn who was just starting some rafting, and we talked. Talked about maybe doing a booking company where I would book trips to Belize. Nothing ever came to it, but I was always thinking, you know. That was a that was a great trip down there.

So, Belize was kind of always still in my mind, that I might do something in Belize, so when I when I went to leave, I was like, "Well, maybe I'll go do a Ph.D." So, I had applied to West Virginia University, and I had gotten in there. And I applied to Colorado State because Colorado State had this program that was a partnership in Belize doing environmental education in Belize, and they had a research center down there.

So, I was like – my wife had actually been born in Fort Collins. Her mom and dad were in school there. So, I was like, “Well, you know, why don’t we.” I’ve never lived out west, so I chose Fort Collins over Morgantown. We moved out west. The Belize connection never ended up working out [Steve laughs], but the fellow who had the Belize program did hire me as a teaching assistant. I got into GIS. I taught some computer skills. I started my computer skills at that point. I wrote databases. I taught a class.

But what was interesting at that point was I thought recreation was recreation, and what I knew recreation to be was community parks and rec, college programming, you were programming, you were organizing trips, organizing instructional programs, doing community assessments, figuring out what activities people wanted to do, maybe you were involved in parks a little bit. Well, what I didn’t know was that Colorado State’s program, their recreation program in outdoor recreation, was in the College of Agriculture, College of Natural Resources, and I got slapped in the face. It was nothing what I thought it was going to be.

And Marcella Wells, who had been a professor at VCU I mentioned earlier, was out there, was at Colorado State teaching interp, so that was kind of a connection I had as well. Helped me get in there, but all those guys were looking at resource management, looking at human dimensions of fish and wildlife management. They were looking at wolf reintroduction. They were looking at crowding studies.

You know, I was there, so I kind of joined in, and a friend of mine at UVA – kind of last thing I saw him, he was a Ph.D., educational psychology. One day, we were doing a sign-up, and he came walking across all happy. He’s like, “Steve, guess what I just did!” I said, “What?” He said, “I just bought a raft company in Fort Collins, Colorado.” I said, “What’d you do that for?” So, Dave Costlow, and Dave Costlow is now the director of the CROA, Colorado Rafting and Outfitters Association, and Dave bought Rocky Mountain Adventures in Fort Collins. That was another connection I had in Fort Collins, so I drove out, and I stayed in Dave’s apartment there and looked for a place to stay.

I drove out with everything we owned in a 24-foot U-Haul truck and found an apartment. Took me about three days. Found an apartment, so family moved out there, and we had two children that time. AJ and Sarah who are both with us. And started into learning about recreation resource management. One of the first classes I took was from George Wallace, which was a wilderness management class. I learned all about leave no trace ethics there, and wilderness management, recreation resource management.

TM: So, Dave’s company would have been on the Ark, is that right?

SS: No, well, it is now – it was. He grew it. It was on the Poudre. So, the Poudre comes right into there, and Dave had a – Dave and Bill. Both of them were at UVA. Bill talked kayaking. He had worked at NOC, and he was really the operations guy, and Dave was a more administrative guy. Bill Pisner, and Bill actually ended up working – Chris Spelius. Chris Spelius worked on the – Chris was a racer, but he started some of the ACA instructional programs with kayaking, and he was a big kayaker.

Chris and Bill started a company down in Chile on the Biobío, and they were doing rafting and fly fishing and different things down there. So, that’s where Rocky Mountain Adventures started

growing, and they actually did a trip to Russia. I didn't get to go on any of these. So, that company started growing. So, one of my projects, one of my cash projects while I was there, was I was an inventory guy. I did databases, so I built an equipment inventory database for Dave and Bill and helped a little bit. They had developed a reservation system.

But the cool thing that Dave brought was he got into passenger pigeons, and he did this – it was before digital photography, so he wanted to have the pictures of the rafters waiting for them when they got back, so he would take the pictures at a couple of rapids, and then put them on the pigeons, and fly them back to the base camp, have them developed, and have the pictures ready for them. That was what he brought. The only problem was, they were reintroducing peregrine falcons to the Poudre Canyon, so about one out of ten didn't make it back to the roost. But anyway, so yeah, I did an inventory system for him.

TM: So, Dave went on to be the director of the Colorado River Outfitters Association. At what point did you realize that there was a, I wouldn't say a conflict, but an access issue between the do-it-yourself people and the commercial guiding industry?

SS: Honestly, not until you and I have been talking. Really. Because in the east, you know, I'm an easterner.

TM: Okay, but on the Arkansas, I mean, those allocations were set long ago, and it's a big deal to not mess with those things.

SS: Yeah, right, and I had done a family – you know, my wife's family is from Denver, and we had done a family trip on the Arkansas in Browns Canyon. And again, I was on a commercial trip, so I never really saw it, and I've never – I'm an odd guy. This is maybe an exception to the rule because when I wasn't working professionally as an outdoor guy, I really didn't do a lot of outdoor stuff. I did databases. I did web stuff because I didn't really know that many people who weren't my staff to do trips, so I'd certainly hike and things, but I pretty much never go on the river by myself, so if I didn't know people, I didn't do stuff.

TM: Or with friends.

SS: Yeah so, I didn't really know. In the east, there really weren't a lot of allocation issues. The Lower Yough, during college, I would go to the Lower Yough every Tuesday and Thursday. I had a friend who was an art teacher at a local school, and he had a planning period, his last period, so he called me up. He goes, "Steve, two o'clock, I'm gonna be there. I'm picking you up. We're going paddling." So, we would go, and you had to get a permit there, but I never really thought of it as a conflict between commercial and privates.

TM: I was thinking about Desolation Gray, and about Ruby Horsethief, you know, Westwater. I mean just how do these systems in the west work differently than the systems in the east, and when did you realize that that was different?

SS: Yeah, you know, the Deso Gray, they did all that. Utah did all that so, I didn't really deal with any of the permitting systems. It was a little bit later when I was at Garrett College. When I had gone there. I was actually to a point where I had equipment. The program had equipment, and I had been teaching rafting a little bit, and I wanted to do a western trip. I had fallen in love with the

Middle Fork of the Salmon, and that's when I started realizing that the west was different from the east because I could not get a permit on the Middle Fork of the Salmon and I tried for two years, and finally I said, "Well if you don't get a Middle Fork, you can do the Main Salmon." Everybody can get a Main Salmon trip, right.

I did get a Main Salmon trip, and it was a great trip. I did just a two-boat trip, and I fished the entire way down. I caught one fish. It was a 24-inch rainbow trout. We ate on it for two days straight [Tom laughs]. It was wonderful. We caught one fish, but yeah, that's when I started kind of getting an interest in rowing and doing some stuff out west. And kind of off and on I would apply for permits, and you know. I have a connection to the Yampa and the Gates of Lodore area, and I'd applied maybe three or four times over the years. Yeah. Then I started looking at the statistics of that and how tough it was to get. I kind of gave up for a long time.

The next time that I saw it, and it wasn't private again. It wasn't because I've always been organizing trips for an organization, but I was bringing a group from Garrett College out to Utah, and we wanted to do a multi-adventure trip. I think we had 15 students and three staff, two volunteer staff. I was paid staff, so I work with BLM. I did all my research, and I was teaching about the different land management agencies. I was teaching about permitting systems to the students, and I had researched in that respect, and I knew that colleges were treated differently then. They weren't privates, but they weren't commercials either. They were somewhere in between.

So, the river we wanted to do, we wanted to do the daily section the Colorado and Moab, and we wanted to do Westwater. So, I work with BLM extensively, and a lot of this experience had come through AORE. You know, talking with them about – they were starting to have permitting system problems with permits for the colleges, so I started learning about it through there, and I knew what to do. I contacted some of my friends out there. So, I work with BLM for – it took me six months to get a special use permit to go on Westwater.

So, I was all set. We had our special use, non-commercial, college program, non-profit, everybody at shared cost. Get to the daily section, and we're unloading. You know, we had a nice state van and a nice trailer and nice equipment and 10 people. We're unloading, and I see this DNR vehicle pull up – or fishing, wildlife, something – pull up, and I see the ranger get out, and he's got a ticket book in his hand. He's like looking us over, and I go up to him. You know, biggest smile I can, take my glasses off, you know. "Hey, how's it going?" I said, "We're all set. We have our BLM permit, and you know, we're good. We're non-commercial."

He goes, "I'm not BLM. I'm the state of Utah, and we manage this put-in, and we manage this river, and you look commercial." He said, "So, tell me something about your trip." He said, "Who are these people? What are they? Who owns the equipment?" He said, "I gotta decide whether I'm gonna confiscate your equipment or not." I said, "Please." I said, "I work with these guys." I showed him the permit. I said, "They mentioned nothing about you." So, he gave me a warning. Said, "You can run your trip." He said, "But, you know, don't come back here." So, we ran the trip. We had a good trip.

So, I was nervous about Westwater. Westwater was big, and you know, but it was low water, and I was only gonna run if it was lower water. I was checking the gauge every day, and we were doing some other things. We were mountain biking. People were backpacking and stuff, and I

was checking the gauge, and all of a sudden Westwater was like seven-eight feet, and it had been like two-three feet. Like, “What the heck? I can’t run at that level!”

I had thought the only, the primary tributary was the Dolores, and I had completely scouted the Dolores. The Dolores was where I wanted to go, and we had come out on an RV trip for a wedding, and I had rented a car, and I drove every point from the dam down to Bedrock along the Dolores, scouting everything. My family was at Canyonlands, and I was driving these dirt roads down in the winter. They were slick, and I drove all the way down into Sheep. I can’t think the name of that rapid. It’s one of the bigger rapids on the upper –

TM: Snaggletooth?

SS: Snaggletooth in Sheep’s Canyon. It was Sheep something Canyon.

TM: Yeah, something like that.

SS: I had driven down in there, and I didn’t know if I was gonna be able to get out. But I had scouted everything, and that’s the trip that I wanted, and on the way out, I actually hit a big rock on the bottom of that car. I thought I’d ripped the bottom out of it, but I couldn’t stop, and I kind of cranked on out. So, I checked the Dolores gauge, and the Dolores was like optimal level for a beginner trip down there, so we went. We did an overnight on the upper section, and then we did a two-night on the lower section to Bedrock. It was spectacular. Three Mile Rapid. Grins and giggles the whole time.

But yeah, that was – Yeah, it’s about permits, and that’s where I started to realize that there was this rationing that wasn’t something that we had in the east that was difficult to get into. And I had read about the Grand Canyon permits, and how I never was going to apply because it was a 20-year wait, you know, at the time. So, I was never going to do that, but I still applied a couple more times for the Middle Fork and still didn’t get on there.

Those were my western trips, and not until, you know, my friend Kirk called me up one day and asked if I would apply for Grand Canyon together with him, did I learn about the change over to the new lottery system and the waiting list. So, I said, “Yeah, we’ll try.” I figured it was four or five years down the road, and we ended up getting the permit the second year.

TM: Did you get your first date or your second or third or fourth?

SS: I didn’t even look. I think it was probably maybe the third date. So, the first year we put in, Kirk did the application. He and I split the fee, and we did the application. Didn’t get it, and then I switched jobs. Had to do some other things. We skipped a year, and then the second time I put in purposely for days that were over two weekends, so that people, you know, they put in on a day that was sort of a funny day that wouldn’t – someone going on vacation would have to take extra time off to be able to do this. So, I looked at those. I looked a little bit the stats on what days people, you know, the lowest number of applications. Those are the dates that I went with. I think I got the second or third date that I applied for.

TM: So, let’s back up a minute because we sort of left off when you started into a Ph.D. program at Colorado State. What was that Ph.D. program in? What were you doing?

SS: Yep, yep. It was in recreation, but it was actually in recreation resource management.

TM: And what did you do with that? I mean you'd mentioned, "Hey, things were really different." It was resource management-based.

SS: Yeah. Yeah, it wasn't really what I was looking for, and I had one great research project. They were doing a FERC re-licensing on Jackson Lake Dam up in Wyoming right at the bottom part of Yellowstone, and I love Yellowstone. I love Jackson, so I actually got that as a summer research position, and for BOR. It was a grant through BOR, and I did an in-stream flow study, in-lake and in-stream flow study for recreation activities on that section. I interviewed all of the outfitters, for whitewater, for scenic floats. I actually went down with the rangers through the scenic float section. We looked at fisheries, state fisheries, and all that.

But I had borrowed money. I had never borrowed money before for college, and I borrowed money, and I had this big debt. I didn't have a good assistantship, and we didn't have a support system there for my kids, you know, my wife, my kids, so it was too expensive. And I had already been accepted, and I got a position back at Morgantown in West Virginia with a project called Rural Net.

It was a science program, teaching teachers how to use the internet to teach science, and I could do web and databases. I developed some skills for online database systems. Helped with an international conference in Belize for human dimensions of fish and wildlife management, and I could live at home. I knew the resource areas, cut the bills in half, and so at the end of the school year there – it was winter, Christmas – we drove everything back to Garrett County. So, mainly a cost-of-living decision.

TM: Were you able to continue your Ph.D. from there then?

SS: I started – it was a grad assistant position in the ed school, but I had already been accepted into the recreation department, which was also in forestry. It was also resource management. But the people there, Steve Hollenhorst, who's now at Idaho, and some of the older folks who were emeritus had a community parks and rec focus, even though they were in a forestry school. It was a good mix.

But when I came back and did Rural Net for a year, I kind of lost interest in my Ph.D., and I didn't want to – I couldn't do both, working, and I needed some money to pay some bills and get that credit card out of the way for my Belize trip. I was still paying for my Belize trip. So, I wrote this database. At the time, the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, had a Surf Your Watershed website where you could learn about the flow. They had the gauges, but you could learn about chemicals in the water and such, and our Rural Net project, our science, we actually did a field science program.

Great guy, Randy Robinson, who had started a video boating business on the New River. He was the original videographer on the New River. Became a friend of mine. I shared an office with him, and he had worked for EMRA that I mentioned before. So, we had an instant bond. He taught me the Upper Yough. He took me on the upper Yough a few times. So, Randy had a very strong environmental science interest.

We used the Izaak Walton League Save Our Streams, the macroinvertebrate counts, as our tool for teaching science. And I developed an online database where all of the schools that were in our program that were all over the state could register their stream study, their water quality study in this database. It was sort of cutting edge at the time. I can't think of the name of it, but anyway. Then we also did some of the first social media. Blackboard was online, but I wrote a custom database where the teachers could come and collaborate on lesson plans in environmental science and the internet.

So, I did that for a couple of years, and I was really focused on that, so I backed off my Ph.D., and I actually got a full-time job as a research assistant with the Rural Net project for two years. It was a three-million-dollar NSF grant, and I was able to do that for two years and stop my Ph.D. They started some things on spirituality in nature, which wasn't really my thing. We were talking about Wiccans? Basically witchcraft, you know, and the religious aspects of it, and more of the social aspects of it. I was a programmer. I really wasn't into that aspect of it, so I said, "I don't think I want to do that right now."

And then, I did rejoin the outdoor field. I started teaching adjunct at Garrett College. I taught their first leadership class there, and that's where I started working with Charlie Walbridge in some of the Swiftwater Rescue. And then when Rural Net ended, there was a position open there at Garrett College, and I applied for it. It was the second position. First position, I didn't apply for, but the second position which was more whitewater oriented – the first position was rock climbing. I got that position.

TM: What year was that?

SS: Probably '96. Yeah, '96. My dad had taught a course. My dad was still teaching at the college, still working at the college, as a research assistant or a research manager. And he had started the IT department and was doing IT there. A lot of people thought I got the job because my dad was there. I don't think so. He didn't really know much about what I did, but he was teaching a class in event management based on his experiences with the World Championships on the Savage.

And I basically took over his class that he was teaching, and taught it, and converted it into an adventure recreation management class. And started backing away from event management in terms of how to set up, you know, businesses, and how to set up organizations, so for my club experience and my director experience, and how to do operations management for an outdoor business, and that was my specialty. And then I taught kayaking as well, and rafting, and cross-country skiing, and backpacking. I did that for three or four years.

I got injured a few times. I had some shoulder injuries and a knee injury. So, I did that probably for four years, and then I got a back injury, and I was like, "Well, I don't know." At first, for a semester, they let me not be in the field, and then the boss man said, "Well, you need to go back in the field." I was pretty sure that I – my problem was I was a field instructor, and yeah, I might be able to get myself down a river, but I was responsible for 10 students.

And I knew that if I went to give a hand to god rescue to a kayak student who was flipped over, I was going to hurt myself, and potentially not be able to flip them over, and lose a student. So, I



said, “Well, I thought about it. I really tormented,” and I was like, “Well, I’m going to give myself another option. How about I leave?” Probably not the smartest decision in my life. I probably could have fought it, but I didn’t want to deal with them, so I left.

I tried to start a business called Venture Quest which was a booking business for adventure stuff. That didn’t really pan out. So, I went back to work on my Ph.D. a little bit more, and I got a grad assistantship, and we got a grant through the Monongahela National Forest to do it. They needed to do a trail study that was actually congressionally funded, and they were going to do a trail management plan. So, I put together a research project on trail erosion and looked at recreation ecology and different aspects that are a foundation for Leave No Trace on trail impacts.

David Cole out of Montana and the Wilderness Institute had just started there. David’s stuff was the foundation of it, and Jeff Marion out of Virginia Tech had sort of established the protocols for doing trail studies, trail impact assessments. So, I did 120 miles, about 112 to 120 miles, of trail impact assessment, as well as doing a management assessment of best management practices that the forest service had. They had, you know, standards for different categories of trails.

So, I looked at trail width, and trail features, trail structures, trail signage, and to see if they were in alignment with the national standards, so they could use it as information to do their trail management plan. But along the side, I did a GIS study on trail erosion prediction. I did a vector study. So, I got down on one knee 900 times on 112 miles of trail. Measured the width. Measured the depth. Took aspect to the slope, position of the trail, whether it was on the ridge top, mid slope, valley slope. Inventory to every section of mud, every section of deep erosion.

I hiked over 300 miles that summer. I saw three people because I was there during the week. I saw more bear than I saw people. I think I saw – one day, my very last trail on Barrenshe Trail in the Cranberry Wilderness, I saw nine bear in one day. Pretty amazing. Pretty amazing summer. So, I did all my research. I wrote up my research. Did my first three chapters. Got everything approved. Took my comps. Had it out with my advisor, and walked away from it.

I didn’t like the politics of the – it was tier two at the time, research institution, publications, human dimensions, and the conflict. I just walked away. So, I was at a bind for a job again, so I was like, “Well, I’m going to recreate myself.” I love mapping. I learned GIS stuff, and I love mapping, and I had an interest in sailing and interest in the coast. I had done – a lot of my early science was in aquatic, marine aquatic, on coastal ecosystems, and such.

And as a kid, I’d always listened to NOAA on the shortwave radio. My parents got a 9-band radio, and I always listened to NOAA. Like, “Hey.” Started looking around for jobs. I was like, “Hey, they have this mapping thing at NOAA. I’m gonna become a benthic mapper for NOAA.” So, I started applying for jobs as a benthic mapper from NOAA.

Got a call from the contractors, and he said, “You know, you’re a little older than most of our people doing that program.” He said, “You’re qualified for it, but we have this other thing we think you’d be perfect for.” And it was an environmental education position within the National Marine Sanctuaries program. So, I came in as a contractor for the National Marine Sanctuaries,

and it was a great match. It really was. The biggest problem was it was three and a half hours from home, and my boss wouldn't let me telecommute, so I had to be there five days a week.

So, I went down, and Ricardo, my brother-in-law who's with us now, offered me his basement. So, I went down, and I stayed with them, you know, Monday through Friday. In their basement four nights a week, and I went into DC. I worked in Rockville. Got to go on some great conferences. I went, you know, to San Diego.

So, that department works – they're the major educators for the marine archaeological programs and the marine sanctuaries. They had started this program for underwater teaching. They actually had the full facemasks, and they had a system for telecommuting from the ship. So, I worked with that department. Nim's Island, the movie Nim's Island, they wanted to do a partnership with us. Disney wanted to do a partnership with us, so I helped coordinate all the educational materials for that.

It was a phenomenal year, but they were running out of funding for my position. So, I got hired on by the Central Office for Education. They were doing a strategic plan, and they had needed a web manager, so I got hired by them. And they let me only work from the office three days a week. I could telecommute two days a week. In the meantime, I had bought a 37-foot sailboat, and I was staying on that. I bought it on Craigslist for 10 grand, and I sailed it the day I bought it. And I sailed it while I was there. Every evening, I would sail all by myself.

TM: A 37-foot boat? Wow. That's a lot of work by yourself.

SS: Yeah. Once you get away from the dock, it's not much work. I had, you know, I had an autohelm and a jib. The jib was on a line back to the cockpit. But in and out of the dock was fun. I learned a technique. I figured it out, and I could do it by myself as long as the wind wasn't blowing in a certain way. [Tom laughs.] I sailed a lot. One year – I had it for seven years. I sailed 100 days.

TM: Wow! That's awesome.

SS: Had some interesting winter experiences. I was the only one that stayed on my boat at night during the week, and one winter –

TM: So, you used it as a place to stay instead of the basement at Ricardo's.

SS: Exactly.

TM: Got it.

SS: Yeah, and I owned a 37-foot boat. I'd always wanted one. [Tom laughs.] I had these ideas of sailing around the world, and I was like, "I could do it!" I quickly got rid of those ideas. [Steve laughs.] But one winter night, I – Oh! Some crazy things though, because I was working in an office at a computer, and I had never lived on a boat before, and every now and then you would get three-foot waves coming in.

And the boat would go up and down, and up and down, and up and down, all night long, and you get in the car, and you get to your desk, and the desk was going up and down, and up and

down, all day long. It was like, "What in the world? Was this a good idea or what?" But I saved a bunch of money. I didn't have to get an apartment. I had my own place, and it was – I called it legal camping, right.

TM: Well, you had to pay berth fee.

SS: Huh?

TM: You had to pay berthage.

SS: Yeah, it was like two grand a year.

TM: That's easy.

SS: Yeah, and, you know, fees for maintaining the boat and such. But yeah, I probably paid like, at most, one year I think \$5,000 for a place to stay. I stayed there.

TM: Which is 500 dollars a month. You know, not bad.

SS: Yeah, I stayed there three nights a week.

TM: And then you can turn around and resell it which I'm assuming you did.

SS: Well, yeah, so at the end of seven years, after working for NOAA for, you know, doing strategic plans. That's where I met Kirk, and Kirk and I had never paddled together in those seven years. Never once paddled together. We always talked about paddling. He was a kayaker. I was a kayaker, and seven years.

I don't know whether to put this on video or on tape or not, but I will say it. Ted Cruz shut down government unilaterally in my sixth year, and I was a contractor, and I worked amongst, you know, feds. Great people. I love them. I'd never say – that's the longest job I've ever stayed in, for seven years, and it was attributed to the great community there. But all of a sudden, somebody, one person in congress basically said whether I had work or not.

And I wasn't allowed to work as a contractor because I needed a supervisor who was a fed, even though everything I did was independent. And very rarely did they say anything to me. I could not work. We were off work for three weeks. Something like that. And at the end of three weeks, guess what? All the feds got paid. Contractors didn't get paid. So, there was no job security there, and I decided I really wasn't interested in working in that setting.

The biggest plus before that happened was my supervisor was this Greek fellow. Wonderful guy. One of the best supervisors I ever had. Great role model. He was ABD, all but dissertation, from a Ph.D. program in oceanography from Connecticut, I believe. And I got a letter from the college, from WVU, that said, "You have one more semester to finish your Ph.D. or we're dropping you from the rolls." And I told him about it, and Christo said, "I'm not gonna let you pass up on that." He said, "You're gonna finish that. I'm gonna make it so you can do it."

So, for three months, he allowed me to work one day a week, and, you know, keep my job. Keep my position. Keep my responsibilities, and so for three months, I wrote my dissertation, and defended, and finished it. Yeah, and I wouldn't have done it without that kind of push, and I was glad I finished it. I don't like leaving things undone. Sort of put it in my back pocket because I didn't need it for anything, you know, and in fact, in the field of being a program director, people look at you when you have a Ph.D. and they're kind of like, "What?" You know, "Are you an educational snob?" [Tom laughs.] "What is this thing?"

TM: "Why did you do that?"

SS: Yeah, and the thing about a Ph.D. is that, you know, my master's, I was doing all these big picture things. You know, I was doing directing. I was doing, you know, programming. I was doing this applied research. When I did my Ph.D., I studied, you know, half-inch increments of erosion on trails, and I was so specialized. It didn't really serve me. It didn't really serve me what I wanted, and it was resource management. My field was not resource management. It was programmatic management, program administration, program design, so I put it in my back pocket, you know. I sort of went on from there.

So anyway, so I left NOAA, and I didn't have anything to go to. I didn't listen to my wife. I had three kids at the time. One of the main reasons I worked for NOAA was I had two kids in college, so I needed a decent income. So, I put two kids through college. My wife at the time was working for a daycare at a ski resort, which was great because my kids learned how to ski for free, and we were still living near my parents'. Not at my parents' at the time, but she did not like her job. She was doing Head Start. Terrible, and she was the low person on the totem pole. So, she had a 12-month position. Snow days, she didn't get any snow days off. She had to go anyway, so it's hard with kids. She was miserable. I just kept hearing how miserable she was. How miserable.

One day on my commute to DC, I heard my old alma mater, Frostburg, had this one-year master's program in education. She'd always talked about being a teacher, so I said to her, "I don't want to hear it anymore. Here's this program. Quit your job. I have a good job. Quit your job, and get your master's in education. You'll be a school teacher. You can do what you want. I'll support you through that."

So, I had two kids in college. Had a wife in college. Three degrees. So, she did that. She was getting her master's. Two weeks before she graduated from the program, they closed three elementary schools in our county. I was like, "Oh great." So, she got a job in the next county over as a special ed teacher, and I quit my job at NOAA. So, I was looking around, looking around, looking around, and I found a one-year, part-time position as executive director of Garrett Trails, and started doing grant writing.

It was odd because, you know, I never thought of myself as a resource manager, and all of a sudden, I was helping develop trails, and maintain trails, and working with land management agencies to design and plan trails. So, the stuff you never know, and you can pull it out of the back pocket, right, and I was applying all my mapping skills. I was creating, you know, I created a trail map, online trail map for the community. I think there were 32 trails on there that people could go in and find out difficulties and, you know, things. Did all my web stuff. I had a web business kind of off and on along the way, so it all kind of came together.

Then a former student who was kind of coming to the end of that first year, and I was like, “Well I really need a full-time job,” and they put together a full-time job for me. Salary was low, but I could live in the county. There were no benefits. But a former student, before I had left NOAA, a former student had started calling me, asking. He said, you know, “Steve, we really want an adventure program, academic program, like the one you developed, like the one you worked at Garrett, at West Virginia.”

He had been one of my students at Garrett, and I had been on his – he had pursued a master’s degree, and I served on his master’s committee, and his master’s was designing a student orientation program for first-year students, freshman orientation. I knew something about it because of my work with AORE, so I was the only person on this committee who actually worked with him to develop his ideas, and grow it, and do some edits and such. So, it was a very successful program. In fact, it’s a two-million-dollar student life outdoor program now. They run about a thousand students. They have a yurt village. They have a high ropes course. They do trips all over the world.

TM: For the first-year students?

SS: The summer programs are for first-year students, and then they started some study abroad programs. It’s kind of in combination with it.

TM: I mean, it sounds a little bit like Prescott College, who does a similar sort of first-year students, they do a lot of outdoor activities together, try to bond the students together.

SS: Yeah, yeah and we used Prescott as one of the models. We used Dartmouth as another model that we looked at who had a long history of doing those types of programs. Now it’s one of the leading programs in the country in terms of program size, volume, and recognition. They’ve got a couple – they’re getting an award at the next AORE conference. They’re leaders in the – there’s a pre-conference. It’s all about those freshman orientation programs.

When I left Garrett College, I told – you know, my students were giving me a big party, and I said, “Yeah you think this is all about me, but this is really all about you.” And I held up a prism, and shined a flashlight at the prism, and all the lights kind of shined. I said, “This is your opportunity to have your light reflect back on what we did here together and to show that.” That was an example of that with my student Greg.

So, Greg called me at NOAA one day. He said, “Hey, you know, could you come up and look at this with us? We have this great student life program, but we’d like to have an academic program to complement it, and the folks here really don’t have that background. Would you come up here and at least talk to us about it?”

So, that was before I left NOAA, and then as my Garrett Trails job started coming to an end or coming to a decision point, he calls me up again. He says, “Well, we think we can find some money for you to come up. Would you consider a job here instead of continuing with Garrett?” I was like, “Well, let’s look at it together to see what it is.” The provost’s office hired me. A salary a third higher than what I was getting paid at Garrett Trails, full benefits, retirement, to develop this program at WVU in Morgantown.

They had a minor, and the minor had kind of gone to the wayside for a while. So, I went to do that. At the same time, they bought a campus down in Beckley, West Virginia. There was a failing college. WVU Tech was kind of a failing college. Been in this town Montgomery for 90 years, and it was really the hub of the city now, but it used to be a big coal mining and manufacturing community, and all that was gone. It's really a dying community. The facilities at the campus were dilapidated. They were condemning a couple of the dorms.

So, the state said, "WVU, you're the tier-one research, you have all the money, and you have the know-how. You're taking over this campus, and you have to make a success out of it." So, they bought another campus that had just gone out of business. Used to be Mountain State College in Beckley which is about an hour away from Montgomery. It's right next to the New River Gorge which has some of the best rock climbing and whitewater. The Gauley River and the New River Gorge. Best in the east.

They had developed mountain biking, and the Boy Scouts had just developed a 12,000-acre high adventure camp. Unique in the country. It had, you know, some of the best mountain bike trails, had high ropes courses, had zip lines. They bought properties all along the river, and all of a sudden, we had a partnership with them. So, they said, "Steve, I know we hired you to be in Morgantown, but would you mind going to Beckley and starting the program down there instead?" So, I said, you know, "It's four hours from home." So, I said, "Why not?" You know, how many times do you get handed that opportunity?

TM: Can I buy a sailboat down there?

SS: Yeah, you know, how many times do you get handed an opportunity I was looking for? What's the equivalent to a sailboat in West Virginia? A camper I guess, you know.

TM: You could buy a coal mine.

SS: Yeah, right. So, I've looked for that. They had a little apartment on campus. They let me stay in a little apartment, and I went down there and started negotiating all these relationships. I had some relationships down there from my work with Glenn Carlson. The rafting and the Dragan Brothers. So, I was kind of a little bit known, but I was just introducing myself, and trying to get people to buy into the idea, and figure out what would be the best match for the program.

So, I developed a proposal for a four-year academic degree in adventure recreation management and sold it to the provost's office. That was about a year ago. In the meantime, I was awarded a permit on the Grand Canyon. [Steve cheers.] At the exact same time that the National Jamboree was going to be at the Boy Scouts. My first year.

TM: Like right now?

SS: Right now. 40,000 scouts are there, and it was really – I had also negotiated an MOU with them on shared resources and teaching, but none of them – they all said, you know, "Grand Canyon only comes along once in a while." So, they all knew upfront that I was doing this. Plus, I had no real interest in being in a Jamboree with 40,000 scouts. Unfortunately, unless we can get

another permit on the Grand Canyon, in two years in '19, they're having the World Jamboree there with 60,000 scouts.

So, we're working on some partnerships with them and some educational programs, mountain biking stuff, and all their staff training. We have equivalents. They use American Mountain Guides Association for their climbing. ACA credentialing for their rafting and their canoeing. They have stand-up paddleboarding which we have credentials for. Rock climbing, as I mentioned. Their ropes, ACCT standards for their ropes. So, we're developing credit-based courses that they can actually apply for their staff training. So, those staff maybe look at our program as a possible way to get a degree or get some college credits. I think that's going to be a good partnership.

TM: Do you think that's the trend of the future then for guiding is that you'll have a four-year degree in outdoor recreation?

SS: Not for guiding. Maybe. Like you mentioned Prescott. There are certain schools like Colorado Mountain College, Prescott, and some others that actually offer degrees in leadership. I think that is stealing students' money because you can't make that much money as a leader, you know, and you'll have college bills. You know, for wealthy students who are looking for a, you know, a liberal arts degree, you know, you certainly learn excellent skills in the leadership and you go on great trips, you know, and study around the world.

Through my AORE – one of my best friends I made through AORE was this guy, Ross Cloutier, and Ross started the top program in the world. At the time it was Kamloops up in British Columbia. It's Three Rivers College [correction: Thompson Rivers University]. I think it's called Three Rivers, and Ross and I worked a lot together. He's an amazing person. Guided internationally, every single type of guiding, and he was the national emergency manager for the ski patrol for all of Canada for a while.

TM: He has his Canadian mountain guide license?

SS: He has international mountain guide credentials, but he has Canadian mountain guides. He trains Canadian mountain guides.

TM: That's a big deal.

SS: Yeah, big deal and much higher credentials than I would ever have, but he also has started a consulting business, and he's written books on design of programs and businesses.

TM: So, who would want this degree?

SS: So, his degree was an international program, so he started a campus in Thailand. British Columbia was the main, Thailand, and now they just opened a new branch campus in Iceland. And they train people how to start guide businesses, and that's the key to me is, you know, if you're gonna take students' money – for me, I'm a vocational educator. It's a dirty word in higher ed, but I'm a vocational educator, and I want to give folks – they can they can work, they can start their own business.

If they get a minor in business and entrepreneurship or business with my degree, they have the specialized knowledge in equipment, and industry standards, in operations management, in staff recruitment, and management training, and rescue, and all that. They have that from me. They can get a degree in business. If they want to go into public parks and rec, which I have some background in, you know, they can get a public administration degree and combine that with mine, and I have connections for that.

If they want to just work in ecotourism, you know, more on the upper level, we have a marketing segment. We'll look at adventure destinations, and we'll pick apart market segmentation. Look at the outfitters, and look at the resources. And I can also help them because of the unexpected, my resource management side. They can work for the park service, either as interpreters or as permit managers, or they can go to a third world country and work at a reserve, and sort of be the program manager. And then also the therapeutic side. We have a therapeutic side that we can do.

So those are areas where people can actually make a living at this, and they may come in and go, "Oh wow! I can go rafting. I can go rock climbing. I can go mountain biking." You know, "I want to be a guide." Well, I want to get those skills early their first or second year, so they can be a guide for three or four years while they're in school, while they're learning about how the business functions, you know. And they do an internship, and then at the end, it helped place them in, you know. And the other area is the area that I've worked in is working at colleges in these student outdoor rec programs.

TM: So, I should ask you this because it's kind of interesting thinking about basically the future of owners of outdoor recreational companies. How are we going to preserve these resources and still have space for all the people that want a slice of the pie?

SS: Yeah. You know, it's an ethics question is "How thin to slice the pie?" but, you know, because of my biology background and my love of the resource, that's an underlying theme. And one of the problems that I see in the industry, and you know I've talked about this a little bit, is the greed aspect of the industry. Of trying to exploit the resource and turn it more or less into an amusement park type of experience. You know, the Pigeon River is like that, and that is not what I teach. We look at that model, and there are some corporate models.

We look at that, but the protection of the resource and the integrity of the experience is core to what we teach in our program. And we certainly look at the spectrum, you know, the range of it, and there are front country experiences. There are urban experiences like my experience with the James. But if you lose the true adventure aspect of it, the unknowns in that, and you make it too much of this cookie-cutter amusement park thing, you know, five days on a motor rig down the Grand Canyon. My god, what is that? That is not – it's one component of an experience, but it does not do justice to the resource.

So, I think, you know, bringing that next generation of manager along that has an understanding of the resource and appreciation for the resource – one of the problems I think originally, the managers, the owners from a monetary perspective, drove volume and diminished the adventure experience, and unfortunately, it's become an expectation of the client. So, I think you've seen a total change in the people who are pursuing – maybe not so much outside –



particularly for our resources, there's a sector of the clientele that want that adventure experience.

Most of them are probably raised by environmentalists, you know, from the '60s. Or what we see in our region is grandparents who were raised in the '60s are bringing and want to share that experience, and there's a shift now going towards that. We need to embrace that, and we also need to target the youth, and get the youth not thinking about this as an amusement park ride, but getting them thinking again about caring for the environment.

They're actually a prime target because the last generations or the me generation is separating slowly. They're the people who are a little bit greedy. They want more, you know, higher-paying jobs, and they want to do very independent things. They don't really care so much about the environment. They do care about recycling a little bit. But it's that next generation that's the we generation, and they care about the planet as a whole. And it's sort of this new reconnection to the natural systems and appreciation for natural vistas.

I think we need to foster that and work with the students to, you know, think about the next generation, or if they want a business, their next clientele. It's the need to foster that and grow, and sort of help that grow. And that's what I teach, and I think that that is at least the future of what I value in outdoor recreation of the resource and that interface with the natural world. I think there is hope for it, but I think we need to get rid of this greed generation. I think we just have to outgrow them.

You know, we have a business in the New River Gorge that wants to be a 20-million-dollar business. That's their goal. When they hit 20 million. They're at about 13, 14 right now. They have kind of a resort. They have a couple of restaurants. They're doing a bunch of rafting. They're doing other things. Ropes course and all that. I don't like their product. It feels like a corporate product. They have – the former top manager for Xanterra is now their project manager, their operations manager. He was from out here actually. It's a different model.

TM: Denny? Denny, no –

SS: It's Dave Hart. Hart. It's a German name. That's the first part of it. That's what he goes by. It's like Hartvestegen [correction: Hartvigsen]. But he was high in Xanterra in Arizona and Utah.

TM: Okay, at a corporate office out of Colorado maybe?

SS: Yeah. I think so, yeah, but he just came on last year. It's this whole corporate model thing. What's fun for me as an educator is, I can show that that's at one extreme all the way down to the mom-and-pop business. And then allow students to kind of explore those and figure out where they would like to fit in. But also show the drawbacks of that type of organization in terms of it's all about making money. Heads and beds, heads, you know, butts and boats.

TM: Yeah, which is such a different experience than we're having today.

SS: Yeah.

TM: That you and I are having here in the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

TM: So, we've been at this now about two hours.

SS: Okay.

TM: Time flies. What I'd like to do is stop this interview here. Our trip isn't over. It's about halfway through, not quite. Sometime down the road, let's see if we can get together again for another couple hours, and you can talk about this trip, and how it relates, and how this trip might relate into your new teaching, or how you're going to teach this program. I'd be curious to know that.

SS: Yeah.

TM: Sound like a plan?

SS: Sounds like a great plan.

TM: Cool, so we'll call this the end of part one of an interview with Steve Storck. This is the Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History Interview. Today is the 24th, we think, of July. We are at the Galloway rapid in the bottom of the Grand Canyon. To be continued.