

Interviewee: Bob Wheeler (BW)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

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TM: Good morning Bob. This is Tom Martin and this is Part 2 of a Grand Canyon Oral History with Bob Wheeler. Today is Friday. It's June 1st, 2018. Bob, may I have your permission to record you for this interview?

BW: You do have my permission.

TM: Thank you very much. Well, thanks so much for bringing us up to speed in Part 1 to your ever-growing canoeing abilities—the ability to surf a canoe in a rapid, to just sort of park there; the ability to get a canoe through Westwater Canyon, a fairly substantial river challenge. Clearly, your skills were getting better and better. You had mentioned in Part 1 that the Grand Canyon had been sort of on your radar screen. How did that trip eventually come to pass?

BW: (*laughs*) Well, it was not easy. For one thing, I had applied, and I don't remember the exact logistics, but I had applied somehow for a permit, and managed to get a permit for put-in on October 30th, 1984. And it was, you know, whatever. It was much easier back then, I think, to get permits in that day and age, because since then—I went in '84, '86 both times in a canoe, I went in '90 rafting it, and '94—most of those were my permits. It became harder and harder, though, as time went on; there were so many people interested in going. So as a private, it was pretty difficult to get on the river. But in that day and age, it seemed that trips in October were not—late October and November—were not all that popular in that time. So I managed to get a trip, and I had a list of folks I was interested in. My compatriot, Steve Krest, who I mentioned in the last interview, would be rafting my raft, and I would be canoeing. And he and I were always pretty solid. We had a pretty good group together to go and everybody actually pretty much canceled out. I think it was everybody except Steve and myself, about 3 months ahead of the trip itself. It was really through connections with various people I knew in Boulder that knew some other people and got the word out and we managed to pull together a total of 11 of us to be able to go on the trip. Several with rafts or raft captaining capabilities. It kind of came together in the early fall, as I remember it, that that was the group that would be able to go. And so we were on.

TM: Cool. Did you get a chance to do any research of the canoers who had gone before you, starting with Leslie Jones in 1953, from Lees Ferry to Phantom—and then he hiked back in '54 and ran out to Lake Mead. Other canoers in the, I believe, 1970's—1971. Had you been able to outreach to any of those people at all?

BW: I did not. The only thing I might of have seen—and I don't remember the timing, if it was before or after I went—but I remember seeing an article in some magazine of a southeastern canoer who had

canoed... I don't even remember their name. That might have happened before I went. But I really did no research other than I knew I had done Westwater, I knew I had done the Middle Fork of the Salmon, I knew I had done the main stem of the Salmon. So I thought, you know, its equivalent. It's obviously a much longer trip. It's more exposure, it's rapids that I thought would be comparable. I thought, yeah, I think I can do this. So no real research in terms of others that had gone before.

TM: Okay. The 11 people that you ended up with, you knew Steve. Did you know anyone else?

BW: I did not know anybody else on the trip, except one person other than Steve, was Les Davis, and he was with the Kansas Canoe Club, which I had mentioned earlier in the first interview. I'd been talking with some of those folks. None of them had ever done anything like this, and Les said, "I've got the time. I'd be really interested in going." So he signed up to go as another single canoer.

TM: Oh wow, so there were two of you.

BW: There were two of us in canoes. And then I met somebody, basically, probably on the river, a guy named Spiros. I don't have his last name actually. He kayaked and said, I'd love to go. I think he was kind of a trust fund kind of guy and could take some time off. He just said, "Yeah, I can do that. I'd like to do that."

TM: Bob, what was his first name—I'm sorry. The kayaker?

BW: Spiros? We always call him Spiros.

TM: How do you spell that?

BW: I think it's S-P-I-R-O-S. I think it's like a Greek name.

TM: Ok, Spiros. Alright, thank you.

BW: So I got talking with him. And I knew I wanted a kayak along just for safety purposes, especially with two of us in a canoe. I'll tell you a little more about that later, which was kind of funny. But he was agreeing to come along, and I thought he sounded like a good little safety kayak boat that we could have along with us.

TM: And Steve is rowing a raft. How many other rafts did you have?

BW: We had three other rafts. One was—I think it's called an Argonaut. A guy named Chris Walker. I think he's a helicopter pilot, actually, by profession. He was trying out the sort of Cataraft approach. I don't think there'd been many Catarafths at that stage, '84. He was kind of trying that out, and I think had some connection with Argonaut to maybe start producing these boats more and that type of thing. I'm not totally certain of that, but anyway, he would have a raft. I'm trying to remember who else was rowing. Ned Cox was on the trip, and Gene Moore. So we had Steve, Gene, Ned, and Chris, I think, were the rowers for the four rafts that we had. And then myself in a canoe—Explorer, Mad River Canoe—and then Les Davis in a canoe, and then Spiros kayaking.

TM: So you had three or four people that were just along as passengers?

BW: Yep.

TM: Okay. That's a lot of people for—well, for four rafts and two canoes. That's okay.

BW: Yeah. It worked out. We had a total of 11 and it was fine. It worked fine, actually, with that number.

TM: Good. Did you have anybody go in and out at Phantom, or was it just a straight-on-through crew?

BW: This was a straight-on-through group. I think all my other trips have had people in and out at Phantom, but didn't have to get that arranged to make sure you're there at the right day, and that type of thing.

TM: Do you remember who your ramp orientation ranger was?

BW: Oh my gosh. I don't, but he was pretty famous, I think. I know he retired. I remember seeing an article about the fact that he had retired a number of years ago. Pretty tall guy. Mustache, as I remember it. I was pretty worried because I knew we had to go through orientation and I wasn't even sure they'd let us go in a canoe in that day and age. Was pretty concerned, so I put all my experience down. Said I had all this experience, which I did, on various rivers—equivalent type of rivers. But he didn't question anything at all about that. He was like, "No problem."

TM: Nice. That would be, I believe, Tom Workman. Does that ring a bell?

BW: I think that is who it is. I think you're right. Tom Workman.

TM: Yeah. Nice. So you filled out the paperwork, which wanted to know your prior experience. You said, "I've done Westwater, I've done the Middle Fork, I've done the Main, in my canoe," and that would have been certainly been enough to carry the day.

BW: It was. And it was, for sure.

TM: Nice. You watched the orientation in the trailer, watched the little film, I suppose?

BW: Yep.

TM: What else do you remember about that sort of exciting day there? That's the 30th of October, 1984. You're all there at Lees Ferry. What were you thinking?

BW: Well, a lot of different things. I mean, I was the trip leader, so there was a lot of responsibility for the group and for the permit, and all of that type of thing. As I remember it, the night before we ate at Marble Canyon Lodge, which is a tradition. I think I've done that every time. I know that has since burned down. I hope they restored it.

TM: They did. They rebuilt it.

BW: Excellent. I was quite nervous in expectation on this. You know, October 30th is getting pretty dark that time of year, and the river flow was quite high, at least at Lees Ferry—I think 25,000. I think we probably got close to 30,000 as we were on the river downstream. I knew that was a big flow, even though I didn't quite understand how big of a flow it really was (*laughs*) in a canoe. It was a lot of organizing, a lot of packing, just getting everything ready. We were a total self-support trip. We had all our own rafts, we brought all our own food, and all our own coolers, our own safety equipment.

Everything that you needed, we were doing. It wasn't like now. My later trips have been going through an outfit that you can rent all the equipment from, basically and you pretty much show up with your personal gear and off you go. This was organizing everything, organizing the shuttle. The shuttle, we actually had a few people drive, I think it was four vehicles, down to the bottom and then they flew back to Marble Canyon was the way we did that shuttle that time. So there was logistics with that. But everything worked out, and got ready to go.

TM: Nice. Did you guys—were you responsible for the food, or did you all work together for a food pack on that? Do you remember?

BW: I think what we did is split into food groups. That's generally how I've done these trips in the past when we've done our own food and everything, is have sort of different food groups. Even though I think on this trip there was one guy in particular, Jack Dugwyler, really took on a lot of the cooking responsibilities and that type of thing.

TM: Cool. That's helpful. So you got the orientation from ranger Workman, and were down to the ramp, put your canoe in the water and paddled off. Now this is an open canoe with some sort of flotation in the front and back, is that right? How did you have your boat rigged out?

BW: Exactly that. The flotation technique I used was Styrofoam—basically big blocks of foam, Styrofoam—that I would carve out to fit into the canoe, both in the front and back of me. Then I would carve knee holes out of the Styrofoam, and then I could really get my legs and knees down into that. So I was pretty well braced in. And then I had a thwart, basically a board that went across. I put that on an angle so it was a little more comfortable. I would face to the stern, so I would be basically putting my butt up against this thwart that was on an angle, but it was right next to the seat. It was normally the front seat, but facing the other direction. And then I could easily sit in that seat if I was in just calm water and paddle sitting. Then if I was coming into rapids, I'd get down into the Styrofoam with my knees and push against that thwart. I was really pretty stable in the canoe, and pretty solid in the canoe.

TM: Nice. Could you do a roll? Had you gotten to the point where you could roll that? Or you were just kind of down and sort of locked in Styrofoam so you could handle kind of big hits, but if you did roll, what would happen?

BW: Well, I did not have a roll down. I know there are canoers that have rolls down, but I never did. What I would do is self-rescue 99.9% of the time. Where I'd get knocked out, I always held strongly onto my paddle. I think only one time on all my river time did I actually let go of a paddle and lose the paddle. That was on the Arkansas River through a rapid called Three Rocks. So I'd hold my paddle, and then I would basically try to swim to or keep holding onto the canoe, and basically would be able to hop into the canoe. Hop in was maybe not quite the right term, but basically get across the gunnel with one arm on the far side of the gunnel, the other kind of underneath me, and just sort of pull myself on up into the canoe, bail out what water was in there—because it could certainly still hold enough water to make you very unstable—and then basically be off and going. Normally that would be at the bottom of a rapid, even though you could do it in a rapid also.

TM: Did you have a little bail bucket sort of tied to the canoe, that you get in there and just use to bail it out?

BW: Yep. Exactly.

TM: Okay. What was Les's setup like?

BW: He was, I think, quite similar as I remember it. But what I'll say is that Les was really strong. I mean, his arms and shoulders were like the size of somebody's thighs. He was just a strong, powerful kind of guy. He came down, and I think that it was either in Paria or just a riffle—yeah, it was Paria. Both he and Spiros tipped over and Les swam in Paria Riffle, and I'm going, "Oh my gosh, this is going to be one long trip if they're tipping over in Paria."

TM: For our listeners who may not know, the Paria is the first rapid. It's a minor rapid. It's right there, just right there out of Lees Ferry. So these guys, both your safety kayaker and the other canoer, are in the water.

BW: That's correct. *(TM laughs)* I'm thinking as trip leader, "Oh my gosh. This is going to be a long trip, if they're tipping over in that." With Les, he tended to tip over in rapids quite a bit, until he decided to tie two of his paddles together so he had it more like a kayak paddle and then he would just power his way. That was his technique, was to power his way through rapids. He could get moving with that setup. And he was much more one to try to power through the river. My approach was much more to coexist with the river. Sort of a philosophical difference there. I can tell some more tales of Les downriver; President Harding Rapid and Crystal and Lava.

TM: We'll get there. We'll get there sequentially *(laughs)*.

BW: We'll get there. Once he started doing that, then he became much more successful.

TM: And what about Spiros?

BW: Well, and he also became much more adept *(laughs)*. I mean, he was actually a pretty good kayaker, and why he tipped over there I don't know. He was probably playing around. But he did fine later on, and actually in Lava was helpful for me, in Lava itself. But we'll get to that.

TM: Super. Okay, so it sounds like first day nervousness; that's normal. Down through the Paria, people are out of their boats. But it sounds like they were then right back in their boats, and everybody was okay, and off you went. The water was cold as it normally would be.

BW: Yep.

TM: And so then it's down past Cathedral Wash and off toward Badger Rapid, the first rapid of consequence. How'd that go?

BW: Well, it was scary, because you looked at this rapid and said, "Oh my gosh, this is huge." There was a hole on the center right side, and looked like a wave train coming down the middle. Did stop and scout it. I also looked at far left to see if I could sneak it, but I just said, you know, that's not going to work either. And I found that to be true on the Canyon. There were really no sneaks *(laughs)* that you could find. Basically, if you were on the side, it was going to pull you over into the middle anyway. Normally how we'd do this is the rafts would go through first and then be setup for safety. Then Spiros might go whenever, but oftentimes with us, with the canoes. And then the canoes would basically go last. We ended up camping there, but I remember coming down, or scouting it first and seeing how big it was especially at that flow, and went out. The real thing, of course, was lining up. With a canoe, you can maneuver pretty well if you weren't quite lined up right. I usually, when I canoe, go sideways a lot,

especially at about a 45-degree angle. One: I can just see easier; two: I can always pull my bow into the waves so I hit it straight on. And I tend to keep my bow to the river right a little bit, because I tend to paddle on the left side, so it's just pulling the bow over into the—and then I can do a forward stroke with power into the wave. Or I can back-paddle, too. Just came down and got in the slot and those huge waves were amazing, but they also were very friendly for a canoe, frankly. You just seemed to fit in perfectly into those waves. It's up and down, and then you kind of come out through the big waves, and then you're down into the chop waves down below. And you know what, it was exhilarating and fun. In my mind, I just said, Oh my gosh. You know, I can do a Class 5 rapid, I know that now. *(laughs)* At least this one. But it kind of gave me some confidence saying, "I can do this." And you know, the big first day wasn't that far down—it's only I think eight miles or so—but we camped on river left that night.

TM: And Les did fine? Spiros did okay?

BW: I'm trying to think. I thought that Les tipped over in that one also, but I don't totally remember. He tipped over a lot until he got his two-paddle technique going in that, so I'm not sure they did make it. Spiros did make it. Spiros started doing better at that point, even early on. He was fine. Even though he tipped over in Paria Riffle, he was doing fine on the rest of the rapids.

TM: Nice. So that's a good day.

BW: It was a great day. Yep.

TM: Nice. What's the weather been like so far?

BW: Well, it's cold for sure during the day. I mean, a nice thing about that time of year is, I would always wear a wetsuit on the river because the water was so cold, and expectations for a canoeer—you are going to tip over. It's not if, it's when you're going to tip over. So I'd have a wet suit on and a helmet on. But the weather tended to be pretty good our whole trip. It was pretty cold. I think the thing is, at that time of year, even if the sun's out, though, it's oftentimes—especially as you are heading more westerly—that portion of river, as you well know, you're heading pretty much south, so you get more sun during the day there. But as you started heading westerly, you would sometimes just canoe to little spots that had a little sunlight on the water, in some far right-hand side of the river in one little corner, just so you could get a little sun directly on you.

TM: Yeah. Yeah, of course.

BW: Pretty much good weather, though, this trip. In '86, we had a lot of rain down at the bottom, which was phenomenal because the waterfalls were like... There's hundreds of waterfalls. It was just exhilarating to see that, even though you're being pounded by rain.

TM: *(laughs)* That's right. It's gorgeous. Yeah, good. So good day, good Day One. So Day Two, rapids again for the day would be Soap Creek, and then maybe North Canyon, if you got down that far—or House Rock. I'm sorry. And how did that work out?

BW: For me, everything was good and I think basically for the group it was fine. I think what I started to learn on Day Two was about eddy lines in a canoe. When you have a river that's flowing at a high flow, it's moving downstream, but the eddies themselves are moving equally as strong upriver *(laughs)*, or close to it. Those eddy lines, when you come in in the canoe, and oh my gosh, would you have to lean and brace as you came on in, just to kind of get stopped and that type of thing. So kind of extraordinarily

strong bracing and leaning as you came in. You really want to cut your canoe into the back eddy and then you'd lean in as hard as you could upstream. I won't say the gunnels were vertical by any means, but they certainly at a strong angle to be able to not tip over as you came in to those eddy lines. You know, House Rock—more recent trips, House Rock is a much more difficult rapid than I remember it at that higher flow.

TM: That's right.

BW: I know at like House Rock, in the notes that I have, that I'm just right of the tongue, basically, but still a little bit on the left. But I missed the biggest waves. And my experience on those big waves down below is, you definitely have to angle harder to the left than you might expect, because they're kind of on an angle, and they can definitely flip you if you're not careful. But basically I made it through there fine. So I think I was just a little right of some of that.

TM: Yeah, that's a wonderful flow for House, is 25,000—25-/30,000—because you can head further off to the right. You don't have to worry about being forced off to the left, where you really don't want to be. The water's higher, you can move off to the right more, and it's definitely more enjoyable.

BW: Yes (*laughs*). So far I'm good. I've stayed upright and doing fine. We had a fun night that night because it was Halloween night. Steve and I brought costumes. One of us was Reagan and one of us was Powell, as I remember it.

TM: (*laughs*) That's fun.

BW: I think I was the head cook that particular night. And, you know, we had a fun evening. Another thing we got into doing—this will apply for this whole trip—is how to deal with your human waste. And we were okayed to do this. We brought basically a rocket box, but kind of a big square one, and that'd be our toilet. We would use that for toilet. And then every night, we would do a toilet burn. Chris Walker invented this thing; it had a little bit of an opening at the top with a copper tube that went around and down into the fire, basically, where the fire would be. At that time of the year, you were able to have fires, in that late fall time period. So we'd have a fire and we would cook the waste, and no odors. The next morning, you'd open it up and it would just be ash. We'd sit around the fire, and a gentleman named Tom, I'm not sure of his last name, anyway, he had brought a guitar, and we'd sing. Which, none of us are particularly singers or anything like that, but he'd play music and stuff, and it was actually kind of fun.

TM: Cool. The experiments with solid waste were vexing Grand Canyon National Park for quite a while. There were early attempts at incineration of human waste, which were incredibly odoriferous, that the stench was terrifying. So I'm very surprised to hear that this was not a problem for you guys. That's great.

BW: It was not a problem. There was really no stench at all. With this little copper tube that went around and back into the fire, any odors that might be there just got burned up by the fire again. I think the biggest thing that we observed was that it definitely used a lot of driftwood. I don't know how driftwood might help the environment down there, my guess is it does, so to be able to sustain that sort of long-term timeframe would be difficult, unless you were using propane. But then you'd have to have a huge amount of propane also.

TM: Right. The caloric discharge of firewood is really substantial. And yeah, if you want to try to replace it with propane, you're exactly right. Driftwood is a key component of the biotic community. It is the foundation of the biotic community. It's very important for river ecology. Yeah, so the system worked well, it just needed copious quantities of wood.

BW: Yep.

TM: Okay. Nice. Very cool. That's fun. Very nice.

BW: It was fun. It was sort of joining everybody together at night. And of course, it gets dark early. It was dark by 5:00 or 5:30. So we'd have dinner, we had lanterns, of course, and that type of thing. But then there were pretty cold evenings, and so you would just hang out around the campfire, burn the waste, and some nights sing songs, sometimes just talk, and revisit the day and that type of thing.

TM: Nice. Okay, so, so far so good. You're heading into now what's called the Roaring Twenties, and that would be rapids called Indian Dick, 24 Mile, 24.5 Mile, 25 Mile, and then Tiger Wash, MNA. That whole series of rapids that comes every half mile to a mile. How did you guys manage with that?

BW: We did well. I think Les had changed over by that point in time to his tandem paddles. So I think he did fine. I think it's 23.5—well, yeah, 23.5 Mile Rapid, if I remember correctly. Was it that one?

TM: 24.5 is...

BW: Maybe it's 24.5. What I remember on that one is it's around a corner, so you don't see the whole rapid. We were still scouting a lot of those rapids at that point in time, especially with the canoes. My experience is that you scout a lot more your first trip down, especially at that flow, especially in a canoe. But even there, you start to not scout it quite as much as what you might have at the beginning of the trip. But we did scout that rapid. I remember coming down, you have to be just right far enough, but you don't want to be too far right cause you get some troubles on the right side. Kind of come around the corner, and the wave train in there, I remember being up and down. I was up quite high up and I remember being slapped by a side wave up on top. Didn't tip over but, boy, that hit so hard it gave me a real feel for this is one powerful place. This river is really powerful and it can get you tipped over really quickly if you are not careful. But still upright, got through all of that. Really an enjoyable stretch because it's pretty much drop pool, drop pool sections with a lot of fun rapids in there. Everything was good. We'd seen a ring-tailed cat; that was our first ring-tailed I think we had seen which was pretty cool to see. That was the night before. You know, it was pretty amazing. You're coming down through all these various layers of rock, and new layers start to form that you'll see later on at all kinds of heights above you. You really start to get this feeling about how small you are in this huge, unbelievably beautiful canyon. It's a pretty amazing place.

TM: Nice.

BW: Another thing I might mention that I would—and I did this on several of my trips, where I was the leader—which I think all of them I had been. I would read from Powell's book the morning of, usually, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*. I try to find where he was on the river comparable to where we were, and then I would read. They have great pictures in there that one of his compatriots drew. So I try to read the stretch of river, what they were facing and what their thoughts were, which always went from terror to peaceful days and that type of thing, but often times, not having a clue what was down below, and talking about some of the different rock layers. Anyway, that was, I

thought, really an interesting way to go down the river, is to kind of say, “Well, for Powell, what was he facing at different places where you might be?”

TM: And I’m assuming you guys were using the Larry Stevens guide at the time, which of course, Powell didn’t have.

BW: Right. That’s true. *(laughs)*

TM: He had a little clue from the Ives Expedition *(laughs)* that it worked, but beyond that, he wasn’t quite sure.

BW: Yep. Exactly.

TM: *(laughs)* So you guys were a little ahead of the game there. So once below the Roaring Twenties, there’s a—it’s almost a 30-mile run, except for Kwagunt Rapid, maybe Nankoweap, which is just sort of a long riffle. There’s a long run of gorgeous scenery and the rapids are not that hard. I’m assuming that that section went well.

BW: Everything did go well with... Yeah, I’m just looking here. The spot where there was some excitement *(laughs)* was President Harding Rapid. Somehow or another, we had done a short hike—I’m trying to think—Buck Farm Canyon.

TM: Okay, which is above President Harding, sure.

BW: Actually on this trip, we didn’t do that. I’m sorry, wrong trip.

TM: Oh, alright.

BW: We came down to President Harding and most of our group was down below, had gone through. You can get by it, but at that flow, the rock was covered with water. It was fully engulfed in water.

TM: So harder to see.

BW: It was harder to see, but we did scout it. So this is where Les said, “I’m more powerful than this river, and I can beat this.” *(TM laughs)* Les was an interesting character *(laughs)*. I saw that rock, and I saw the hole in back of it at that flow, and just said, “Oh my gosh. You do not want to be anywhere near that rock, because that hole is huge on the other side.” And he said, “I’m going to do that rock. I’m going to go over that.” I said, “Les, you’re crazy. No way. Don’t do that. That’s even dangerous. Don’t do it.” I don’t remember everybody being right there. I remember Chris Walker was there, and Steve Krest in my raft—my pink Achilles—were there with us. But they’d kind of gone through and were waiting for us to come down. We’re scouting it on the side and he’s going, “Yeah, I’m going to do that.” And I said, “No, no. Just follow me.” *(TM laughs)*. So I come down. I was on river left and got around it fine. Huge back eddies behind that and really squirrely. I turn around and here comes Les and he’s right in line for that rock and I’m a little bit down below. And you know what? I have a picture of him, but I don’t know where it is. But I swear, the stern of his canoe as he came over that was basically on the water on the rock, and his bow—I bet you it was 15 feet off the water in front of him, I swear.

TM: Yeah. Yikes. Yep.

BW: We exaggerate things as boaters (*TM and BW laugh*), but this was a pretty amazing sight. And it seemed to me that it was fairly late in the day, because I just sort of remember it as being sort of dark. But maybe I'm wrong. I just remember seeing him do that. He came down and hit in the back eddy with the water coming against that rock. He flipped instantaneously and bubbled around in there. Canoe's upside-down, and it's just sort of in that location next to the rock, and sort of moving around. He disappeared under the water and came up about 25 feet downriver of the rock. The water pulled him all the way back into the rock...

TM: Whoa.

BW: ...and he disappeared again. He came up about 30 feet downstream and was able to swim his way out of there. I think that taught him a big lesson, even though he always would basically feel that he could power his way through almost everything. I think he did see, hmm, that was unbelievably scary and maybe not a good decision.

TM: And his boat got kicked out eventually as well?

BW: Yeah, the boat came out to the side. We had the various rafts that were there and we were able to come out and get everything together and head on downstream. But it was interesting watching from the side (*laughs*). I think Chris Walker really enjoyed it 'cause it was (*TM laughs*) sort of like excitement on the river. You never know what might happen with the canoes. So he would just kind of watch us.

TM: Hey Bob, I want to jump in and ask you, the other people on the trip—did others have cameras or movie projectors, and were they using them, and are you in touch with them still, or do you know how to get in touch with them?

BW: I'm not in touch with anybody. I'm sure there must be some of those folks that had cameras, but I don't remember anybody with a movie camera, other than me.

TM: Even still images. Yeah, it would be fun to try to track these people down, and see what's in their archives, and see if we can get those curated. That'd be great.

BW: Well, I can send you the roster I have with all their names and their addresses...

TM: At the time. That would be great. Yes.

BW: ...at that time. So they might be able to do that. I do remember upstream though, which was more of the peaceful part of it, Vasey's Paradise was just gorgeous; we picked up water there. The cavern was just phenomenal. Nautiloid Canyon was really a special place, too. We camped there. That was a pretty cool location with the fossils that you see up there. So all of that stuff is pretty cool. I don't remember if we stopped at Nankoweap and hiked up to the granary. I've done that multiple times. But Kwagunt was, even though it's only a class-five, was a pretty exciting rapid at that flow in the canoe. Just big waves and really fast and everything. As I remember it, we camped two days there. We did a layover day there if I remember correctly.

TM: Nice. Yeah, I want to go back to President Harding for a minute, just to catch this on tape. There's a giant rock in the middle of the river. There's a clear route—at the time, it was a clear route to the right or the left, the left being wider around the rock. So Les's choice was to go right over the rock instead of

the more prudent choice off to the side. I get that. So, okay. This is all just excellent learning curve stuff here.

BW: It is (*laughs*). And it certainly taught me. When you know a river, and you know you're pretty secure—there is a road along the side or a railroad track or whatever, you've done a river—to me, you can always do things a little more in an adventuresome sense. But when you're out in the middle of no place the effect of an accident or some sort of a problem is pretty significant. So I always personally try to be a little bit more cautious in terms of how I would do a river in those types of conditions.

TM: Another question you just reminded me to ask you: did you see any other trips on the water?

BW: That trip, what I remember is, we did not see anybody else the entire trip up close, except we went the wrong canyon. We went up Garnet or Granite Canyon instead of up Elves Chasm.

TM: Oh (*laughs*). What did you find up Garnet?

BW: (*laughs*) Well, it wasn't anywhere near as exciting as what I've seen at Elves Chasm.

TM: No. And did somebody pass you then, as you...?

BW: There was a big boat that did go by, as I did remember. A group. Yeah, I just remember it being a huge raft, as I remember. But we never saw them on the river, never saw them again.

TM: Right. And this was common for November pre-1995, is November, December, January, you would see one or two other trips on the water, and that's it. Yeah, okay.

BW: Yeah.

TM: Alright. Okay, good. So as far as the water is concerned in Grand Canyon, there's a great learning curve that you guys are going through with some pretty good water that you deal with but then there's miles and miles and miles of flat water and stunningly amazing scenery. But you're heading toward the beginning of the Upper Granite Gorge, where the river then takes a form more like Westwater Canyon of very narrow, very fast, sort of from Hance down Sockdolager, Grapevine. You pass Phantom Ranch, Horn Creek, the typical run down there for Granite and Hermit and Crystal. Kwagunt's good. So down below you go to past the Little Colorado River and down past Lava Chua, and then off to Tanner and Unkar. That entire section above the Granite Gorge, did all that run fairly well for you guys, then?

BW: Everything went well. Yeah, no real problems at all as I remember it, until we—continuing on down. But yes, all of a sudden you're starting to build up, and then you get down to Hance and you have Sockdolager and Grapevine. I can tell you my experience at Hance.

TM: Please.

BW: At that very high flow, in looking at the rapid it's huge, and it's huge across it. The right side seemed like no way you could do that. So for me, what I decided is the left side was the way to go. Basically, you had to come down through—even at that high flow—some rocks, and then you had to make a move to the right and then down through big wave trains and on down to the bottom. So this was, to me, the first super-big, big rapid. By the way, we hit... I don't know, it seems on all my trips, you hit huge winds from Little Colorado down for a ways.

TM: Yeah.

BW: We hit those big winds (*laughs*).

TM: So how did you handle the winds in the canoe?

BW: Well, you sort of hunker down and do the best you can. I usually will try to keep my bow just a little big on the lee side of the wind, and then I keep pushing against it and just kind of keep going. But it can be very frustrating. I think any canoer will say that, is wind is very difficult in a canoe. Sometimes you just paddle backwards. But you know, you keep working it and you eventually make progress. You try to stay in the current, also, because the back eddies, again, as I mentioned earlier, are so huge. We used to kid around, "We should just name the back eddies instead of naming the rapids."

TM: (*laughs*) Yeah.

BW: But you know, if you can try to stay in the current, that's at least going to help you a little bit.

TM: That's right.

BW: So come to Hance. We scouted from the left bank, spent quite a bit of time doing that. It's huge. Basically, what I—and I even wrote this in my journal, which you have a copy of—I learned a lot at that rapid, I think, because if I worried about the sound... That's one thing I actually want to say before I go there. The sound of the rapids in the Grand Canyon, it's not like it's this little, "Oh there's a rapid ahead." It's like (*sound effect*)—it's this thunderous, low pitch. You can just tell, "Oh my gosh, this is a huge rapid." And then when you're scouting this, if you look at what you could potentially get into across the whole rapid, it can freak you out. Where's most of the noise coming from? You can kind of lose your composure, especially in a canoe. So what I found to do though, was to say, "Well, you know, I'm not going to be over there. There's no way I can even be there." And I'm one in canoeing to say, well, this is Plan A, but what's Plan B and C? You don't want to block off areas where you might end up, even though you may not want to. But still in that rapid, you're going to be in a small area on the left side. So I would just focus in on those areas and say what do I need to do to kind of get through that? So down I came. I made the move to the right, made the route back down along the side of the stuff that's on the left. Came through some huge waves and came out fine at the bottom upright.

TM: Nice. And Les and Spiros?

BW: That I know and remember, yes. I'm not seeing that they tipped over in any of those rapids at this point in time.

TM: Nice. That's a real confidence builder when that happens 'cause...

BW: It was.

TM: ...you've got a plan, you've got to try to stick to your plan. You've got to deal with what's thrown to you on the way, and either you make it or you don't. That's good.

BW: Yeah. And you have some confidence that you can self-rescue, or with a kayak if you need it, or rafts you can get help if you need it. By this time, we were starting to build some confidence in some of

this. There's always Crystal down below. There's always Lava down below, but you know, you just keep your focus and just keep saying, "I'm going to do okay here."

TM: How was your trip doing as a team?

BW: I think really good. It was a good group. By the way, I didn't mention this. We only had one woman on the trip. It just turned out that way. And she was great. She and Ned were together. Her name was Pam Curella. Not Cruella like the *101 Dalmatians*. She was a great sport and really nice to have on the trip, really fine person. She was with Ned. Ned by the way, had his raft. He liked to go vertical with his raft. He'd have basically his little rowing compartment in the middle, and then he'd have these two canyons, these big, huge, towering piles of gear in front of him and in back of him. But they were all competent boat people. They were fine. I don't remember any big problems or any tip-overs at all. And I think really a nice thing was, Steve Krest did a great job going down. He had a really nice clean run. He was in my Achilles, the bucket boat, so a lot of bailing. But he was doing really fine also. Usually Chris would be the lead boat, with Ned or Gene next. Steve was usually the last raft, and usually the canoes and the kayak would be towards the last part of it, for most rapids.

TM: Okay. I did want to ask you as well, were you able to stand up in your canoe and scout? Was that something that you did?

BW: Sure.

TM: Yeah? Okay.

BW: Yeah, oh yeah.

TM: That's great!

BW: I could stand up. Yeah, I'd often do that. I mean, I'd stand in the bottom of the boat; I wouldn't get up on the Styrofoam, but I would just stand up and could scout pretty nicely. It was a nice way to stretch, too (*laughs*). So yeah, no problems on that.

TM: Excellent. So below there is Sockdolager and Grapevine.

BW: Sockdolager. I remember Sockdolager. Again, because of the time of year, because you weren't getting much sun in there at that time, it seemed dark all the time in there. But first, what a phenomenal canyon with the Vishnu Schist and the Zoroaster Granite. It's just an amazing spot. Came down, as I remember it, a little bit left of center. Those waves were so huge. I think they were the biggest waves I'd seen at that point in time. It's the type of thing, it was so big that I knew I had to be paddling to get up it so I didn't get up part way and come back down the rapid going upstream. Then, what I also remember was getting past those big waves. I just remember being almost engulfed by those big waves because you were down so low and then all of a sudden you're on the top of the wave, and then you're down in the valley again, back up and down. But you kind of come around the corner a little bit and there's a huge long part of the rapid down below you. It's not like you're through the rapid kind of thing. That was true of Sockdolager and Grapevine both. But it's just like, "Woah, I have a long ways still to go. I got to pay attention here." But what a fun rapid. We camped at that campground in the middle on river left before you go to Grapevine, there's a...

TM: And that camp is Grapevine.

BW: It's called Grapevine.

TM: That's right. Nice. Sandy camp.

BW: We camped there. And then went through Grapevine. Grapevine had a lot of similarities to Sockdolager. I remember we tried to scout it, but boy, you're so far away from Grapevine. We knew those were the two rapids that Powell was not able to portage around. So we took a look, but wasn't much we could do except just go for it. And that we did. Made through fine, and basically came down to Phantom Ranch. Nice little respite.

TM: So by the time you get to Phantom Ranch, you have all the boating skills you need. The rapids behind you are no less challenging than the rapids that are going to be in front of you. Even though we're concerned about Lava Falls, that run on the left is—I don't think it's any worse than Hance, which you've already done. Suddenly, here comes Phantom Ranch, where there's bridges, and people, and mules, and helicopters maybe in and out. What were your thoughts there? How were things going?

BW: I think we were really pretty strong at that point in time as a group. I think we felt pretty good about things. I think it was a nice respite from the river, sending cards out and making phone calls from there, if I remember correctly. What I found is the group would get tense before huge rapid days, and you could just sense it. Lava is just notorious for that. We camped at Fern Canyon, I'm downstream a little too far but it gets at what you're saying, where the morning of the big day, people would be fairly quiet. They'd just kind of go about their business. There wouldn't be a lot of chit-chat going on. People would be noticeably nervous. Then you get through that busy day, big rapids, and people would lighten up and basically you would be enjoying yourself that night in camp. I've had, what, six different trips on the canyon. I've had some really great trips with great group dynamics, and I've had some trips where the group dynamics were maybe a little bit different than that (*laughs*). I think that's pretty normal, especially for private trips. But, you know, we were just pulling this all off on our own and figuring it out as we kind of went down, and I think we did pretty well on everything.

One sort of side story here, Spiros was a pretty independent sort—and I'll tell another story about him downstream—but he had a hard enough time just taking care of his own stuff so he would spend a lot of time. In the morning he'd have something for breakfast, but he'd basically pack. He had the smallest drybag I've ever seen for his stuff. Hardly had anything to pack into it. And Steve was carrying my gear, and Steve's gear, and Spiros' gear. There was days that Steve would just take off from shore and say, "Spiros, we're leaving," and Spiros would throw his bag from the shore out to Steve (*TM and BW laugh*), and he would just grab it in some place and then downstream we'd go. Spiros sometimes wouldn't be in sight, you know, not great. We talked to him about it and said, "Hey, you know, you need to stay close." He'd be here when we needed him, but he'd explore a lot on his own and was kind of an independent sort for sure.

TM: Yeah, okay. But solid enough.

BW: Yep, certainly so.

TM: Yeah, good. Okay. So leaving Phantom behind then, this is going to leave all traces of civilization back behind you guys now for another couple hundred miles. You're on your way. There's still, in this Upper Granite Gorge, a series of rapids one after the other after the other. The next one out of Phantom is Horn Creek, and at 25,000 it's a good flow for a left run at Horn. That ran okay for you guys?

BW: It did. I remember, though, looking at it in the canoe and just going, "Oh my gosh," because there's that...

TM: *(laughs)* It's a big drop.

BW: I know it's not named after the horn at the top, but the wave was—it was such a perfect wave, and curling, and the way it formed at that flow. Oh my gosh, it's such a beautiful, smooth...

TM: It's gorgeous.

BW: ...sort of laminar flow, and then it hits this turbulence with this wave. I remember thinking, "Gosh, is there room to get by on the left of that?" So you go back up, hop in the canoe, come on down, and oh my gosh, it was like a beautiful avenue left of that big horn. Smooth green water coming down through that. Was a beautiful experience that I can still remember right now, and the feel for that, how cool that was coming down that. So that was fine, no real particular problem there. And then...

TM: Granite.

BW: Granite. I think we camped—just quickly checking. I think we did Horn Creek, and then I think we camped above Granite Rapid. Why we camped above a big rapid like Granite, I have no idea, but anyway we did *(laughs)*.

TM: Well, you got to camp somewhere *(laughs)* and that's a nice camp.

BW: Yeah, you got to camp someplace.

TM: Yeah.

BW: So we camped above Granite. Then we had...the next day we were going to go all the way down. I think we went to Bass Camp that next day. So it is a long haul.

TM: That's a very long day. And the rapids are, first up Granite right out the gate, then Hermit, then Crystal, then the Gems: Agate, Sapphire, Turquoise, of course Tuna. It's a long day, but it's only eight miles/nine miles. Well, actually, no. It's more than that from Granite, 10/11/12 miles. But it's a busy 12 miles.

BW: It's a busy 12 miles. And this was my day, me in the canoe. Did I have fun *(laughs)*!

TM: How'd you do?

BW: Well, Granite was huge, of course, and pretty much right of center, down through the big waves. Didn't get into the eddy on the far right side and got through fine. So I did fine there. And then Hermit. So Hermit, I thought, well, maybe I will try to skirt this one a little bit, and see if I can't get out on the front waves that are sort of side-curved at the entrance. And nope, it just took me right down the center *(TM laughs)*. I made it to Hermit, had not tipped over yet, come down. I'm up and down in these waves. They're huge and getting huger. I come up on top of this peak of one wave, and I look at the next wave and say, "Oh my gosh. This is the biggest wave I've seen." I come down into the trough, I paddle up because I know I need to have some forward momentum. I think this is the big wave at the bottom. I come up on top of that and I look ahead of me, and there is the biggest wave *(TM laughs)*. Nope, I

wasn't on the biggest, the next wave was going to be it. Frankly, I think I was awestruck because it was so beautiful and big. I can hardly bend at all now with my knees, but I managed to get my butt on the bottom of the floor even though I was kneeling. I got down so low and braced in so hard. And I come down into the trough ahead of it and start off and I'm saying, "You'd better paddle." I paddled, paddled, and I get up on top of that thing. I'm way up on there, and all of a sudden the wave broke on top of me at that point, even though I'm on top of it. As I remember, it was sort of a wave came in from the side and hit me like wham! Knocked me over. So that was my first swim. I was not going to be turning it back over (*laughs*) doing a roll. I basically hit it and I managed to hold on to everything. It was a pretty phenomenal experience, really. Just taking a quick look at my notes here. I think it's partly that I just was going too slowly. If I had been going a little bit faster, maybe I would have made it. But anyway, hey, this is the Grand Canyon. You know it's going to get you sometime.

TM: Well, it's all good. I mean Hermit is the best rapid to flip in...

BW: It is.

TM: ...just because there's nothing below you but flat-water. And the water is deep, there's no rocks. It has a potential to... Unless you get bumped in the head by some of your gear, it's a good place to take a swim.

BW: It is a good spot to take a swim. It was exhilarating. I mean, in some ways, it was such a rush and such an amazing thing. I self-rescued. I got my boat out on the side, I had my paddle, I was fine, no problems at all. I thought, "Hey I made it 95 miles and I hadn't tipped over." So for me that was quite an accomplishment to get to there.

TM: Indeed.

BW: So, quite the thrill to get to there and to see that beautiful rapid. So then it's Crystal.

TM: And Zee Grant, just a little history here, in 1941, the first sort of what you could call a kayak which was a fol boat, full of inner tubes—they walked. Norm Nevills on that trip refused to let Grant run the rapid, though he thought he could do it. So they had walked around that. Les Jones had walked around a bunch of rapids. So you're right in top, in probably the top five, certainly the top ten of people who are running all the rapids, self-rescuing, getting back in your boat, continuing on, following in the footsteps of Walter Kirschbaum in 1960. So well done!

BW: Well, thank you, except the next rapid I did walk around.

TM: Oh (*laughs*).

BW: But until there—and that is the only rapid I walked was Crystal. But Les ran it (*laughs*).

TM: Okay. How'd he do?

BW: But I appreciate what you said, and I did feel happy that everything I did, but Crystal was more a judgment call for me. I know about lower Crystal, and I knew that that was going to be nasty if you swam that. I saw what I needed to do, which was basically, at that flow, start on the left side, paddle like crazy across to the right, hit the side-curl waves at the top, try to cut through those, and then just skirt the big hole that was in the middle down below that was pretty famous. Even though that rapid had

changed so much every year. I've gone right on it in a raft, I've gone left on it in a raft, I've gone through the middle in a raft. So I looked at that and said, my chance of breaking that wave is zilch, and then it's going to put me right into the middle of that huge wave and there's no way I'm going to survive that huge wave. And then for me, it was just saying, I'm not going want to swim this thing from there down, because that swim is a lot gnarlier and nastier.

TM: Yeah. How did Les run? Did he run right or left?

BW: He just came down. He had his double paddle. Again, he had the capability of going much faster and much harder than I would have been able to. He hit the first wave and flipped and swam the whole thing.

TM: On the right side.

BW: Yep, and he swam the whole thing and came out down below and was fine. He wasn't hurt or anything like that. I basically put in right next to... I just went below that side-curl on the right and just put in right there and then did the rest of the rapid from there down.

TM: So you walked the upper—yeah, probably upper tenth of the rapid?

BW: Yeah. And then just put in and went from there down.

TM: What a good idea.

BW: And then it seemed to be my day. I think it was Sapphire. That one I came down—I came down and somehow I was a little sideways and I hit a huge wave in there. It turned me around, faced me upstream in my canoe, and then I slid down, going upstream, until my bow hit the water that was breaking against it at the bottom and flipped me there. So I flipped there in addition. Then I swam one more time that day, I think just because I was tired. What I have is 23 miles that we were going all the way to Bass Camp. But anyway, so that was—I'd say my worst day, but only in terms of my paddling wasn't great, even though I'd made it through Granite, I made it through Tuna Creek, lower Tuna Creek, Agate, Turquoise, and a number of rapids that were pretty substantive. And again, one other rapid I tipped over, and I came down to Bass Camp.

TM: And well done, meaning, you're getting good at flipping, you're getting good at sorting things out, getting back in the boat and heading on downstream. It's all practice. Nice. Did Les get knocked out as well, or how's he doing? He swam Crystal and...

BW: I don't remember, and I don't have any record of how he did the rest of that day. I wouldn't be surprised that he did okay that day. And again, with that double paddle he had some power and he'd power his way through things.

TM: Nice. Alright. Yeah, that made a difference, I think. As you're saying, you get that momentum going. You get turned around backwards, it may be difficult but if you can keep everything going straight and you got some speed, yeah. But you made it to Bass.

BW: Yep.

TM: Happy crew?

BW: How were we? Everybody was great. I think we were exhilarated. We'd come through a lot. It was a fun day, for sure. We were doing good.

TM: Excellent. Very good. And then?

BW: Well, then we falsely hiked Garnet Creek, which isn't anywhere as spectacular as Elves Chasm, but that's okay. I can say I've done both of those.

TM: (*laughs*) Well, you ran Waltenberg and Waltenberg is a—it's a little easier on the right at higher flows but it's a good little rapid as well.

BW: Yep. Yeah, and I don't remember anything particularly until, anything extraordinary, until we... I don't even really remember Bedrock. I'm sure we ran right. I've run it once left in a raft, which was not a way to go, because the guy who went through first said, "Oh, yeah, you can go..." He pointed, "Yeah, you can go either way" (*TM laughs*). That was an experience.

TM: I bet (*BW laughs*). But no, at 25,000 there's a nice right highway, and Bedrock is like...

BW: Yeah, there is.

TM: ...ho-hum.

BW: Did fine.

TM: (*laughs*) But the left side of Bedrock is a 'Whoa, there be giants'.

BW: Whatever flow that was when I rafted it, it was an experience. Three time's a charm; I finally got out of the wave (*TM laugh*). That recirculated us a bunch. One time, I actually went across, hit Bedrock with the raft, and it bounced me back into the back eddy and I had to go around one more time. So I had to sort of... It's strong enough current to tip you over, too, even in a raft. Anyway, made that. But what I do remember is Dubendorf. Dubendorf was huge. I just remember it was pretty late. We were going to camp at Tapeats. That's when you could camp at Tapeats. We camped at Lower Tapeats. And it was getting close to dark because it had been a long day. It ended up being quite a long day. Came down, went left. It's funny at Dubendorf, because what I remember there's a rock kind of part way down that's a pour-over usually. And even if you think you're going to be fine staying to the right, it'll take you into that hole, regardless of basically where you start. But anyway, I managed to get through all that. But I remember just being in my canoe, and in a trough, and you couldn't see anything except big, huge waves around you. It was just like you were engulfed by the whitewater around you. I remember saying, "Oh my gosh, this is huge, and I'm actually not that comfortable in here because anything here could knock me over. There's holes..." Even though I don't remember as many holes at that flow on that left side, but it's gnarly. But I remember coming down and seeing the back eddy on the left side just below the...down near the end of the rapid and just heading for that and hitting that thing as hard as I could, as fast as I could—which was pretty fast—again, needing to lean so far on a brace, and spinning around in that back eddy, and then sort of taking a deep breath and saying, "Oh my gosh (*laughs*). I made it." It was pretty interesting.

TM: How did Les do?

BW: I don't remember how he did. He did tip over a few more times, I know, but I'm not—and I don't

have it in my notes which ones he might have tipped over in, or not tipped over in. So we go to Tapeats. I've done this now several times, even though usually I've done it a different direction. What I have down—but it's vague in my memory—is hiking up to Thunder River, which is phenomenal, and then continuing on up into Surprise Valley, and then over to Deer Creek, and then down into that, and then basically back on the River Trail back to camp.

TM: That's right. Yeah.

BW: I've done that mostly the other direction, including in some hot weather, which was in spite of six liters of water...

TM: Challenging, yeah.

BW: It's challenging. But did that. I don't know, to just have a day of hiking like that—what is it, 10 or 15 miles or something like that, for that round trip—was just amazing to see all this terrain and everything around there. It was pretty cool. Just such a beautiful area and to have that chance to camp on the river and then do that loop is pretty cool. So we stayed two days there and then basically... I don't have a lot of remembrance at... And then we stopped at Christmas Tree Cave. It's beautiful, and then we saw Deer Creek from down below. Matkatamiba, which is a very special place also. I think a Shakespearean play should happen up there when you get into that little basin up in there.

TM: Yeah. Let's talk about Matcat for a minute with a canoe. Typically the pull-in is a tight eddy on river left and you've got to kind of time it. You've got to sort of race in there with it. Would be no problem to sort of get in there with the canoe, and then pull up, and just pull up on the gravel. And that was that.

BW: Yep. No problem doing that.

TM: Okay. Easy. Alright.

BW: By the way, the moon...I also remarked here, I think this is at Bass Camp also, but the moon was pretty full at that time. And boy, when you're in that section of the canyon, and you have the moon on the cliffs above you, right into you, the lighting is just so spectacular. That is such an amazing canyon. So we're talking mostly about the river, but the side hikes and the scenery—it's just surreal. It's hard to even think that's real out there, when you are looking off into the distance and seeing the moonrise on the cliffs. Pretty phenomenal place.

TM: Absolutely. Yeah, I mean, we could go interview after interview after interview (*laughs*) talking about the hiking and the sunrises and the sunsets. As you mentioned, the rain and the waterfalls on your next trip—it's pretty phenomenal. Alright, let's just stick with the river and the canoeing (*laughs*).

BW: Right. No, I understand.

TM: But you're right. It's day after day, whatever you do there, it's just phenomenal. Yeah.

BW: Yep. Which actually leads me to a philosophical side of this first trip in particular, but I think every time it gets accented—is, I don't see how you can go down the canyon and not have that affect you or change you as a person in whatever way that might be. I mean, it's just such an immense experience and phenomenal opportunity to do that. At that stage, I was really thinking a lot about who I was. I mean, I was in a successful career and all that type of thing by that point in time for sure, but just about

life basically in general. I had a lot of people ask me and say, “Well, boy, wasn’t that trip really physical for you, canoeing the Grand Canyon?” That type of thing. It got me sort of thinking about the fact that we have four sort of components of our lives. You have a physical side, you have an intellectual side, an emotional side, and a spiritual side. It got me also thinking about physics a little bit. I’ve always been interested in astrophysics and those types of things—*The Dancing Wu Li Masters* or the *Tao of Physics* and all of that. I knew that there’s the four forces of nature: there’s electromagnetic, strong force, weak force, and gravity and they’re trying to get a theory of putting all of those forces together. That had been something I had been reading a lot about at the stage I went down the Canyon. I got thinking about the river itself, and it really came to me that there’s really four forces in our life, or four components: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, and if we’re trying to unify those or pay equal attention to all of those, how can you pull those all together? And maybe that’s what our purpose is, is to try to do as best we can at having all of those come together into the grand unification theory, so to speak, of physics, bringing all of those components together equally. Because what I said is, “Well, yeah, it was very physical, but it was intellectual too. It was emotional, it was spiritual, it was all of those things together. And in a way, it was all four of those together.” So I’m not meaning to get sappy here, but to me it was a very amazing growth opportunity for me, in terms of sort of my philosophy of life and things we should focus on while we’re here.

TM: Nice. That is important. Certainly the Grand Canyon has the ability, I think, to be incredibly inspirational. I think the journey itself can talk to us on a DNA level. Where there are small groups, we depend on each other. And yeah, it does unify our life. It rings all those—as you mentioned, the four different aspects there are all firing on full cylinders. It’s pretty neat.

BW: Yeah, I found it fascinating and great. Yep, totally. So we camped at Ledges above Havasu. A little tale to tell about Havasu. Remember it’s wintertime, or November, so not a lot of light. Ledges was... I loved that camp, I don’t know why. I’ve never camped there since. I think one time there was somebody that wanted to camp there, and we let them camp there and we went down a little bit further. But anyway, went into Havasu and did the hike to Mooney Falls, which is a fair piece up the canyon.

TM: About 10 miles, yep.

BW: So, not everybody did that. There was part of our group that did it, and some of the group didn’t. I remember Spiros did it, myself, Les Davis did it, Steve Krest did it, and then we had—I think he was probably in his early twenties, maybe around twenty—Chip Dye, I think was his name, and he was along with us. So probably about half the group went up for this hike all the way up to Mooney Falls, and we went a little bit on the side. It was getting pretty late, and we had that many miles to get back to the river. And what a phenomenal canyon. It was like a jungle at that time, just amazing. I’ve been back since several times, not up to Mooney Falls because that is quite a trudge up there, not easy to find the trail, actually either, all the way but just to see how floods have washed it out at times. It’s a changing environment there in a big way, but when we went it was lush and beautiful and just unbelievable experience. And Mooney Falls was just like, woah, this is phenomenal. So we’re up there, and I don’t remember what time, but we had... Is it 10 miles, you say?

TM: It’s 10 miles one way.

BW: So we had another 10 miles to hike down, and it was pretty late (*laughs*). So we tore on down the canyon. Meanwhile, the other group that did not hike all the way up, they were going to go down to Fern Canyon and set up camp for the night. And that was our night before Lava the next day. So they all

went down to Fern Glen Canyon and camped. Heck, I don't even know if we knew what side of the river it was, or anything about it (*TM laughs*). So we get down to the boats and it's about 4:00/4:30, something like that. We have my raft and the two canoes, and Spiros had disappeared. We had no clue where Spiros was. He was someplace up that canyon, but he hadn't stayed with us, and he had gone off on his independent sort of thing.

TM: So his boat was there, but he wasn't there.

BW: He wasn't there, that's right. (*TM laughs*). Not a good way to run a trip, but you know, Spiros had this independent spirit to him. So we hop on, and it is getting dark. As a matter of fact, it gets pitch black. The raft had a little tiny pen flashlight on it, was about all it had. We were in our canoes—we had these two canoes—and we had not huge rapids to go through, but we had a few rapids.

TM: It's exciting enough with no light. It keeps you alert.

BW: Yeah. With no light. There's National Rapid, there's 164 Mile Rapid, just twos. Fern Glen Canyon Rapid is a two. So nothing too major, but without any light. I remember going through one rapid. And Les actually ended up going first. I would usually go first in the canoe, but he ended up first. I remember I couldn't tell if I was actually facing upstream or downstream. I could see the raft because they had a little pen light on them. I think they were just up above me. But I looked down and I see Les's canoe upside down, no sign of Les. But I could just see it, and it's only because the pen flashlight just had enough light to shine off of that. I remember seeing either I was going downstream, or it was going upstream; I don't know which way was which. You lost all sense of where you were in the river or how you were even faced. I just remember seeing his boat tearing by my boat—I was still upright—and sort of just going, woah. I yelled, "Les is over!" So what we did is we pulled the canoes to the raft. He was fine, got to the raft. Put the canoes—which are pretty long; they're as long as that particular raft—put those across perpendicular to the boat on the front and the back and we had five/six of us on the... Chip got in, just put sunglasses on, because it didn't matter (*TM laughs*), and he just rowed. Steve Krest and I would yell conflicting directions on where to go, not purposefully, but just I just thought we should go this way, he thought we should go that way, and went the rest of the way down to Fern Canyon not really knowing where we were. That's a huge back eddy below the rapid.

TM: And there's also a pretty good pour-over in the middle of that rapid, which at higher water is a little gentler, but still, it can surprise you.

BW: Yep, but we got through it. And then I remember we pulled in because we didn't want to miss camp, you could see the light on the side of the cliffs and in the camp. So we just pulled and pulled and pulled (*TM laughs*), and shifted, and finally got over, but...

TM: To get in this giant eddy, yeah. Huge.

BW: We were probably in two or three feet of water the whole way, felt oars on the bottom (*laughs*). Anyway, we finally got to camp, and I remember being very thankful that they had dinner all set for us.

TM: Where's Spiros? (*laughs*)

BW: And Spiros shows up about an hour or two later.

TM: Wow. Good for him.

BW: Got into camp. That was where we had some group dynamics, because some people were really upset at him for disappearing, understandably so, and others said, "This is Spiros. Who cares." (*laughs*) So we had some dynamics about that, but hey, we made it.

TM: Team had dinner when you got in. Yeah. Nice.

BW: Had dinner there. And then of course, the next day was going to be Lava. I was pretty tired. I slept pretty well (*TM and BW laugh*). I was pretty tired from each day. As I say in my notes, "I wouldn't call this a relaxing trip," meaning it wasn't like going to some beach and sitting on the beach. So there we go; we're down to Lava.

TM: Silence on my side. Then what happened? (*laughs*)

BW: (*laughs*) Well, as I mentioned earlier, it was very quiet that morning. People got up and just kind of did their thing. It was a beautiful day, sun on the upper rim. Fern Glen Canyon was a great camp spot. Basically, we just kind of worked our way down—everybody was pretty quiet, nobody is in a particular hurry—and get down to the rapid. Lava at 25- to 30,000 is huge. We scouted on the right side. I didn't know how I was going to do it in a canoe, because I could see this thing is huge at that flow and there's a lot of spots you don't want to be. I just wasn't really sure how to go about doing it. I think we all went left route because the right was just huge waves, even right of the big hole at the top. That rapid is so unbelievable when you are down at river level scouting it and you're parallel with that huge front hole and just look at the power of that thing. It's just amazing. But right of that there's huge waves, and of course you've got the rock down on the right side. Chris Walker went first, followed by Ned. They make it through fine. Spiros went down on the right side and flipped over backwards on the first wave. He rolled before the third wave, he flipped again, and he did several rolls before he actually got up. Gene and Steve, they ran left and made excellent runs, really, and then I'm next. So I canoed across up above the rapid over to the left side and scouted. I learned a lot (*laughs*) from this rapid, because I think I was not careful enough in my scout to really follow the line of where I needed to be. So I go back up into my boat. I'm just kind of going, okay, here we go. I hop in, I come down, and I can't see anything from my canoe. Not a thing. And you're getting close enough that you can't really be standing up to try to track where you are. I misjudged, and I... Basically, there's a huge hole on the left side near the top, and you're probably familiar with that hole or known about it. So I came down—and actually the movie pictures of me show this—but I came down and I hit right into that hole. The pictures show me basically disappearing, but I come up above on that wave, and then I come back down into the wave (*laughs*) because I didn't have the momentum to get through it. When I came back down to the bottom—again, upstream, coming back down—soon as I hit, it flipped me right over. So that was my fourth and final flip. You know, off I went. That's one time I was not able to hold on to my canoe. I remember actually hitting rocks with my toes, nothing dangerous or damaging in any way, shape, or form. My canoe went downstream, and the rafts were getting that. I held my paddle, and I got out to the left in the hot springs on the left side, which actually are quite nice at that cold time of year, (*TM laughs*) and was just sort of over there. They got my canoe out. It was on the right side, though, and here I am, isolated on the left bank. So here's where Spiros came in handy. Good old Spiros came across and came to me. I hopped on the back of the kayak, sort of held on. He paddled me across to the right side of the river and made it just before Lower Lava Rapid where that cliff is, and got out. Heck, there we were. I think we camped right there, or very close to there, if I remember correctly. Since then, the next time I canoed it in '86, I did not actually do it. I didn't do Crystal or Lava, even though I rowed rafts through those. But I learned how much you have to pay attention to the fine details. The last time I rafted it, we did a left run. It's a subtle little run in there...

TM: It is.

BW: ...but it's a perfect run. If you do the subtle run on that left side it's a great run. It was almost anticlimactic in the raft.

TM: It is. Yeah, it can be dry. It's like, "What happened?"

BW: Yep. It's like, whoop, and you're through it, and then it's like, oh, okay. But again, nothing in my mind, it was just like, woah, that was pretty amazing. So made it through and we had a great night that night. The tension just totally released in the group and everybody was really comfortable. The next day we stayed there; we camped two nights there. I hiked way up on the right side, up through basically lava and the sort of just scree slopes all the way up to the top for some phenomenal views way up above the rapids. I got up to the ridge up above, back when I could do things like that, up towards Vulcan's Throne.

TM: Yeah, you can get up on the Esplanade there and it's a gorgeous view, yeah. Well done.

BW: It was great, and fun to do that type of thing. That was basically that, and there we go. We're on the way back down river.

TM: And a lot of rapids below, which would have looked big on Day One or Day Two—205 Mile, 217—you're sort of very comfortable with things much bigger than those by now so it's just like, off we go.

BW: Yep, totally that. What I always caution people on my trips is, just because we've done all of this doesn't mean there's not serious rapids down below. You've got to be careful. But no problems at all that I remember. We had a nice trip on out, and then...

TM: Below Diamond Creek, though, the Lower Granite Gorge gets into that Westwater Canyon type of journey again, where it's fast, and the eddies are hard, the rapids.. Killer Fang of course at 25,000 everything's going to be covered over, but still there's a good jet of water that goes off to the right shore. You still have to sit up and pay attention to that journey down there.

BW: You do. You do for sure, and especially in a canoe. But I don't remember any troubles. We had a good trip down.

TM: 1984 Lake Mead was full...

BW: It was.

TM: ...and you would have encountered the reservoir effect in western Grand Canyon by Bridge Canyon. And so was it just—you got to get out, so it's a long row. Of course in a canoe it'd be easier than in a raft, I would assume, but it's a long paddle out.

BW: So two things that we did. One: we went to Separation Canyon, got in there and spent the night, and then spent the next day. One thing I remember doing is, some of us hiked up Separation Canyon—of course it's named Separation because on Powell's trip that's where the group split up and the three that were hiking out ultimately didn't make it, or I think a lot of different theories why they didn't make it.

TM: That's right.

BW: But I remember reading in Powell's book—and again, I'd been reading Powell's book as we covered these different sections—that they had stolen from the Native Americans, that they stole some of their squash. This was phenomenal: we hiked up there and we ran into some squash that was growing—vines on the ground and sort of an orange...I don't know what kind of squash it was—and thought, "Oh my gosh, these are squash that are from the tribes that were using..." It was part of their food source. Who knows, maybe this passed through Powell eventually somehow or another. (*laughs*) So I just remember that being quite neat. And then what we did the next day after that night is we basically tied our rafts together and did a flotilla. Had everything as flat as we could and we did the night float out. That was such a phenomenal experience, just trolling on down the canyon. We had one raft set up to row and everything else was just sort of all tied together and went about 26 miles, which has been my experience. We had arranged... In that day and age there was at least somebody who would pick you up and pull you out. So a boat came in 26 miles downstream. I won't remember exactly where that was, but—and then you pulled out...

TM: 240, -50, -60—265-ish, somewhere down there? Yeah, and towed you out.

BW: Yeah, it would have been someplace in there. Yeah, it was pretty near Bat Cave, a little short of that.

TM: That's right. Yeah.

BW: And then he towed us all the way on out. And that's when Pierce Ferry used to be way back in on that side part of Lake Mead. Took us all the way out there and there we were. We were done with our trip.

TM: Nice. What did that trip do for you as far as your boating skill and your personal confidence?

BW: So in terms of boating skill—you know, it was huge water. It was very much a strong sense of accomplishment that I was able to do this. Yeah, I tipped over a few times, but I thought, I made it 95 miles without tipping over at a high flow. I did everything except Crystal. I felt a sense of accomplishment that I'd done that. I think that canyon is just such a phenomenal experience it gave me confidence. I oftentimes, if I get into whatever in professional career, or challenges or whatever, say, "Well, you know, I was able to get down the Grand Canyon in a canoe and face all of that. So I think I should be able to face whatever else it is." I talked a little bit about sort of some of my philosophical thoughts, and I think that's been a real helpful thing for my life. We were sort of a make-up group, and I haven't really ever kept in touch with anybody except for Steve Krest. You know, we're still fast friends. Actually, he and I—he just turned 70; I'm 66—we and another friend that we used to work with just canoed Stillwater. Quite a different river stretch, but that was a great thing. We're going to do something else next spring again. Still active.

As I got family—I have twin boys and two stepdaughters—always we're active with them. Actually, I had a chance to bring nine people in my family down the Canyon, out of a total of—well, we had people walking in and walking out at Phantom, so we had probably 22 total. No, maybe 20 total, but 16 on the river at any one time. But nine of my family were able to go back in 2005. So it's been a real component of our lives. I have twin boys. One is a mechanical engineer, master's degree in mechanical engineering. My other son has Down Syndrome and is just the greatest guy. I didn't take him along the Grand Canyon just because there's a lot of care needed with that, but he loves whitewater rafting. We go, still, every chance we can go. Matter of fact, my one son is organizing a trip just on Deso-Gray. My son Blaine with

Down Syndrome will go on that one. So it's been a real great family aspect to our lives, doing a lot of whitewater boating and that type of thing.

TM: Well, that's an interesting thing you said about, you take canoe through Grand Canyon, it gives you a sense of accomplishment that puts life in perspective, where all the other challenges in life are easily faced. That's very nicely stated.

BW: Yeah. For sure.

TM: Excellent. Bob Wheeler, thank you so much for this wonderful two-part oral history here. As we wrap this up, is there anything else you want to mention?

BW: For anybody, if you can go on the Grand Canyon, go. *(TM and BW laugh)* I mean, what an experience. You don't have to be canoeing it. As I said, it's the river. You just get into the day-to-day, you don't get a lot of news from the outside. Heck, I think the most stressful trip I ever had on the Canyon was whether or not, 'cause the park might close down, if our four people would be able to come in that were coming on into the river because the park might be closed down.

TM: Government shutdown.

BW: Yep. That might be a little stressful, and that type of thing. But it's such an experience to have, and it's all components of it. Go do it. It's pretty amazing.

TM: Nice. Well Bob, thank you so much for this oral history. It's been really fun. Today is June 1st, 2018. This is Part 2, the end of Part 2 interview with Bob Wheeler and my name is Tom Martin. Hold the line, Bob. I'm just going to turn this machine off.