

Interviewee: Curt Sauer (CS)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Curt Sauer recounts growing up and first ranger job at Grand Canyon in 1972

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TM: Today is September 4th, 2020. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Curt Sauer. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, Curt. How are you?

CS: Morning, Tom. I'm doing pretty well.

TM: Good. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this oral history program. What year were you born?

CS: 1950.

TM: And where were you born?

CS: Fairbanks, Alaska.

TM: What were your folks doing in Fairbanks?

CS: My father was in the Air Force and just happened to be stationed in Fairbanks when it was time for me to born.

TM: How did your dad meet your mom?

CS: I don't know. He was assigned to coastal patrol in World War II on the Oregon coast. Mom was from Roseburg, Oregon. Not exactly sure how they met but I'm assuming it was some place close to Roseburg, Oregon.

TM: Fun. What year did they get married? Do you remember?

CS: No. Those kinds of details you'd have to talk to my sister-in-law who's the family historian.

TM: Okay. Did you have any older brothers and sisters or were you the first child?

CS: No, I was the fourth and last child. My brother Ricky, Rick Sauer, not Ricky, Richard L. Sauer, named after my dad, was five years older than me. So he was born in '45. My oldest sister, Sandra, I believe was born in '44. She died when she was eight years old. I don't really remember much of her except for in pictures. Then my third sibling, my younger sister, is Diane and she was born in '46.

TM: Okay, nice. Fairbanks. Did you guys stay in Fairbanks or did your father travel with the Air Force much more?

CS: We moved every two to three years throughout his career. We left Alaska about a year after I was born. Went back to Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, Colorado. Moved around. I was in Newfoundland for first, second, and third grade. I was in Massachusetts for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, South Hadley Falls. Was in Madrid, Spain, for seventh and eighth grade.

TM: Hang on a second. I'm like, wait a minute. What do you remember about Newfoundland?

CS: Well, first, second, and third grade. So six, seven, and eight, right? Here's what I remember about Newfoundland. In the winters you ice-skated and played hockey. In the summers you went fishing. In the winters in Newfoundland there was a large lake close to where we lived. The ice was about two to three feet thick, as I recall. And the club, probably an officer's club, would get together in the winter. The fathers would get ahold of some sort of a tractor that had a plow on the front of it and they would plow the snow off the ice. It was 10/12-foot-wide pathways and if you skated the whole thing, you skated a couple of miles. It was full of loops. When you got tired of skating, you went back to the warming hut and had some hot chocolate and something to eat. So we'd spend hours out there.

TM: Did you get good at hockey? Did you like hockey?

CS: I wouldn't say I got good by today's standards. We were a bunch of rank amateurs, backyard. We lived in a housing complex and there was a big, huge field behind where we lived, so that was good. Part of it would get flooded in water about two or three inches thick and that was our at-home hockey rink.

TM: Nice.

CS: Yeah. So we just played hockey. We didn't have any helmets. We didn't have any facemasks. We didn't have any hockey gloves, that's for sure.

TM: Lots of bruised hands and shins, I can see there. Did you learn to swim there in the summer?

CS: Well, you learned to get in the water and get out real quick.

TM: Okay, never mind.

CS: There wasn't much swimming cause the lakes were just too cold. I don't really remember where I learned to swim. Must have been in Aurora. After Spain we moved back to Aurora, Colorado. My dad was from Boulder. He retired in Aurora. That would have been in 1963/'64.

TM: So take me to Spain for a little bit. What was Madrid like?

CS: Madrid was fun. We lived in...I would say it was a well-to-do part of Madrid and that's just based on the fact that all of the houses had walls built around them and the neighbor three doors down had a backyard swimming pool. So I assumed, at the time, that they must have had some money. It was an interesting time. I was in seventh grade, 13, '63. My passion was baseball. I drew a target on the stucco wall out on the street and then I crossed to the other side of the street and used the curve as a pitching mound. When my dad came home he wasn't too happy. *(TM laughing)* But it stayed up. We would be

bused on to Torrejón Air Force Base to go to school and then we'd be bused back. So during the school year I played baseball and I was good at math. That's about all I remember about school. We did take an all-star baseball trip in eighth grade, I guess it was. We went to Paris to play against the American teams. They had an all-star team there. I got to see the Eiffel Tower and I mean literally see it. We didn't get out of the bus. After the game we headed up... I guess we went to Belgium and played there. Then we went to Wiesbaden, Germany and played several games there. Then we came home.

TM: That must have been a long bus ride.

CS: That was nice. There are all kind of close-together countries over there.

TM: Couple days, maybe.

CS: It was probably about four days/five days. Staying in quarters on bases. There's two vivid memories I have in Spain. Three, actually. One was, I was in Spain when President Kennedy was assassinated. We got off the bus from school, as I recall, and had to walk about a half mile to the house. I just remember all of the Spanish people, when you walked by they all got quiet and they just looked at you like, "We're really sorry." They kind of liked President Kennedy. So that was one.

The other one: I frequently would go to bullfights by myself. My dad took the family to bullfights. It wasn't that hard to get there by the trolley. The trolley, as I recall at the time, cost one peseta, which is about one penny. I was good enough speaking Spanish—I'm not fluent in Spanish, by any means, certainly not now—but I was able to talk enough to figure out which trolley to get on as a 14-year-old in Spain and went to the bullfights, which at the time I thought were quite majestic, very ornate, very colorful. Picadors just as brave as the matadors.

It was a generally different culture. On trash day, at the front of the house, you put your trashcans out. The garbage man would come by in his mule or burro pulled wagons and he would dump all your trash in his wagon. Then they'd transport it not too far, cause I went down to the dump a couple of different times. It was just an open field with mounds and mounds and mounds of trash. Lots of birds and lots of very poor people picking through the trash looking through stuff for stuff that they could use. We lived in what I would call an affluent neighborhood. It wasn't very far away from the very poor and the gypsies, who were all very nice. Very nice. So, sort of a simple life for a 13/14-year-old.

TM: I think that would be an incredible education.

CS: I probably learned to swim in Spain, now that I think about it. You're bringing back the memories. Cause I would go down to this friend's house that had a pool. I remember coughing and gagging, and I remember him telling me, "When you come up, blow out through your nose and that won't happen." So from there during the summers I routinely went up to the area pool, which you could bike ride to, and took about five to ten minutes, and swam up there. I remember jumping off of the high diving boards. Not diving, but jumping off of high diving boards. I guess I learned to swim in Spain now that I think about it.

TM: Nice. Did you guys take vacations at that time? Did you travel Europe at all while you were there?

CS: My dad and my mom and my sister and my brother, mostly my mom, dad, and sister Diane travelled quite a bit. Well, "traveled." They'd go down to Barcelona for the weekend, the beach, some other

towns. I stayed home because they traveled in the summer and it was time to play baseball. So I missed out on seeing a lot of the art. There was one museum in Madrid. I'm trying to remember the name of it. Starts with a "P". So I did see some art, but as far as getting out in the country to go to other towns or go the ocean, the Mediterranean, I didn't go.

I spent a lot of time in the winters in the Pyrenees skiing. Dad was an avid downhill skier. We'd get on a bus and go up and stay a night or two up in the Pyrenees and ski for two or three days and then come home. Other than the Pyrenees and the museum and the bullfights, I don't really recall. Oh, and I learned to... Dad was a member of the rod and gun club. That was when I got my first 16-gauge shotgun and learned to shoot trap and skeet. Occasionally we would go dove hunting. Dove hunting involved a bunch of different guys in different cars. There are some memories coming back. You were responsible for getting to a certain village on your own. So we'd leave late after he got off work and drive almost all the way there and stop and camp. We left the next morning early and get to the village. This rod and gun club would hire the local villagers to start about two miles away from you in a long band of men and boys. Their job was to flush all the quail and the doves out of the brush so that they would fly towards you. Then as they came over you would shoot at these birds. I remember doves being one of the hardest things to hit with a shotgun because of their flight patterns. In fact, it probably took me three different hunting trips before I actually got a dove. But I got really good with a shotgun, which helped me out later when I became a ranger. I was very familiar with shotguns and most of the rangers weren't. So on the range, when we had to qualify, it was never a problem. So that's my recollection of Spain. As far as traveling, I really didn't see too much as a tourist except for bullfights.

TM: Interesting. And then back to Aurora. Did you finish high school there in Colorado?

CS: I graduated from William C. Hinkley High School in Aurora, 1968.

TM: Had your bigger brother and bigger sister gone on to college? Was that something expected of you?

CS: I was the first one in my family to go to college. When I left Spain, my sister was...I think she was a senior. No, she must have been a junior. When we left Spain, my brother had graduated from high school and he decided that he would join the Army when we got home. My sister stayed in Spain for another year of what they called "finishing school." So she didn't go to an American high school for her senior year. She went to a finishing school some place in Spain, might even have been France, I don't know, for a year. Then she came home, lived at home for a while. My brother was in the Army, was in the infantry. He had a very distinguished career, actually.

TM: Did your dad have a problem with him going in the Army, your dad being in the Air Force?

CS: No. He didn't. He could go in the Army as long as he was successful. Dad retired as a lieutenant colonel and thought the military was an honorable profession. No, he never expressed any regret that my brother went in the Army. So Rick went in the Army, came out of boot camp as a second lieutenant, somehow or another. Ended up going to Nam his first tour. Was wounded in a hellacious battle. At the time my dad was flying for United Airlines. After he retired he had over 10,000 hours of time in transport aircraft in the military so he went to work for United. United took my mom and dad and I on a plane, first class, flew us to Tripler, Hawaii. Flew us to Tripler Hospital. I don't know what town it's in...Oahu, wherever. Put us up. So we were able to go over and see my brother recover. He recovered over there for probably two weeks and then was shipped back to Aurora, Fitzsimons Army Hospital. In six months recovering from his wounds, he told the Army that he would reenlist if they would train him

to be a helicopter pilot cause he wanted to go back and protect the infantry on the ground. He went back and got shot down seven times and rescued seven times. Came home after that and continued on for a 20-year career and then had about 20 years flying for Continental, I guess, before he was supposed to retire at 65.

TM: Did you ever fly with your father on military transport planes when he was flying?

CS: Is the question, "Did I ever fly?"

TM: Yeah. Did you ever get a chance to fly with your dad as he was doing his transport work?

CS: No, no chance to fly with him on military transport. However, he was a pilot. So when we were still in Massachusetts... That would have been no later than sixth grade, no wait a minute. Yeah, no later than sixth grade. Probably fifth grade. So that's eleven, when I was eleven. Sometime in there. ...he rented a Beaver airplane on wheels. We put Mom and Dad, three kids and a family dog in this Beaver and flew from South Hadley Falls, Massachusetts cross-country and up into the Yukon where he met up with another buddy who was also a pilot. So, I don't know, it took us days to travel there. I guess he got the bug when he was up there, so when he retired from the Air Force, in the summers when I was a sophomore, junior, and senior in high school we would leave late June from Aurora and fly up to Teslin, which is just outside of Whitehorse in the Yukon.

TM: Outside of Whitehorse, okay.

CS: He and his buddy had what they called a hunting and fishing camp, fly-in. We would fly people around. There weren't that many customers so he ended up getting contracts with various companies to fly into mines that were out in the wilderness and have dirt strips. We would fly into the mining camp and pick up the ore samples to take them back to be assayed from the placer mine. Or he would fly around in his plane with a location beacon looking for weather balloons for the government. I believe it was the U.S. government, but it might have been Canadian government. After the weather balloons came back down, they had to be located in the brush/bush.

TM: Oh, interesting.

CS: So he'd locate them and then they would get a helicopter and land at the closest accessible place. So I was up flying into lakes and onto dirt strips as a fifth and sixth grader, if I have that right. No, that would have been ten/eleven/twelve. Sophomore, junior and senior year in high school.

TM: Let's back up a minute. You mentioned the Beaver. Was that one of these giant, kind of amphibian, twin-engine things?

CS: No, it's a single-engine prop.

TM: Alright. In the summers, you mentioned your dad would leave in late June and head up to the Yukon. Would he rent a plane or did he have his own plane?

CS: Well, they had this company. And in Canada, at the time, might still be that way, if you weren't Canadian you couldn't own a majority interest in the company. So there was a third partner, who I never met, who owned the planes. I could go on and on about that and the experiences up there.

TM: Well, just a little bit. [laughs] So would he keep the planes, then, down in Colorado in the winter, and then fly them back up for the season in the summer?

CS: No. We flew up commercially to Whitehorse. The planes were over-wintered there.

TM: Were you interested in flying? Did you fly?

CS: Well, that was one of my memories I was going to mention. We were flying quite a bit, and he said, "So, you want to learn to fly?" I said, "Not really. I'd rather be on the ground, hiking." He said, "Okay, well, I'll teach you to fly in the air." So when we were going cross-country on flights, I would fly the plane. Of course, he was sitting the pilot seat; I was sitting in the co-pilot seat. He never went to sleep while I was flying, I can guarantee you that. But when it came time to land, he never taught me to land. He would have. He would have taught me how to fly but I chose not to which I think mystified him cause he loved to fly.

TM: Did he teach your elder brother? Did he teach Rick how to fly?

CS: No. I don't think so.

TM: What about your sister?

CS: No. [laughs] I don't know how many times she would actually get in the plane voluntarily. So we'd spend short, two-month period-of-time, July and August. Again, Canadian people are some of the nicest people I've ever met. Just polite folks. Dad had to be out of town one time for my 16th birthday I guess it was, maybe 17th, probably 16th birthday. It was ten o'clock, time for coffee, and I walked up from the camp into the town, which was about a mile away, sat down in the café and out came a birthday cake.

They said, "Your dad ordered this. Happy birthday." So I lugged the whole cake, less one piece, back to the camp, which was pretty nice. It was on a lake. It was a log cabin, but a nice log cabin that we rented from somebody that had a summer home. Dad became good friends with the locals, most of whom were natives, First Nations people. Maggie, an older lady, kind of adopted Dad. He went out of his way to make sure that she and her two sons—must have been grandchildren, actually, now that I think about it—had enough to eat and enough to buy some clothes. In exchange she sort of adopted him. I still have the gun case that she made for him out of moose-hide and beaded as a gift to him for what he did. So he was well-respected.

There was another time that he was out of town and I had nothing to do and apparently fell in with the wrong group of people. I'm walking home, quote, "late at night"—in the summer, late at night is ten thirty—and a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer drove by and stopped and said, "Hop in. I'll give you a ride." I think I said, "No, that's okay. I'll walk." He said, "Hop in. I'll give you a ride." [laughs] As he was giving me a ride back to town, he said, "You're not hanging out with the people that your father would want you to be hanging out with. I want you to stop hanging out with them." "Yes sir, I will." Sure enough, when my dad got back, at the end of the day he sat me down and said, "I understand the constable so-and-so gave you a ride home." "Yes sir, he did." "Okay, do I need to say anything else?" "No sir." So I was well looked after even when Dad wasn't around. Everybody knew who I was. I was Dick's son. We fished a lot, pulled into little inlets in the lake that looked like nobody'd ever been in them.

TM: What kind of boat did you guys have?

CS: Oh, it was a little 16' outboard. Speaking of swimming, that's a vivid recommendation. If you wanted a bath you jumped in the lake, got wet, climbed out, soaped up, jumped back in the lake, climbed out as quick as you could, and waited about half an hour for the headache to go away from the water.

TM: Well, you had good training in that from Newfoundland. [laughs]

CS: Yup. Learned to drive a bulldozer there. I think it was a small little Caterpillar bulldozer. Let's see, what else can I recall here? For my 18th birthday we were over in Saskatchewan someplace flying ore samples and staying in a two-story apartment building. I got home and was doing something and Dad came in and said, "Well, happy birthday, son, you're 18." "Great, let's celebrate my birthday." He said, "Okay," and his partner walked in with a case of beer and a bottle of Bourbon. [TM laughs] The next morning I woke up draped over a log in the forest. [laughs] Made my way back to the apartment house. All the doors were locked so I climbed up the downspout to get to the roof on the first floor so I could reach the windows to get in to where we lived. As I pushed open the window there were two rifles pointed at me. Dad said, "Don't ever try to come through the window." Those were some different days.

TM: Yeah. Were you thinking about college then? Were there some things about further education that were attracting you?

CS: Well, I guess I would say it wasn't any pressure, but I would say that it was expected that I would go to college. Of course, like so many other young boys, my dream was to be a professional baseball player. Come junior year, when I still hadn't made varsity, I kind of figured out I wasn't good enough. So in my senior year I quit playing ball and got a job so I could make some money to pay for college.

TM: What did you do?

CS: Well, let's see. My first job was working at Burger King. That lasted for a while. Then a couple of buddies that also worked there decided we needed a raise, 10 cents an hour. So two of them went to the manager and said, "We want raises, 10 cents an hour." He said, "You're not getting a raise." They said, "Okay. We quit." He said, "Okay. See ya'." So I came in to work. He said, "So, you want a raise, too?" I said, "No, I'm going to keep working here but it would be nice if I could get a nickel an hour more." He said, "You know, if you keep working here, you can work here for a nickel more an hour."

I was a kennel boy at Dr. Sunshine for two years. Then I drove a pizza delivery truck. Made arrangements with the manager there that I would work on Friday nights cause my girlfriend was a pom-pom girl and she was always busy on Friday nights with football games or basketball games. Saturdays usually weren't any games so she had Saturdays off. So I had Saturdays off. I was never too interested in football anyway. Never played football until ninth grade, American football. Came back from Spain and decided I'd go play football. I knew absolutely nothing about football, I knew absolutely nothing about basketball. In ninth grade I made junior varsity. Yay! Then tenth grade it was time to change schools and go to high school. I just decided, since I didn't know anybody that I wasn't going to out for football. So I never played football and certainly never played basketball.

TM: But it sounds like you were good at putting objects on targets.

CS: Putting objects on what?

TM: Targets.

CS: [laughs] Yeah. So that was Spain. That was summers during high school up in the Yukon. I think from there I decided that I wanted to be a forest ranger, just because of experiences. So I went to college. Started at Northeastern Junior College in Sterling, Colorado in the fall of 1968. That was a farming town. Lived in a dorm for a quarter. Met a fellow by the name of Larry Van Slyke in the surveying class. I haven't talked to him yet to see if he'd be willing to talk with you, but if you're going to do some oral histories on people that worked in Grand Canyon I highly recommend you interview Larry. I'll get permission from him to give you his contact information.

TM: That'd be great. Thank you.

CS: Larry was a seasonal ranger at the time at Rocky Mountain National Park.

TM: Was he teaching the class?

CS: No. He was a student and he hadn't gotten a college degree. I guess he was about four years older than me, something like that. There's the GS-025 Series for park ranger and the GS-026 for park technician. He was a park technician. At the time, you couldn't be a park ranger unless you had a college degree. So he decided he'd go to college. Walked in, sat down, just happened to sit down next to Larry in the surveying class and struck up a conversation. We became best friends, and mentor, and at that time I was still thinking about being a forest ranger, United States Forest Service. He said, "Well, why don't you be a park ranger?" So that summer I rode my bike from Aurora up to Estes Park...

TM: Wait. Stop. Aurora to Estes Park. How long is that ride?

CS: About 65 miles.

TM: You manage that in a day? One-speed bicycle?

CS: It was 10-speed Schwinn.

TM: Ten-speed. Alright.

CS: Yeah. Ten-speed Schwinn with Converse sneakers, cut-off shorts, and shirt, and a pint water bottle.

TM: Oh boy. Lots of water there, huh? [laughs]

CS: I was so dehydrated when I got up there. My butt was sore. I trained for that. My high school biology teacher was a bicycle enthusiast, Mr. Wacholz. He and his wife were avid bicyclists. So Tim, the across-the-street neighbor who was like three years younger than me, and I decided that we were going to ride to Estes Park and we needed to train. Three days before the trip was scheduled his parents decided that he was too young to ride, so I decided to make the trip myself.

TM: Wow. Not only you're fighting the distance, but you're fighting the altitude.

CS: Yeah. Estes, what's that probably 9,000 feet. Denver's 5,200 feet. So yeah, about 3,000-foot elevation gain. Spent the night with Larry and the next day had a wonderful ride downhill to Lyons. Then my high school girlfriend picked me up and drove home. So I didn't ride, it wasn't a round trip. Riding up...I forget which river it was...

TM: The Saint Vrain or the Poudre?

CS: Either Saint Vrain, Poudre, or Big Thompson Canyon. I can't remember how I went.

TM: Yeah, Big Thompson, okay.

CS: Frequent stops to get water and exhaustion. So anyway, I rode up, stayed the night with Larry. I might be getting the years convoluted here, but anyway.

TM: So this is '68. You meet Larry and he says "Well, why don't you become an NPS ranger?" He clearly liked you enough to invite you up there.

CS: Right. So whatever summer it was. Would have been the following summer I think I got a job in '69 as a recreation technician for the Bureau of Land Management out of Pueblo, Colorado. On my times off I'd either go back home to Aurora or go up and do some hiking up in Rocky Mountain. Larry was working at the time as a Longs Peak ranger so I'd go out on patrol with him. Summited Longs Peak on the east face several different times on his patrols.

TM: Did you get into climbing then?

CS: Larry taught me how to climb. I would say that I never got above 5.4 route comfortably. Then, must have been about 1970, Larry and I both transferred over to Colorado State University, which at the time was the ranger program. I was still in forestry, College of Forestry. Let me think for a minute here, it must have 1971.

TM: You know, Curt, I'm going to ask you, if you wouldn't mind, please, to tell me a little bit about the recreation technician job with the BLM out of Pueblo that summer. What did they have you doing?

CS: Going to the various campgrounds and cleaning toilets, and cleaning campfire pits, and talking to people. Cleaning the fire engine. [laughs] It was basically a maintenance job, but they didn't call you a maintenance worker. Did that, went back to school. I'm just estimating it was some place around '71 or '72, 1971/'72 that Larry and I were rooming together going to school. It was Easter break/spring break and he took off and he went to the Grand Canyon. I took him to Stapleton International Airport in Denver and dropped him off. When it was time for him to come home, I went back and picked him up. We were walking down one of the concourses in Stapleton and he said, "Want a job?" I said, "Sure." He says, "You can have a job at Grand Canyon as a backcountry ranger." I said, "Great!" This was in April. "Great." And this is on a Sunday. "There's only one problem." I said, "What's that?" "You have to be there Wednesday."

TM: Ooh. Well, wait a minute. You're still in school.

CS: Yeah. He had gone to Grand Canyon and visited his former supervisor in the Everglades, Ed Carlson, and Ed had offered him a job. Larry declined cause he wanted to get his college degree. Couldn't drop

out of school, he had six more months or something like that. So I said, "Okay." Sunday night I packed up all my stuff. Monday morning I went in, did the paperwork to drop out of school. Drove home to Aurora in what I called "my" 1964 Rambler, actually owned by my father.

TM: Two-door?

CS: No, it's four-door. Reclining seats. Said, "I dropped out of college." My parents were like, "You what?" Said, "I got a job working at Grand Canyon National Park." "Well, what are you going to do about college." I said, "Well, it's for six months and then I'll just go back to school." "Okay. We don't really approve of this, but drive safely."

So I drove down to Grand Canyon and showed up Wednesday morning in Ed Carlson's office. To show you how things were different then, walked in and he said, "Here's your ticket book. Here's your radio. Here's a copy of the Code of Federal Regulations. I want you to read those. Here's your handcuffs. Here's your Smith & Wesson revolver. We're going to go out to the range this afternoon and I'll teach you how to shoot." I said, "Oh, okay." [laughs]

So we go to his house, have lunch. When he finished his lunch, we go out to the range. I qualified the first time, qualified with a shotgun. He said, "You're not going to have any problems." He said, "Now tomorrow we're going to hook you up with a couple of wranglers and they're going to teach you how to pack mules." I'd ridden a little bit in high school cause my girlfriend had horses. I was familiar with trail riding, but I'd never packed. A couple of old-timer wranglers that had lived in Arizona all their life and were working for the Park Service as wranglers...

TM: Do you remember their names?

CS: I don't remember their names. I remember the mules' names.

TM: What were the mules' names?

CS: Well, they gave me Jack and Parrot. Jack was an old army mule, pulling caissons throughout his army career. So he must have been 18 years old or so. Parrot was a youngster. She was only about eight/nine years old. They taught me how to load panniers, and how to secure stuff, and a couple of different hitches for two days. Then they told me, "Okay, you need to go and buy all the stuff you need for the next 10 days cause you're going to go to your ranger station tomorrow and Stan is going to take you." Stan—it'll come to me. I don't remember his last name. He was probably a 35-year-old Arizona cowboy with a big, bushy mustache. Showed up at the barn at six o'clock in the morning with all my food. The ranger station that I was going to it had beds, it had sleeping bags. It had a full kitchen with propane-fired stoves and an old diesel engine for electricity. So we loaded up and we rode down Kaibab Trail seven miles to the river. Stopped at Phantom Ranch for lunch, maybe an hour, and then we rode seven miles towards the North Rim up the North Rim Trail to a place called Cottonwood. Cottonwood Campground was there and that was my station. Moved everything in, got the lay of the land right around the ranger station, which wasn't very far from the Bright Angel Creek, and went to bed.

The next morning I hear Stan out rustling around in the kitchen about five thirty in the morning. I got up, went out and said, "What's going on?" He said, "I'm heading out. I'm going to get out before it gets hot." "You leaving?" [laughs] I'm 21 years old, I'm in the bottom of the Grand Canyon with Ted and Parrot at

eight o'clock in the morning. Stan's long gone back down the trail to go to the South Rim. That was the beginning of my Park Service career.

TM: So Stan split out with the mules and there you were.

CS: Well, I kept Ted and Parrot. They stayed with me. He took the other mules that he had with him.

TM: He took Jack?

CS: No, Jack was my riding mule and Parrot was my... So Jack and Parrot stayed with me. Stan took a couple of the other mules and left. I don't know what all he had packed in, supplies for the station and supplies for the diesel generator and what not.

TM: Did he kind of orient you on the way in that Roaring Springs is up the way, and this is Phantom Ranch here, some of the people here? Or did he just take you on in and that was that?

CS: No, he gave me a little orientation and reiterated, "The mules will take care of you. When you're coming out, they know where to stop. They know how long to stop. You just ride them." So of course I thought that was silly, but learned further on that that was very correct. Jack and Parrot and I had a great time. And this was April so there weren't a whole lot of hikers coming through. My job was to patrol the area. Keep the campground clean, keep the diesel generator serviced, and go up to Roaring Springs. There was an operator there that ran that intake system.

TM: Who was the operator at Roaring Springs at the time?

CS: You know, I'm not sure exactly who it was in 1972, but I'm pretty sure that it was Bruce Aiken. That name sound familiar?

TM: Absolutely. So Bruce and his wife Mary. They would have been young, like you.

CS: Yep. I'm pretty sure it was Bruce, cause now that I think about it, it had to be. Cause I was only at Cottonwood for that one spring, summer, fall. Wonderful person, incredible artist.

TM: Was he doing his artwork back then, in 1972 when you went up and knocked on the door?

CS: Yes.

TM: Can I ask you some questions about Cottonwood? It's a small little ranger station. Gosh, can you describe that building? It's not that big.

CS: My recollection is you walked in the front door. You walked into the kitchen/living room, which is, I don't know, 14' by 14'? That's just a guess. And my recollection is, off of each side were two bedrooms which each had two cots, two bunks. Well, they weren't bunkbeds. Two beds. They were metal frame, metal springs, and an old-time striped mattress on each one. All of the legs had tin cans. The legs were stuck into tin cans and the tins cans had about half an inch of oil in them so that if a scorpion climbed up the tin can to get to the leg, he would have to go down into the can and get stuck in the oil. That was your scorpion prevention system. Many rattlesnakes.

TM: Did you have a radio?

CS: Yeah. I had a radio and I had a phone. I had a phone that connected to park dispatch. So if I needed anything all I had to do was pick up the phone, or I could call dispatch on the radio.

TM: This is April, 1972. Was there anybody camping in the campground then or were the hikers just heading on through to Phantom? Or were they stopping at Cottonwood on a multi-day crossing?

CS: Yeah. They were stopping. There were very few people doing cross-canyon hikes in a day. Seemed like you either...you left the North Rim, you came to Cottonwood and stayed, then you went to Phantom, then you went out. Or...

TM: Or over to Indian Gardens and...

CS: Yeah. Indians Gardens, to Phantom, to Cottonwood, to North Rim. So I just got to explore the area.

TM: That's a neat area to explore there.

CS: Yeah. Do you know about Rainbow Falls?

TM: No.

CS: [laughs] About a mile down towards Phantom, mile/mile and a half, there's a place called Rainbow Falls. It's a travertine waterfall that's about—my recollection is it's about 60 feet tall.

TM: So I'm thinking about Ribbon Falls.

CS: Yeah, you're right. Ribbon Falls.

TM: Okay. I was thinking, wait a minute, maybe it's got another name and it's called Rainbow Falls.

CS: Well, my brain is calling it Rainbow Falls.

TM: [laughs] No worries. That's a nice name for it.

CS: So there's also...at the time nobody knew about it, but I think it's been discovered, is Upper Ribbon Falls. So I would patrol up there and, of course, there wouldn't be anybody there. Here's an interesting tidbit: on one day, on one patrol, I was halfway up towards Upper Ribbon Falls. Looked over to my right, and there's some I recollect it was probably sandstone, might have been a different formation, but they had little crevices that were about a foot deep. So, I don't know why, but I decided that I'd pull out a film cannister—back in the days when we used film—and I put my name and address and phone number in it and stuck it in one of those crevices thinking that someday somebody would find it and they could call me. Well, of course I no longer live there and that phone number is defunct. But just sort of the weird thing you do when you're out there doing stuff. Another incident at Ribbon Falls: after a heavy rainstorm some hikers came up to the ranger station and were very excited. They said, "We just found a pot. There's a pot stuck in the edge of the wall and half of it's been exposed because of the rains." So I got on the phone and I called the park archeologist, Bob... somebody.

TM: Euler.

CS: Bob Euler. Just a nice, nice man. So I called Bob. How I had known him already I don't really know but I knew to call Bob. So I get Bob on the phone and now I'm all excited. "This is an ancient Indian pot. What do you want me to do?" He said, "Well, just take a spoon and go down and very carefully excavate it out of the wall and I'll send a helicopter in tomorrow and we'll pick it up." I thought, not only did I just get dropped off a couple weeks ago, now I'm supposed to go excavate this ancient pot? [TM laughs] These things are rare. They're valuable. They're treasures. "Yeah, just go excavate it out of the wall."

TM: With a spoon.

CS: Yeah, with a spoon. So I go down there and the visitors show me where it is. I'm like, it's not half exposed, it's like a third exposed. I hope I don't break this thing. So I get it out and I very gingerly carry it back up to the station. I don't put it in my backpack, I carry it. I call Bob and say, "Okay, I got it." He said, "Okay. Well, we'll send a helicopter in tomorrow. Put it on a shelf." So it's sitting on the kitchen table while I'm having dinner and this thing is amazing. They come in and they get the pot and they fly away. When I come out after my 10-day tour, of course I want to go to the museum and see the pot. So I go to the park museum, I don't know if it was Bob or one of his assistants, they said, "Well, it's right back here." So we go in the storage area and there's like 40 or 50 pots that look exactly like mine. Eventually that pot was moved. What's the name...down in Tucson, the Southern Arizona Archeological Society?

TM: Is that the Western Area Conservation, the WAC folks down there?

CS: Yeah. The WAC. It was moved down there. Well, come to find out—I never went down there that I recall—they have so many pots from that era and lack of storage space, that I was told that many of the pots that are not in the best of shape are cut in half and nestled into each other because there's so many of them. So from my one of a kind, unique, rare find at Ribbon Falls I began to understand that there are a lot of artifacts.

TM: Yeah. Was this painted or was it thumbnail, that kind of pushed thumbnail ware or was it smooth on the outside, just a regular, smooth sort of fire cloud, kind of burned?

CS: Smooth. It was red in color and I do not recall any decorations on it.

TM: Okay. Wow. So that's your first 10-day tour.

CS: Well, that pot and the sticking my name in the Kodak film canister I wouldn't say those occurred on the first 10-day tour. Those occurred during the summer, the sixth-month period.

TM: You met the Aikens.

CS: Bob Cornelius, who you've spoken with, was the Phantom Ranch ranger. We had opposite days off, so his four days off were different than mine. I would pack enough stuff in or get resupplied by helicopter. After my 10-day tour at Cottonwood, I'd go down to Phantom Ranch for four days. Then the day he was coming back in I'd ride back up to Cottonwood. I think 24 days was the longest time I ever spent on that range of patrol. You know, another person that—I think he may have passed already—that you might find interesting in interviewing, was a fellow by the name of Ed Starkey? He worked for the

United States Geological Survey. My recollection is he lived in Pink house, close to Phantom Ranch but it's USGS housing and he ran the gauging stations down on the river.

TM: What do you remember about him?

CS: [laughs] I remember that he never left the Grand Canyon except he had to leave once a year for his evaluation. He told me that when he had to go out, he started getting so nervous that he got hives. But for some reason he was always nice to me. One of the things I remember about Ed is—this won't affect my retirement, no, I think I can tell the story. I'm through Phantom Ranch to take a break. And then it's, what, half a mile or so up to Phantom Ranch from the river? I'm riding by on a hot summer day and Ed comes out and hands me, "Say, I got something for you for your trip up to Cottonwood." "What is it?" He said, "Lemonade. Ice-cold lemonade." Said, "Well, thanks." In a container like today's Slurpee cup or something [TM laughs] and it had a lid on it. "Just take that, that'll keep you cool." "Well thanks, Ed." Never got off the mule, just passing by. He said, "Yep. Have a good trip." Stan Stockton, that's the cowboy. We'll come back to Stan in a minute. So I get past Phantom Ranch and I'm getting a little thirsty. I said, "Well, I think I'll have a drink of this lemonade." Well, Ed forgot to tell me that he'd put some Bourbon in the lemonade. I think he put about half of the Bourbon in the lemonade. I was young then, it was probably only a couple shots. So I'm proceeding to ride up with my mules to Cottonwood sipping on lemonade. Nobody on the trail. Just riding along having lemonade. That's what I remember about Ed Starkey.

TM: Did you ever get a chance to ride out on the cable with him and watch him do his USGS sampling?

CS: Actually, yeah, I did go out on the cable with him once.

TM: What was that like?

CS: Well, it felt safe. It's kind of strange being suspended over the Colorado River. I don't know how high we were above it, 40 feet/50 feet, I don't know. You're just sort of swaying, and to Ed it's like... Roy, Roy Starkey. It wasn't Ed. Roy Starkey was his name. You're in this small little contraption of a basket. It was just like watching him conduct a symphony or something. I don't know how I want to describe it. He didn't move much. He had everything positioned, cranked up some buckets and samples, took them and pulled it back in, tied it off, and out we got. I don't know how often he did it, but he'd obviously been doing it for years and years. A bit of a recluse.

TM: Was he tall? Was he short? How would you describe him?

CS: Well, I'm five ten. I'd say he was five eight, five seven. Light blond hair, thin, fit. How would I describe Roy Starkey? Wiry, there you go. Wiry, yeah. Had a very funny laugh, almost like a giggle. And he liked to laugh, so.

TM: Did you guys talk politics or park management? Did you talk state of the world or Canyon adventures?

CS: With Roy?

TM: Yeah.

CS: No, my recollection is just conversation in passing about what was going on, what the dudes looked like at Phantom Ranch the night before, how drunk the trail crew got at the trail crew bunkhouse the night before. I'm betting Roy was right there with them.

TM: I was wondering.

CS: Yeah, if you talk to Bob Cornelius again you might ask him, or maybe you already have. I haven't listened to all of them, if he talked about Roy.

TM: Yeah, I'm always just asking everybody the same questions. [laughs] So that's alright. And of course Roy's got a beach named after him. Not much left of it now, cause the sand's about gone, but Roy's Beach there upstream of the cableway. I don't think it's official USGS name. [laughs]

CS: Yeah, so then another recollection is I was at Phantom Ranch covering one time. I don't recall who they were, but this was my first year with the Park Service and I'm what 21/22, I'm informed that I think it was the Director of the Park Service... I wonder who that was in 1972? Was that Dickenson?

TM: I'd have to look it up.

CS: Anyway, the Director of the Park Service. Maybe it was just, "just", the Regional Director, but a director. I think it was the Park Service, could have been the Regional Director, was going to be arriving at Phantom Ranch and staying overnight at the bunkhouse. "Okay. So what do you want me to do?" "Well, go down to greet the boat and show them around."

TM: Oh. They're coming in by boat.

CS: Yeah. They were on a river trip. So I spend a good bit of time not far from the river to make sure I don't miss them cause I'm supposed to greet them. Then comes, I don't know, one/two boats. I think they were motor rigs. I know they were motor rigs, that's what the Park Service ran in '72. J-rigs. The person running that boat was probably Tom Doerr. So they pull in and I'm like in awe, the Director is here. So I "show them around." "There's Phantom Ranch up there and there's the bunkhouse. See ya'."

Well, it's dinner time and there's a knock on the ranger station door. I open the door and it's the Director. He said, "We're having dinner over here. Why don't you come on over and have dinner with us?" I thought, "Well, how unusual is this?" [laughs] So that was one of my first exposure, one of my first exposures, to the Park Service family. Just regular old folks. Worked their way up through the Park Service just like everybody else had and they didn't forget they were rangers at one time. It was pretty impressive to a 22-year-old that you don't forget where you came from. So I went over for dinner, didn't say a word. [both laugh] They were all very cordial and they left the next morning. Yeah, this is good. I haven't thought about this stuff in a long time.

So I want to go back to Stan Stockton, the cowboy that guided me down, gave me the advice. He and I became pretty good friends. I think Stan was in charge of what would have been called the trail crew then, because he showed up at Cottonwood with his trail crew cronies several different times and they would stay for five/six days at a time. Just an Arizona cowboy. Salt of the earth. I don't know if he's still around, but you might want to try and run him down. I don't have any contact info for him. One story I'll tell you is, I was over at his house one time and we're talking and he said, "So, I got something I want to show you." He pulls this box out from under a table. He opens it up and he pulled out the top, well, it

wouldn't be the top, middle part of an agave stem with the spines sticking out. There's a swift impaled on that spine with its wings open. This had been flying through the air and for whatever reason, either chasing something or avoiding something, it flew directly into the spine, killed itself, and it mummified in place like that with the colors still intact. Stan was riding between Phantom Ranch and Cottonwood one time and he just happened to look over and see it. So he collected it.

TM: That's hard to do, on a mule to get it out of the Canyon without hurting it.

CS: Yeah. That's what I remember about Stan. [laughs]

TM: Wow. What did you do with your trash back then in 1972 at Cottonwood?

CS: We packed it out. I think I had a trash compactor, but you know, your panniers were basically empty when you were heading out so we packed out whatever trash needed to go out. Trash that other people left that got that packed out. Your own trash.

TM: Bob was talking about burning trash down at Phantom. I know eventually that changed. I'm trying to remember when the permitting system came in, whether it was... Would have been right about that time. Cornelius had been to Phantom for a couple years before you arrived. Is that right?

CS: Yes.

TM: Okay. Was Cottonwood busy? Were there a lot of people there at times?

CS: No. There might have been 10/15 people there at a time, my recollection. There weren't that many people coming through Cottonwood. I imagine there are now.

TM: Yeah, it's different. That summer of '72, were you talking to Larry or writing him at all every now and then about how your summer was going?

CS: No.

TM: Were you communicating with your folks back home?

CS: Oh yeah. I was communicating with them, probably talking to them on the phone. Yeah. Just thinking, Mom came down to visit. That would have been '74 or '75. Yeah, we'll get there.

TM: The other thing I was thinking was you'd been to Newfoundland. You'd spent a lot of time in the Yukon. Madrid might be the closest thing you'd come to that kind of heat. How did you manage that first summer?

CS: Well, I was 22.

TM: Okay, and you had some nice lemonade.

CS: Yeah, and I had some nice lemonade. You just got stuff done in the early morning hours. And then when you got to Ribbon Falls you spent an excessive amount of time there. It was cool. [TM laughs] Yeah, you didn't go out on patrol in the afternoon. Everything done. Yeah, it was...

TM: I'm sorry?

CS: It was warm.

TM: And then, finally, of course, the monsoons, the summer rains would have come in.

CS: Yep. Incredible waterfalls. Incredible waterfalls.

TM: And this was all after the 1960's pipeline major flash flood.

CS: Oh yeah. Yeah, so 1972, I remember they were working on the pipeline. Was that '72? Maybe I'm getting things a little mixed up, but at rate I was in a Bell helicopter with a pilot. We were sling-loading something down to Phantom Ranch. The way they were sling-loading it was it was on a tilt-trailer and the helicopter was sitting beside it. The pilot took off, went to full power, and when he told them to they tilted that tilt-trailer and whatever he was carrying slid off the edge of the rim at full power and we dropped probably 500 feet. Then he was able to get enough power to fly it down to Phantom. Now, can you imagine doing that today?

TM: I can't imagine doing that at all. [laughs]

CS: Putting them on a tilt trailer and you have a passenger?

TM: Yeah. Holy cow. No wonder it took you 500 feet to try to get some airspeed.

CS: That's the other interesting thing about flying out of the canyon, which I did a lot of in later years cause I was in search and rescue. Helicopters were phenomenal and we'll get into talking about some of the pilots we got to deal with. They were all from Nam. Have you flown in a helicopter in the Canyon?

TM: No, I have not.

CS: You start flying towards the rim, you're going up, going up. Then you're getting closer and closer to the rim and you're thinking, "We're going to fly directly into this rock wall," which is, I don't know what the top strata...

TM: Kaibab?

CS: But you fly towards the wall and then the air currents pick that helicopter up. If you ever stand on the rim and you watch the ravens, you can see that effect cause they just fly towards the rim. They're like 1,000 feet below the rim of the Canyon and they don't flap once. They just catch the currents and soar right up above the rim, soar 500/1,000 feet above the rim. I've watched them play with each other and do acrobatics. Flipping over on their back doing somersaults. So all those air currents work for the birds, they work for the helicopter, too.

TM: Nice. Curt, I've got to tell you, we've been yick yacking about an hour and a half.

CS: Yes sir.

TM: I think this might be a good place to wrap up Part 1 and we will pick this thread up. So I'm going to wrap up this interview then. This is the end of Part 1 Oral History interview with Curt Sauer. Today is September 4th, 2020. My name is Tom Martin. Curt, hold the line for a second and thank you very much.

CS: Okay. Thank you.