

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Emma Benenati (EB)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Emma recounts growing up and her introduction to Grand Canyon hiking through 1986

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Part 1 of 2

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TM: Today is the 1st of July, 2019. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Emma Benenati. My name is Tom Martin. Today's interview is conducted in the living room of Tom Martin's house. Emma, thank you so much for coming over today and being willing to talk about Grand Canyon and a bunch of other different things here. I've got a question for you. First question is, what year were you born?

EB: In 1956.

TM: Where?

EB: Detroit, Michigan.

TM: What were your parents doing there?

EB: My dad was born and raised there. His parents were off the boat from Sicily and they ended up in Detroit. Probably that was one of the cities they targeted because of all the work, cause Detroit used to be a really major, a great city. My mom was a farm girl from Kentucky, but her family used to go up to Detroit. They couldn't make it on the farm so they'd go up to Detroit to work in the car industry to make money and then they'd take it back to Kentucky and put it into their farm. My mom, after she grew up, she went to Detroit and she met my dad.

TM: How'd they meet?

EB: High school.

TM: Oh.

EB: Then they got together after they graduated. A few years after they've graduated from high school.

TM: Okay. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

EB: Yes, I have two sisters and one brother.

TM: Older? Younger?

EB: Two older sisters, one younger brother.

TM: Okay. And did you grow up in Detroit?

EB: Yes, till I was 25. My dad was a firefighter, we had to live in the city, and he had friends who had moved to Arizona. He knew he wanted to get out of Detroit. So when they moved to Arizona, I followed.

TM: Before we get there, what was your schooling like in Detroit?

EB: We had to live in the city limits because my dad was a firefighter. But we lived on the very, very west side. In other words, the farthest away from downtown you could be. We were only a couple blocks from the border to the next kind of suburb township. This was probably part of the whole busing thing. The school I went to, my elementary school, was good. The education was good, however, I was part of the baby boom and our classes were huge. I think they were having trouble hiring teachers. Every class I was in was always huge. My high school graduating class should have been like a 1,000 students, but it was 4,400. It was just that baby boom time. So as a result, I think... And we had a lot of racial strife. We had race riots, knifings. In fact, I missed my high school graduation because we had a race riot at our school. They finally brought us back like a month and a half later to graduate.

TM: I've got a bunch of questions. Let's go back a little bit to your elementary schooling which sounded like you enjoyed it. But I'm curious, your dad was right up against the town border. Would he have preferred to then live in a rural environment?

EB: No, my dad is and was a city boy through and through.

TM: Was it your mom then?

EB: No, I think... Yeah, probably my mom, but it wasn't rural. It was city blocks. There was city around us, north, south, east, west of us. There was Redford township and then Livonia, it just went on and on. But it was away from all the crime and everything in downtown.

TM: And he would commute every day?

EB: Yeah. Although as a firefighter he would work a day, off a day, work a day, off three.

TM: Okay. Oh.

EB: Work a day, off a day, work a day, off three.

TM: And his day was 24 hours?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Alright. In your grade school, sounds like it was good. When you were growing up before you got into high school, did you camp as a family?

EB: No. My dad hated camping, hated nature, cause remember he's a city boy. He grew up in downtown Detroit, poorer than anything. Used to sell newspapers with his father. We would take vacations every year. I think that was spurred by my mom. We went to California and then we're all around for a month. We'd go to Florida. Driving, driving across country. All this without air conditioning.

TM: The six of you?

EB: Yeah.

TM: In the car?

EB: In the station wagon.

TM: At least a bigger car. But still. Did you have stuff up on the roof?

EB: Oh yeah, totally. Big car carrier. You know, it was all like this whole situation. My dad would make all these lists and then we leave, and then we'd be hopefully not too far down the road and he'd realize he forgot his wallet. Always. [TM laughs] He'd have all these lists, but he'd forget the most important thing. But yeah, so he was... We never camped. We always stayed at Holiday Inn with a pool, had to have a pool.

TM: I'm just thinking about the drive from Detroit to California across, well across the country, across the Mississippi...

EB: With no air conditioning.

TM: ...and across the American west.

EB: Yeah.

TM: The Mojave Desert. If you went...well, did you come through Kingman?

EB: We did. We went the south route through Texas and Arizona.

TM: Tucson, Yuma in the summer? No air conditioning?

EB: We went to Grand Canyon. We may have skipped... We went through Flagstaff, so we didn't go Phoenix or Tucson.

TM: That would've been nice this time of year in the summer, but still, its desert either side of here.

EB: Yeah. I remember we went to the Painted Desert, probably Petrified National Forest.

TM: 1965ish?

EB: I think I was 9, 9 or 10.

TM: '63?

EB: '66ish. The way my dad did it... He worked for a bunch of other guys at the fire department and he worked up over a month off.

TM: Oh, wow.

EB: And at that time, my mom wasn't working, so she didn't have to ask off. And I got let out of school early. I was so excited that I got to leave school early to go on this trip.

TM: Nice. And you guys did that every summer?

EB: No, no, just that was one year. But other... We went to New York, we went to New Jersey, we went to Florida, we... Then we started going to South Carolina, Myrtle beach, South Carolina. We did that for like eight or nine years in a row. We really liked it.

TM: Okay. So you'd rent a beach house then?

EB: Oh, just a motel. Yeah, right on the beach. Same one. We knew the family, we got to know them.

TM: Nice. So by the time you were in high school, you had traveled around the country from coast to coast. What were you thinking about what you were seeing?

EB: I liked it. I really liked to travel. Yeah. It caused me to enjoy and want to travel and see things.

TM: Okay, fun. And then heading into high school, were you starting to become attracted to certain types of fields of study or work environments? There's always a question of what are you going to do and it's a stupid question because there's a zillion things you can do and you did do. But what were you thinking about?

EB: So much of my life is accidental because I was brought up to be a housewife, secretary, or a nurse, period. Now I know other people my age, women who are say a geologist, and I just think, how in the world did that happen? I mean, my parents weren't... They both were not educated beyond high school, but they wanted us to go to college. They made sure of that. But the message from all my counselors at school... I mean, my counselor he just put me into the future nurses club. So I just thought, oh, I'll be a secretary, nurse, or a teacher. I didn't want to be a nurse or a secretary. So education. I went into some like elementary education classes and I didn't like them.

TM: Okay. Your two older sisters had gone off to college before you.

EB: Mhm.

TM: What did they go into?

EB: My oldest sister became a nurse, immediately hated it and went on and got her Master's and PhD and she became a professor of psychiatric nursing at U of A.

TM: Wow.

EB: My other sister became a teacher, elementary. So she followed the pattern. And she liked it. She really liked teaching elementary school.

TM: Okay. She still doing it?

EB: Pardon me.

TM: Has she retired now or is she still doing it?

EB: Yea. She's done.

TM: Where did she teach?

EB: She taught in Michigan. She stayed in Michigan longer and taught, whereas the rest of the family came out west.

TM: So in high school, were you in sports at all?

EB: Yeah, I was in the band. All of us grew up playing instruments. My mom wanted us to... We played piano. I play flute. My other sister played clarinet, my other one played trumpet. So I was in the band. That took a lot of time. And then I was on the swim team.

TM: Okay. Did you like water where you...

EB: Yes, I loved water.

TM: Did you get out on canoes at all?

EB: I did on a church trip in my teens. Yeah. Yeah, I did. That was fun.

TM: Just one, just [laughs] one time?

EB: Yeah, some trip.

TM: Okay. Some place near Detroit?

EB: Yeah. Some river north of Detroit.

TM: Okay. But there wasn't anything your dad and mom kind of wanted to do.

EB: Right. Well, my mom probably would have done anything. She loved to travel. She loved camping. She was total outdoors person. In fact, when I moved out west, I wanted to go to Grand Canyon. So we took a trip and we stood on the rim. I remember looking down—and it was the second time, cause I was there when I was nine—I was looking down and I heard someone say, and this was probably 1977 or something, they said, “Oh, it takes a whole day to hike down to the bottom and two whole days to come out.” That just fascinated me. I remember thinking, wow, it's that deep. Actually, that was a trip before we moved out because as soon I moved and got a teaching job, I tried to get on a Grand Canyon hiking trip.

TM: Okay. So you run ahead and all I can see is dust so I'm gonna bring you back to high school, on the swim team.

EB: Mhm.

TM: Were your grades good?

EB: Yeah, I was college prep. They were pretty good.

TM: Okay. Alright. You might want to spend more time outside. Certainly mom was encouraging, but if you went out on road trips with your dad it was hotel to hotel to hotel, so you weren't sleeping bag on the ground and in a tent or in the rain. That kind of stuff wasn't happening. Okay. And then given these options of secretary, teacher, nurse, housewife you decided to teach.

EB: Yeah.

TM: So to carry that university schedule on forward as you were getting ready to graduate from high school, where were you thinking to go to school?

EB: Oh, I pretty much did so many things that my sisters did. Cause I had two older sisters and I just followed in their steps.

TM: But one went into nursing and one went into teaching.

EB: Right. But I went to the same university, Wayne State University in downtown Detroit.

TM: Okay. And you mentioned the riots. The Vietnam War was grinding on, but slowly starting to wrap up. Berkeley had already had its race riots of the 60s, that whole very tumultuous time. But that was also going on in Motor City and that part of the world. What were your parents thinking about it at the time and did that come into you children listening to their dinner time discussions?

EB: Oh, you mean in terms of the riots and all that? Well, let's see. My dad was in the Detroit 1967 riots, which were huge. He was gone for a week and firefighters were getting shot at. The whole city was burning. Remember we lived in the very, very west side. I remember one night in July we were playing basketball in the backyard. My dad was a triple letter man in high school, very talented

baseball, football, basketball. So we were always playing something like that. I remember looking up at the sky and it was like this dark cloud/a line was moving towards the west. I looked up, said to my sisters, "Look at that." And they're like, "Yeah, what is it?" I said, "It must be night coming." But it was the smoke from the fires of downtown coming all the way to the west. I forget how many miles. We were a lot of miles away from downtown. My dad was prejudiced. I mean, I think all police and firefighters in Detroit were. So I grew up with that, but at least I had... Thank goodness I wasn't... You can get into this narrow minded thinking. I was in a band and our band had all kinds of ethnicities. We were like, "Wow, everybody's... It isn't all white people that matter," or whatever. So that widened my horizons. That was probably part of the reason my dad wanted to get out of Detroit. Just because of the unrest. I mean, it was going downhill. The new mayor and the new whatever management of Detroit, they destroyed it. It imploded because of mismanagement and corruption.

TM: And also the jobs walked out eventually, too.

EB: Yeah, I think it was... I read that book *The Autopsy of Detroit*, but it was just mismanagement. Corruption from the city levels, misspending of money, probably pocketing money, and things weren't getting paid for properly, the infrastructure fell apart. So yeah. So they got out.

TM: They got out after you completed your degree at Wayne?

EB: No, it was in the middle. In the middle when they moved.

TM: So you were heading for a teaching degree, but once you got into Wayne, you would've realized, gee, there's a lot of different...

EB: Yeah. I took other classes, but I just thought it's my destiny. I just thought it's my destiny. I didn't like elementary education and I thought, "Oh wow, this is awful. What am I going to do?" I would take classes. I would take swimming, I would take golf, I would take tennis. I was talking to some woman and she said, "Oh, you should go into physical education." I was like, oh yeah, that would be more interesting to teach than elementary school. So I did. Wayne State had a really good...it was health, physical education, dance. There was a lot to it. It wasn't just throw out the ball. It was very, very well rounded. So that's what I did.

TM: In four years?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Okay. Good grades with that?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Were there any university clubs, hiking, boating, any of that stuff? Did you get into any of those things?

EB: No.

TM: Did you stay in the band? Was there a university band?

EB: I did over one semester and then it was too much for me because I was trying to take classes and I guess I wasn't as interested.

TM: So halfway through your degree your folks... Was your dad on a 20 year retirement track, was that happening with the firemen at the time or did he have to go a full 30 years?

EB: I think he retired at 25 years.

TM: Okay. Was he a chief at the time? Did he work up the ladder?

EB: He was a lieutenant.

TM: Okay. Did they spend some time looking around... Your elder sister had gone to the U of A for her degree. So had they gone out...

EB: Well, she graduated from Wayne State with her PhD.

TM: Oh, she did?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Oh, who was at the U of A in Tucson?

EB: She's a professor there now.

TM: Oh, she's teaching. I'm sorry.

EB: Yeah.

TM: So your older sister was at Wayne State as well, both of them.

EB: Right. She got recruited to... Well, when she decided that they were going to move west, she looked for jobs at ASU and U of A.

TM: So did your folks leave first for the west?

EB: Yes.

TM: Okay. And where did they go?

EB: Phoenix/Scottsdale.

TM: Wow, did they know how hot it got in the summer?

EB: They wanted it badly.

TM: Okay. And that was in '75/'76?

EB: That was...I believe '78.

TM: What was your father's name?

EB: Pete.

TM: And your mom?

EB: Virginia.

TM: So they moved in '78 to Phoenix. So he retired, sold the house...

EB: Yeah. Yep.

TM: ...and left you in Detroit?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Good luck and...

EB: Well, because as I said, I followed in my sister's footsteps. I mean I was told all my life, why can't you be like your sisters? Cause I was always trying to do my own thing and they'd be like, why can't you be like them? Both of them got married at age 20 and so I got married at age 20 to a guy that asked me. I figured, well, I'm 20 I guess I need to get married. [laughs] So I was living with him.

TM: What was his name, first name?

EB: Al.

TM: Okay. Thank you. And you met Al at the university?

EB: No. At an Italian restaurant where I worked.

TM: Okay. Okay. I think of these things as starter marriages [EB laughs] because it's what we do. It's what we got to do. This is how the history rolls along. When you got married to Al, were you thinking, well, I'll teach here in Detroit or in this area or...?

EB: I had a hard time. When I graduated I was like... I think I sobbed. It was horrible to sub. Substitute teach is, oh my God, its hell.

TM: And you graduated in '79ish?

EB: Uh-huh. But I desperately wanted to go to Arizona.

TM: Had you been out to visit your folks in Scottsdale between '77 and '79?

EB: Mhm. And I went with them on their checkout trip in 1975.

TM: Tell me about that.

EB: Oh, we flew out and we checked out Tucson and Phoenix and my dad decided he liked Phoenix better than Tucson.

TM: Did your mom agree?

EB: I guess so. I don't remember any discussion about it. They just decided that they liked Phoenix.

TM: Both Phoenix and Tucson were growing like mad at the time.

EB: Yeah.

TM: But that's not the time you went to Grand Canyon and heard people saying a day down, two days up.

EB: Right. So my parents were there in '78 and I was still going to school and married. We would take trips out to visit them.

TM: So when you went out on the scout trip, what were you thinking?

EB: Oh, let's see. I don't know what I was thinking. You know, I was kinda... I didn't know if it really was going to happen. But I liked it. I liked it in Arizona. I mean Detroit, every day the sky is white and if it's not white it's raining. And the streets were filthy. I remember when we came to Arizona, I was struck by how clean everything was. And the sky was blue. Everything was just fresh and clean. I really thought I had arrived in heaven.

TM: Wow.

EB: And I loved the heat. Loved it.

TM: Was it monsoon season?

EB: No.

TM: Or summer, pre-monsoon?

EB: When we get off the plane and felt like we were in an oven, I loved it.

TM: [laughs] When you mentioned the dirt on the Detroit streets, were there like piles of trash or just grit and grime?

EB: Just filth and... Well, probably like papers or whatever. For example, they never plowed and we had a lot of snow. People would regularly get...

TM: Never plowed?

EB: Never plowed.

TM: How did that work?

EB: Not very well. People would lose their mufflers. They would get torn out of their cars because the snow would get so high. There would be two ruts and then you'd meet somebody and one of you would have to decide to get out of the ruts. Whoever did...

TM: Into the snow and you'd be...

EB: Into the snow at the side. Whoever did would get stuck, period. Hopefully somebody'd be around to push you back into the rut so you could get to the main streets which were plowed. But on all the city blocks, it was never plowed.

TM: Wow. Okay. Did your dad have a truck?

EB: No. Station wagon.

TM: Okay. Huh. Yeah. So I can appreciate, hey, we've come to heaven getting out of the plane, cruising around. So they decided that's it. Dad retired, they moved out.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Meanwhile you had married Al.

EB: Uh-huh.

TM: Were out of university and working as a sub and not very happy doing that.

EB: Right. I was just so unhappy that I told him, I'm going to Arizona. I didn't know what was going to happen, but I had to go.

TM: What did he do?

EB: He stayed home and he worked. He managed a restaurant.

TM: Okay. Alright.

EB: He was happy doing that. So then I stayed with my parents for a few months.

TM: This is in '79? No, '80?

EB: '80, I think? '80. I think he thought that's it, she's gonna leave me. So then he said he'd come out. So he moved out/we moved out.

TM: Okay. When you came out, did you stay with your parents then in Scottsdale?

EB: Mhm. I got a job at a fitness center and I substitute taught. Then I got a full time teaching job.

TM: Where were you teaching?

EB: Paradise Valley School District.

TM: Which was a new?

EB: Yeah. It was pretty new.

TM: And school, the class sizes?

EB: Oh, regular, you know, gosh...

TM: 20/25?

EB: Yeah. 20/25ish. So he moved out. And so I heard someone talking, "Oh, we're going to go hike the Canyon." I was like, "Can I go with you?" And it was to Havasupai.

TM: Oh wow.

EB: I remember I didn't like to camp. I had been on a couple camping trips in Michigan mosquitoes. It was horrible. And I didn't like feeling dirty and just the whole... I just was not into it. But I said, "If it means I have to camp, I want to hike the Canyon."

TM: Wow. Big deal. Okay. Were these friends, were these co-teachers?

EB: I think they were co-teachers and they were taking... I took days off school to go. I rented a backpack. You know, I didn't have...

TM: Where did you rent it from?

EB: From the Hiking Shack. I had this horrible sleeping bag and the complete wrong clothes.

TM: What time of the year was this when you're going?

EB: Actually it was late October we went to Havasupai.

TM: So not blisteringly hot.

EB: No, no. In fact, I was freezing. I remember I froze. I had the wrong sleeping bag. It was some cheap Boy Scout thing or something. All my clothes were cotton. But I really loved hiking. Carrying the pack was nothing. I loved hiking. All that work was... I remember hiking out Havasupai, which is not that big of a hike, I was like, "Oh my God, I'll never do this again," cause it was so hard. Then a little while after I got home and like the next day, I thought, I have to do that again. [laughs]

TM: I'm just trying to put this in a timeline So 1980/1981 you started working for Paradise Valley. And the backpack would have been right in that time as well?

EB: Mhm.

TM: When was the time that you were at the rim, a day down, two days up?

EB: Where I heard that?

TM: You heard somebody say that.

EB: That was probably '79. Cause we would go out every year and visit my parents after they moved in '78.

TM: Alright.

EB: One of the trips my brother and sister and I went to the Grand Canyon.

TM: Just for day trip, just to drive up?

EB: Yeah. Just for a day trip.

TM: Nice. So now you're back. Did Al go with you on the backpack?

EB: No.

TM: Okay. Were you still with him then...

EB: Yeah.

TM: ...or was that breaking up? Okay. Because now suddenly there's something you really like to do and he wasn't there.

EB: Right.

TM: The next day, you're like...

EB: Got to go back.

TM: ...I got to go back.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Wow. And then what happened?

EB: And then...so let's see. I started hiking. I guess I started going to Grand Canyon doing like day hikes. And then...

TM: Were you hiking out of Phoenix? Were you're doing any of the Superstitions, down into Mexico eventually?

EB: Yes, mhm. I joined Sierra Club in '83 so I would do hikes with them. Day hikes and some weekend camping hikes, backpack.

TM: Who was leading the hiking?

EB: I don't even remember.

TM: Okay. Jim Vaaler is a name that comes to mind.

EB: Oh, I did go on a trip with him.

TM: Okay. He was going in some pretty remote places at the time.

EB: Yeah. I did a weekend trip with him.

TM: Do you remember where you went?

EB: Yes. I think it was called Devils Chasm. It's somewhere near the Verde Valley.

TM: Okay. Was that overnight or was that...?

EB: Yeah. It was a weekend trip.

TM: Okay. Did you get into climbing at all or was it just backpacking?

EB: Just backpacking. I didn't do any climbing until I did a NOLS trip.

TM: When did that happen?

EB: That happened in '86. So, what happened was I loved hiking. I did more and more and then I did this overnight trip. There was a backpack trip into Grand Canyon from South Bass to Boucher so I took time off work.

TM: Okay. Hang on a second. The South Bass to Boucher hike is a fairly... At the time, this would've been the early 1980s, it had been done many times before but it was one of the remoter more difficult hikes. It wasn't the corridor South Rim to North Rim via Phantom ranch. It wasn't the Tanner or the Hance. You had to go way out on this miserable little road out to the South Bass trailhead. Drop down to the river and then walk along the top of the Tonto, maybe 600 feet above the river, for days in and out and in and out and in and out as you went back upstream or east until connected to the Boucher trail to get out the Hermit drainage out to Hermit Rest.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Who was the trip leader? Let me back up a minute. Was this a Sierra Club hike?

EB: No, it was a Parks and Recreation, a Phoenix hike.

TM: Oh, wow. Was that something they normally did? Was that part of their...? Were they doing that every year?

EB: No, it just probably depends on who was working for the Parks and Recreation and what they wanted to do.

TM: Who was leading the trip?

EB: His name was Ken.

TM: Okay. So now that's a how many night trip?

EB: Five I think?

TM: Was the overnight into Supai...

EB: That was a couple nights in Supai.

TM: It was a couple of nights. So would this would have been the longest trip...?

EB: Yeah, that was my longest backpack.

TM: Okay. Did you have your own pack by this time?

EB: Oh, I can't remember. Maybe.

TM: Or were you still renting [laughs] junk from the Hiking Shack?

EB: I don't remember. But I did go to Hiking Shack to rent. I remember I went there a number of times to rent a backpack.

TM: Okay. And I'm assuming freeze dried food?

EB: Yeah. I think I didn't have a stove. I just would pack food.

TM: How many other people on the trip?

EB: Probably five, five or six.

TM: What time of year?

EB: I remember it was a little chilly, early spring I think. Yes, early spring. Maybe late March or early April.

TM: What do you remember about the drive out there?

EB: Out to South Bass?

TM: Mhm.

EB: The road was terrible. We had four wheel drive vehicles going out there.

TM: This was '80...?

EB: '84.

TM: '84. Okay. So this is your second backpack into Grand Canyon?

EB: No, I had done several. [laughs] Ignorantly I got my brother, my sister, I got my parents and we would do backpacks. But always like to Bright Angel or we'd stay at Phantom Ranch. It was always in July or August cause I didn't know any better and I loved the heat. So it was completely normal to do a little backpack in July or August.

TM: Did your mom and dad like the heat?

EB: Yeah, [TM laughs] they still, you know... They became desert rats.

TM: Okay. July, August. Oh.

EB: Yeah. I know. It's crazy. Crazy. I'd go with my girlfriends or we'd go to Havasupai. I mean, I've been to Havasupai at least 10 times. During this period we'd go to Havasupai.

TM: Alright. So this was after the Grand Canyon Enlargement of 1975. The visitation to Supai was increasing, but not like it is today. But the park had pulled out of Supai in '75 with the Enlargement Act. The little ranger station down there and the campground and all that stuff that the park service had employees manning, that was all shut down.

EB: Yeah. It cost us a dollar for our permit.

TM: A dollar?

EB: One dollar.

TM: Permit was easy to get?

EB: Yeah. You just walked down the dusty path into that building, was one of the first buildings you came to. Go in and...

TM: On the left there?

EB: I think it was on the right.

TM: On the right.

EB: The little house kind of thing. And some Havasupai older man would fill something out, pay a dollar and we got our permit.

TM: So you got permit just for showing up?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Okay. Did it matter where you camped or where you went from there? You got your permit, your just on your way, what would you do?

EB: Then we just would go choose our camp. It could have been anywhere. I remember there was a lot of people there and they were tearing down branches off of trees, making fires, you know. And they had those horrible outhouses.

TM: Yeah.

EB: I remember the Havasupai Indians would come around and ask us if we had any booze or marijuana.

TM: Okay. That's a lot of hiking. What other hiking were you doing at the time?

EB: Oh, I remember going to California in that time period, maybe like '79 or '80, with my sister and her husband and my husband. We were in Yosemite and I remember I'd try to get out and hike. I found a trail and I started running on it. I remember thinking, I had just discovered... I was like this is the coolest thing ever, running on a trail. Yeah. I don't know what rock I was under, but I just thought, this is it. This is the greatest thing.

TM: Huh. Had you been running before?

EB: Yeah. I started running in 1978.

TM: Okay. Did you then take up running in Phoenix?

EB: Yeah.

TM: I mean, were you like running Camelback and...?

EB: Too much.

TM: Too much. Okay.

EB: Yeah. I ran for 30 years. I ran in Detroit on the street. There is not a lot of trail options. Then in Phoenix I would run on the belt. You know the belt along Hayden? There's a really nice... It's a long greenway belt. I think they use it for flooding. There's parks along the whole... It's beautiful. Also I had ran on the canals. I loved that. It's just great.

TM: So Yosemite was the first time you did some trail running.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Okay. Had John Annerino's book come out yet?

EB: That I don't know.

TM: *Running Wild* I think is the title.

EB: Yeah. I remember seeing his book. But I don't know.

TM: Okay. So then did you take that running to other places where you might run into backpackers on trails? Not necessarily people running.

EB: I think. Let's see. After I came home, I pretty much kept on my canal running or the greenbelt running. Then I think I would do Camelback or Squaw Peak. We'd do that. We try to run, hike/run kind of thing.

TM: Did you backpack in Yosemite when you went out there?

EB: I didn't do that till 1987.

TM: Okay. So by this time, you're teaching in Paradise Valley.

EB: Mhm.

TM: Okay. And backpacking.

EB: Mhm.

TM: And running.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Okay. Were you swimming?

EB: No. I stopped swimming because I had a near sort of choking/drowning thing. It started when I was 20 at Wayne State. I would take water safety instructor classes. I'd just repeat them year after year because I loved to...

TM: Just to get access to the pool?

EB: Yeah. So I had this sort of choking/not being able to breathe episode. That really freaked me out. At that same time I had a tumor growing in my chest called a teratoma.

TM: What's a teratoma?

EB: Well, when I had it out at age 20 they told me it was my twin; which it wasn't. It's a tumor that has congenital tissue like cartilage, hair, teeth. So they thought, oh, it's a twin. And then I guess as they researched, they figured out it's just congenital tissue that grows.

TM: Interesting.

EB: They didn't really know what... They had no clue. I had so many x-rays and...

TM: But it was impacting your airway?

EB: Yeah. And it was growing around my aorta and they took my thymus out with it. Since then, doctors think they nicked a nerve that controls my vocal chords.

TM: Ah. Yeah, this is fairly major surgery.

EB: Yeah. He said he should have gone in open-heart, but he just went in at my neck.

TM: So that makes sense why they could have gotten your vocal cord nerves.

EB: Yeah. And he's like, "Well I really scraped and scraped. I think I got it all." He said it was as big as his fist. So it was big.

TM: Wow.

EB: They did a lot of scraping. So because of that, I have very sensitive vocal chords. And if your vocal cords close, you cannot breathe.

TM: And this was 1980ish?

EB: This was like '78 or '79ish. Yeah. So, as a result, I quit swimming. Yeah. I mean, it could be a future topic, but that's why it's kind of a conundrum why I would get a PhD on the Colorado River.

TM: On water.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. Yeah. Well, just standing outside looking in, it's clear that you love to exercise and swimming was a way to do that. And when swimming wasn't an option, you started running and hiking. That all makes sense. But near drowning is a pretty big pause in the...

EB: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. So it makes sense. You love water.

EB: Mhm.

TM: Yeah. So that kind of makes sense. Okay. So this is sounding fairly normal American here. And then what happened? So we're up sort of mid 1980s, you're hiking more, you're teaching, and you were running.

EB: Uh-huh.

TM: So now you're running on trails and so that was fun. And you'd met people in the Sierra Club.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Were you doing any activism work at all with the Sierra Club...

EB: No.

TM: ...or simply just outings?

EB: Simply outings. I remember when we'd be on an outing and someone would start to give a speech, I'd think, oh God, here it goes. [laughs] I just...cause I'm very activist today on topics. But no, I was just yelling it into me, just immature, just clueless. I just wasn't looking at what was going on in the world, what to get upset about. I just wanted to hike.

TM: Okay. There were other outings groups in Phoenix. There were other groups of climbers and hiking clubs. Did you do anything with other groups at all?

EB: No, just Sierra Club. Then later, after I met Joe, we joined the AMC, Arizona Mountaineering Club, that did climbing.

TM: That would have been roughly...

EB: '87.

TM: Okay. Who was running that at the time?

EB: Oh, a guy named Paul Diefendorfer, I think. So I guess I should say that on this South Bass to Boucher trip, I met a man and that sealed it for me for getting out of my marriage cause I knew it wasn't right. I mean, I knew it walking down the aisle. Yeah. But you know, I always like... I don't know, maybe it's my Midwest roots, your just brought up to be submissive and just accept your lot in life kind of thing. But after that I just said, "Nah, this isn't right. I have to get out." So I did.

TM: And that was '85ish?

EB: '84.

TM: Okay. Let's go back to that hike. We had driven you out there on this terrible road in a four-wheel drive vehicle. And then you get to the rim right there at the trailhead and you look out over this incredible expanse off to the north of this huge, deep canyon and red, red rock all over the place as you look out on the Esplanade there and then you start down the trail. Five days, how did that go? That's a fairly long journey.

EB: Mhm. I loved it. I loved it. I loved the exercise and the scenery was beautiful. I still wasn't a good camper. I was a terrible camper. I probably brought, you know, some non-cooking food of course. But I was learning and, yeah, I loved it.

TM: Do you remember how you were treating your water at the time? Were you using the little tablets?

EB: I think we were using tablets.

TM: And again, did you say what time of year that was?

EB: That was late March or early April.

TM: Okay. So flowers?

EB: Yeah, I remember it was rainy and gray a lot of that trip.

TM: That's okay for hiking, but can make everything wet.

EB: Yeah. And I have always total cotton.

TM: Ooh. When did you figure cotton wasn't such a good thing to... When did that get on your radar screen?

EB: Well, after that the man I met...we did a bunch of hikes in Grand Canyon after that. That was our quest. I learned from him, you know. Then I think we'd go to REI and I learned to buy polypro. Polypropylene.

TM: Which was on the market at the time. It was a big deal.

EB: Yeah. Mhm. So that's when I started getting those kind of clothes.

TM: And the guy that you met's first name was?

EB: Ken.

TM: Okay. Not the Ken...

EB: Yes, that Ken.

TM: Ah, okay. Alright. And started doing a ton of hiking.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Like where? Like what? Hang on, hang on. I'm just thinking for a minute. You're still teaching in Paradise Valley?

EB: Mhm.

TM: Okay. And that's a full time deal now?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Okay. But you're following the school year, which means you have summers off, and Christmas break, and some spring break. So there's a lot of breaks in the...

EB: Mhm. Every available weekend we would go. We did Marble Canyon hikes.

TM: Wow. What year is this?

EB: Well, actually...well, hiking with Ken was '84 to '86.

TM: Okay. Marble Canyon had people in it much, much earlier, but for the major main hiking crowd, that was more than a lot of people in there at the time.

EB: I remember we did this July 4th trip to South Canyon.

TM: Okay. Nice and hot.

EB: I remember we pull in and we got up probably... When we got up the sun came over the horizon and it was so hot.

TM: Right, way early.

EB: Ken was a really good hiker and backpacker and we couldn't find the way into South Canyon. It was that... I remember it was tricky. There was this kinda rockfally thing you had to get over. We went over that and we just couldn't find our way, couldn't find our way. So we left. But we tried, you know, we went down. But then we went back, you know, and we found it. Then I remember later on when I worked for the park, I did a trip into South Canyon in like 2004 and I remember it was a highway going into South Canyon.

TM: So 20 years later from 1984/'86 to 2004.

EB: Yeah. It was a... But it was...you couldn't find your way back in the days.

TM: And just to be clear, this wasn't the UPS direct/the carbonate/the Boulder Canyon route. This is actually from the Buffalo Ranch headquarters?

EB: Yeah. Yeah. And so Boulder...you mean Bedrock Canyon?

TM: Bedrock. Yeah. Yeah.

EB: Yeah. I discovered that.

TM: Later.

EB: Later.

TM: Yeah. But that's a good one to get lost in, too. Kind of wandering around there. But now that's a highway. So it's...hmm. Where else did you go? So Marble Canyon.

EB: Our goal was to do all the... We did Tanner, Beamer, Escalante route, Grandview, South Kaibab, Hermit, Boucher, South Bass. We'd just go back.

TM: So started repeating the same things again?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Okay. Was there any thought about hiking to connect a line through the canyon?

EB: No, I mean, pretty much because of our timeframe we always... When we had jobs, it was just...

TM: Drive up.

EB: Drive... Yeah, drive up and drive back.

TM: Go hiking and come back.

EB: Yeah. So in 1984...was it four? Yeah. Oh, I did a river trip through Phoenix College.

TM: How did you find out about this?

EB: Well, I always was taking classes. I loved learning. I took southwest classes. I took classes with Scottsdale Community College and Phoenix College and they had a trip, a Grand Canyon river trip.

TM: Taking classes now as a teacher, you're encouraged to finish a Master's degree.

EB: Yeah.

TM: So these classes were kind of piling up into that or were you just like "bring it on. I am really interested in all kinds of stuff, and so I'm just going to take a bunch of classes as I can." Or were you gearing towards a master's degree and...

EB: I started a master's in exercise physiology but it was too much for me. So I...

TM: Trying to teach and school?

EB: Yeah. I took a bunch of credits, but then I quit. So that master's degree was on hold. And I was mostly taking southwest classes. History classes about Native Americans. That kind of stuff.

TM: And this would be one or two classes a semester just to make sure you could...

EB: Yeah.

TM: And these were like evening classes?

EB: Yeah. Evening classes. So I saw this class, Grand Canyon river trip in '84. So I signed up. It was with...can't think of it. They were out of Page.

TM: Diamond?

EB: Diamond. Motor trip. Pat Genius and I forget the other guy we had. But yeah, it was big boats. Eight day trip.

TM: And lots of water because they were still trying to dump the reservoir.

EB: Yeah. In fact, when I'd go backpacking again when the water was down, so I'd be backpacking years after '84, I'd always say, "Something's wrong here. This isn't how it looked on the river trip. Something's wrong with the beach." I can't figure it out cause I had no clue about water levels, but I was just like, something's wrong. I remember that. "Didn't look like this, but I know I'm at the same spot." [laughs]

TM: It didn't look like this then and why not?

EB: Yeah.

TM: But you couldn't figure out that...

EB: Right. Knew nothing about...

TM: ...big difference in water levels.

EB: No clue. I remember them saying we're at high water. But that was the first time I'd been down to the Colorado. It was, gosh, it was 40 something thousand.

TM: It would have been constant. Everything was wide open for months and months and months and months and months to bring the level of the reservoir down and to shunt everything upstream. So Pat Genius, this was a eight day trip to Diamond?

EB: Yeah. It was either Pat or Chris Genius. I forget which one.

TM: Okay. What else do you remember about that river trip?

EB: I remember the leader of the trip, he's some teacher from Phoenix College. Every day they would talk up rapids. They would create this alter reality of, "oh, we're going to..." And I was scared. They would talk about Lava and Crystal. I thought, oh my God, like, it's... "I don't know if we're going to make it." And "oh, I remember this one trip where the boat was standing up vertical." They did that every day. There was a flash flood at... This was a July trip, yeah, this was a July trip. There was a flash flood in Havasu. We were hiking up Havasu and it started to rain. I think the water was coming up and they said, "Get out, get out." So we all scrambled back and the water kept coming up and people lost their boats. I remember this one boatwoman was yelling, "Look for bodies!" I thought my God. We ended up taking like a whole trip on our boat. We were super, super crowded until... I guess we went downstream and they found their boats and then we let them off, I remember. And everybody was very sad and quiet.

TM: So their boats blew out of the mouth with the flood?

EB: Yeah. Either that or they cut them.

TM: Okay. Okay.

EB: But people were left without their boats.

TM: Right. And of course it's monsoon season, so the river's liquid mud. Okay. How did that work? You guys must have still been under power and were able to pull into shore to gather up people off the ledges and then take them down.

EB: Yeah. I guess we dropped them off. They found their boats or something.

TM: Okay.

EB: It was real somber, I remember, like people didn't know if somebody was killed or something. But I don't remember hearing about anybody getting killed. Then on our takeout day, we had to wait cause there was a flash flood coming out of Diamond. Then we finally went out and I believe it was later that day or the next day where Diamond flashed so bad that it took an OARs stake-bed truck with all the boats on it into the river. I remember learning about that later and I was like, "Wow, I'm glad we weren't there then."

TM: Yeah. Had you hiked Havasu from the rim to the river?

EB: Never.

TM: So you were starting to connect now the river with some of the hikes that you'd done, but you'd done a bunch of hikes to the river with Ken. Those...

EB: Yeah.

TM: ...hikes down. What did that river trip do for you and your understanding of Grand Canyon as a place after hiking it? What were your thoughts? Was it like, "Oh well, that's what the river's all about," or...

EB: I thought it was beautiful. I always considered myself more of a hiker/backpacker than a river person. I felt lazy on the river trip. Like we'd do these hikes, you know, we would do these little hikes, but I just felt sitting on a boat was not really my cup of tea. But I liked it. I appreciated the beauty.

TM: Two boats?

EB: Yeah. Two big boats.

TM: Yeah. Certainly you're not carrying your food.

EB: Right.

TM: And that's a big difference. It's not on your back. You're sitting on it on a river trip, and that's a big difference.

EB: Yeah, definitely.

TM: At the end of that trip, were you... I was thinking at the end of that river trip versus the end of your first trip into Havasu. The next day after the first trip into Havasu was, I want to do that again.

EB: Yeah.

TM: The same on the river trip, I want to do that again?

EB: Not so much. I wasn't like, oh my God, I have to get on the river again. I already felt like I knew Grand Canyon.

TM: Did you get a sense that you might've known Grand Canyon for the hiking you've done more than anyone else on the trip?

EB: Gosh, I don't recall that. The people were kind of regular tourist types, you know what I mean? Not extremely outdoorsy.

TM: Well, so this the Phoenix...

EB: College.

TM: ...College outing. And you would have been a small group of 10 people maybe?

EB: Oh. We were probably closer to 16, cause we had those huge boats with side tubes. Two of them.

TM: Oh. I'm thinking you would have been 25% of the whole trip cause a group size would have been 40/42 there would've been. If the boats were full there would have been 80. No, that's wrong. There would have been 40 people on the trip. And if you brought in 20, that've been half the trip right there. But there would have been people on the trip who weren't part of the school.

EB: Oh, it was all Phoenix College.

TM: Oh, so they chartered the whole trip?

TM: Okay. But the people that had booked the trip through the college were educators, weren't necessarily hikers or camping people or...

EB: Well, I know that the... I think it was a math teacher or something at the college and I think he did it every year.

TM: Okay. You remember his name?

EB: I don't.

TM: But mostly teachers. So people would have been curious looking at stuff?

EB: Yeah. I don't recall that at all.

TM: Alright. What else do you remember?

EB: Not much. I enjoyed it. It was a different scene, you know, with the cooks and the kitchen, the boatman. I did get the feeling that the boatman was kind of burned out. Vito was his name. I can't think of his last name. He was burned out. Pat or Chris, I forgot whoever it was, it was like the person we didn't deal with later on on river trips. He was really nice. And then they had swampers who are really nice who would take us on hikes. But it was a different scene. It was a lot of people, it was totally different than backpacking. I thought it was nice, but I don't know if I would want to do it again kind of thing.

TM: Mhm. Yeah, especially some of the hikes that you've done, you and Ken, just small group and the canyon is yours.

EB: Yeah.

TM: And that's real different from being with a group of 40 others of people you know or you don't know.

EB: Right.

TM: Interesting. And this was 1986?

EB: The river trip was '84.

TM: River trip was '84. That's right.

EB: And actually, that was '84. I was meeting Ken at that time. I met Ken in '84.

TM: So you did the South Bass trip and the river trip.

EB: Yeah.

TM: And all these other trips.

EB: But from '84 to '86 we did a lot of backpacking.

TM: Okay. So then that question I asked was really not quite...

EB: I had done some trips, but I don't think...

TM: You had done as many?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. So the river trip wasn't at the end of all your canyon hiking. It was actually early on.

EB: Yeah. Kind of. Cause I had started doing little backpacks in '81.

TM: Day hike kind of things or...?

EB: Some backpacking but mostly like Hermit or South Kaibab or Bright Angel or Havasupai. Those kind of things.

TM: One day, one night, kind of weekend.

EB: Yeah. One or two night weekend type things.

TM: Okay. Alright. Your school schedule, was that four days a week or five days a week?

EB: Five days. I took a lot of time off school. When I think back now, when I left, when I finally quit teaching, I had zero. Cause you could build up sick days like crazy. I had none left. I kind of foolishly used... I used all my days going hiking.

TM: Well, nothing wrong with that. At least you used them.

EB: Yeah.

TM: So, yeah. Okay. '84, '85, '86, a lot of Grand Canyon hiking. Do you have any really nice memories of some of the hikes that you did then?

EB: I loved to do Boucher.

TM: Bass to Boucher or just the Boucher itself?

EB: Boucher around there or we would do... I guess we'd go down Boucher and over to Slate Canyon.

TM: Hermit and come up...

EB: We'd do... Well, I guess Slate was a day trip.

TM: Down to Slate.

EB: We'd go sit and watch/look at Crystal. That canyon is so cool. The geology in it. I enjoyed hard backpacks. Like Boucher was really hard, I think. Or Tanner to Beamer and up the Little Colorado.

TM: Did you go out Hopi Salt?

EB: No, we went up, but we never...we didn't...so we must've not gone far enough.

TM: Well, that's still... From Tanner down and back again, without doing the loopy exit, you don't have to walk so far.

EB: Yeah. We would do the out and back. I just liked being there.

TM: Nice.

EB: I enjoyed it tremendously. I really did actually like Monument Creek, so we'd go down Hermit to Monument, I guess?

TM: Mhm.

EB: I thought that was a beautiful, beautiful canyon, Granite Rapids. I like that much better than say Hermit Creek where there was tons of people.

TM: So let's talk about that tons of people. This is 1984/'86. I believe Gaylord Staveley was running Grand Canyon Trail Guides. At the time there was a commercial concession leading guided backpacking trips in the park.

EB: Oh.

TM: And so some of the people you saw there may have been from them.

EB: Maybe.

TM: Otherwise, if it wasn't, it was just regular folks who were getting permits and going down there. Now, on a spring break, you might expect to be a lot of people down there. But outside of that, were you seeing...

EB: Not very many. We would go every month of the year.

TM: The typical visitation is a two humped camel with high use in the fall and high use in the spring and little use in the winter and little use in the summer. And you were going every month.

EB: Mhm.

TM: Did you see that up and down in visitation as you...

EB: Oh yeah. We would go there. It would be dead. It would be dead in January, dead in February, dead in November. Yeah.

TM: And in the middle of the summer, depending on where you went.

EB: Right. We probably didn't do that much in the middle of the summer. I got smart finally. [both laugh]

TM: Well, if you like heat, you know, you go for it. So more folks in the spring and fall?

EB: Yeah. Right, I remember one time... This is when I was backpacking with Joe. We would just drive up. We'd go to the south rim permits office back when it was... Oh, well first it moved from where Shrine of the Ages or whatever to...it was like a little trailer. I forget where that was parked. That was kind of near the showers of the campground.

TM: That's right.

EB: I remember we'd go in and I remember the ranger saying, "The canyon's full. Literally the canyon is full."

TM: When was that?

EB: Like '87 or '88. It was spring break.

TM: Alright, so spring break 1987/'88 were at capacity for backcountry.

EB: Well, and the thing was, there were areas... So when I got up, I knew their backcountry ranger, Ken Phillips. I knew him well from all the...

TM: How did you meet him?

EB: Just from getting permits.

TM: Okay. So he was working in the permit office?

EB: Yeah, at that time, and he knew me and so he gave us a permit that he probably wouldn't have given anybody cause it was really too far to go on one day. But he goes like, "Here's your camp site." It was Palisades or something beyond Tanner.

TM: So you had to go down the Tanner which is nine miles and then you had to hike up toward the Little Colorado to get out of the Tanner use area, which was full of people to get into the next use area where you could camp.

EB: Yeah. I just remember he... Cause after, they were telling people you can't go, you can't go, cause you know... But he's like, "Oh, hi. Okay. Here's something for you. Here's where you can do this." So we said, "Okay."

TM: Was that the first time you guys were suddenly made aware that there was a lot of people in the canyon? Or had it hit you before then?

EB: I guess it had hit us before, but it did strike me as funny to hear him saying the canyon is full.

TM: Without you even asking about where you wanted to go?

EB: Right. Cause they were telling people in line ahead of us. Yeah. [laughs]

TM: How many people were in line ahead of you, do you remember?

EB: Oh, there would be like 10 at the permits office.

TM: Okay. Let's go back a minute and talk about the first time you went to get a permit to go hiking. That permit office was at the Shrine of the Ages or was it at park headquarters?

EB: At the old visitor center, the headquarters.

TM: Yeah. Headquarters.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Do you remember which office? You'd come in there and there's a courtyard with the old boats.

EB: You had to go into the courtyard and then go to the window. Yeah. Stand outside.

TM: Okay. In the courtyard there.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. And then they would give you a permit or not. Did you ever get turned away? You wanted to do a hike somewhere and...

EB: No. We'd take whatever we could. But once again, in was in the early days it was just the corridor type stuff was all I was ever interested in.

TM: Okay. And then within the scope of seven years/eight years, visitation had gotten up to a point that they had moved the permits office out of park headquarters.

EB: Uh-huh.

TM: The old park headquarters or the old visitor's center, to put it exactly. And then they had the trailer over by Mather campground. Which is where then you went to get permits over there. I wonder why they did that. Why they took the permits people, people that were after permits and took them completely away from the visitor center where it might've been already busy enough and moved them over there.

EB: I dunno. Maybe they needed more space or something.

TM: Always a question and issue of space. Sure.

EB: Or maybe they didn't want people in the courtyard, you know, getting in there during different hours or before the visitor center opened. I don't know.

TM: Hm. Yeah. If they had it open early and they didn't have anybody on staff in headquarters yet.

EB: Maybe that was it because I remember they opened at 7:30 or something like that.

TM: Okay. Alright. So you keep mentioning Joe Shannon. When did you meet Joe?

EB: In '86.

TM: How did you guys meet?

EB: NOLS course.

TM: Tell me about the course.

EB: It was an outdoors educator's course. I was looking to hike and I'd heard about NOLS, so I thought, oh, this would be a good thing. So I signed up for a month long trip in June. Outdoor educator's course.

TM: June of '86.

EB: Mhm.

TM: So did you travel around to a lot of different places or was it just focused on outdoor education for one trip, one...

EB: It was in the Wind Rivers. And so we were backpacking.

TM: Summertime?

EB: Yeah. Although the Wind Rivers had 300% snow pack.

TM: Wow.

EB: So in addition to having 80 pound packs, we were on snowshoes.

TM: Wow. And this was a weeks long trip. So you got...

EB: No, a month.

TM: Well, the whole backpack was a month long?

EB: Mhm.

TM: How did you manage your food?

EB: We had...

TM: Resupply?

EB: ...rations. Resupplies.

TM: Okay. 80 pound packs and snowshoes.

EB: Yeah.

TM: And building snow shelters?

EB: No. I have done that, but we had tents. Normally NOLS has tarps, but because the weather was so snowy, we had tents.

TM: Okay. Tell me about that trip. What else do you remember about it?

EB: Oh, well, I met Joe. So that's kind of...and we fell in love. I didn't go intending to do that.

TM: Were you still hanging with Ken at the time?

EB: Yeah. But it was deteriorating. Ken...he was...he wanted to break up. So yeah, it was hard. It was hard. First of all, 80 pounds, you know?

TM: How much do you weigh? How much did you weigh then?

EB: I weigh about 120.

TM: And you weighed that then?

EB: Yeah. We had pitons. This was a old fashioned... The main instructor was like a...he was kind of a stick in the mud. Oh, he was really a chauvinist. Oh my God. But...yeah, we were carrying pitons, climbing ropes, fishing poles. All the lakes were frozen over. Snowshoes, books. The sleeping bags were heavy. Yeah, we had it all. And we never fished. People on the trip were really struggling. And we were in deep snow. This was the kind of instructor it was. We were in snow up to our waists. And

we were, you know, ignorant, all of us, we were all educators. I remember they sent us off to find camp. And we're just post-holing. This one girl is crying, she's near hysterics. We say to each other, we were carrying our snowshoes, we say, "Well, do you think we should put on our snowshoes?" We said, "No. They would have told us if we should." [laughs] So there we were post-holing up to our waists and we were so... Finally this one girl threw herself on a rock. She's like, "I can't do this anymore." So I think Joe came and looked for us and then he showed us how to put on our snowshoes and then he took us back to camp. I mean, that's how ignorant we were. We just were like, "No, no. They would have told us if we had to wear our snowshoes."

TM: And the instructor on the course wouldn't...

EB: He purposely did that to make us miserable. And he was so smug. When we came straggling back into camp, he was just so proud of himself. Like you know...

TM: Was he trying to educate or was he trying to kick people out of the program?

EB: He was very strange. He was just...he was a horrible person. I remember once another woman on the trip, her pack was wasn't working. It was falling apart. I had backpacked enough and I knew about backpacking pins and you know, so I said, "Here, let me see about tightening this." So she took off her pack and we were just talking amongst ourselves. He was there smugly off to the side saying, "Huh, the blind leading the blind. The blind leading the blind," that kind of stuff.

TM: Lot of help from him.

EB: Yeah. He was just like... He had weird issues. And then he left. He got evaced cause he broke his ankle. So then things picked up after that.

TM: Early on?

EB: About halfway.

TM: Okay. Then hopefully things got better.

EB: Yeah, things got better. The substitute instructor that came in was young and a lot more fun. This guy was old...old like, I dunno, 50. He shouldn't have been an instructor. [laughs]

TM: It's curious that given the snowpack that they still stuck to their Wind River plans and didn't go anywhere else.

EB: Yeah.

TM: I mean, just this is what we do, so this is how we do it.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Huh. Interesting. What did you come away with besides meeting Joe... That month long journey up in the Winds, it's pretty special country up there. What else did you come away with that trip?

EB: I really enjoyed it. I liked the backpacking and all that. We learned how to climb on that.

TM: Oh. Okay.

EB: I came away... I traumatized my shoulder cause I was climbing so improperly that I popped my shoulder out.

TM: Egh.

EB: So I came away with that injury that plagued me until I got surgery. I also came away with a fear of snow because I was so used to stepping anywhere and then falling up to my waist. So I got over that. But after that trip I was afraid of snow, hiking. I thought I could fall through.

TM: And the very fact that you completed the trip, did you get some certificate from NOLS saying you were a guide or something, or was it...

EB: No, that was just a student trip.

TM: Okay. Wow. Hmm.

EB: I remember because the main instructor was such a jerk we didn't really have classes. He would sit down and he'd just pontificate. And he would ridicule us if we participated. So Joe told us we should all ask for our money back. I remember I was just like so happy to have survived and I felt like I learned a lot that I never would have dreamed to ask for my money back. But today I should have asked for my money back. But Joe was like, "You guys should ask for your money back. You really got cheated, you know?"

TM: Well did he?

EB: Well, he was one of the instructors underneath that other...

TM: I see.

EB: ...guy. And that guy made fun of Joe. I thought, wow, I guess this is how NOLS instructors work. They have this shtick they do. But he was just... He had some issues. He needed to stop being an instructor.

TM: What else did you do that summer of '86 besides the NOLS trip?

EB: I don't know. Probably just hung out. Ran on the greenbelt.

TM: Did you get your shoulder relocated?

EB: Yeah. Well that was '86. I didn't get shoulder surgery till like I think '94 or something.

TM: Okay. Were you easily dislocatable?

EB: Yeah.

TM: When you're sleeping and you'd feel it ride out and then you'd bring it back in.

EB: Yeah.

TM: Painful.

EB: Yeah. Very like weird, scary like...

TM: Pins and needles, neural...

EB: It feels like your arm is coming out of your back or something. When it's not where it belongs, it just is a terrible feeling.

TM: Yeah. Okay. Okay. I wonder, we've been at this almost an hour and a half.

EB: Wow.

TM: Time flies away. Maybe 1986 is a good time to hit the pause button and wrap up Part 1.

EB: Okay.

TM: And as I do the wrap ups, is there anything else you would like to add to what we've covered so far that you'd want to be in this part one?

EB: Well, I guess I could say that I never taught PE, what I went to college for, because when I went to get a job in Paradise Valley schools, there was no jobs in PE. But I had a triple minor. I had a health minor, a science minor, and a speech communication minor and they needed science teachers. So I taught science.

TM: I forgot to ask you. In what grade?

EB: High school and middle school.

TM: Okay. Science as in biology?

EB: Biology and earth science.

TM: Okay. Did you like that?

EB: Yeah.

TM: Did you sub for chemistry or physics at all?

EB: No.

TM: Okay. So really in biology or earth science just as a...

EB: Yeah. One year I taught drama. [laughs]

TM: Had you taken any acting, any drama?

EB: No. They gave it to me cause I had a speech minor. No, I had never ever...it was...yeah...it was something. [both laugh]

TM: Okay. Hmm. Well, fun. Did you enjoy middle school more than high school or was there a grade you liked the most?

EB: I actually enjoyed middle school. The seventh graders were sweet and they're fun people. The eighth graders were more mature, but also just really interesting human beings. I thought, oh my God, this is going to be horrible. But they're really...they're a lot of fun.

TM: Okay. So middle school preferred. Anything else?

EB: I guess that's all.

TM: Cool. Well, with that, this will conclude Part 1 of Grand Canyon oral history with Emma Benenati. My name is Tom Martin. Today is July 1, 2019. And thank you so much.

EB: Thank you.