

Transcription Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Esther Litton (EL)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Born in 1919 in Los Angeles's Westlake neighborhood, Esther recounts how her grandparents came to the United States from Mexico, growing up in LA, meeting her future husband Martin Litton in College, their honeymoon which included a night at the El Tovar Hotel, the war years, world travel, operating Grand Canyon Dories and her role in environmental activism. In Part 4, Esther discusses moving to the Bay Area, her first trip to the Grand Canyon, traveling through South America, and California environmentalism and activist organizations.

Date of Interview: May 25, 2020

Method of Interview: Telephone

Transcriber: Kiana Cook

Date of Transcription: May 17, 2021

Transcription Reviewers: Esther Litton, Kathleen (Litton) Riley

Keys: Martin Litton; Grand Canyon; Colorado River; Lava Falls, Horn Creek, Soap, Hance Granite Falls rapids; Los Angeles, California; *Los Angeles Times*; Frank Wright, Norman Nevills; Georgie White Clark; Lefty Bryant; John Riffey; San Fernando Valley; P.T. 'Pat' and Susie Reilly; David Brower; Sierra Club; Yosemite National Park; Dinosaur National Monument; *Sunset Magazine*; Menlo Park, California; Los Altos, California; Kings Canyon National Park; Havasu Canyon; Phantom Ranch; Kaibab Trail; Elves Chasm; Temple Bar; Lake Mead; Portola Valley, California; Stanford, California; Argentina; Buenos Aires; Andes Mountains; Chile; Puerto Varas; Puerto Montt; Santiago; Panama; Colombia; Leticia, Colombia; Venezuela; Caracas; Canaima, Venezuela; Angel Falls, Venezuela; John Haddaway; Kern Plateau; Sierra Nevada; Cottonwood Pass; Mount Whitney; Berkeley, California; *Time and the River Flowing*; *The Last Redwoods*; Philip Hyde and Francois Leydey; Otis Marston; Glen Canyon Dam; McKenzie River dory; Keith Steele; Gaylord Staveley; Ron Smith; Bill Belknap; Ted and Don Hatch; Tad Nichols; Committee for Green Foothills; Wallace Stegner; Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST); coast redwoods and national park, Weyerhaeuser Company; Mineral King; John Litton; Kathleen Litton; Donald Litton

TM: Today is Monday, May 25th, 2020. This is a Part 4 interview with Esther Litton. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Esther. How are you?

EL: Good afternoon. I'm fine, thank you.

TM: Great. Esther, may we have your permission to record this interview?

EL: Yes, you do.

TM: Thank you. Yesterday, we finished up with 1952, and Martin was hiking into the bottom of the Grand Canyon at the top of Lava Falls Rapid, a very steep and hot route to hike down. Do you remember how he knew those river runners would be there?

EL: Yes. Martin and I had made that hike before—I think a year before. And when we got to the bottom, there was nobody there, but he wanted a picture of the river. Later, he convinced one of the employees at the *Los Angeles Times* to join him again. I don't know why he wanted to go back, but the gentleman who went with him was from the *Los Angeles Times*. They hiked down.

I don't think that Martin knew that Frank Wright was going to be there. It's possible that he did know, but I don't have that information. But when they got to the bottom, to Lava Falls, Frank Wright was

there. He had taken over the river business from Norman Nevills, who had died in a plane crash. And Frank Wright, I think, ran just one trip during the summer. But he had a couple of ladies as his passengers and I don't know who else.

But, also, Georgie White was there with a passenger. She was in a raft, and she wanted to go down Lava Falls at the same time Frank Wright did so that she would follow the right course.

TM: Okay. Did Martin hike down with a fellow named Lefty Bryant?

EL: Correct. Yes.

TM: What do you remember about Lefty?

EL: I don't know a thing about—I didn't know a thing about Lefty. He might have been a janitor, for all I know.

TM: [laughs] Okay.

EL: But he's someone who wanted to do the hike.

TM: Okay. And what did Martin—what did he think about that? He hiked down. It would have been hot. You guys had done it before.

TM: He knew it was hard.

EL: Yeah. It's very hot, and it's volcanic ash, and you're sliding down most of the way. And when Martin and I hiked down, he had on a heavy backpack and his tripod and his camera, so that—and then hiking back up was even more difficult because we kept slipping back. But that was the hike that we made. And I imagine that the hike down with Lefty Bryant was equally hot and fragile, with the volcanic ash.

TM: When you were there in probably maybe '51, did you meet John and Laura Riffey?

EL: Did I what?

TM: Did you meet John Riffey?

EL: Oh, I'm sure we did, because we had to check in with him. He was a ranger at the Grand Canyon National Monument. And I don't remember what year we met him, but that's probably the year we did. At that time, he was married to his first wife, who died later. But Riffey was very kind to put water along the trail for us, because he anticipated that we would need water.

TM: Nice. What else do you remember about John Riffey?

EL: Well, he was very affable, very helpful, and gave—and was eager to help us in any way he could. We met him many times later on with his second wife, who was an avid birder, birdwatcher. I think she taught in Oregon, at some university in Oregon, his second wife. But, anyway, do you want me to go on with the Frank Wright?

TM: Yes, please.

EL: Okay. As a result of that meeting, the ladies [on Frank Wright's trip] invited—got in touch with Martin later that month that they were going to have a big get-together in San Fernando Valley at

someone's home. Well, they were going to talk river trips and show slides. So Martin and I did go that autumn to a home in San Fernando Valley. And at that meeting, which lasted for hours, we met [P.T] 'Pat' Reilly. That was our first meeting with Pat and Susie Reilly.

TM: Okay. That's good, because that was a question I had for you, is: How did you meet Pat and Susie?

EL: Yes. Yes. Well, we did.

TM: Okay.

EL: And then, of course, if I jump ahead to when Martin started at *Sunset* [Magazine]—but probably I shouldn't jump ahead yet, but I have to introduce the fact that because of the *Los Angeles Times* articles, one of which caught the Sierra Club's eye, which was called "Yosemite's Beauty Fast Disappearing," which Martin wrote to indicate the pollution that existed in Yosemite at that time because of the many, many cars that traveled to Yosemite to watch the firefall, and they were trampling the meadows.

Anyway, because of that article and the others about Dinosaur, David Brower had contacted Martin. Either he had come down to Los Angeles to meet—I don't remember when Martin met Dave Brower. But in 1954, David Brower was approached by *Sunset* Magazine because *Sunset* had just lost their travel editor, who had moved on, and they needed another travel editor. They suggested the job to Dave Brower. He wasn't interested; but, because he had met Martin and read the different articles on conservation and travel, he suggested that they contact Martin.

And in the spring of 1954—well, earlier, possibly—I think in the spring of '54, Martin was interviewed—went north to Menlo Park, where he was interviewed by Mr. and Mrs. Lane. And he left a portfolio that had the pictures and articles that he had done. He had some things that had been published in *Arizona Highways*. He had something that had been published in *National Geographic*, something in *Pacific Pathways*. So he had a fairly rich portfolio of his work and his writings. And they offered him the job.

TM: Okay.

EL: But at that time—oh. Yeah?

TM: No, no. That's fine. I just said, "Okay." Keep going.

EL: Oh. All right.

TM: Yep. They offered him the job.

EL: Well, first, we had—we hadn't been in the house that we built too many years, just a few years, and we didn't want to sell the house. And it was a question whether they would be interested, *Sunset* would be interested in a conservation angle that Martin wanted to bring. He wanted to bring conservation into any article that he might write.

So he accepted the job, and the kids and I stayed behind and finished the upstairs, which had been left unfinished, and it included two bedrooms and a bath. And I didn't want to—we didn't want to sell the house at that point, but we rented it out for a year, because we thought if the job at *Sunset* didn't work out, we could always come back home to Los Angeles.

So Martin reported to *Sunset* around April or May of that year. And then the kids and I followed in June. The first article that was planned for the following summer was a big article on the Grand Canyon. So Martin, besides figuring out other articles, other travel articles to work on, he wanted to include the river experience in the coming big article on the Grand Canyon. And to do that, he contacted Pat Reilly, whom we had met in San Fernando Valley, and asked him if he was going to run a trip in the summer of 1955. And Pat said yes, he was going to run a trip in June of 1955. So—shall I jump to 1955?

TM: Well, unless there's some neat things to talk about for '53 and '54?

EL: Well, I don't remember anything specific, except the river trip in Dinosaur and the kids [laughs]—one born in '46 and the other born in '49.

TM: So that's John and Kathleen?

EL: Yeah. Yes. And then building the house.

TM: Right. And, so, while Martin was looking to get the job at *Sunset*, you were raising the kids and working on the house.

EL: Yes. Yes. Because Martin left early, around April or May, and then in—while he was gone, I got a contractor to finish the upstairs. And we arranged to move—I think we moved in June. Martin had found a house in Menlo Park [CA] that we could rent for a year. So the kids and I came up to Menlo Park and moved into this house in Menlo Park.

TM: And that was closer to the *Sunset* offices?

EL: Yes, it was [*Sunset* office is in Menlo Park]. But the people who owned the house would only rent it for a year.

TM: Okay.

EL: So in June of the following year, when we were getting ready to go on the river trip, we also had to find another place to rent.

TM: Wow. What did you do?

EL: Well, we knew we couldn't rent the house in Menlo Park after June, so we did find a house to rent in a town called Los Altos. And that was much farther from the *Sunset*, but it was near a nice shopping center in Los Altos, and it was a nice house. So we had arranged that when we came back from the river trip, we would move from Menlo Park to Los Altos.

TM: Wow. So I want to ask about the kids again. When you went on that river trip in the summer of 1955, where did the kids go?

EL: Well, they went to stay with my mother in Los Angeles.

TM: Okay.

EL: Yeah. I think we drove down to Los Angeles and left them there with my mother while we made our way to the Grand Canyon.

TM: That makes sense.

EL: Yeah. I was very apprehensive about the trip. I had seen pictures of the [Grand] Canyon in the *National Geographic*, and it seemed to me that it might be very claustrophobic. But it turned out to be entirely the opposite. It was a very hot June. June is the hottest month in the Grand Canyon.

Oh, but I should explain first—two weeks—two or three weeks before we left for the Grand Canyon, Martin had been on a scouting trip in the Kings Canyon [National Park]. During that trip, crossing a river, the horse had stumbled and fallen. And Martin had been tossed off onto a waterfall, and he'd fallen on this waterfall. And in trying to get his balance and get his pack off of his back, he dislocated his shoulder.

TM: Ouch.

EL: So the pack went disappearing down the river, but the people or the packer who was with him, of course, got him out of the water. But they still were a day and a half to where the cars were, to where they could get him to a hospital. They did get him to a hospital, and a doctor relocated his shoulder. And Martin said, "Well, now, am I going to be able to row? Because in three weeks, I'm leaving on a river trip, and I'm supposed to row one of the boats." And the doctor said, "You absolutely cannot row. You keep it in that sling, and don't lift it."

So, where he was supposed to have rowed one of the three boats that we took, he had to stay quiet for a while. That didn't last very long at a certain point. He still had the tripod and the camera and the film, because, of course, he intended to take pictures. He did manage to get a very good shot—color shot, that was used in the inside of the magazine, of Havasu, where we were taking boats in there, to Havasu.

It was a—almost a three-week trip, but Pat Reilly did not like to take passengers through the rapids. So we walked around everything. In fact, Pat Reilly didn't—he wanted to line a lot of them. He wasn't comfortable running a lot of the rapids. And when we got to one, one of the boats, the boatman in one of the boats turned over in Horn. And he was all right, but they lost a couple of oars. And so when we got to Granite, which is below Horn, we stayed there, watching to see if we could spot the oar that had been lost. But Pat Reilly had some material on the boat, and he fashioned another oar, temporary oar.

But by the end of the trip, Martin was moving his arm around and able to maneuver the tripod and the camera. And, actually, the next year, 1956, he went again with Pat Reilly, and that time he rowed one of the boats. But when we went, there were just three—three boats and nine people. There was just Susie and Pat, and I was the other woman. The others were gentlemen who Pat Reilly knew from his work at Northrup. And so, anyway, in 1956, Martin went again.

TM: What do you remember about Pat and Susie Reilly?

EL: What did I what?

TM: What do you remember about them?

EL: Oh. Well, they were very knowledgeable about the river. And Pat and Sue, they had worked out a very spartan [menu] [laughs]. Pat was very agreeable, very, very cheerful, and very knowledgeable about the river. But he was quite cautious. As I say, when we got to Lava Falls, we emptied the boats of everything. Susie and I carried buckets of food and cans around to the bottom of Lava Falls while the boatmen, Pat, and the other gentlemen lined the boats to the bottom of Lava Falls.

TM: Okay.

EL: So we didn't row Lava at all. In fact, as I said, like Soap, Hance—any of those—and Horn, we walked around all of them. We did stop at Phantom Ranch, and we walked up to the ranch, and we spent the night in one of the cabins at Phantom Ranch. And then—

TM: Okay. What do you remember about that?

EL: Well, I remember there was a swimming pool, which in later years was filled because of a storm. And I remember there was a mule party with riders that had just come down the Kaibab Trail, and the people were having trouble getting off of the mules [*laughs*].

TM: Yeah.

EL: I remember [*laughs*] they were just sore and tired. I remember that it was a very pleasant facility. The food was great, and the people who had ridden down were really pretty tired. And so—

TM: I bet.

EL: But—

TM: Gosh.

EL: But later, there were some bad floods along the creek there. And, eventually, they filled up the swimming pool, so it doesn't exist anymore.

TM: Well, you had a chance to go swimming there. That's pretty neat.

EL: [*laughs*] I don't think we swam, but it was there.

TM: Okay. Okay.

EL: Yeah.

TM: What else do you remember about that river trip in general?

EL: Well, it was such a revelation. And the thing is there was nothing claustrophobic about it at all, because each canyon had something tempting. And we did some of the side hikes. And, of course, we stopped at Havasu and at Elves Chasm. And Martin was taking pictures, as I said, along the way. And it was a long pull-out, because at that time, we went out at Temple Bar, which was a long, long trip over Lake Mead.

That's—but, anyway, we moved into Los Altos, and it was a very comfortable home. We were there until [1959]—while we were there, the traffic was hard for Martin, and it would take him a half an hour to get to Menlo Park, because the traffic was building up. So when it looked like we would be staying, we started looking around for a place for a property. And then, at that time, we decided to put the [Los Angeles] house up for sale.

And in 1950—I'm trying to think what year—I think it was 1957 or '56 [1958], we saw the property in a place called Portola Valley, which is on the edge of the end of Stanford land and the beginning of private land. And it was called Portola Valley, and we looked at some property there. I wasn't too eager for the place because the lot that Martin favored, while it was almost four acres, there was a limited area on which you could build a house. But it was a beautiful spot. At the time, I was pregnant with [my son] Donald, and I really didn't want to argue [*laughs*].

So it was a reasonable—I think it was \$9,000 for the four acres at the time. But there was a heavy, heavy rainfall that particular spring, a steady, steady rainfall, which—the lot that we had had a pad to build on off the street. But then it had a slope and another slope, and then the rain saturated the slope, and it all sloughed down so that we didn't have a lower level on which to put the lower part of the house. So it involved getting an engineering company to come in and restabilize the slope. And it has stayed stabilized to this day. They did a wonderful job.

So when we were here again, we designed a house and got a builder. And this time, we got the Cal Vet loan. And the Cal Vet loan required that you had the property paid for and the plans ready, and I don't think they gave you more than a year to get all of this together.

So it was a rush to design the house and the plans. And so we did manage to build it. The children, actually, in the later years, loved the place because, while we didn't have much of a lawn for them to play ball on, they had the hillside, which was heavily wooded with oaks and madronas and—well, also poison oak. But then they built a little trail through the woods, and they played on special—they had a special rock. So over the years, all of them felt that they had had a magical childhood in that particular home and situation.

TM: Nice. Oh, that's beautiful.

EL: Yes. Well, I don't know whether I should jump to 1960, because at that time, the South American tourist agency [South American Tourism Association aka SATA] contacted the Lanes and said they had never had an article on South America; would they consider sending their travel editor to South America? So it was arranged that Martin and I—because I spoke Spanish and I met the man who was the agent—we were to go in 1960 for a month and divide it between Chile and Argentina. So that was what we did in 1960.

We went—we flew to Mexico City and changed planes to Canadian Pacific, which was flying [then]—which flew down to South America. We flew down the edge of Peru, over the Andes, and into Buenos Aires, and spent two weeks in Buenos Aires. And then we did the lake route, where you go down to Bariloche and Puerto Montt, Puerto Varas, in the southern part of Chile, where we crossed over to Chile and then visited the cities of Puerto Varas and Puerto Montt in Chile and then took the train up the coast to Santiago, where we did some—Martin did some shooting there. We took the train that goes over the Andes from Santiago to Argentina, but we took it just to the top, where it reached the top of the Andes; and then we turned around and took the train back down, because we didn't have time or we didn't want to get caught on the Argentine side.

So we had the train trip. And then we flew to Panama because the money was running out [*laughs*], and Martin still had—I had promised to be home at the end of the month, and the month had already passed. And I was anxious to get home, so I came home from Panama City. Incidentally, in Panama City, we went into a camera shop where Martin was able to buy his Hasselblad [camera]. And the Hasselblad was—with lenses, some very good lenses, came to just \$500.

There were no charge accounts or anything like that. So we said [*laughs*]—we wrote a check. For some reason, we had a checkbook. We wrote a check for the \$500, but asked him not to cash it until we got home [*laughs*]. And so he did. He agreed to that. But Martin stayed on and visited the Guianas. He spent a day—I don't know how long, but each one. He went to the British Guiana, Dutch Guiana, and French Guiana and covered those photographically. And while he was in Dutch Guiana, which is also Suriname,

he met a jungle guide at their tour office, Tony van Ommeren , who said, "You know, come back and we'll—we have rivers to run." [Tony] was part Bush Negro, part Carib Indian, part Dutch. And he was very well-educated, and he knew the jungle, the area, very well. And he would lead tours. So it was the beginning of a long friendship with Tony van Ommeren.

Anyway, we did those two countries in 1960. And in 1965, we spent a month [correction; 2 weeks] in Colombia and a month [correction; 2 weeks] in Venezuela. And the exciting part—well, it was all very exciting. We were in Bogotá, which is very high. And from there, we took an army plane that took us down to the Amazon, where Colombia had a city named Leticia and also a—the navy, a navy ship there [laughs], which was thousands of miles from the ocean. There was a small village. And while we were there, we visited one of the native villages, and we flew in a plane that was delivering [mail] to an outpost, an army outpost, up one [of] the [branches] of the Amazon. And when we landed there on the water—it was a water landing—the pilot took us over to a large native village, which was interesting. But it also gave us a chance to see from the air the extent of the river system and the beautiful rainforest that existed. It was a beautiful flight.

And Leticia was just a small town. And we met a guide who was doing something really illegal. He was catching some of the wildlife and shipping it to the United States, which he—later, he was arrested and put in jail. But he was a very competent guide. Anyway, we did get back to Bogotá, but what happened when we were in Leticia—Martin had gotten malaria during the army games during the war, and the trip to Leticia, which was at Amazon level, and the heat apparently triggered the malaria again. So when we got back to Bogotá, the hotel, he was very ill. He was shaking one minute and then very hot the next. And, fortunately, there was a doctor in the hotel who helped Martin get well.

But then, from Bogotá, we went to Venezuela, and the airport was on the coast. And Caracas is inland. You have to take the freeway—there's a freeway that goes over the mountain into Caracas. And at that time, in 1965, the mountain, which was Monte Avila, I think, was pure rainforest, beautiful. And Caracas—the hotel where we stayed, the Tequendama, I think, was very comfortable. And we were able to get—we were advised to get a flight to a place called Canaima, which was inland. And on that flight, which was on a small plane—by that, I mean it held about 10 people. It wasn't just a two- or four-place thing. But on that flight, before we got to the dirt strip at the place called Canaima, the pilot took us over Angel Falls. And Angel Falls is the highest waterfall in the world, [named for Jimmie Angel who was the first to fly over the falls]. Several years before that, Martin had met Jimmie Angel when Jimmie Angel was in Los Angeles, trying to get money so that he could go back to Angel Falls [where he had had to crash land], and where he thought there was gold. But, anyway, the pilot let Martin come up into his copilot's seat, and he made several runs in front of the falls so Martin could get some good pictures.

And we were fortunate that there was no fog or clouds, anything covering the mesa—what they call [a] tepui—where the falls were, and Martin got some good pictures. Unfortunately, some of the people got airsick because [laughs] the pilot made several swoops so Martin could get some good pictures.

But the landing was at a camp called Canaima. And Canaima, at a lower—much lower level, also has some waterfalls—nothing like Angel Falls, but they were very picturesque. And it was—I think it was a dirt strip that we landed in. And the cabin where we stayed had an aluminum roof. It rained very hard that night, and it was very noisy. But the accommodations were fine. It was elementary; it was spartan, but it was fine. And, of course, the area was perfectly beautiful. So that was our adventure in that part of Venezuela, but we also went to other areas where Martin got pictures.

TM: You know, let's go back a little bit between—well, that—1955 to 1965. Where else did *Sunset* send Martin? Where else did he go? Do you remember?

EL: Well, he did very many major stories. In the summer, he would schedule a story or pick a story that the kids and I could go on. They didn't send him—they would work out the stories and the areas that they wanted to cover. There was a fairly big story where went to Vancouver Island. So Vancouver Island was the main story for travel that summer. And then another summer, we went to Yellowstone, and he did a big story on Yellowstone.

And then we did a pack trip with the kids, with the two kids, to the Kern Plateau. That was a three-week pack trip with [three mules]. And Martin, in the meantime, had also—he had convinced the older Lanes that they could sure use an airplane. And he [*laughs*—he had a pilot's license, so they did invest in an airplane, which made it possible for Martin to get around to some of these areas. But he did—let's see. There was a big story scheduled from Baja, and that involved flying down to Baja.

And then—oh. In September of 1960, there was a big story scheduled for the coast redwoods—well, the redwood country. It was several pages long. And in the captions and in the pictures, Martin had taken a picture of a very large cut in the highway where several redwoods, of course, had been eliminated to widen the highway. It was along the Eel River somewhere. And we showed them that picture in that article. Many people wrote in and said what was happening? Why were they cutting down those trees?

You know, and so it started—what happened was that the Weyerhaeuser Company that was doing a lot of clearcutting and another lumber company—couple of lumber companies up there that were doing clearcutting, were alerted to the fact that Martin was zeroing in on the destruction that was going on in the redwood country. And so they watched the articles very carefully to see what in the world he was saying or writing. And as a result of that—I'm afraid I have to jump to 1968, when Martin left *Sunset*. I don't know whether you want any other things in between.

TM: I do, but you know what? Let's jump to '68, and we'll finish that little story off, and then we'll go back.

EL: Yeah. Because in those years, from 1955 to 1968, Martin was very involved in the Sierra Club. He was on the board of directors, and so many of the big issues came up at that time. There were the coast redwoods, and there was Mineral King. And so all of these things—there was so much going on besides *Sunset's* stories. So I can't remember exactly which is which [*laughs*].

TM: You know, I did want to ask you, though, during this time, from '55 to '68, what do you remember about David Brower?

EL: Excuse me. What was the last thing?

TM: What do you remember about David Brower?

EL: Oh, yes. Well, he became a very good friend, and he would come by for lunch frequently. And Martin was in almost daily contact with him about different issues. And, of course, while he was there [at the Sierra Club], the problem with the Grand Canyon came up, the dams. And, of course—let's see. David Brower had to report to the board, the executive board. So, many times, his decisions were not what Martin thought he should do. At one point, David Brower said Martin was his conscience, because Martin could suggest some particular avenue of performance, but it would [have gotten] Dave Brower in a lot of trouble with the powers that be at the Sierra Club. So, while Martin could suggest something

outrageous, David Brower couldn't always do what Martin was suggesting. But I'm trying to think what other projects were going on during those years.

TM: So David had some kids. Did his kids play with your kids?

EL: He was what?

TM: David had some children.

EL: Oh, yes, he did. Kenneth Brower and John Brower. And he had a daughter, and I think—I think he had two sons, three sons. I'm not sure. But Kenneth Brower went on to write books. And I think the daughter became a geography professor in Oregon. But I never met any of them, except Kenneth Brower.

TM: I wondered if they played with your kids, and it sounds like—

EL: Oh, no, no, no. There was never anything like that. They weren't the same age, and David Brower lived at the top of Berkeley, and we lived down in Los Altos. Geographically, we weren't close at all. Martin's association with David Brower was mainly through meetings, the [Sierra Club] board meetings that took place.

I never went to any of the board meetings, but Martin went to all the board meetings and any other special meetings that were going on in San Francisco at the Sierra Club. And then Martin was on the publications committee, so he was instrumental in the creation of *Time and the River Flowing* and *The Last Redwoods*, those two books.

TM: You know, there's another question I wanted to ask you about Berkeley. Did Martin get a chance to meet a guy named Otis Marston?

EL: Oh, yes. I was trying to think of his name. *[laughs]* Yes, we—yes, he was a very, very good friend of Martin's, and a correspondent. Lots of correspondence between Otis and Martin. And Otis Marston is a really good historian, going way back of the Grand Canyon, and he did many deep studies of the people of the land of the—well, just very deep studies of the whole area. And his papers are in the archives of Huntington Library.

TM: Okay. Did you get a chance to meet him and his wife, and what do you remember about them?

EL: I did. I only met Otis and his wife—we had dinner one night in Berkeley. I did meet his wife. She used to be—she had to—when he went down the Grand Canyon with other people, he had to have a "rim party". *[laughs]* And I forget her name. But, anyway, she was listed as his "rim party." *[laughs]*

TM: Okay. Yeah, Margaret. Margaret was her name.

EL: Oh, Margaret. Oh, okay. Yeah. There was a lot of correspondence, lot of phone calls between Martin and Otis. They argued about different things, about who did what and all—and when did it all happen. Oh, they—they conversed a lot, and he was a very, very knowledgeable man.

TM: Okay. Let's see. We were talking about places that Martin went. And you mentioned Baja and—

EL: Yes.

TM: —the Kern Plateau. Where is that?

EL: Well, it's in a southern Sierra [Nevada].

TM: Okay.

EL: It's a more gentle part of the Sierra. And when we first moved up to Menlo Park, Martin was concerned about the conservation tactics he wanted to take. And we went to Mammoth [Lakes, CA] to meet a couple—John [and Dorothy] Haddaway. And John Haddaway, at the time, was very concerned about the Kern Plateau because of the cutting that the Forest Service was doing. So, later on, Martin scheduled a story with the pack trip that we made into what was called the Kern Plateau.

And I don't quite know how to explain—let's see. We—I'm trying to think how—we went in from the east side of the Sierra, up to Cottonwood Pass. At that time, you had to ride a horse to get up to Cottonwood Pass, which was pretty high. It was about 9,000 feet. Now there's a highway that goes up there. But from there, we went over another pass down into—trying to think—we did—we went to a place called Crabtree Meadows. It was a long trip.

I can't remember the itinerary, but at one point, we were camped at a place called Guitar Lake, which is on the west side of the Sierra [just below Mount Whitney]. But it has a trail and the Hitchcock Lakes. Kathleen and I stayed behind. John [son] and Martin climbed Mount Whitney. It was a fairly—not easy, but it was an accessible climb for the day. But I think that they just took a day to do it.

But while we were there, there was a [solo] hiker [from Trona, CA] who came by, who had hiked up and had also climbed Mount Whitney. But he was—turned out, he was quite ill. And by the time we caught up with him later at a 10,000-foot level, near Wales [Lake], he was very ill, and he died at [our] camp [on Wallace Creek]. But that's a different story. I won't go into that, because that was a different thing that happened. But—

TM: That's tragic.

EL: Yes, it was. Very, because what he had was what later has been described as [high altitude] pulmonary edema.

TM: Oh, altitude sickness.

EL: Yeah. And the altitude didn't help. And so it was quite essential, with helicopters coming in [to our camp to take him out] and it's a whole different story. I don't want to or I don't think you want me to get into that.

TM: You know, there is a question in this time period I was thinking about that I do want to ask you. Glen Canyon Dam, construction started in, I'm thinking, '54 or '55 and finished there in—well, closed in '63 to take the river. Do you—

EL: Yes. Yes. Well, it was in, I think, '61, before it was finished, that Martin organized a big boat trip that went down the river [Grand Canyon]. And the photographer went along. I think it was—oh, Phil[ip] Hyde, and Francois Leydey, who wrote the book, [*Time and the River Flowing*]. They did the trip during Martin's vacation time.

Martin—this gets kind of complicated, because, I think, in around 1960 or '61, Martin had flown up to Oregon for the McKenzie River—it was a fishing get-together kind of celebration. So he went up there to take a picture of the activities. And, while he was there, he noticed that the McKenzie dories could

possibly be modified and be used in the Grand Canyon. He didn't have a boat yet, but while he was there, he found out who made those boats, who built those boats.

And it was Keith Steele—I think it was Keith Steele—in a town in Oregon [Leaburg]. So he contacted Keith Steele and told him the kind of modifications he'd like in the fishing boat. And so Keith Steele built the shell according to Martin's specifications. And, eventually, it got home, and Martin finished with the inside—you know, the seats and the storage and all that. And then—I've lost track of the time and the years, but probably—

TM: '62? Maybe somewhere in there?

EL: Yeah.

TM: '63?

EL: Yeah, about that. I could check with my son, John, about the year. Kathleen remembered that trip as, like, 1960 or '61. But they did use that boat. And with past boats, they did the run that later produced *Time and the River Flowing*, the book *Time and the River Flowing*. [published 1/1964]

TM: Okay. There's another—well, I just wondered. I know that David Brower did some river trips in Glen Canyon just before the dam started backing up. And—

EL: Yes, he did. He probably did. We were invited at one point in '51, in that October, or maybe it was—yes, it was in October of '51, the first time we went with the kids to Dinosaur [National Monument]. We had the choice of going to Dinosaur or doing the Glen Canyon. And Martin chose to go to Dinosaur. So we never went. We never ran Glen Canyon.

But the years that Martin was at *Sunset* were so active in different ways and so busy with the redwoods, and the clearcutting of the redwoods; and the attempt of the Sierra Club to create the national park that would protect what was left of the virgin coast redwoods; and then the fight with the lumber companies, because each time the Sierra Club came up with a boundary, some kind of a size of what they wanted in the national park, the lumber company would start cutting at the edge of where they wanted to start the park or include—enlarge the park boundaries. So it was a constant fight between what the Sierra Club—how they wanted the park to be and what the lumber company was not willing to give up.

And Martin did quite a few—well, he did a lot of aerals of the area to show where they were clearcutting and what was left of the virgin forest. So it was a constant tug of war between the two of them. Maybe you remember Julia "Butterfly" Hill who camped for a year as at the top of a coast redwood. Martin flew her father in so he could climb up with her. And Woody Harrelson, the actor, wanted to visit. Anyway, there was so much disconnected—there were so many disconnected events [*laughs*] that I have trouble keeping them in order.

TM: It sounds like a very busy time.

EL: It was. It was a very busy time, and I have trouble remembering the years.

TM: Right. I was trying to think. Are there other river runners that you remember during that time?

EL: Well, let's see. There was—well, there were the ones who used the pontoons, which Martin didn't like. And some of their boatmen, when they saw the dories, they wanted to come over and row on the

dories and leave the pontoons. I'm trying to think. There was ARTA [River Trips]. And I think George Wendt also had a permit on the—had a limited permit on the Grand Canyon. And I really don't—I'm trying to think who else. I'm sorry, but I don't remember who the other river runners are.

TM: Oh, I was thinking about Gaylord Staveley and—

EL: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Martin did know him. I never met him, but Martin did know Gaylord Staveley. Yeah.

TM: And Georgie White and—

EL: Oh, yes. Of course. We always ran across Georgie. She had the pontoons.

TM: Yeah.

EL: Yeah.

TM: Ted—Don Hatch and Ted Hatch—

EL: Yeah.

TM: Just some of the people there in the 1950s, 1960s. Though, let's see. There was a guy—Joe Monroe?

EL: Oh, there was Ron Smith. Ron Smith, I think, was one of the ones I remember, because he had the most userbase.

TM: Okay. And Bill Belknap?

EL: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. We knew Bill Belknap, and we used his guidebooks. We would get his guidebooks for the passenger[s]—for the people on the river trips. Yeah.

TM: Okay. And do you—well, Bill was a photographer as well, so he would've—

EL: Yes. Yes, he was.

TM: —had a lot in common with Martin. His kids were older, I think. Yeah.

EL: We did meet his daughter one of the times when we were in Hawaii. For some reason, she was in Hawaii, and we caught up with her there, but I don't remember what year it was.

TM: Was that Loie?

EL: Yeah.

TM: Fun. Okay. All right. I just wonder if you had any thoughts, and Martin had any thoughts, on the loss of Glen Canyon?

EL: Well, I've enjoyed books that have [been put out]—let's see. Tad Nichols had a black-and-white photography book of Glen Canyon before it was flooded. And I only have—I've only seen pictures of it, because I never made it, never got to it.

TM: Right. Okay. All right.

EL: And I was always sorry. Dave Brower just felt so—so guilty about Glen Canyon. It bothered him, I think, to the day he died.

TM: I bet. It was a gorgeous, gorgeous place.

EL: Yes.

TM: But, you know, that was a—well, very fascinating issue there.

EL: Yes. Yes, it was. Yeah.

TM: So, once again, we've yick-yacked for about an hour. Maybe this is a good place to wrap this up. And next time, we'll pick up 1968.

EL: Okay. That was a big year. *[laughs]* Oh, I should go back and tell you when we moved into our house in—what was it, '58 or '59. And my daughter started school at Portola Valley. She came home all bubbly the first day because she had met the librarian, and my daughter loved books. And so she volunteered to work in the library, and the librarian said, "Well, I'd love to have you. This will be just fine. And tell your mother, if she wants to volunteer, I have a book-mending group that meets. Maybe she'd like to join them." So I did. And, well, for many years, the ladies would come to my house, and we'd meet once a month. I would pick up the books that had to be mended—pages torn, you know, different things that we could fix before they went back on the shelf. So that was my activity from that particular year to 1968, when Martin left *Sunset*.

TM: Nice. Oh, that's fun.

EL: *[laughs]* Actually, when we moved into the Bay Area, it was a hotbed of conservation issues. And Martin got involved in the Committee for Green Foothills, which was started by Wallace Stegner. And then also there was a big conservation fight for the building of a freeway, the 280, which was supposed to go through Stanford land, but they objected to that, so it was pushed up toward the foothills. And one of the first battles of the Committee for Green Foothills was based on the fact that Stanford and their outlying lands kept creeping up into the foothills. And the foothills were precious to the people who lived near them, and they objected to Stanford's plans for development in the foothills. So that's another story.

The Committee for Green Foothills, [and] a later organization, which was the Peninsula—Peninsula—it was called POST. Peninsula—I can't remember what it stands for, but it's P-O-S-T [Peninsula Open Space Trust]. And it's been a very effective conservation organization for the foothills and the farmland on the coast side of the coast range. It's been a very, very excellent conservation group, and well, eventually, at that time, there was a lot of conservation turmoil going on, and Martin got involved in all of it.

TM: Okay. Well, let's pick up 1968 in—

EL: Okay. *[laughs]* I'm afraid it's a period when, you know, there's so much going on, I can't keep track.

TM: Well, I'll—I'm looking forward to hearing what you do remember. And I think I'll ask you next time about Wallace Stegner as well. That's another name.

EL: Yes. Okay.

TM: All right. Well, then, let's conclude Part 4 Oral History Interview with Esther Litton. Today is Monday, May 25th, 2020. And, Esther, thank you so very much.

EL: Well, have I made any sense?

TM: Oh, yes. Absolutely. [EL laughs] I mean, it's—it's amazing. Your memory, your ability to remember all these various travels, it's just wonderful.

EL: [laughs] Well, I have a lot of the [Sunset] magazine covers that Martin shot. I'll go back over them and see what years we did what. Maybe that'll help.

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