

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Patricia McCairen (PM)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: In Part 1 Patch recounts growing up in New York City and eventually making her way to the Grand Canyon

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TM: Today is Tuesday March 5th, 2019. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History interview with Patricia "Patch" McCairen. My name is Tom Martin. We are in Tucson, Arizona. Patch thank you very much for your willingness to chit-chat today. What year were you born?

PM: 1940.

TM: Where were you born?

PM: In New York City, Manhattan.

TM: What were your folks doing there?

PM: Well, they were born in New York and my grandparents were born in New York. Then some of the great-grandparents came over from Ireland. Actually my birthday is March 7th, it's Thursday.

TM: Oh my gosh, Happy Birthday!

PM: Quite a coincidence, yes.

TM: Nice. What did your folks do in New York in the city?

PM: My father had different jobs. He did some kind of drafting or mechanical type of drafting. And my mother was a stay-at-home mother, which was common at the time.

TM: Yeah, yeah, very much so. Did you have brothers and sisters?

PM: I have one sister.

TM: Older or younger?

PM: Older, 16 months younger and her name is Anne.

TM: I'm assuming that you went to grade school and high school there in New York City?

PM: Yes, I lived my first 35 years in New York City, except for when I was like 18, 19, 20, and 21, something in there, I spent about a year and a half in Wyoming. I wanted to be a cowgirl [laughs] and I worked on dude ranches.

TM: When you were growing up, did you get into the Adirondacks? Did you get experience with canoes? Did you know how to swim?

PM: Yes. Actually I've been camping since I was 10 years old. We went up to the Adirondacks, which is wonderful. The Adirondacks State Park is the largest state park in the country and it's a lovely place. Of course, after being out West, the bugs. There's lots of bugs, naturally, back East, mosquitoes and black flies and those things. But, yeah, we went camping at an early age. I never did any canoeing but I've always loved the water so I learned how to swim. I loved being in the water and that kind of thing. I'm trying to think, I guess I had been maybe once or twice when I was a bit older in a canoe, but I never did any real boating at all.

TM: Okay. Swimming in New York, in the Hudson and all that stuff, the water is cold. Where did you learn to swim? How did you do that?

PM: I went to the YMCA and took swimming lessons when I was 12 or 13, something in there. I'm a little vague on the age, but something in there. Then we went to Jones Beach, which is a state park on Long Island. It's a beautiful state park, at least it was then, and actually pristine. They had people just keeping it clean. It was amazing. You think of New York City and a lot of people think of trash. This was a state park on Long Island right on the Atlantic so we had surf, nothing like western surf but surf. I went there every Saturday, all summer long from the time I was 1 years old until into my 20s. I just loved the water. Loved body surfing or diving through the waves and that kind of thing. So I was very comfortable in water. Yeah, that's a nice memory.

TM: And your mom and dad would have liked that? Did they go, too?

PM: Yes, they went, too. It was a family trip.

TM: I always think that water might be cold.

PM: It was very cold, but you know how children are. In fact, I would be turning blue because as you see I'm very fair. My nails would be blue, my lips would be blue, and my mother said, "You have to come out of the water," [laughs] and I wouldn't want to because I was enjoying it so much. But you know kids... I even see it now this winter here in Tucson. It's been cold here for Tucson and in the morning I'd be bundled up with layers and I'd see this little kid, you know 10 or 12 years old, and he's got shorts and a tee shirt on. I think of course he's just a kid. So that's what that's about. Children can just withstand that kind of thing.

TM: So growing up, was your elder sister Anne, was she...?

PM: Younger, she's younger.

TM: Sorry, thank you. Was she interested in outdoors as well?

PM: My sister is mentally retarded. She's not helpless but she has limited facilities. I still am in contact with her on a regular basis. She lives in a group home in New York State.

TM: You mentioned the Adirondacks, now was that more of a summertime vacation type or a camp? What was that structure?

PM: That was when my father would have the annual two week vacation. We would drive up to the Adirondacks, or sometimes New Hampshire or Maine, and camp for a week in the campgrounds. They'd be state park campgrounds in all three states. Tent camping, that was before the little tents/backpacking tents and so forth. These were the big, they were called umbrella tents. As I recall they had a center pole and then we had cots. First we had cots then my father realized we'd be warmer sleeping on the ground. You put newspaper down, then you put your air mattress on. So the newspaper provides insulation and the air mattress makes it comfortable. We didn't have sleeping bags. I think we just had blankets. It's summertime, but it's in northern New York so be cool in the evenings but not cold, not in the summer. And the same way with New Hampshire and Maine.

TM: Where did you go to high school?

PM: In New York City, Oevander Child's high school in the Bronx. I'm a kid from the Bronx. I guess that's a person. It was big. We had 4,000 in the school and graduating class of 700. But it's New York City. [both laugh]

TM: What were you interested in in high school?

PM: Horses. [laughs] I was horse crazy for a long time and still love the animals. They are wonderful, wonderful animals. But I don't ride, I wouldn't ride anymore, it would be too dangerous to fall. I started riding and going to local stables in the Bronx. Riding/learning how to ride. I learned how to ride from a book. I learned how to do a lot of things from a book, from books I should say.

TM: Did you like to read?

PM: Yes, been a reader since I was young. That was one thing, my mother was very good. She read to us from the time I was very young, every night before bed. And I've heard since as an adult, that it's such an important thing to do with a child because you do instill a love of reading and how much you can learn from reading. Even novels you can learn from. I used to go bike to the library and fill up my basket with six books every week, this would be in the summertime, and then read them and then take them back and get another. At one point I think I had read every single book in the children's or young adult section of the library [laughs] before I went to the adult section. Yeah, it was great. I don't remember most of them, that was a long time ago.

TM: Was college something you were expected to go to?

PM: Unfortunately just the reverse. I was more than discouraged, it was almost forbidden. Which is one of the sad things. It's really a shame. My mother unfortunately would say... Anytime I would say, "I'd like to be such and such," she'd say, "Oh you'd have to go to college and that would be a waste because all you're going to do is get married and have children." If you've read my book you know that there was a very negative...

TM: It's fascinating, this is the second interview I've done in 24 hours. The 90 year old that I just interviewed, her mother and father told her the exact same thing. This was in the 1940s. You were born in 1940 so this would have mid-50s but that same generational... Your job is to raise the family and be the homemaker and that was the thinking of the day.

PM: Yeah, to some extent, yeah.

TM; Did you buy into that or were you like no I'm not interested in this?

PM: I did. I did because my mother was quite manipulative and I just thought when somebody is doing this kind of thing to you, especially when you're very young, you don't know any better. So I just thought for a long time that I wasn't even smart enough to go to college. What's ironic is I've never married and I've never had children.

TM: So you worked your way through this. And you mentioned that at 18 you ended up going to Wyoming?

PM: Yes.

TM: How did that happen?

PM: I graduated from high school when I was 17 and I got a job in New York City on the 60th floor of the RCA building.

TM: Doing what?

PM: Just kind of secretarial type of things. Statistical typing, just office kind of stuff. One of the neat things, this is an aside, but one of the neat things about working high up like that... At the time, the RCA building was the 3rd tallest building in New York. The first is the Empire State building, the second is the Chrysler and the third was the RCA. On some rainy days you'd go in and it'd be raining down on the ground, and you'd take the high speed elevator up to the 60th floor and you would be above the clouds. You could look out and just see the Empire State building and the Chrysler building sticking up above the clouds but everything else was covered. It was really a neat experience, I wish I had a picture of it. Anyway, I forgot where I was.

TM: So you were 17 and you're working in the RCA building but when you're 18 you're going to end up in Wyoming. How did that happen?

PM: So, you know, you get a vacation. I had the office job. On my first vacation, a friend and I who were both really into horses, we decided we wanted our vacation at a Wyoming dude ranch. So we went out there for 2 weeks and we just loved it. The following year I was ready to quit my job... Oh I know, I wanted to go out for six weeks and I thought, well, I'll have to quit my job because I can't get six weeks. But, I had this really nice boss who was very kind of paternal. He looked at me and he thought, "I don't think she should do that. She's 18 years old." So he gave me a leave of absence so I could do the six weeks and then I came back to the job. He was a sweetheart.

TM: Nice. So this was when you were 19?

PM: This was when I was 18.

TM: So six weeks, where did you go?

PM: I went to this Wyoming dude ranch. It was IXL was the name of the dude ranch. It's in Dayton, Wyoming which is just west of Sheridan, Wyoming. Sheridan is the bigger town. Wyoming doesn't have very many big towns or cities.

TM: How did you get out there?

PM: Flew. What's interesting, though, that was before the jets cause this was in 1957 and '58. Northwest Airlines went from New York to Detroit to one of the cities in North or South Dakota, then to Billings, Montana. Then we had to take a train from Billings, Montana down to Dayton, I guess, and the ranch would meet us.

TM: Was the ranch a working ranch?

PM: It was a little bit of one. This particular ranch was primarily for guests. It was a guest ranch. They called it a dude ranch at the time. I don't know if they still do that. So it was a guest ranch. We were guests and then we'd go out riding every day. Because we knew how to ride, my friend and I, we could go out and if the cowboys had to do some rounding up of stuff we could go. In fact we went on a cattle drive. It's traditional, I think, all over the West. The cattle are in the ranch area during the winter and then in the summer they drive them up to the mountain pastures. So we got to go on that. We left at 4:00 in the morning and got back at like midnight that night. So we had an all-day cattle drive. That was a neat experience. Got back late that night.

TM: Nice. What was I like, do you remember, coming back to New York after six weeks away in Wyoming?

PM: By then I realized that I wanted to go out. That summer, the six week summer, we asked the ranch owners if we could come back the following year as waitresses. They wouldn't hire at that time girls, we were called at that time, even though we were now about 19/20. They wouldn't hire us as cowgirls but we got jobs as waitresses, as a waitress at the ranch, but we could still ride. We could still go out riding and that kind of thing. It was nice. So we arranged to have that for the following summer.

TM: Was that set up as a six week...?

PM: No, that would be not permanent but the entire summer.

TM: Like three months or four months.

PM: Three or four months, right. I don't remember the exact date.

TM: What did they say on the 60th floor of the RCA building?

PM: Yeah my boss, I don't remember exactly his reaction but he was understanding me. And by this time, I think I would have been... It was 1959 that we drove across the country in her Volkswagen bug. Before the interstates, remember. They were starting to make them, I think, then. I know it was during the Eisenhower administration that the interstate system began. So we drove the regular two lane highways all the way out from New York to Wyoming.

TM: Had you learned how to drive by then?

PM: Yes. She had taught me, my friend. She was two years older than me and she had taught me on her VW Bug.

TM: What was her name?

PM: Anita Warde.

TM: Nice. So she taught...

PM: We have lost touch over the years.

TM: And that would have been a stick shift, so you learned how to work a clutch and do all that stuff.

PM: Oh yes, oh sure, right. Absolutely.

TM: So you had to tender your resignation then. Were you thinking you were going to come back or you were just like let's see where this goes?

PM: That's right. That's more my style, [laughs] let's see where it goes. So no, I was figuring I'd just go out there and I would stay out there and be a cowgirl. Maybe meet a cowboy or whatever. After the summer ranch, the IXL closed for the summer. They didn't do any winter or anything. There was another ranch nearby called Eaton's Ranch, named after a family. It supposedly is the oldest dude ranch in the country, I think, and that's in Wolf, Wyoming. Wolf is a post office, essentially. Anyway, I got a job there for the winter. I stayed there through the following winter. That would be 1960.

TM: What did you do in Wyoming in the winter?

PM: Well, actually, this ranch had guests in the winter. They only needed one or two waitresses because there were just a few guests. There were some guests there who had their own cottages and, of course they'd be insulated in Wyoming, log cabin cottages, and they spent the winter there.

TM: Okay. Wood fires and...?

PM: Yes, right, exactly. And these women, I remember, I really liked some of them. I remember one in particular. She must have been in her...cause when you're twenty anyone over 50 seems old. I'm pretty sure she was in her 70s. She was an interesting women and I really had some nice conversations with her. See, it's an interesting thing, the others that worked on the ranch, they came from small towns. They didn't have the... I don't know how do I say it without putting down. They couldn't carry on the conversations that I could because coming from New York you're exposed to so much. So as a result, I was able, even though at that time I hadn't traveled extensively or anything, but still was able to converse with her because I had seen enough. I really liked her.

TM: And she probably wanted that stimulation as well.

PM: She was very nice. Yeah, right, right. We had a nice rapport. She was obviously a wealthy woman and she didn't treat me like a servant or beneath her. She was really very egalitarian, or whatever. She treated me with respect and nicely.

TM: Nice. So, your job was waitress and then what other tasks did you do? I imagine there was wood to cut and what other things did they have you doing?

PM: No, I didn't have to do any of that because there were people who did it. One of the things that was interesting is they, I'm a little vague on this, but I remember vaguely they would cut ice from a pond and then haul it. They would cut big blocks of ice and haul it into a barn or shed or something to store over the winter and to be used in the summer. They would store it with sawdust and straw, I guess, to keep it. That was interesting.

TM: Did you get out and help with that, watching or...?

PM: Watching, yeah, because men would do it and you'd have to be pretty strong to do it. I don't think they had horse-drawn things but they'd have tractors and stuff to haul the big blocks and that kind of thing.

TM: Were they on the grid or were they off the grid? Did they make their own electricity do you know? Oil lamps?

PM: You know, I don't... No, we had electricity. That's a good question, I don't know if they had... Solar, of course, wouldn't have been in at that time.

TM: Well, the ice box hadn't show up yet there, regardless, because if they're making their own ice and they're storing it in sawdust, that's a summertime ice box journey. That's neat.

PM: Again, you'd be looking at 1960.

TM: '60-'61, yeah.

PM: Yeah, right. Different era.

TM: Do you have any other memories or recollections from that 18 months?

PM: Not really. I got tired of it. I got tired of doing that and I tried to live in this little town nearby. I forget if I had any kind of... I don't remember if I did anything. Then I finally went back East. I had a lot of pressure from my parents to go back which was a shame. So I did go back and I wasn't happy about going back. You know, I didn't really want to live in the city anymore and that kind of thing. But I changed my mind. I sort of became, say, a real New Yorker when they gave the parade for John Glenn after he had been the first one in orbit. I believe that was '61/'62. Well, Kennedy was president so it would be '61 roughly. We'd have to look up the date, I'm not sure. They say "no one does pomp and ceremony like the English and no one does a hero's welcome like New York City." The ticker tape parades, I don't know if they still do them. I haven't ever heard of one recently. But at that time it was electrifying. Just this most incredible thing. The motorcade was going north on Fifth Avenue and he's, of course, sitting up on a convertible like you've seen in pictures of things. It was just so incredible and I just loved it. That kind of got me back into being a New Yorker. [laughs]

TM: But you'd need a job.

PM: I got an office job. It's always my fallback thing. [laughs] I don't even remember.

TM: At least your parents were happy because you were back in the city, but that pressure probably didn't let up even though you were back.

PM: Yeah, it wasn't... I lived in there with them and that was a big mistake. One of the biggest mistakes I've ever made. But anyway, I had an office job. So say I went back in '61 and I guess I worked at an office job for a couple of years. Then I got a horse. I don't know if you know New York at all but there's the city which has the five boroughs and then just north of the city is Westchester County. In Westchester County I got a horse and I kept it at a stable. Then I met one of the owners of Miller Harness Company, which is the oldest saddlery shop in New York. It goes back to the horse and buggy days when the family... That was a family run business, the Millers. I got a job there. I rode my horse in the mornings, then worked six days instead of five to make the hours, and then go into the city and work at the shop. That was nice, I enjoyed that.

TM: What was your job with them?

PM: It was a salesperson in the shop with a bunch of them. Of course English horse riding, showing and fox hunting and all of that, is of course very wealthy people, naturally, cause horses are expensive. English riding probably more than western riding. Out here people could have a horse for a lot less money than you could back there. And of course, these were serious people. In fact I got to meet all of the members of the United States equestrian team, the Olympic team, cause they would come in there and shop. They were nice people, really nice people. There was a number of actors who came in, also. Let's see, Tab Hunter, he was a horseman, and Harry Belafonte who was probably the handsomest man I've ever seen [TM laughs], and Johnny Mathis. Those are the three I remember.

TM: That would be exciting.

PM: It was, it was fun. They were just nice and relaxed. They weren't trying to be snooty or anything like that.

TM: Looking for saddles or trying to fix their widget that hooked to the such and such?

PM: It was clothing and they did custom clothing there. They had a wonderful tailor who was from Barbados. He immigrated to the US, he had been in the US for years. He just made these beautiful clothes for everybody. He measured everyone up and made custom clothing for them.

TM: Nice. Did you have any input on that based on what you had seen in Wyoming, what the cowboys were wearing out there?

PM: No, this was all English. There probably was a bit of western. If somebody was riding western they could come in and get something but the real focus of the shop would be English.

TM: So this is fox hunting. This is black boots, white pants, red jacket.

PM: Right. It's all of that. And jumping fences and that kind of thing. And dressage. Yes, all of that. If you need any explanation on that I can... I was horse crazy for years and years and years. They are wonderful animals, just wonderful animals.

TM: So you were 3 or 4 years working for Miller?

PM: Let me think for a minute. I was there five years from 1963 to 1968.

TM: Did you take vacations back Wwest when you had them?

PM: No, boy that's a good question. I had vacation time but no, I would stay around and ride my horse in Westchester, up in northern Westchester.

TM: I'm a little confused in my geography so help me out here. Pennsylvania has a town named Westchester.

PM: That's right, I guess they do, but this is a county in New York State. It's the county that borders the Bronx.

TM: Just north.

PM: Just north of the city. New York City is made up of five counties or boroughs, they're called both. Westchester County is outside the city, and of course we say 'The City'. [laughs] It's one of the wealthiest counties in the United States and that's why... There's a lot of horse country and especially as you go further north in the county. In that time it wasn't... Now part of it where I used to go, where billionaires live. I mean Bloomberg, the former mayor, he has property up there. He's a billionaire. It was a lovely place to ride, it was really nice.

TM: It's interesting, it sounds like you were going to Wyoming, not for Wyoming but for the horses.

PM: Oh yeah, the horses.

TM: So when the horses were closer to the city, everything was copasetic.

PM: Right. It wasn't Wyoming, per se, it was that I liked the whole idea of the dude ranch and being able to ride and being out in the wide open spaces kind of thing. That was the draw, but the horses were the number one priority.

TM: It sounds like you could have stayed with Miller forever, what happened in 1968?

PM: I got the travel bug. [both laugh]

TM: How did that happen?

PM: I don't know, I get tired of things. You see that's the problem for me. So after 5 years I was a little tired of being there. I forget how it came about but I decided to go to Europe for the first time. I had spent a year before this learning how to speak French. The three countries I was going to, Ireland, England and France, and I wanted to be able to speak the language in all three. Of course, two, naturally, I could.

TM: Where did you learn French?

PM: There was a wonderful school called the French Institute in New York City. It was small group classes with the emphasis on speaking, not on reading and writing. Not like schools would teach language, although we did have books so you would learn to read somewhat. Four pupils to a teacher so you really

do learn the language. I had a year of that and then I made plans to go to... I booked my flight to Paris from New York and arrived in Paris in 1968 during the height of their strike. There was a book by this titled *Is Paris Burning*. I mean, it was really was quite something. So we couldn't even land at one of the commercial airports. We landed at the military base and then were bused into town. The hotels were open but no public transportation. Walked everywhere. But, I had also booked... Have you ever heard of the Club Mediterranee/Club Med? I was booked into one of those and actually I ended up in the one in Corsica for 3 weeks. That was a total immersion in French because I was the only American of about 1200 people. There was one English women who I became friends with. She was quite fluent in French and had been speaking it for years. Every so often I'd say to her, "Peggy let's go off, I need an English break." [both laugh] When you're speaking a foreign language, when you're new to it, your head feels like it's going. Then I went back to Paris and stayed in Paris for a long time.

TM: A long time like 3 more weeks?

PM: Let me think for a minute. I went back to Paris and stayed a couple weeks and then I went over to Ireland for a month, and then England for a month. That was supposed to be the end of it but I was so frugal with my money I had enough money to stay longer so I went back to Paris and stayed I think another 2 months. I ended up working on the Americans Abroad for Humphrey. That was during the Humphrey-Nixon election in 1968. I actually did think of staying. What would it be like just to stay here and immigrate?

TM: What were your parents thinking?

PM: I don't know. I'm not sure. I was still...

TM: You were still writing back and forth.

PM: Yes, we were still writing.

TM: But they weren't pressuring you to come back to the city or were they?

PM: I don't recall. Possibly a little, my mother might have been. It wasn't too much. I don't recall entirely about that.

TM: At this point she might have said, "Let her go." What was it like working for the Humphrey campaign?

PM: It was very interesting. I'd never done anything like that before. We'd go around finding Americans who were living...expats and give them campaign stuff.

TM: Getting them registered to vote.

PM: Right, possibly. I just was one of the grunts and helping with distributing things and that kind of thing. It was nice meeting the other Americans doing it. That was really a nice group of people.

TM: Was that a paid job?

PM: No, no it was a volunteer thing. Maybe some of the upper ones were. Then we listened to the election. Remember, of course, Paris is a number of hours behind the east coast, or ahead rather, so we

listened to the results coming in at the ambassador's apartment at night. I remember that. We stayed up till about four or five in the morning and then, of course, we learned that Nixon won.

TM: So then what happened?

PM: So then I went back to New York and within a month I got a job at Air France [laughs] in the office. You had to be a French citizen to fly for them, but I got a job in the New York office. Of course I was there to travel. It was nice. I enjoyed being there. I was there for almost 7 years and I was there to travel. I traveled a lot. I liked it but I enjoyed the company and I enjoyed the people. Yeah, it was a nice place to work.

TM: Where did you travel to?

PM: Well, we got such great... Excuse me I'm digressing here. I remember the first Christmas party that they had. I started in January so in December we had the Christmas party. You know, company Christmas parties there's always the drawings and things. The prizes, well, here's a free ticket to Buenos Aires, here's a free ticket to wherever, Hong Kong.

TM: Oh my gosh.

PM: In the time I was there I went to Portugal and Spain. I went to France, Switzerland, Bavaria in Germany, England, and Ireland. I'm just trying to remember them all. I used to go to London for the weekend in November to do Christmas shopping and it was quite feasible. I'd leave on a Friday evening flight, get to London Saturday morning, get a B&B. I went out maybe for an hour or two but I'd be really tired so I'd come back to the hotel, sleep for a few hours, set an alarm, and go out for the evening. Go out to dinner and the theater, that kind of thing. I guess I'd do some shopping on the Saturday. Then the Sunday the flight for New York didn't leave till 6:00 pm and then you get home at 8:00 pm because you are catching up on all the hours. You're gaining the time. So I would do something on Sunday and then get back and then go back to work on Monday. You can do that when you are in your twenties. I couldn't do that now. [both laugh]

TM: Where you still engaged in horses at all then?

PM: I think I was, yes I was. I had friends up in northern Westchester who had horses. So I would go up on weekends. I didn't have a horse at that time, my own horse, but I'd go up and ride with them on weekends and visit people up there. It was nice.

TM: Were you doing any boating at this time?

PM: No. Actually, because I was with Air France, I went to Nepal a couple of times. My second trip to Nepal, which would have been in '74, I got so sick which, of course, happens in the Third World countries. I remember I met another American and we were trekking together. I just met her in Kathmandu. I said to her, "I think the next vacation I take will be in the states where I won't get sick." She said, "You should try a Grand Canyon river trip." I said, "Oh, okay." That, of course, changed my life. [laughs] I booked the trip and the most ironic thing ever in my life is I booked a second half trip with ARTA—it was ARTA at the time before they became AZRA—because I thought I didn't want to do a full trip in case I didn't like it. So I hiked down. We met a guide up at the Bright Angel trail and hiked into the canyon and the boats, all the big snout boats, they came along. Got packed and the people who were leaving walked out. I got on the boat and we went through... You know there's just a riffle there at the

bottom of the Bright Angel trail but it's a nice little wave. We went into that and, of course, I get all wet and that was it. It was like this... You know you hear religious people say have a born again experience, well, that's what this was for me. It was just so incredible.

TM: Baptized by the river.

PM: Yeah. Then that whole trip, it was about eight days I think, the lower half of their trip. Nice guides. The guides could see what was happening with me. In the flatwater or a riffle they'd let me row the boat.

TM: So these were 22 foot long rowing snouts. The oars were 16 feet long. You're how high and you weight how much?

PM: [laughs] I think at the time I would have been almost 5' 5" and I would have weighed probably between 115 and 120. But you know what they did with the oars, they had counterweights so they really weren't that hard and they'd show me how to do it. But as I said, it was in real safe sections of the canyon. You know how much flatwater's in the canyon. In fact, I can name the boatmen if you want. Dave Lowry was the head boatman. And in fact, his girlfriend at the time and later wife, Sue, is the one who led the group down into the canyon and she was bringing steaks in a black bag for the trip. [laughs] Then there was Phil Town. Did you ever know Phil Town? And then who else. John Otterbein. John was from Oregon but he was a Grand Canyon boatman, an ARTA boatman. Then Peter Winn. You know Peter Winn. Peter was the one who really encouraged me because if you've met him, you know he's a small man so he was the one "you don't have to be real big to do this." He was the one who told me about ARTA's whitewater school. So yeah, he was really encouraging. They were all great. They were all just great. Nice group of people. Nice group of passengers on that trip, also.

TM: I'm assuming you had fun swimming in the water and hiking Havasu and Deer Creek Falls and Lava Falls, scouting, looking, ran that.

PM: Yes.

TM: The trip would have ended at Diamond Creek or not?

PM: No, it was Pierce Ferry. They did the float-outs then. We had the float-out to Pierce Ferry.

TM: And this is 1974?

PM: This was 1975. I put-in...pretty sure it was May, 30th, 1975.

TM: Alright. And then you're still working for Air France back in New York City, what happened then?

PM: [laughs] I remember going back and thinking oh my I have to do this. So I worked for the rest of the year, till December of '75, and I quit and moved out to Colorado. Had signed up for whitewater school and that was a wonderful experience but on the first day of Whitewater School I broke my leg running Rainie Falls.

TM: So back up a minute. You quit in December of '75, whitewater school would not have been that December it would have been too cold.

PM: It would have been June '76.

TM: So you moved out to Colorado and spent 6 months out there traveling around or looking around or...

PM: A horse friend from Westchester, going back into those days, had moved to Denver and had gotten a job taking care of the horses of wealthy people in Denver. She was originally from England. I think her mother was very sick or something, but she wanted to go back to England for a month long visit. She had arranged for me to come out and fill in for her. Live in her little cabin, take care of her dogs, and take care of the horses. And I could do all of that. So I had a month there. Then I wanted to live in a small town so I went to the west slope and moved to Glenwood Springs and I did waitressing. I knew I wanted to go rafting in the summer so I didn't want to get a regular job that would tie me down. And that's what I did. So I lived in Glenwood Springs. I had a room in a house, or shared a house with one or two other people. I can't even remember.

TM: This would have been February, there would have been snow up the road. Did you learn how to ski then or did you already know how to ski?

PM: I knew how to ski. I downhill skied back in New York. I belonged to really nice club in New York called the Swiss Ski Club of New York. One time skiing in Vermont I broke my leg. That was the end of downhill skiing. Then after that I did cross-country skiing. I did a lot of cross-country skiing in Colorado which, of course, has wonderful snow. I lived in Glenwood Springs, or in that area, I forget how many years. Four years or something like that. I lived in a teepee, also, part of the time.

TM: In the summer or winter?

PM: No, winter, year round. This is all in my book, but anyway.

TM: It doesn't matter.

PM: So I went to, let's see where were we? I skipped around a little bit here.

TM: Let's back up. You quit Air France that December. January you're in Colorado in Denver taking care of a friend's job so they could go visit their family. Then headed from there to Glenwood Springs. Got a job as a waitress. The whitewater training is going to happen that summer of '76. You mentioned Rainie Falls, which is on the Rouge River which is in Idaho.

PM: No, that's in Oregon, southern Oregon.

TM: That's right. So you're waiting for that to come along.

PM: Yes. So I stayed the winter in Glenwood Springs. You know Colorado winters, I guess the weather is changing, of course, say generally Colorado winters they might get a really big snowfall but then the sun comes out. You know how it is. I mean Flagstaff is the same way, which is nice. So I don't remember the winters being horrible, you know, terrible to take.

TM: Not like New York. [laughs]

PM: Or northwest Washington. Yeah, it was nice. I met some nice people when I was there in Glenwood. I went to whitewater school and I went back to Glenwood Springs.

TM: You mentioned you broke your leg at Rainie Falls.

PM: Yes. So then I was on to whitewater school and the first day we take off from...what is it? Something Bar. Alameda Bar on the Rogue River? The instructors are starting to teach everybody how to do different things. How to tie down loads, how to paddle captain, how to read water, all of that stuff. We get to Rainie Falls and, of course, we all pull over to scout it. Have you seen Rainie Falls? There's the main falls and then there's the fish ladder. A number of people decided they wanted to run Rainie Falls in an Avon Redshank.

TM: What is an Avon Redshank?

PM: Sorry. It's a small inflatable boat made by the company Avon which is from England. It's only about ten feet/twelve feet.

TM: Rainie Falls is a six or seven foot drop? Is it more than that?

PM: No, I think it's bigger than that. So we're in this Redshank. The first group goes and they all get bounced out of it so they end up swimming but they all swim to shore and everybody's laughing and excited. "Oh let's do it." So my group goes. I didn't know much but I knew we were in the wrong place when we were in the falls. The guide made a big mistake. Anyway, we went over the falls. My foot is on the floor of the boat, tucked under the tube, and the pressure from the water on my knee twisted my knee, my left knee, and fractured the tibia and fibula and twisted the knee up. They had to carry me out. They made a stretcher out of oars and a tarp. There were nine young men on the trip, guides and students, and one of them who lived in the area ran ahead to notify—I don't remember if there was an ambulance—anyway, to get a vehicle to be able to take me into the hospital. The other eight took turns carrying me out on the trail. Some of that was pretty hairy but they carried me out. I remember, "Oh she's so heavy."

TM: All 115 pounds.

PM: Right, exactly. [laughs] So they carried me out and I got to the hospital. I spend the night in the hospital and then the doctor set my leg. The group went down the road with the rest of the class. I went back to the house that was owned by this guy who ran out, Steve. I just waited for them there. When the group got off the river and came back to his house in Merlin, Oregon, we discussed it and it was decided that I could join the group. I couldn't go on the river, naturally, because I had a plaster cast on my leg but I could still learn a lot about the packing of food and rafting, tying down loads and all of that practical stuff. So I did end up being with the group. It was a 28 day school, so say 20 days of it was... One day they'd come back to a basecamp. They'd be out on smaller rivers in Oregon for the day and then come back to camp. It was my left leg so... I couldn't drive cause there would be...

TM: Was that the same leg that you broke skiing?

PM: Yes. I've had six breaks.

TM: In that same leg?

PM: No, two breaks in that leg and a broken foot.

TM: So three others elsewhere?

PM: Yes. I've got to be real careful.

TM: The horses?

PM: No, not horses.

TM: So 28 day school and they do day trips out here and there.

PM: Yes. They went to different rivers in Oregon. Oregon has a lot of smaller rivers. Good training rivers because some of them are technical but nothing too difficult for new people. Ok they get hung up on a rock and then somebody could get out of the boat and move it. It was real safe but very educational. So I had the pleasure of being with the group and we had a fun, fun time. It was really nice. So I did that and then afterwards... I had just less than a year before been working for a company, Air France, where I had really good medical benefits and I was able to carry them forward. At that time it wasn't the expense that it is now. So I was able to keep the insurance for a couple of years. I think it's only allowed for a couple of years, I don't remember. And, of course, I could have sued the company, naturally, but I wasn't interested in that. Bill...what's his name, he just died, actually. Bill Center. He was running ARTA in California. He was my age, well, I guess a little younger than me. When I spoke to him after getting back at the house and out of the hospital he said something like, "We'll take care of the medical bills for you." I said, "Oh, you don't have to I have insurance." You could almost hear him on the phone, "sigh." So what they did for me is, I didn't go on another whitewater school but when I get off I went to the California rivers and I got training. I kept going on different commercial trips as the extra and being trained by different guides.

TM: So you were swamping then for them?

PM: Yeah, they didn't use that term, but anyway. Yes. So I got my training in a little different way.

TM: This is on the American River?

PM: American River mostly. A little bit of Stanislaus.

TM: Which is steep, rocky, fun, fast. Not big heavy gear boats but paddle boats, lots of people?

PM: Yes. They did had to carry gear down because they used to do 2 day trips, an overnight trip. We did that on the Stanislaus, also. Then I got a job on the Stanislaus after that.

TM: Working for ARTA?

PM: For ARTA, yeah.

TM: Was that the same '76 or was that '77?

PM: '77 was a dry water year. There was a drought in the West in '77. The Grand was even very, very low and on the California rivers so I don't think I did much river running in '77.

TM: What did you do then otherwise?

PM: I was living in Colorado, I was back in Colorado. That's when I moved into my teepee and lived there. I drove a school bus and waited tables. Yeah, just got into mother earth. [laughs] Was a hippie.

TM: Did you learn how to kayak at that time at all?

PM: No. I've never learned to kayak per se. I've been in a kayak. I never learned how to roll. I've never really kayaked I was always a rafter.

TM: Did you get into rafting on the Upper C any of that area up around Glenwood at all?

PM: I did do some rafting there, yes.

TM: With friends?

PM: With friends. I did do a little bit of work there. Maybe it was in '77, it might have been in '77. I really loved Colorado and I was very happy to stay there. But then '78 I got a private permit on the Grand. I was trying to put the trip together in Colorado and I was not having any luck.

TM: How do you mean?

PM: I would meet people. I remember meeting this one man—just as well I don't remember his name. I didn't have a boat at the time but he had some experience. When I mentioned I had the permit and I was interested, he just came in and took over and that didn't go well with me. [laughs] So what I did is...I'm trying to remember details. It was '78 and I drove out to ARTA in California on the Stanislaus and got some AB's. Some of the people I had been to whitewater school with were working there so I knew some people and then I managed to put the trip together. I got some really nice people. In fact one of the people that was on that trip was Drifter Smith. Drifter, of course, had a great deal more experience than I had but he allowed me to be trip leader and not question that, but he would say, "You know, maybe we should... You know, it might be a good idea..." He would suggest things in such a nice way allowing me to still be the trip leader, even though he had the... He was just great. I really, really liked Drifter. The other people on the trip I'm not sure you'd know. I can't even remember everyone's name. It was a wonderful, wonderful trip.

TM: Was Sue, Drifter's wife, was she on that trip?

PM: No, actually he had a different girlfriend then. A woman named Lydia. This would be 1978. He didn't meet Sue until I think the early 80s. Then what I did is I realized okay... I went back to Colorado for the winter in early '79.

TM: So, hang on a second. We have been yik-yaking about an hour and six minutes. I think if you're willing, if you'd be willing to talk a little more or even a lot more about this trip in 1978.

PM: Okay, as much as I can.

TM: As much as you can and then if you're willing to pick this up again tomorrow or the next day we'll schedule again.

PM: Okay.

TM: Because I would like to spend the same amount of time on your solo trip. Just trying to figure out how to put this all together if that's alright with you. So 1978 you went to California and gathered up...

PM: I was at the ARTA house in Vallecito, which is in Calaveras County. I don't know how familiar you are with that.

TM: I'm not.

PM: Okay. It's on the Stanislaus River, which was still undammed at the time. I went there and did some trips with them and just met a group of people. It was just one of these magical things where everyone... Most of the people didn't know each other. It was grabbing people from different places. I forget how many boats we had, maybe 4 or 5 boats. I had gotten my own boat. I bought an Avon Pro and got so I could row it myself.

TM: The Avon Pro was that a 16 foot boat?

PM: No, it was 15. That was the early, the square front/the snub nose and the square back Pro and I think that was a 15 foot boat, I'm pretty sure.

TM: Did you build a frame for it?

PM: I had a frame built. I had somebody weld a frame for me.

TM: Metal or aluminum?

PM: Metal. I'm pretty sure it was metal. It was the pipes that are used on cars, the exhaust pipes.

TM: The muffler frame.

PM: Muffler, thank you. That's it.

TM: So it would have been bent around on the corners. A basket frame if you will?

PM: Yes, sort of like that. So I bought all of the equipment and I had the frame made. That was, let's see, what was the put-in on that? I think it was a September put-in. Pretty sure it was a September put-in.

TM: So off-season commercial trips would have really have been petering out back then in the '78 time.

PM: That's right. We had 10 of us I believe. I remember a comment that Drifter made, because he didn't know anyone either. He said, "Well, at least I won't lose any friends." [both laugh] Isn't that great. But we all got along. There was one guy who was a bit of a sourpuss on it and he had his own boat. He actually apologized at the end of the trip for being a sourpuss. But we had a grand time. I remember we did a long...

TM: Did you go to the lake on that?

PM: Yes, we had a float out.

TM: I'm sorry you were saying, you remembered...

PM: We hiked all the way up to... Is it Deer...no Tapeats Creek goes into Thunder River Falls right?

TM: That's right.

PM: So we did that. I'm not sure if we camped up there or not. I think we must of. And then Drifter and Lydia and this fella Doug Reinhold, whatever, they all went into a cave up there that's next to the big falls. You probably know this better than I do because I don't do that kind of stuff. [laughs] We did that and then we spent the day at Havasu hiking maybe to Mooney Falls, I think, that day. It was a 30 day trip, yeah, it was a 30 day trip.

TM: In September.

PM: In September, yeah. As I recall it was nice weather. A lot of different ARTA people on it, people who had worked for ARTA. I think Drifter was either working for ARTA or working for Zepher in California at the time and he wanted to get to the Grand. That's why he jumped on this, cause it was a Grand trip.

TM: Was this his first Grand trip or had he been there before?

PM: I don't think so. I don't think that it was but I don't know for sure. In fact, I'm digressing here or jumping forward a little bit, you know when he died I contributed a number of pictures of him from that trip on Facebook so that people could see. So anyway, it was such a good...we had such a good time. I flipped, that's my only flip. I flipped in Sockdolager. Went into it, got in wrong, and Sock had those big waves. This big wave is here and I'm sideways to it and I go, "Oh no." I probably said something worse than that, anyway. So over we went. I had a passenger, it was a friend of mine who was not a rafter and I had invited him on the trip. We went over and he got caught up in...the bow line wrapped around him. So that was serious. I finally got up on top of the boat. Drifter and another boat had gone before me so they were in an eddy. We got over. I threw them a line and I had the flip line on the bottom of the boat. My friend Jeff and I were on the bottom of the boat and Drifter and this other, whoever else was there, pulled us over. We get over to the eddy and I'm shivering. I'm freezing, naturally. Fortunately I had a wool sweater on and laying against the schist to warm up and that was great. Anyway, Drifter organizes flipping the boat right side up. He gets people, I think there's 3 of them or so on one tube to pull on the flip line. Just as the boat is coming up he says to everyone, "You know we're going to get wet." [both laugh] And of course they go under. The boat's right side up. What I was pleased about was my load hadn't moved an inch. I was so proud of my tie down. But that was my only flip. Then Drifter says, "You know, there's only two kinds of people in the world with flips. Those who have and those who will, and now you have." [laughs]

TM: That's right. Nice.

PM: He was a nice man, nice person and a good boatman.

TM: So 30 days, lots of hiking, lots of layovers going nowhere.

PM: Lots of hiking, layovers, yeah. I'm trying to remember if I can think of any. Where else did we layover? What are the typical ones? There's so many.

TM: Oh my gosh, could be Nankoweap.

PM: No. I think we had or maybe another one was Quagunt.

TM: Yep, could be Quagunt, sure. Cardenas, Tanner, the list goes on and on.

PM: There's so many places you can. I'd have to look at notes to remember. We had a bunch of layover days. I think that was the trip where I baked bread. I think it must have been at Quagunt. I decided to bake bread in a Dutch oven. So I didn't want to go on the hike, I was going to stay around camp and do this. So I do this... Maybe that was Nankoweap, anyway, whatever. I do this and everybody gets back and the bread is gone like in less than half an hour. [laughs] Wait a minute, I spent hours on this.

TM: Well they must of liked it, you must have done well.

PM: That was fun.

TM: So when you were living in a tepee were you using a Dutch oven a lot?

PM: Yes.

TM: So it was pretty easy.

PM: Yeah. I was baking my own bread, also, on a regular basis.

TM: So you stopped at Phantom Ranch. Do you remember seeing any other the trips on the water?

PM: Oh, I'm sure we did. I'm sure we did because September still was... They did space out private trips more then didn't they? Yeah, right. But I specifically can't remember. That's something that may come back to me as I'm thinking about it, or I can even possibly look up some notes tonight on my computer or the slides.

TM: What was it that inspired you to try to get a do-it-yourself river permit?

PM: I was obsessed with the Grand Canyon. I thought about this more recently, I think it's because in some ways I feel like Grand Canyon saved my life. I was just, you know, drifting along. Well I had a nice job at Air France but I think I was looking for something with more meaning in life. I went on that first trip and that was it. It just changed me and my life and it opened up a whole world to me. So I think that because of that I just wanted to be in the Canyon all the time. I was just not lucky enough to get hired. That I shouldn't go into because that would be negativity about people, so we won't do that.

TM: I'm following your lead.

PM: Just what your statement before all of this began. So anyway, I tried to do as many private trips. The 1978 trip was my 3rd trip. I had the very first one as a passenger and then in 1976, the following year, I did a private trip.

TM: You missed that, you skipped that.

PM: I did because it wasn't a particularly good trip people-wise. Although that's the trip where I rowed that surplus raft. It was in 1976.

TM: Can you tell me about that trip as much as you can without going into the details about the people?

PM: That was a 32 day trip.

TM: When, winter, spring, summer, fall?

PM: It was probably I think early fall, something like September. It wasn't too late because the weather was still nice there. It was a long trip, so we had a lot of layover days and hiking and all of that kind of thing.

TM: How many boats?

PM: Do you know Jeffe Aronson?

TM: I do know Jeffe Aronson.

PM: He was on that trip. Jeffe and I just clashed horribly, however, we became good friends about a year later. So that's why I can say that. I like him a lot. I'm not sure you'd know anyone else that was on that trip because they were California people.

TM: This is 1976 and you were rowing a surplus raft. This would have been a 10-man or a 7-man? This was a military surplus raft...

PM: It was only about 15 feet long.

TM: ...that kind of has a funny shape to it, kind of comes out to the front and then comes around or was it oval?

PM: It looked like, actually, the Avon Pro that I had but not quite as big. Well, the tubes aren't as big but then it has the outside tube around it. Then because of the weight of it it tracked. It was somebody else's raft and different people were rowing it. At one point I said I really like rowing that raft because I find it really easy to row for me. They let me row it through Lava Falls and I had a really good run. One of the guys who was really kind of snooty, I won't say his name, he thought a lot of himself. They all looked down on me about rafting, "why are you doing this?" He flipped in Lava and I had this beautiful run. [both laugh] It was that raft, it was a nice raft to row. Pulling it up on the beach or anything was impossible for me. You need big guys for that but it was a nice raft to row. Maybe it was 13/14 feet long, something in there. So I don't know about the person part of it, how to evaluate that or to use it as a description.

TM: Did it have a wooden frame or did it have any frame at all?

PM: It did have a frame because it was a rowing raft. We were rowing it and it carried baggage.

TM: The early military surplus rafts they would glue on a piece of rubber with an oar block bolted to the rubber. It had no frame, they put stuff in it and tie it on the best they could.

PM: No this had a frame just like the modern...

TM: Metal or wood? Do you remember?

PM: Can't remember that.

TM: Ok, but it had a frame.

PM: It did have a frame. It probably had a metal frame because remember all of these people are ARTA people and ARTA had metal frames.

TM: Was this an ARTA boat, was it borrowed from them maybe?

PM: I don't know. I don't think so. I think they had the Avon's by then because in whitewater school we had Avons and this is all pre-selfbailing boats.

TM: In '76 do you remember how many passengers or how many people. How many boats, how many people? The maximum group size allowed in 1976 was 16 people.

PM: I can look all this up. I can do that, I know I'll be able to find it.

TM: Just curious to know.

PM: I would say we probably had 14-16. We probably had the maximum. Now on my '78 trip I'm pretty sure we only had 10. Again we did a lot of hiking. Do you know Jim "Jimbo" Tishner?

TM: Yes.

PM: He was on that trip and his brothers were on it, too. Yeah, you wouldn't know because they never did Grand trips.

TM: And this was right about the time, well there was a movie made later.

PM: Yes, I just saw that and there's another movie out revisiting it. I want to see that. That was Rob Moss who made the movie. He was in ARTA. It was kind of the ARTA family. In fact they get together every year for Seder. Not on the official time but at the end of April. One of these years I'll try to get to it. But he made that movie. I'm not sure what trip... Wouldn't be '77, I don't think anything went anywhere in '77. As I remember it was a drought year. That could have been '78/'79, something like that.

TM: The Grand would have been running because they were letting water out at that point.

PM: Even in '77?

TM: Yeah. It might have been lower water than people are used to, but it would be today's normal.
[laughs]

PM: Oh, is that right. I don't think you'd know any of the other people on it because they never became connected to the Canyon. Jeffe Aronson and Jim Tishner would be the two on that trip. In fact Jim Tishner was the one who was brave enough to be in the boat with me when I rowed Lava. He was so good. You know there was the whole thing...in fact I learned from Peter Winn...you don't have this anymore, but at the time the thing was follow the bubbles because they knew where they're going. I was nervous about rowing, naturally, I hadn't done... This would be the first time I'd be rowing Lava. Jim said, "Put your fear into positive energy." I did and I had a good run. [laughs] But then, again, it was follow the bubbles. I have to think of years. After '83, the high-water year, that bubble run was washed out I guess. Course you've been down more recently.

TM: Well, the bubble line is still there.

PM: Is it, cause it was out for a while. Maybe the water was so high that... Oh, the bubbles were there but they were leading you into the ledge hole. Whereas before, they led you next to the ledge hole on the left and then the big water on the right and you could just sneak through right there.

TM: That's right, that's still going today.

PM: Is it really? Okay. A couple of my runs of Lava, I would get through and I would be dry from the waist up. When you're small, and Peter showed me this in that very first trip, you row with your brains not your brawn. When you don't have any brawn, you can't use it.

TM: That's right. Nice. Well Patch maybe this would be a good place to wrap up what we'll call Part 1. Is there anything else you'd like to include in this before we wrap this up?

PM: I can't think of anything. I'll look up stuff on my computer just for the dates of those two trips.

TM: Alright, that sounds good.

PM: And I'll look for that picture with Bert Loper's boat.

TM: That'd be great.

PM: I should be able to find that, too.

TM: So in that case, we will call this a wrap for Part 1 interview with Patch McCairen. My name is Tom Martin today is Tuesday March 5th, 2019. Thank you so much.

PM: Your welcome, this was great.