

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Roger Neisess (RN)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
Subject: 1970s river running with Sanderson Brothers
Date of Interview: June 25, 2015
Method of Interview: Telephone
Transcriber: Sadie McFarlane
Date of Transcription: October 2019
Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest, Tom Martin, Roger Neisess,

Keys: Glen Canyon Dam, Stewart Udall, River Guiding 1960s-1970s, Georgie White, growth of river running, Tom Doer, Dave Bledsoe, Ron Smith, Governor Babbitt, Del Web, Fort Lee, Wilderness River Expeditions, Dr. Robert Euler, Bert's Canyon, Marble Canyon Dam Tramway

Keys: Raleigh "Rod" Sanderson, Larry and Karen Sanderson, Kevin (Hoss) Sanderson, Jerry Sanderson,

TM: Today is June 25, 2015, and this is a phone conversation with Roger Neisess and Tom Martin. Roger, how old are you?

RN: I'm 65, this year.

TM: OK, where were you born?

RN: I was born in Fullerton, California, it's in north Orange County, right next to Anaheim and Disneyland and all that.

TM: OK, and who was your grandfather?

RN: My grandfather was, well, we called him "Rod" – Rod Sanderson, I think that's how he's generally referred to in river history. I know when the guides look at it... His actual first name is Raleigh.

TM: OK, and what do you remember about Rod, as a young man? Well – as a kid? What are your memories about him?

RN: Right... Well, I just remember him as being...for me, he was a prototype grandfather, you know, he was a great, sweet guy, he always had a great big laugh, and he was always willing to tell a story. He loved to go fishing, and probably as much as anything, he loved the Colorado River. I think he started running back in '47, '48, somewhere in there, and picked up some boats from Doc Marston that he used every year, kind of like family vacation river running boats. He would bring along, on those trips, a 16 mm movie camera, and take movies on the trips as they went down, always on spring and summer flood trips because that's the only way they could use the boats that he had. Then he

would bring the movies over to Fullerton, because there was his eldest daughter, who was my mom, and I would sit there, underneath the card table, where he had the projector running, and just not even want to move while he was running those incredible pictures with those three 19-foot aluminum boats. He had twin 35 4-cylinders on them. And these trips would generally take about 10 days, and we would sit there and look at these movies for about an hour or so, and I was in total rapt attention on that particular place. He was just incredibly, um, in love with the Grand Canyon, and his opportunities to be a part of it in the way he was.

TM: Neat. Could you tell me the name of your mom?

RN: My mom's name is Helen. Because her last maiden name was Sanderson, a lot of people just call her Sandy. Interestingly enough, that was a very common nickname for my grandfather, as well.

TM: Well that's fun.

RN: Yeah, and for us kids, he was just "Gamp", you know, because the oldest grandchild in the family wasn't pronouncing r's, you know how that works.

TM: Yep.

RN: So my grandparents were Gamp and Ganny and Rod was Gamp. That's how I remember him the most. He was "Gamp" and he brought the movies and it was just incredible to sit and watch those every single year from about the time I was five until, I dunno, he made his last trip, I'm wanting to say... They started building the dam in '56... I think they made a trip in '56... I think they made a trip in '57, actually. '58, there may have been a trip? But they ran several of them, all of the boys, Larry, Jerry, Bud and Bill, so with the exception of my uncle Dick, the other four boys all learned to run the river from Gamp. On those trips and on those boats.

TM: So Roger, the people you mention, Larry and Jerry and Bud and Bill; were these all Rod's sons?

RN: They were. My grandmother's name was Lois, so Rod and Lois had a rather large family, 8 kids; my mother Helen was the oldest, followed in order by Bud and then Larry and then Jerry, Bill, and Dick, and then the last two kids were both girls, Karen and then Judy.

TM: OK, thank you.

RN: Sure. Of those 8 kids, my mom, Larry, and Karen survive to this day. Larry is in Page, my mom is still in Fullerton, California, in the house I grew up in, she and her husband got married, my dad Kendall. They have been married a long time. [laughs] I'm sorry! They were married in '47, and they're both still very active in their church and things. My Aunt Karen now lives in Apache Junction. That's where the siblings are scattered around to at this point.

TM: Where did those films go, those 16mm films?

RN: You know my cousin Kevin (Hoss) Sanderson, as far as I know, still has them. So, they're out there, and I think they have been dubbed onto video and disc, at this point in time. If that is something that you would like me to work on getting you...

TM: I'd love to see those!

RN: I would be happy to talk to Kevin and see if he has them. I used to have an 8mm – or, not an 8mm, a VHS tape that those are on. I've been meaning to look for it, and I will.

TM: That would be great – we can get that digitized, as well. That would be great stuff. I know that the museum collection at Grand Canyon National Park would be interested in that stuff.

RN: Yeah, I think Jerry had them put onto tape, and that's where I got a copy of it. However, if you've never seen them, they are a definitive treat to watch.

TM: I'd love to see them.

RN: If there's a way that I can make that happen for you, I will. Always looking for a good reason to go to Flagstaff, so...

TM: Even the 16mm films – that would be the best, if those are still around.

RN: I'm sure that Kevin has them; he lives in Page. Do you know Kevin?

TM: I don't, no. I've heard of him, but I don't know him.

RN: Yeah, ok, well, Jerry passed away a couple of months ago. Kevin still has the old river warehouse and shop building there. He does some stuff during the summer when there's a few more tourists in town. It's called "Into the Grand" is what he renamed it. He's got quite a bit of river history and lore and mementos kind of scattered around the warehouse there as kind of a museum. It's kind of an interesting walk-through, and next time you get up there you should stop in and check it out, introduce yourself. Kevin's just like a dad, he likes to talk and tell stories and show people around.

TM: Nice. OK, so you're a young kid, you're under the table watching these mesmerizing films from Gamp, and then what happens?

RN: Well, my mom and dad... What's the best way to get into this? Jerry and Larry and Bill were all working for the Bureau of Reclamation on the Glen Canyon Dam project at one time or another. Larry was a high scaler and actually set the initial charge that President Eisenhower detonated by remote from Washington, D.C. I guess there's some family history there, as well. Jerry was a

ranger, part of the Bureau of Reclamation Police Force. I think my Uncle Bill worked at the water treatment plant that served the construction camp that later became known as Paige. There was family history not only tied to the river, but also to the dam, Lake Powell, and the city of Paige, in large measure. Jerry and Larry, as they were Bureau employees, were asked by the commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation to put together a trip for Stewart Udall when he was Secretary of the Interior. I believe this trip was in... I'm wanting to say '65 or '66, I'm feeling a little... on that date, but it could easily be researched. At any rate, they put together a couple of rafts that they picked up from, either Ted Hatch or John Cross, one of the two, and just kind of the standard double 30-footer setup with a motor in the middle, much like Georgie White was running at the time. And he took Stewart Udall down, and he wanted to see the canyon from the bottom up, because there was there was such a heightened controversy in terms of placing another dam in the canyon. He wanted a first-hand look at it. So they took him down, and because of that trip they were subsequently asked to provide some other people, if they were still doing trips, you know, would they want to do them commercially.

So, with this little beginning, by 1967 they had a full schedule of trips going down, probably 6 trips or so. For them that was a full schedule, because they were still full-time employees of the Bureau of Reclamation. So they would do these on whatever vacation and sick time they had put together at the time. In 1967 that expanded to about 12 trips, and by 1968 I was getting ready to graduate from high school. My parents had just been on a trip the summer before, in '67, with Jerry and Larry, and they decided that well maybe for graduation Roger would want to take a trip. So they had it all set up, I was to graduate from high school and supposed to be on the river three days later, and so I flew into Phoenix and things were moving along pretty good for Sanderson and Brothers River Expeditions by then. I think the summer had grown from 12 trips to 24 trips, and they had called prior to June, about February, and asked me if I would like to stay the whole summer and do 3 trips. And of course the answer was yes. So I made my way to Phoenix on an airplane, and my grandma put me on a pickup truck with some guys that had fabricated some raft units for the boats that Jerry and Larry were designing, and off we went up to Page.

TM: How old were you, then?

RN: I was 18. Three days out of high school, and almost never looked back from that point on. On the river three days later. It's hard for me to remember a lot of the details of that first trip. I'm sure it's the same for you. You're just trying to absorb so much at one time, you're just like a kid at the mall, you don't know where to look next. I just absolutely felt a very strong affinity for where I was. I was on a boat as a swamper with guys I didn't know that well, and at that point in time Jerry and Larry were kind of hard pressed to find people that had a lot of river experience, that would be willing to run trips. There would be, I guess guest pilots you might say that would be dropping in and out, making trips for Jerry and Larry all summer long while they were in the midst of trying to train people that

lived there in town to become their staff, their pilots. Back then, the general rule of thumb was if you made one trip as the swamper, you can make your next trip as the pilot, and by your fifth trip we expect you to be a lead (laughs).

TM: Alright, let me get this straight – one trip as a swamper, next trip you're driving, and by the sixth trip you're the trip leader.

RN: Yeah, that's kinda what they were going for, because they were doing so much business, they couldn't find enough staff. We were in heavy training mode from the time we hit Lee's Ferry to rig out the boats. Actually, I say that laughingly, because the Park Service still has some rule and regulations involving whether or not you were a minor and whether you were over 21. That had to be paid attention to. Actually, I didn't get to lead until I was 21, so that was three years later. We ran a different kind of trip than a lot of the other outfitters, and that was Jerry's business sense, to some degree. He was a great businessman. He knew, or at least he almost had a natural instinct for how he wanted that trip and that business to move forward.

TM: How was that? How was he different? What was he looking for? What did he do differently?

RN: Jerry wanted - and this was very Jerry – Jerry wanted to have a Cadillac trip out there. He wanted his people to know that all they had to do was pack a duffel bag and make it to Page, and everything else was going to be provided for them. The wet bags, ammo cans – all that stuff, the sleeping bags, as far as that goes. I mean, we furnished the sleeping bags for the entire history of Sanderson River Expeditions for our passengers. He just wanted them to literally get to Paige and go on vacation, and not have to worry about a whole bunch of details about the trip process that they knew, really, very little about. He wanted to handle all that for them. He wanted them to enjoy a first-class menu, and that's why he included steaks and ice cream and things like that on his river menu, and that was another aspect of our training. We had to learn how to be good cooks, as all boatmen had to be. He also wanted us to be entertainers, because that's the way he enjoyed a trip. He liked to tell stories and fill in the history with anecdotes where we had them. He had some history, just because of the early trips that he had been on as a young man, learning how to run boats with his father. So, there was a great deal of Rod and Jerry and Larry in all of the training that we did as pilots in terms of how he wanted us to not only comport ourselves, but how he wanted us to interact with the people who came on our trip. He genuinely wanted them to have a resort experience on an expedition. It was a real fun thing to try and get your hands around as a young pilot, a young employee, to try to catch all of those different angles that Jerry and Larry were shooting for, in terms of the character of their trips.

TM: What do you remember about those early, early trips – and we're talking 1968 here?

RN: Yeah. I remember running into people like Georgie White, going “Oh my gosh, I’m actually sitting here, listening to Georgie White tell a story, I can’t even believe this is happening.” How much... how LITTLE regulation there was. I mean, at the time it was – there was no such thing as a “user day”, there was no such thing as a Port-o-Potty, there was no such thing as “carry out your trash”, you know, you were supposed to take your cans, put a lot of holes in them, and let the rocks at the bottom of the river grind them up. I mean, it was all very “camp-ish”, and really in ‘68 and ‘69 the visitation numbers weren’t what we began to see in ‘70 and ‘71. There was an explosion between ‘69 and ‘70 in terms of, you know, the popularity of the trip in general. I don’t think that anyone could really see that explosion coming, it just happened. And I think that for all of us that were part of the, that were really stewards of the Canyon, the boatmen, it really surprised all of us, to a large degree. And it helped us to eventually get a better grasp on how much we needed to pay attention to how we took care of the place.

TM: OK. And what else? You met Georgie, there was a huge explosion of river growth, y’all sort of became stewards of the resource... What other stories do you remember about those late ‘60s, early ‘70s trips?

TN: Oh, I think for the most part, I remember there being a lot less fluctuation in river level. I think those were obviously wetter years for the drainage system. I don’t ever remember running on anything less than 25,000 or so. It was just almost like a constant flow, and then as we got into years like, uh... ‘72, I want to think, ‘72 when there was quite a bit of water and it was beginning to encroach a little on Rainbow Bridge, up on Lake Powell. There was a lot of controversy there about the flows and the need to get more water into the Canyon so that it doesn’t harm the Bridge, and so there was this constant... and it would move from court to court, because I remember at the time. One court would say “No, it’s OK” and the next one up would say “No, you can’t do that, and we’re gonna overturn” and there was just a lot of confusion as to what to do with the water that was coming into the drainage system, and then all of a sudden there was NO water. And as pilots that hadn’t really seen much under 20,000 or 25,000, all of a sudden there being 7,000 was kind of startling. I remember that we had to kind of rethink how we were operating our boats; were we doing this by rote over those rapids, do we do this, do we do that – or did you have to read the water a bit more. I think some of the techniques of river running that I from that time forward tried to impress upon the swampers that I trained was that you cannot memorize how to run a given rapid; you have to understand where the water is moving in the river and then use that to frame how you operated your boat. It changed, for me, as much as anything, how I trained my successors. I think it was a good thing to be exposed to that, and I still think it is. I think you reach a point in your career, and I ran almost 14 years, and I think you reach a point where you understand that the river is way bigger than you are. You simply kind of passing through, you know, a moment in time, and the river keeps on moving. You’re kind of just there for a little bit. You have to adapt to what the Canyon gives you, as opposed to trying to force what you want the Canyon to be onto it –

it just doesn't work that way. I think when you're young though, you have a tendency to live in the latter perspective, and I think as you age, and you're in your "Golden Years", you begin to see that the former's really more true. I can't remember how many times I would sit on the back of the boat in the late evening, and just watch the water go by, and think "You know, this river is going to do the same thing day after day, year after year; it's going to be here long after we're gone, and it's going to clean up everything, all the damage we – and we did a lot in the way – and it'll go on. It's been doing this for millions of years." We're just here for a blink, anyway.

The early years were probably the more interesting years in a lot of respects. We grew up with the Park Service in terms of how they decided they needed to start managing it, after that explosion, after that visitation explosion of the early '70s we began to help the Park Service incorporate all of those visitation regulations that were important to the stewardship aspect that we as boatmen needed to keep in mind. I think, when I look back on it, sometimes I say "You know, those early years were a lot of fun, because they were wild – it was like the Wild West, right?" The later years were a lot more structured, a lot more regulated, and sometimes I look at those and go "Well, it's what we gotta do, it's the right thing to do, but those early years, they sure were fun." It's kind of some mixed emotions there.

I had the opportunity to help train Tom Doer when he was one of the first two river rangers that were going to start taking trips for the Park Service on a regular basis with their own rigs. Tom always has an interesting perspective on it, as well. I remember his first trip was with me and Dave Bledsoe and he couldn't... it was difficult for him to grasp what it was that his new job was going to be. He had never really been down on the river and now he was learning how to run boats, because the boats that he was going to run were very similar to the S-rigs that Jerry and Larry were running at the time. Eventually they - the Park Service - sort of incorporated the design that Ron Smith was using over at Grand Canyon, and that worked better for what they needed to do. But it was still, essentially, you know, a single baloney with two outriggers. So Tom was learning how to run it, and just being constantly slack-jawed about the immensity and scope of his job-to-be. He came away from that first trip with a very different perspective. It wasn't just about shoving a bunch of regs and bureaucratic legalese onto all the other boatmen and outfitters that were working in the Canyon. I think he appreciated the job from the perspective of not only being a boatman but also being a ranger, and there was something that he had to kind of weld together, there, come together in the middle and help create the River Ranger Force as it exists today. It's done a little differently now, but still, there's a perspective and an attitude that he had to reconcile himself with at the time, as well.

TM: And did his father work for the Park Service?

RN: I don't know if his father did. Tom was working as a ranger with the Park Service on the South Rim at the time. The River Ranger position came up, and there was another guy that was training with him, on the same trip – I can't remember his name. I remember Tom very well. I think Tom made two training trips with Sanderson. He also made some trips with – what was the other outfitter? (garbled) over at GP – I can't remember. Anyway...

TM: OK, I was just curious about that. Roger, what was your last trip through Grand Canyon?

RN: Well, I worked for Jerry Sanderson until, through the 1980 season. One of my last trips was taking then-Governor Babbitt down on a river trip. That was kind of interesting. I left Sandersons in '80. I had just gotten married – my wife Kathy and I married in '79. I decided that I probably ought to try spending some time learning a real job (laughs). So, I got to do construction work, a big construction job over here in the White Mountains. They were building Springerville Generating Station, Units 1 and 2 at the time, and I went to work at the concrete batch plant there, with a subcontractor handling the concrete production. Eventually I ended up being the superintendent at that plant. I was there for about 12 years. We made our way back to Paige in '95, and I went to work for Aramark on the lake at their boat rental operation. When I got back there, at the time, I was sitting on 96 trips. I had the most trips of any Sanderson pilot. Of course, Sanderson's no longer exists; Jerry sold the company to Del Webb in 1983. Actually, Del Webb bought Fort Lee Company and Sanderson River Expeditions at the same time, and then combined them into what is now Wilderness River Expeditions. I was sitting on 96 trips when we got back, and I was able to make a trip with Diamond in '96, and then I made two subsequent trips with Wilderness River Expeditions in '97 and '98. So, now I'm stuck on '99. (laughs)

TM: So, you're pretty close, here!

RN: We're going to have to do something about that at some point!

TM: I think you are! So, my next question is, from '68 to '98, 30 years of perspective from your first trip to your last trip now, and now you're ready to go boating again, 2018's coming up, I'm just saying! Were there any changes that you saw in the river environment from '68 to '98?

RN: Well... I think - and I alluded to this earlier – I think the biggest change from '68 through '71 was, we knew that the river fluctuated every night, because once in a while we'd have to push our boats into the river in the morning. Or we'd have to get up and re-tie them in the middle of the night, whichever the case may be, depending on where we were. Beginning in '72 through, actually probably through about '78 or so, we dealt with a lot more fluctuations. It's probably just more of the result of combined wet years, dry years, power demand, that sort of thing.

I don't believe that there was as much pressure on the Bureau or the Park Service to look at the habitat down there in the same way they do now, and that's why we have the two floods that they do every year to try and restore some of that. And you know, if that is working that's probably a good thing. It's nothing like the floods that used to come through. When my grandfather was running his trips down through there, they would generally run on 128,000, 135,000 was I think the most that they ever ran on; that was '57 if I'm not mistaken. The film from that trip is incredible. It made Lava Falls look like a genuine rapid as opposed to the more of a cataract that we ran on. You get below 20,000 and Lava is challenging, of course, but there's no real huge water. When you get 157,000 the ledge hole [126,000] is just mind boggling. My grandfather's boats, like I said, they were only 19-foot aluminum boats. I guess the saving grace, in most cases, is water flow does two things for a rapid – it either washes it out or makes it difficult to run. So between there's some fun stages to work with but high water or low water is one extreme or the other, it's either there and it's great big and we can get lots of room to drive around in it, or low water it's pretty specific. Like I said, in '72, when we were learning how to run on flows that were less than 12,000 or ever 15,000 is more the norm, it was challenging. It created some differences in how we camped, it created some changes in how we trained our staff. When I look at the trips that I made most recently, the three last trips that I made, I can see that the huge shift in how you deal with your camp sites, how you monitor your camp sites – there wasn't that much more regulation moved in, but that's when I think some of their regulations had been toned a little bit. In some cases it may have been overkill, but again, I think that as a practicing boatman you have to realize that you have a certain stewardship obligation to the resource that you're utilizing.

The dam was good or bad, time will measure that, and long after we're gone someone may have the opportunity to look at 100 years of data and see whether or not it did that much, I don't know. I think that in general, the growth of regulation helped us to hone in on how we needed to take care of the environment we used, and kind of changed, again, the perspective from being a young teenager with an exciting job it kind of changed all of us to a little bit more thoughtful and perspective-driven boatmen by the time we finished our careers. And I think you can ask any of the boatmen – any of the elder boatmen – and they'll probably tell you much the same thing.

TM: Nice. Yeah, you mentioned that the Babbitt trip that you took down towards the end of your river career in the late '70s was interesting – what was interesting about that trip?

RN: Well, I think the most interesting thing about Bruce Babbitt was that while he was trained as a lawyer, he was also trained as a geologist, and whether or not a lot of people know that I don't know, but on that particular trip I had Bruce Babbitt, I also had Dr. Robert Euller on that trip. Euller is probably, in my opinion anyway, the foremost authority on Grand Canyon anthropology and archaeology, and I had met him, actually, on my second trip down the river. He was doing a

excavation there at Stanton's Cave. My uncle Larry knew Bob because he had also participated in some of my grandfather's trips. He was, in a sense, a family friend, and I had a chance to meet him on my second trip, and got a good tour on his work there on Stanton's Cave, and what he was doing in there, and it was, again, a kind of a behind-the-scenes trip, and that was kinda fun.

TM: And that was in 1968.

RN: That was in '68, yeah. That was one of those insider things that I got to do because of my relationship with the historical river family that knew the Canyon. So Bob was on that trip. Listening to Bob and Bruce Babbitt talk about the anthropology, the zoology, and archaeology of the Grand Canyon, just sitting there on the boat talking, was fascinating. For two people – Bob had been in and out of the Canyon for most of his adult life, but Bruce wasn't exactly shy about sharing his knowledge, either. It was interesting to see Bruce Babbitt in that light, as opposed to how we generally saw him as Governor – it was just... interesting.

TM: Nice. You also mentioned that you'd met Georgie, so I'm going to try and think about other river folks – did you get a chance to meet Marston, when he was on the G.C.E. trips, before he died in '79?

RN: I met him, but he didn't know who I was, other than the fact that he knew my grandfather. So yeah, it was interesting to shake hands with a legend. He had quite a crowd around him, so I barely had time to talk, just simply introduced myself and tell him who I was, and small talk for five minutes...

TM: Where did you meet him?

RN: I believe I ran into him at the... could have been the Park at Havasu... I'm thinking it was further upstream than that. Could have been in Marble Canyon...

TM: So this was when he was on one of the G.C.E. historic trips and you boated on by, or vice versa, they boated past you guys? Neat.

RN: Yeah, we just sort of ran into each other during work as boatmen. He ended up stopping at a lot of the same places, and one of the guys mentioned "Oh, do you know so-and-so was on our trip?" and I said "No, but I've got to go meet him!" So, we did. It was interesting doing that. It was always interesting to me to listen to my Uncle Larry – and I made probably half a dozen trips with Larry – listening to Larry talk about the Marble Canyon dam sites and all the work that went on there, because my grandfather was the head surveyor for the Bureau of Reclamation in that period of time, in the mid-'40s there, and they were looking for all the eventual dam sites where they were going to construct. And so as a family we had some inside stories about that that were always interesting. I don't know if you know this, but Jerry has a collection of glass slides that my grandfather took when he was working there in Marble Canyon. I would be surprised if Kevin didn't still have those, as well.

TM: Can you check?

RN: That would be an interesting source of information, probably, for you to look at sometime.

TM: Yeah, because those can be scanned. That material can go digital. That would be great to see.

RN: I will try and get ahold of Kevin. Today is actually his birthday, so I have to send him some well-wishes anyway. I'll try and remember to ask him about that.

TM: Thank you. Great.

RN: Some of those stories were good. My grandfather had a camp at the Royal Arch Creek just downstream from the dam sites where they were doing the work. They were also the responsible party for finding Bert Loper's boat and tying it off. Whenever in those early years – I remember when I first started running, the whole boat was there. Not any more! (laughs) By the time that visitation explosion sort of wound down with the User Day regulations, a lot of it had disappeared. In those early couple of years, that I ran, we would stop at the boats, we would take the people out and we would look at the loper boat, and then we would walk on downstream past that, to Royal Arch Creek, where my grandfather's survey camp was.

TM: Was that also called Bert's Canyon?

RN: It could have been – I mean, it was a canyon, right there, so it was kind of between the boats and Royal Arch.

TM: That's right, yes. And there were some tables in there.

RN: My grandfather's survey table was still sitting in there, and it was, for me, an interesting few minutes to spend, because you could sit there and see him and his guys sitting around, doing... it was a memory thing, for me.

TM: Nice.

RN: I think all that stuff – I think the Park's done a pretty good job of getting rid of all the old history down there. Some of it was kind of fun to have. But something like that was really more a piece of family history as much as anything, for me. So for it to go away, that's probably OK. But there were other things like that. I mean, I remember one of the old jet boats being stuck down there below Grapevine, you know, so they hauled it out. I remember a lot of that stuff. It just doesn't exist down there anymore. I think that would probably fall into that answer of "What has changed the most in the last 30 years since I started?" the beginning to the end of that span of time. A lot of that old history the Park Service has sort of went in and cleaned up and removed from there. And there can be some good thought to doing that. Nothing wrong with that, I guess.

TM: Yeah, um, you mentioned that Jerry sold the company out to Del Webb in '83. Do you know why he did that?

RN: I think that... you know, his reasons were his own. I'm sure they offered him a lot of money. Maybe that was some of it. But he'd been in it for so long, and maybe he was just ready to sit back and be done with it, I don't know. He still enjoys the Canyon and being in the Canyon, so maybe he was just tired of running the business. It's hard to say, like I said, his reasons were his own, whatever they may be.

TM: Fair enough. OK.

RN: I will share with you another funny story about the Marble Canyon survey crew.

TM: Please!

RN: I've been thinking about this. You know how they had to move stuff in and out of there on their cable ways.

TM: So, back up a minute. It seems like there were two exploratory attempts in that area. One was in '48-'50 and the other one was in '62-'64.

RN: We're talking about the '47-'48 period of time there.

TM: Yes, the tramway – got it.

RN: Yeah, the tramway. That was also the primary way to get people in and out, as far as the staff was concerned, as well. As the story goes, according to Larry, they had hired a camp cook and he came out to that head of the tramway site there, out of Flagstaff and looked down in there and looked at the buckets he was supposed to ride in, and he said "No, I'm sorry, I'm not going to do this. I've changed my mind." And my grandfather really needed a cook down there, so he said "OK, well, you know, I'll take you back into Flag, and we'll get you on the next train out." He'd come in by train and he was going to go out by train and he and I both went to college out there and I rode the train myself. You leave in the evening and you get in in the morning. So he'd gotten in in the morning and my grandfather drove in and picked him up and taken the guy out and the guy looked and said "I'm not going to do this, and Gamp said "Alright, I'll run you back to Flag" and we'll get you some dinner and you can leave on the train tonight." The guy was fine with that, and they took him in and got him some dinner and more than one or two or three beers, I'm sure, and by the time dinner was done, the guy was pretty close to lights out, so Gamp took him back out to the tramway and dumped him in the bucket and sent him down to the river.

TM: [laughs]

RN: So he woke up in the morning, and didn't seem to have a clue what had happened except that he was at the bottom of the canyon instead of up on top. So that was how Gamp made sure he had his camp cook. I'm sure he did more than cook. But that's how they got him down there. Larry liked to tell that story; that was always a fun one for him to tell. That really sort of started everything for the Sanderson camp, working down there as surveyor and meeting Doc Marston, I mean it all started there. That whole little piece of orientation and storytelling that we would do with the folks once we'd gotten at that point in the Canyon, all the way through the little hike up Royal Arch Creek, it was always a special, fun part of the trip for me. I enjoyed that.

TM: Because it was those stories that I remembered from the trip we did in 1971 when I wrote about Moulty Fulmer and his river running in 1955 through 1959. Those stories came to life. That was a lot of fun, because you guys certainly talked about those stories, and they meant nothing to me until much later. And then I looked back in the rearview mirror and said "I remember those guys talking about those stories."

RN: Yeah. Those early years really helped me try and focus in on what kind of information I wanted to give to my people as they made their journey through the Canyon. I wanted them to leave the trip with a feeling that they'd really experienced not only the Grand Canyon... and we would talk about the geology and about how perhaps the Canyon came to be, but also I wanted them to have the feeling that they'd actually met some of these other people, that they'd met these people that had worked on the Marble Canyon Dam site, that they understood who people like Georgie White and Doc Marston were, and John Cross, and Ted and Don Hatch; people that really had a lot to do with establishing some of the history of river running in the Grand Canyon. I found it important for them to know these people somehow. So, these stories that I was learning from people like Larry and Jerry or Georgie or whoever it might be – those were the ones I wanted to pass along to them at some point in time. You know, when you're just floating along down there, you're not trying to make a bunch of miles in a day, it's easy enough just to step away from the back of the boat and walk up there and talk to them about it. It made the trip, in my opinion, a little bit more of a personal experience, and above that, it was important. The Grand Canyon, to me, is always and will always be a very special place. It's overpowering to some degree when you look at it from up above, and it's more personal when you're sitting on the boat and looking down on the water. So there's two sides to the Grand Canyon. It was always important for me to try and make that trip a very special trip for the people, because it is a special place.

TM: Yes. Nice. Excellent. Well, on that note, maybe we should wrap this up at this point. I want to ask you one more question – if someone were to find this recording 50 years from now, is there anything else you'd like to mention to them?

RN: Well... I think that we always, at Sandersons, and they still do it at Wilderness River Adventures, we always had kind of a special little ceremony on the last night on the river – I'm sure that most river runners, most of the commercial people had some kind of a special thing they did on the last night. For us, we had these cute little rat pins that June Sanderson had helped design and create, and we would give all the passengers that were leaving the next morning one of these little rat pins. And it was nice, in my opinion, that we could confer on them the title of "River Rat" in a very physical way, giving them that little piece of jewelry – I still have my first one. But also, to me, it was important for them to take home with them an understanding for how important it was, not only just to take care of the Grand Canyon, in the time that we were there. I mean, every morning it was time for "let's police the camp", pick up the trash, make sure that we were not leaving anything that we don't want the next group that might come in and use this camp to find. We wanted to try and encourage them to understand that keeping, taking care of, the environment that they visited, or even lived in, whether it was a city park, whatever it could be, whether it was your home or your back yard, to keep it clean. Take care of the environment that you're a part of. So, we were trying – I was always trying – to kind of push that stewardship aspect that I had sort of adopted onto them. I figure that every group of 30 people that I sent out, if I could send out 30 stewards that were willing to adopt the same type of philosophy about the environment that they were living in, and sometimes they brought kids and the kids would grow up - maybe it was a way to sort of help care for the world, my little contribution to taking care of a larger place than even the Grand Canyon. This was something that I liked to leave with them, not just talk about that sort of thing... I would generally try to read some of the passages that I liked from some of Leopold's books or some of the Sierra Club stuff that I carried with me. There are some good thoughts in there, and whether ideologically you believe all of them or not, you can still take pieces of those thoughts, and put together a pretty good perspective for how we should be stewarding and taking care of the world that we live in. Those were some genuine thoughts and sincere thoughts that I was having, and that I wanted to try and leave with them on the last night. In exiting the Canyon, they were exiting the Canyon not just as river rats, river runners, a very small minority in the larger scheme of things, really, but they were also exiting the Canyon as people that may have learned a different perspective for how they viewed the environment they were a part of. So, I think in closing... you know, I closed my trips that way, maybe it's a good way to close our conversation here. You know, I still believe all that. I like to go camping up here in the mountains. The mountains up here behind me are where I get most of the wood that I work with, and when I go up and go camping I still do the same thing, I walk through the camp as I'm getting up to leave, I make sure that I pick up all the stuff that might be lying around that someone else left, those things are still part of what I do. Maybe they're still part of the 300 to 400 people that I took down the river, maybe it's still part of what they do.

TM: Fun. Very nice. Well, Roger, thank you very much for your time. This has been an interview with Roger Neisess and Tom Martin on the 25th of June, 2015. Roger, if you could stay on the line, that'd be great.

RN: OK.