

## **Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society**

**Interviewee:** Sharon Buck

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin

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TM: Today is Tuesday, March 22, 2022. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Sharon Buck. My name is Tom Martin, and this is Part Two. Good afternoon, Sharon. How are you today?

SB: Fine, Tom. Thank you.

TM: Great. Sharon, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

SB: Yes.

TM: Thank you. After we finished off the interview on the 19<sup>th</sup> on Saturday, you mentioned then the next time we talked, you would like to talk about the early churches there in Page. Could you pick that thread up and talk us through that?

SB: I can. When we were arriving— Well, earlier in the interview, I had made mention that it seemed to me that the people in charge of the dam construction and the Bureau of Reclamation and all of the people involved tried to make this town as normal as they could or as complete, I guess, as they could. And one of the things that fascinated me a lot, because coming from an organized town, there were probably five different churches in Holbrook when I lived there. And they were all in regular buildings with, you know, pretty large memberships. And when we came to Page, we still had a lot of those same religions represented, but people were meeting in their homes, outside on little patios. Every trailer had, like, a little slab of cement beside it. And I'm guessing it was an 8' by 10'. And people would bring folding chairs, and when the weather was nice, they would sit outside, crowd into any kind of places they could. And it was like they all decided that they weren't going to leave things behind, that they were going to continue with a normal life. And normal for a lot of these people was to attend church, and so they found a way to make it work. Then once they started working on the churches— And they didn't all start at the same time. But there was a lot of construction going on. One of the things that people did find out is that sometimes there would be workers, like, say, working on the Methodist church and all of a sudden, they would be gone. And they would be working on the Catholic church. And what had happened was because we didn't have alcohol in this town, sometimes people would bring in, like, a few cases of beer. And if you came to help work after your job ended, you can have a beer while you help put up a wall or something. So, some of the churches went faster than others if they had the right incentives for people to come work.

TM: Interesting. Sure. Well, clearly, the construction tradespeople would have been in huge demand.

SB: Oh, totally. Yes. And you know, even the project helped so much. There's probably churches in this town that you couldn't blow up the foundation if you tried because sometimes if there was extra cement, rather than have it go bad, if some area was framed up at a church, they would bring it in, dump it there so it could be used. We called it dam cement, and the dam cement is really, really strong. It's almost impossible to jackhammer through.

TM: And so that cement would have been used if there was extra. I can't help but think that the Bureau of Reclamation was swimming in cement, and there would always be extra.

SB: Yeah, I think you're right.

TM: Okay. And the cement is very strong, and that makes sense. But once you poured a slab, you know, you'd need to build walls and a roof and go from there. So, were the individual congregations— Did they have to do their own fundraising for their churches in the towns? Do you know how that worked?

SB: You know, I was young enough that I didn't pay any attention to it. I don't know if they were getting funding from a chapter church or a mother church or whatever you might want to call it. That was not something that I thought of at that time. And that's a really good question, but I don't know the answer to it.

TM: And if you don't mind me asking, which denomination are you?

SB: When I was when I first moved to town, I was LDS until I married. And my husband was Methodist. And for me, it was super important that we go to church as a family. He wasn't as willing to make a concession or move as I was, so we attended the Methodist Church so we could go to church as a family and raise our children as a church family.

TM: What do you remember about the construction of the LDS church in Page?

SB: Actually, not a whole lot. Like I said, I was just young enough that I would notice, wow, the wall was taller, or this happened or that happened. But I couldn't even have told you the story about, you know, the people going to a different church to work because of the beer except that it was one that my dad loved to tell and laugh about how they would lose construction workers all of a sudden. And they would just be a block down the road, working on a different church at that moment.

TM: Because the incentive was better.

[Laughter]

SB: Yes. Very much better. Because we were dry, you know, no alcohol here. That's about the only way they're going to get a beer without having quite a long drive.

TM: I know nothing about this except that I think of Boulder City as the construction town for the Hoover Dam. It never occurred to me that Page as the construction city for Glen Canyon Dam might be a dry town. Was it a dry town at the time?

SB: You know, I'm not positive that the construction workers or the construction people had anything at all to do with that decision. Just with the limited that I know growing up here, alcohol has always been something that the Navajo reservation preferred not to have for their people easy access. And we were in the heart of the reservation. In fact, trading land to get this land. And I think that was the biggest reason why we didn't have it, but I don't know that for a fact.

TM: Well, that makes very perfect sense, because, as you say, the land that the town is on was traded with the Navajo for other lands. And so, it's possible that that was a restriction that came with the land.

SB: Or a courtesy to the people. I really— I wish I could say, but I don't know for sure.

TM: Is there alcohol sold in Page today?

SB: There is. Yes.

TM: I'm not sure how the reservation boundary works there at Page, whether it is carved out around the town. I'm not sure how that would work, but okay. Well, that makes me think I should ask you what other stories do you remember your father telling about that time in Page in the late 1950s?

SB: Well, there is one that my dad told, would tell almost anybody that would listen. Like I told you earlier, my dad worked for a company called Babbitt's that was basically based out of Flagstaff. And the Babbitt son that was in charge of the grocery stores was Ted Babbitt. And partway through the construction of the dam, we had a strike. And I think people hoped it would be mended, settled in short order. And it wasn't. So, after a given period of time, many of the men left, left their families here, because they knew they had to go find any job to earn some money. And so, while they were gone, my dad talked with various families, and they were out of money. I told you earlier that they were good, honorable, hardworking people. And these people would come to my dad and want to know could they get credit. And of course, my dad couldn't make that decision by himself, so he called Mr. Babbitt, and he explained what was going on. Mr. Babbitt very kind, generous man, and he said, "We can. but George, you don't honestly think you're gonna get all that money back, do you?" And my dad said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "Well, go ahead." He said, "Don't let anything get out of control like any balance gets to be so big, it can't be satisfied." And nobody tried to take advantage of it. Luckily, the strike was settled. The men came back. The town celebrated as big or better than any 4th of July celebration. Long story short, by the time everything was said and done, everything but 10 cents has been repaid back. And the only reason we think the 10 cents wasn't repaid is the person didn't know they owed the 10 cents.

TM: That makes sense.

SB: Because everything got repaid.

TM: That's amazing. Can you tell me more about the strike? What do you remember about that?

SB: Well, I don't really understand—I didn't really understand striking. I knew why or what they were striking for. I can't say I didn't care. I did care because I had friends that were impacted greatly by this. But I saw it only really from a child's perspective, and their dad being gone all the time then. Mom worried about money, and kids wanting to find anything they could do to earn 25 cents or 50 cents an hour to help their parents. I didn't fully understand. I mean, I know what I read and what my dad said, the reasons that they were striking, but at that age, I don't think I seriously understood everything.

TM: Okay, but you mentioned a party when the strike finally ended. What do you remember about that?

SB: Well, we didn't have big buildings that we could gather in. There was a warehouse, a bureau warehouse, and sometimes the bureau let people use it for things. In fact, one time we had an eighth-grade graduation, well, actually, a high school graduation in there, as well. But I just remembered that nobody was in their trailers. Everybody was out of the trailers, on the street, laughing, some guys firing guns, loud music from about 20 radios or record players, people sharing food. It just looks like a city party kind of strung out along various little dirt roads that the trailers were on.

TM: And many of those might be empty or at least missing husbands, as you say, who were out working and hadn't heard that the strike was put back together.

SB: Right.

TM: Or did that party wait for a week or so? Or was that, as you remember it, was that like the day the strike was announced to be over?

SB: Well, the day that the strike was announced, yes, partying. And you know, it's not like a party now. It's just people celebrating and laughing and hugging and all of that stuff. And it seems like it was just a couple of days later, maybe it was more, that a lot of the men were able to return. And then it was another party, a bit more organized. But I don't think it was as fun as the way people were responding just right after the strike was over. I mean people who probably didn't even know each other were hugging each other and dancing in the street, stuff like that, that night the strike was settled. And as you could know, they were mostly, well not mostly, but probably the majority were women and children.

TM: Okay. I'm trying to put this timeline together, which I'm not very clear on. There was an initial strike that the people making the upper cofferdam walked off the job because they knew that if they didn't get that cofferdam built that winter, they would have to wait until the next spring high water relaxed back down again before they could try building that cofferdam. I think that first strike only lasted a week or so. It didn't catch. But then the next strike did, and everybody walked out, and they didn't come back.

SB: Right.

TM: And that was over the winter of— Was that '58, '59?

SB: I honestly don't remember.

TM: Some of the equipment wasn't winterized, and so radiator water froze and a lot of the equipment was damaged because there was nobody there to do any maintenance on it. Was it six months or was it a year? It was quite a while for that strike.

SB: It was a long one. But you know, you probably know better than I do, Tom. It seemed like it went on forever, mostly because I was feeling so sad for my friends. But I can't remember. I can still visualize the front page of this little newspaper flyer thing showing the celebration, but I don't know how long people were actually gone. And some of them didn't leave right away because I think they were hoping that it would be a repeat and be settled fairly quickly. And then it wasn't.

TM: Right. And the wolf's at the door, and you've got to do something for food. And you gotta pay rent on housing because, I mean, people aren't living in their own trailers, where they? They were living in company- or reclamation-provided housing with a rent payment.

SB: Some were living in that. But the majority of people, I think, were actually in trailers. That's why our trailer court became the largest one in the world.

TM: So they were living in their own trailers.

SB: And in fact, at the time of the strike, I'm not sure that they had Bureau of Reclamation homes built then. Under construction, yes, but I don't know— My friends' dad— I only had two friends whose dads could have had housing, but neither of them got into the housing that soon. So, I don't know the circumstances there other than I really believe it was majority trailers at that time.

TM: Okay. And, yeah, so if it was indeed only individuals' trailers, they would have had to pay for the trailer's space.

SB: Yes.

TM: And the hook up, because you're getting water and electricity and sewer hooked up there. I didn't know it was the largest trailer park in the world at the time.

SB: Yeah, that's what they had said.

TM: And of course, you know, today we think of Quartzsite and the places down by Yuma along the lower Colorado in the winter, which are packed full of people. But this was different. This was a construction—

SB: This was their home. This wasn't something they did for the winter. These are the homes that they lived in. And many of the workers were so specialized that, just say ironworkers, and at this point— Well, that's not a good one to say because the iron workers were here for the majority of the dam. But there were some people, the job that they did was a small piece of the dam construction, and so they would come and stay for that amount of time and then move to a new project that needed their particular talents. And so, for the majority of young friends that I made when I first moved here, they were construction families, and they were used to moving. They didn't do what people do now, that you have a house and a fourth of it is packed with stuff that you never use and when you die, your family has to go through it.

TM: Right.

SB: They had what they needed and nothing more.

TM: Right. And, of course, today, the people at Quartzsite are recreational RV people to a certain extent. Some of them, that is their home, and they drive it around. But some have another home someplace else but very different, as you point out. Good point. Another question I wanted to ask you was about the bridge, not the little walk bridge that you talked about so wonderfully last time, but about the Glen Canyon arch bridge that was built across the river just downstream of the dam site. I mean, right almost on top of the dam site but just downstream of the dam. It's still used as a driving bridge today. Do you remember the construction of that bridge?

SB: Well, I'm not sure I know what you're talking, which one you're talking about, Tom.

TM: This is the main steel arch bridge that you drive over if you're going to drive to Kanab today.

SB: Right.

TM: That bridge was constructed just before they started laying concrete in the bottom of the dam site.

SB: Oh, Okay. Okay. Gotcha. I was thinking the two things were directly connected. I just wasn't listening carefully enough. Sorry.

TM: Sorry. No. I didn't explain it well enough. So, do you remember that being built?

SB: Oh, of course. Not as much as my dad did. And I had mentioned earlier when we talked the other day that almost daily my dad went down to check the project and see what they've done new since yesterday. And he kept telling us, it is never, because they started from two sides— They didn't start from one side and build it across. They started from two sides that met in the middle. And he kept telling us, it's never gonna match. It's never gonna match. I've gone from every angle. It's never gonna match. And if I remember correctly, when it did come together, it was only 1/4 of an inch off.

TM: You also mentioned that after school, y'all would run down to the top of the cliff there and watch the crew change. I'm imagining that watching that bridge being built was something you all watched, as well.

SB: Oh, of course. I mean, everything here— And maybe to some of my friends whose parents had been involved in projects like this, it might not have been as amazing as it was to me, but I had never seen anything like this happen before. Nothing. Home being built, that's about the biggest construction I had ever seen, and so I was mesmerized by this. But also, there wasn't a lot of things to do, and so that was something to do, and we did it a lot.

TM: It would be like watching TV, you know, the slow TV. Let's watch a dam being built.

SB: Right.

TM: And I seem to recall somewhere that when the bridge was completed and opened up, there was a big party. Do you remember that?

SB: Well, I don't know that I remember the big party. I remember the, whatever you want to call it, the inauguration of the bridge, that piece. But I'm guessing, I mean, it wasn't a party that I went to. But I'm guessing there was a big party because that was a huge project that needed to be celebrated.

TM: Right. But you don't— You weren't there? You don't remember that the inauguration?

SB: No. I remember that inauguration, but I don't remember the party, just the regular celebration of the workers and that piece. I'm sure they had one. I just don't remember it.

TM: What do you remember of the inauguration?

SB: Not a whole lot. Just the speakers and— You know, they'd fly, they'd bring in the important people. I went because that was the thing to do, but I didn't listen that carefully to the speeches. I was just watching the people and walking out on the bridge and, you know, just kind of taking that all in. If I'm not mistaken, I think it was, the speaker with Lady Bird Johnson.

TM: I think that was—

SB: I'm pretty sure that's who did it, but I'm not positive. I have a picture someplace. I just don't know where it is right now.

TM: I know that she was there for the inauguration of the dam. I'm not sure about the bridge.

SB: Okay, so the bridge, I can't tell you for sure.

TM: And I seem to remember something about— Well, I digress. What else do you remember about watching the dam being constructed?

SB: Well, it just seemed to me, because knowing nothing about construction, that it was so slow. You know, it's like, oh, they should be able to go faster than this. And then I got older and started understanding the sensitivity of even mixing the concrete to get it exactly perfect. And then once they dump the bucket of concrete, and somebody has already been putting in the metal framing, and then how the guys have to settle it down. At the time, it seemed like everything was taking way more time than it needed to. And now when I look at some of the film and some of the videos that people have, I can see why everything took the time it did. I mean, the concrete had to be worked so well that there was not even a bubble of air in it. And it took a long time to do that. And so, looking back as an adult, it actually happened fairly quickly. But seeing it as a child, it seems like it took forever.

TM: Okay. You mentioned watching the cofferdams, the upper cofferdam, from river right connecting with river left. Did you talk about that last time?

SB: Well, I didn't. The biggest thing that I remember about that was them trying to get water to stop so they could put it around the sites. And I only saw one thing. My dad came home— I saw them with these giant, giant things that look like bales of hay. I just happened to be sitting down there one day, and those things hit the water and took off like a rocket. My dad went down one day, and he said, and I'm quoting, "Those are the biggest damn rocks I've ever seen, and that river just played with them and dumped them out." They had quite a job getting stuff to stop enough to be able to bring the cofferdam across and to force the water through spillways.

TM: Right. Through the bypass tunnels.

SB: Right.

TM: Yeah, and they were dropping big stuff in there [*unclear*]. [*Laughs*]

SB: Oh, really big stuff.

TM: That's right. And the river was like, "Hey, get out of the way." But they kept putting it in, and they finally closed it. Do you remember that as a child, going down there and looking and going, "Oh, they got it closed"?

SB: I do not. I just— One day, my dad said something about, well, they finally got it fixed. And I just— That was it. I guess I just didn't care enough to go find out anything else.

TM: Sure. As a small child, I would expect that. It's like, "Oh, um, okay." Your dad mentioned that the two halves of the arch bridge, he thought they were out of line, and they would never connect up. When they did connect up, did he say anything about that?

SB: Oh my gosh, he was just so amazed. That's all we heard for a couple of days: "I just can't believe they could do that. That's just such a miracle. Those dam guys are so talented." And he would just go on and on.

TM: That's great. It really was an amazing engineering feat. There's no doubt about it. What else do you remember about those days, maybe either about the people or some of the things you had to do that we all take for granted today with, you know, hot and cold running water and all things like that?

SB: Well, I will answer your last one first because it's simplest one. Our biggest problem was probably us kids because everybody was hooked up very similarly for how you go into a campground with your motorhome or a trailer or you have your electricity that you can pull up, you know, plug in. And you have your water that you hook up with your hose, and then you turn it on. And I personally didn't do it, but I was with the kids the night that we took off down A Street running, and they were running in pairs left and right of the hookups. And the one on the left unplugged the power, and the one on the right cranked off the water. And then you run down to the next trailer. And we can hear the people behind us yelling and cussing at us. And I mean, it did no harm. It was inconvenience. It was just like a big, old campground, and you couldn't control what all was going on in it. But I don't remember kids ever, to be honest with you, doing things that were harmful, hurtful to people or any of those kinds of things. And that's to piggyback on the question that you asked me about the people. Probably it's the best reason that I still have all these amazing feelings for Page, came back to Page, mostly because I needed to raise my kids in a place like this. When we were here, we truly— Everybody was equal. We all lived— Some lived in better, bigger trailers, but the majority of us were in trailers with the same crazy hookups with the same crazy kids running down the road. We all wore the same kind of clothes because it all came from catalogs. Frequently we took our showers at the wash house, because if you've got four people getting ready to go to work at the same time in the morning, you just did it. Nobody worried about whether we were safe there or not, or if some guy was going to come wandering in on the women's side. To my knowledge, it never happened.

TM: Hey, Sharon, let's back up a little bit. Did your trailer have a shower?

SB: It was a tiny, little tub. It was probably one of the four-foot tubs that the shower went in, so you could give the child a bath in there. But you showered, because my family was already all too big but my sister to have a bath in that little tub. So, yeah, we did have a shower, but we— There were four— There were five of us that got up. Well, Dad got up first and went to work. So, we're all getting ready at the same time. Mom really pushed that, like, at 5:00 in the afternoon, 6:00 in the afternoon, my youngest sister, who went to sleep earliest, had her shower or bath. And that at least one of us kids would do the same thing in the evening so that in the morning, there was less. But my parents also took in some boys that needed a place to be. Don't want to say too much about it, but things weren't exactly right in their lives. And so, we didn't have any room, but we had a shed at the side of our house. And it got insulated and an electric heater out there. And so, there's two more people that need to use the shower because it was right by the back door, which was where the bathroom was, and so they could come and go. And so, part of us had to shower at the wash house.

TM: So, what was the wash house? And where was it?

SB: Ours was— We were on A Street, and on A— I can't say for all of the streets, but the side of the street that we were on was solid trailers. The other side of A Street, about halfway down, there was a structure, and then there was more trailers to the end. And the structure had a men's side and a women's side. And in those sides, and I can't tell you the number of things, but there were sinks. There were toilet stalls. And there were shower stalls. Only with curtains, but they were private stalls, you know, with, like, shower curtains around them. And so, in the morning, if you were at a busy, busy home— There was a family that lived down the street from us, and their trailer was smaller than ours, and they had eight children. And they had a set of twin bunk beds, and the four smallest kids slept in them, two on each end, and feet mingling in the middle. And now we have people who complain because they didn't get the California king; they just got the regular king bed. And I'm like, oh, these people can teach you a lesson.

TM: You bet.

SB: So, we had a lot of families that needed to do something there because of a lot of people in one small structure.

TM: So, there were multiple wash houses then for the different areas where the trailers were.

SB: Right. I think that our wash house, the one that A street went to, was also a wash house for B Street because their trailers backed up to the wash house as well.

TM: Got it. And I was thinking about your trailer. Did it have a little hot water heater so that you had a small shower, which makes me think of an adult sitting in a tin bucket. You know—

SB: *[Laughs]* You know, it was a trailer water heater. If you— My dad's shower, because my dad was very conscious of this, and he still did it until the day he died, and I'm guessing he might have learned it living in that trailer, was to get in, and you got wet head to toe, and then you shut the water off, and you washed your hair, washed your body, did whatever it was you needed to do. You turned it on long enough to rinse off, and you were done.

TM. Okay. So different. Yeah. So, your trailer had a small water heater, but I'm assuming it was propane powered. And it would turn on when the hot water ran through it, and then turn off when it didn't.

SB: You know, I actually think, and I could be wrong, because like I said, I was young, and I didn't pay a lot of attention, I think it was electric, our water heater because if somebody pulled the power at night, the next morning there was no hot water, so I'm pretty sure ours was electric.

TM: So, given the demands on the one shower that you had, some of the people in your trailer would walk down to the wash house.

SB: Right.

TM: How long did that last? Did that last— At one point, did you guys shift from a trailer to a house there?

SB: We didn't shift to the house until, I think it was 1960. So, we were in the trailer a long time.

TM: Three years. Okay. The wash house, was it another tin building, as the school was a tin building?

SB: No, actually, it was built more permanently because it was designed to last better. Let's put it that way. Whereas with the schools, they knew the school was going to be used for X amount of time because while we were using it, they were actually starting on a permanent school, at least the foundation and stuff. So, I think part of the reason that those buildings were so rustic is why would you put a ton of money into something that we really hope we're not going to be using that much longer.



TM: Good point. What else do you remember about entertainment at the time? Games and, you know, sort of, what else did you do?

SB: Well, I mentioned the other day, I don't know if it was just you and I talking or not, but we gathered in a group. And everybody's trailer had this tiny, little patio. And we'd take out record players and listen to music, talk. After 10 o'clock at night, we could get KOMA because the FCC allowed people to bump up power. Play games at night a couple of times, and I didn't like this game. We would run off the mesa, like on the way to the job but don't go all the way down to the job, just from that area to the right of the road as you drive towards the dam from Page and play hide-and-seek in the desert. Well, I was a scaredy cat, so first of all, I didn't want to climb under a sandstone ledge just in case I wasn't the first critter under there.

TM: Right. Smart.

SB: Secondly, I was afraid that they wouldn't find me fast enough, and I'd have to stay hidden in that place I hated so much. I only did like desert hide-and-seek a couple of times and decided that wasn't for me. We would go out hunting; a lot of people would eat rabbits. My family included. I got to be a pretty good shot with a 22. And so, in the afternoon Saturdays, we would go hunting, just out in the desert. Lots and lots of hiking. There was a place on the way to Coppermine, on the dirt road to Coppermine, that the cedar trees were just the right distance apart that we could hang a volleyball net between those two cedar trees and play volleyball out there. Wow, some of the guys - and I didn't do it. Again, I was a scaredy cat - actually went over the edge on ropes. And they had seen their dads do that kind of stuff. And they went into what we call Lower Antelope Canyon well before all the tours started doing it. And I don't think any of us really appreciated how—I didn't do it, like I said, but I don't think any of them appreciated how truly beautiful it was. They were just kids pretending to be high scalers.

TM: Oh, fun! Of course, the high scalers were the men hanging, dangling on ropes down the side—

SB: Yes.

TM: —of the cliffs that were removing the loose rocks and preparing the faces either side of Glen Canyon for the dam concrete.

SB: Well, and many of them also were, like, shaving the, shaving the wall so they would have to blast. So, they would set the blast and then kick off from the canyon wall, and they were so good. They could kick and go 30 yards and go to someplace else, wait for the blast, and then go back. And as you say, then start shaving off the loose rocks and— Super interesting to watch. That I did do at least once a week. I would go walk off the edge and watch the high scalers.

TM: And these guys were preparing the abutments, the sides of the dam, the sandstone, working that sandstone back, cutting it back with a— They would have a drill, so they would, they would drill in and then set some dynamite and spin away. And then that blast would happen, and they would then go right back.

SB: Go back and smooth it off. Be sure there's no loose rocks or anything like that. Sometimes the high scalers, they weren't just blasting. Sometimes they put in rock bolts where they would drill, and then the bolt would open up at the back end just for strength. If you go on the dam tour, you can see right on the tour, um, it's not the basin, the top end of the rock bolts that they put in. Those were for strength.

TM: Right. There was a whole bunch of rock bolting done, very long, long rock bolts, just downstream of the dam. But that was— I think that dam had been completed and the Reclamation thought they should add those. It makes sense that there were others. Anyway, I'm confused about all that.

SB: Well, I wouldn't be surprised— Yeah, I wouldn't be surprised if we don't see more because the rocks are so porous and as they absorb some water, it wouldn't surprise me if there's not somebody later that said, "Hey, we need to put some more in here" or something. Yeah. You're right.

TM: Okay. Well, that must have been fascinating to see them doing that. Were you there? Do you remember the first bucket of concrete?

SB: I didn't see it, but I was able to see a Super 8 of it. Yes.

TM: Okay. I mean, was there any day when there was something really amazing happening at the job site that your class would have stopped school and gone down and watched? Did that ever happen?

SB: I don't— It didn't ever happen for my class. Something that did happen in those days, and it's not, it's good and it's bad, is that it was a dangerous, dangerous job. And we had a couple of doctors here in town that I still look back on and say, wow, those are some of the most amazing doctors. I can't imagine, because as a child, I don't think I appreciated what they did and what they had to work with and how dangerous sometimes their jobs were. And if there was— We had, like, a fire siren. We're a small town, and so you can hear it. And this fire siren would go off, and then it meant that there was an accident at the dam. And frequently at least a doctor would go to the dam, but that also alerted people in town that would be the support staff, the nurses, our little hospital, any of the things like that, alerted them to the problem so that everybody was ready. That was a beautiful thing to see happen. But as a child, it had a different meaning. As the siren would go off, and even the chattiest, little, twerpy kids would also get completely silent. Because all of these young people, and like I said, it didn't happen to me, my dad wasn't down there, but all of my friends, when the siren went off, everybody went completely silent and probably was silent for hour, hours because everybody is waiting to see whose parents going to come pull him out of school because something happened to their dad. And it was— Even telling you now I just get goosebumps all over because I can't imagine living in those young people's skin for an hour or two after each siren thinking was that my dad.

TM: You mentioned playing music at night. And KOMA, I think that's Oklahoma City—

SB: Right.

TM: —that had a high-powered radio station that they would turn up at night and that went all around the Southwest, I mean, all around a big chunk of the country. Is that where your family would get its news then? I mean, was there a—

SB: [*Laughs*] Well, no, because my poor parents never had a chance. We had a radio, and it was a regular plug-in radio, a small one. And it was— Once school was out, it was always outside with kids so we could listen to music or whatever. I honestly don't know how my parents ever got any news because they had to put up with us for so much of the time. But I also didn't pay any attention to that, and I, at the time, wasn't concerned about the news, so I never turned it on the news station.

TM: I wonder, running the store, if the store had the Flagstaff newspaper. Eventually there was a Page newspaper.

SB: Right.

TM: And that was how— People didn't necessarily get their news off the radio, but some did with the news on the hour. But the newspaper was the way to do that. And of course, your dad running the store, I would think Babbitt's would have provided some sort of newspaper like that, maybe.

SB: I'm sure, I'm sure that there was something like that happening. I just wasn't aware of it.

TM: What other games do you remember playing as kids during that time?

SB: I don't know. There weren't that many organized games. I mean, it was just stupid stuff. I mean, no, I can't say there were— They *were* always organized games, but they weren't the kind like a Monopoly set that you buy. They were the kind that somebody came up with this idea. And let's go through this.

TM: So, creative type.

SB: Right. At school, when we had a break, because the tin buildings were right on the edge, two of my best friends, at every break time or at the end of their lunch time, went scorpion hunting. I personally wanted to be as far away from a scorpion as I could get. And they would, like, their Thermos or whatever they had for lunch and try to bring a scorpion back. So, organized no, but fun with groups, we did it all the time.

TM: Was there a baseball or basketball, any sort of ball games like that happening?

SB: We did have— We had teams, and I mentioned the other day that everybody tried to make this as normal for us as they could, and I think they did a super job. We had a football team, and we had a basketball team, and they both practiced outside on the dirt with a hoop for basketball and on this dirt field, even with rocks on it for football. And you have to understand construction people. Those men, even the smallest of those men, were so tough. Maybe the smallest man, not so strong, but for his size, he was still so tough, and they worked so hard. And that's the same mentality that they grew and nourished in their children. Our football team, nobody could touch, because these guys had the same mentality that their dads had. Just because somebody grabs you around the back doesn't mean that you have to go down. You could drag the other three guys hanging on to you and get another 20 yards. And they just wouldn't quit. They were so good and so strong, and without decent facilities, we could still go play these sports with other schools and win.

TM: And the other schools probably had grass, grass courts, grass fields.

SB: They had all the nice stuff. Yeah. Gyms. We got to go in gyms to play basketball. That was pretty cool.

TM: [*Laughs*] Okay, so there was no gym there. Right.

SB: Not immediately. We did get one once they built our real school, the gym came as soon as the classrooms came.

TM: When that happened?

SB: It all opened at the same time.

TM: Do you remember when that happened?

SB: No, I don't. I'm guessing that might have been my— Well, no, I'm not even going to guess. I don't know. I can remember the day. In fact, our first day got delayed because after the school was all done, and everything was ready to go, one of the smaller buildings had a fire. It didn't do that much damage, but it kept us in the temporary buildings for another a week or two, maybe, getting everything back up and running. And I will tell you we were so excited when we finally got to go to school in the real school building.

TM: I bet. Well, I'm sure your teachers were too.

SB: Oh, I'm sure they were. Yes.

TM: Let's see if we can figure this out. You move to Page in 1957, and you were in the 7th grade? So—

SB: Eighth grade.

TM: Okay, 1957. Eighth grade. And did you graduate from high school there?

SB: I did.

TM: So, that would have been five years later, so, that would have been in 1962.

SB: I graduated in '63. So, then I've given you the wrong year earlier, because I for sure graduated in '63. That number I do know.

TM: All right. Well, maybe I miscounted the grades here. I could mess up there. So, somewhere between '57 and '63, the school opened.

SB: And it was—I'm trying to remember if it opened, if I was in the tin buildings two years or just one. I don't remember if I went to high school as a freshman or as a sophomore, but it was one or the other. I was there for my last two years for sure. I'd have to pull out my annuals to know all this stuff for sure.

TM: Well, that must have been quite a change with when the wind would blow the sand wouldn't rain into the room anymore.

SB: And we had a heater and a cooler! [*Laughs*] Especially a cooler. That was nice

TM: I'm wondering about the workers at the time. Were there Navajo living in town, working on the dam site?

SB: I don't know about the dam site. My class— In fact, I'm still in touch with the Navajo students that were in my class. We had a 50th reunion a few years ago. There were— We had so few kids being bused. A lot of the Navajo children, if there weren't parents already living by a school that did dormitories and went to school someplace else, once the high school, well, not just the high school, once the schools got established, and we had real buildings, and then they could add school buses and all of the rest of the stuff, then we had many more Navajo students in the school. But early on, I think there were only three in my little class.

TM: Right. Because then the Navajo could come in from Kaibeto and Coal Mine and points further away from Page that were a bus ride away, maybe even Inscription House. Did you get kids from that far east?

SB: You know, not in the beginning, but when we moved back here, I was a teacher, and we had kids coming from Inscription House every day. And I think it's about 75 miles, so they left home in the dark, came into school, tried to do as much of the homework as they could possibly do on the bus on the way home because many of the homes they went to didn't have electricity. They'd eat, went to sleep, and started all over the next day. I think we'd have to look that up, but I think Inscription House might have been 75 miles away for some of the— Now, we weren't getting kids from there while I was in school. They were much closer. That's when I was teaching here that our buses started going that far.

TM: Okay. All right. What else do you remember about that 1957-1960 time frame?

SB: Well, to me, the most important thing, I mean, and it's what I keep in my heart, it's what I share with people, it's how my classmates talk when we all get together. There was a closeness in this town that people probably can't understand. We didn't have problems because the job site and the construction managers and the people in charge, the bureau, didn't allow it. If your kid got in trouble at school, your dad got called in at work, and your dad got a warning. And if it happened again, you're out of here. Your job is gone, and if need be, they could hook one of their big, old, fancy trucks up and just pull you off the mesa. So, we didn't have kids doing things that kids are doing now because I'm sure their dad put the fear in them after the first talk with his manager. And so, we didn't have those kinds of issues, kids doing the mean, awful, horrible things. I just— It was just such a nice time. And the construction workers were all big. They were all strong. They were talented. But they, to me, were some of the most hardworking, they were probably the most hardworking people I've ever met and with honor.

TM: Yes.

SB: They wanted the job done right. They wanted to be proud of what they did. They were so respectful of other people and other people's rights. I can remember one night we were eating a place that was called the Page Restaurant, Page Cafe or Page Restaurant. It now is a Mexican food place and totally remodeled. And a guy sitting in there said something to a woman at a different table. And the construction worker - I'm not going to use his name but a big, old guy, just a giant of a man - heard it, and he said, "Sir, I think you probably should apologize to her." And the other guy popped off again, and he said, "Maybe we should go out for a minute." Well, of course, the other guy, being a smarty pants, goes out. And he says, "Are you going to go in and apologize?" And the guy said, "I'm not." One swing to the jaw, guy goes down, a little bit of blood on the side of his mouth. The construction man hands him a handkerchief, blocks the blood. And he said, "Now you going to go on and apologize?" And he said, "Yes," walks in, goes over the table and apologizes to the woman. And everybody sits down and has dinner like nothing ever happened. I mean, you just— They treated people fairly. They treated people like they wanted to be treated, and everybody worked hard for the money that they earned.

TM: You mentioned something that you may not want to talk about, but I can't help but wonder. You mentioned that your parents took in a couple of kids that needed some protection or needed some extra assistance. Can you—

SB: Yes.

TM: —speak to that as much as you're willing?

SB: Now, I just don't want to say too much. We got them one at a time. The one young man who was working part time for my dad and going to school, his stepfather threw him out. Told him he needed to go find his real dad. He wasn't going to live here again, and my dad sensed at work one day what was happening. And he told my dad what went on. And so that afternoon the two of them and a couple of other guys from work were insulating the shed. And when he explains to a different job site what he needed insulation for, they gave it to them for free. And they insulated a shed. Electric cord went out of my bedroom window. It was a typical trailer with those little slat windows, so I could close it all the way but maybe 1/4 of an inch, and that was either the light or the heater. It couldn't be both because it would blow the switch. And they had, at first, cots, and then second after that, a couple of twin beds out there. And the second one came under similar circumstances. And eventually they ended up both working for my dad and then Mr. Babbitt found— well, my dad found a trailer, asked Mr. Babbitt would he be willing to pick up the rent on that trailer if the guys were all working for the store, and my dad could vouch they were hard workers, and he said yes.

TM: Great.

SB: So, they were with us in the shed for, I don't even know, six months. It was like having two big brothers that thought they could tell me what to do so I got really, really mad at them, I would just pull the electric cord and that took care of it. [*Crosstalk*]

TM: Oww! Don't mess with me, or I'll cut off your heat!

[*Laughter*]

SB: Right! But it was kind of cool to have big brothers, too.

TM: Well, it was interesting because you mentioned respect and how people were doing their best to get along. But you know, the realities of human nature and small towns being what they are, here's another way where the community was respectful of these children who were caught between a rock and a very hard place, which is kind of lovely, you know, what you guys did, what your father did, what your parents were willing to do was take in, you know, more children yet.

SB: The biggest issue is mealtime because we had a trailer that has the typical four-chair table. And so, if we were all there, and that was that was my dad only rule— The store in those days closed at 6 o'clock, and

so the guys would get out of school and they would come home and work and, of course, Dad would have to be there until all the registers were closed out. And these two young men would stay and work, as well, they were being paid for it, to be sure that the sections were stocked up nice and neat, you know, what they call faced off. Then everybody arrives for dinner. So, four people would sit at the table, and it was typically my mom, my little sister, and my brother, and then any other person. My dad always offered it up. But the rest of us had our plates on our laps, and we'd sit, like, on the couch or in a chair or something, and it worked fine.

TM: Got it. But you all ate together.

SB: That was my dad's rule. That was the one rule that they had to follow if they were going to live there. We were going to eat as a family. And you know, I keep saying my dad, my dad, my dad. And one thing I want you to know, my dad was a very, very strong personality. He loved people, he was loud, he was boisterous, he was caring, but my mom, who was the quiet one, was the person who kept all of those cogs running and not jamming up.

TM: Yeah, I bet. Can you tell me more about your mom?

SB: My mom also was from a big family. Both my parents were big families. My dad's family was abnormally large. My grandma had 26 births. They did not all live. And then, and I don't remember, one of the big diseases that took children, smallpox, something, with all that many people in a home, over the course of, like, three weeks, they lost, I think, five kids. So, I didn't end up with that any relatives. My mom was one of nine, and she was the oldest of nine, and there were some expectations with my mom. My mom was super, super smart, so generous but, like I said, in a very quiet way. She's in the background making sure things happen, that meals are always ready, and that laundry is always done, and the stuff that sometimes is overlooked because it's not out for the public. And when we came to Page, because we came to try and get back on, for my folks to get back on their feet financially, my dad ran the floor, and my mom ran the office. And so, she worked the same number of hours. Not the closing and opening, but that the stores were open, and then would still come home and be sure that there was a meal for us when we got home school or basketball practice or whatever it was, and kind of was the unsung hero that nobody really notices but was the hard worker.

TM: Especially if she was working the accounts, working in the books in the office for the store—

SB: Yes.

TM: —and doing the cooking, the cleaning and sewing, and you know, whatever else needed to be done. Shopping. That's two jobs right there.

SB: Well, by the time she got rid of all of us kids, I think she had four or five jobs but never complained. Never. And I will tell you that my parents fell in love with Page the same way that I did. My mom had the hardest time leaving. Because in Holbrook we left all of my dad's family and 27 miles away all of my mom's family. And so, she had all these brothers and sisters that she loved spending time with. And when we first came to Page, I think my mom had the hardest problem and the adjustments. And you know, about once every two months we'd go back and visit with family and stuff like that. Even though the roads were horrible, my mom needed it. Well, then when Babbitt's in Holbrook got in a hard place, and they asked my dad if he would go back and see if he could straighten the store out. And so, my mom acted like she was super happy, and I think she actually was, but we didn't realize how much she had grown to love Page until as soon as Dad left, they got a new manager in, and things went horrible fast. And Mr. Babbitt said, "Hey, can we get you to go back?" In the meantime, Babbitt's had actually built the home for us. It was built on the exact same floor plan as the bureau houses because that was the way we could get construction workers who knew what to do. But it was the exact same thing as the rest, even though it was owned by the company. And when they asked my dad if he'd go back, my mom said, "Yes, we will. We will buy the house from you, and we will never leave Page again." That's when I realized that she actually really had fallen in love with this town. She's just so quiet, it was— She didn't voice that she was mad she had to

leave. She just moved like the dutiful wife. But when she was going to get it back, then he had to promise we would never take her out here again.

TM: What year was that when you guys left and went back to Holbrook and then came back to Page? Do you remember those years? Those dates?

SB: They went to Holbrook when I was getting my master's degree at Arizona State University, and that was—I graduated with a master's in '67, '68? '67? Nope. Graduated from college '67. It had to be '68. So, while I was in the valley getting my master's degree, they were in Holbrook.

TM: So '68, '69?

SB: Well, at least '68, for sure. And then I don't remember exactly when they came back. I think they moved back to Page while I was already in California. So, you're right, '68, '69. And then they were back here and stayed here.

TM: 1970-ish. Okay, just putting that timeline together. Great. Sharon, we have been yik-yakking about an hour and 10 minutes here.

SB: Oh, my God.

TM: Once again, the day has slipped by. Is there anything you'd like to add to this conversation about the issues we've covered?

SB: Well, I can't think of anything right this minute. Well, one thing, you know, and it could come up in the next session. Well, let's just end this one and maybe I can tell something, just little things that we might talk about.

TM: That sounds lovely. So with that, we will conclude Part Two of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Sharon Buck. Today is Tuesday, March 22, 2022. My name is Tom Martin. And Sharon, thank you so very much.

SB: And thank you, Tom, for asking.