

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Ann Hopkinson (Ann)

Interviewer: Tom Marin (Tom)

Subject: Ann's experiences in South America, being a mother, and Grand Canyon trips **(Part 3)**

Date of Interview: April 13, 2019

Method of Interview: Over the phone

Transcriber: Amya N. Moore

Date of Transcription: May 14, 2020

Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest, Tom Martin

Keys: Kayaking, skiing, Biobío, Fletcher Anderson, South America trip, paragliding, piloting, canoeing, Roger Paris, Grand Canyon river trips, Dave Garrett, Brian Dierker, Russell Sullivan, Hugh Turner, group dynamics, San Juan River race

Tom: Today is Saturday, April 13, 2019, this is Part 3 of a Grand Canyon Oral history with Ann Hopkinson. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning Ann, how are you today?

Ann: Fine, how are you?

Tom: Good, thank you. Ann, may we have your permission to record this interview over the telephone?

Ann: Yes.

Tom: Thank you. Where we left off was, not quite hanging on a cliff there in the Biobío down in South America. Could you tell me a little bit more about that South American trip? How long were you down there? How did you get there? What else did you see?

Ann: Fletcher and I did a two-month tour that started in Trinidad and Tobago, just backpacking, staying in cheap places. We went there then we went to Venezuela, back then – maybe now, I don't know – we used a South American handbook and just picked and chose the places we thought sounded cool. A friend of ours had done a similar thing and so we took some tips from him. I think it was Eric's idea to do the Biobío and he joined us in Chile. He was about to marry a Chilean woman, Hamena. Her family hosted us in Santiago and helped us out a lot. Then we went to Peru, did the Inca Trail. It was November and December of 1978 that we went. We did the Biobío and then we went to Easter Island. Spent a week there, hiked around the perimeter of the island, met lots of locals. That was so cool. The people there were so wonderful.

Tom: Tell me more about that.

Ann: Well, we were both anthropologists so we were really interested in that. Most people that go there go with a tour. We kept seeing these buses of Germans going by. Even on the plane coming in there, on the flight I was sitting next to this guy that had tattoos all over him, on his hands that said... I forget what they said, and he looked pretty rough. I ended up talking to him and he was super nice. He invited us to come to a party right away. He said, "Don't let any of these taxis get you, we'll come pick you up." Fletcher was a little skeptical. I was like, "No, he's fine, he's fine." They took us to a luau where they

baked all these fish in the ground and met all these cool people. Actually, his mom was one of the redheads which was some ruling class from way back before they had the war. We'd just read Thor Heyerdahl's story about his time in Easter Island so we understood the red topknots meant they were the ruling class and there were some connections with Peru. It was really awesome. We decided we were going to hike the perimeter of the island. All through the island it's riddled with volcanic tubes. There were all kinds of caves with remains in there from people living there and things like that. It was really fun just wandering around. And then, of course, the statues are, too. We hiked to the quarry. This guy's father had a house right near the quarry and we stayed with him there. We met tons of neat people there. Everyone was very friendly.

Tom: Very nice. What was the Inca Trail like back then?

Ann: We didn't see anyone on it. It was amazing. We slept in the ruins. It was rainy and misty, and incredible scenery. It was one of the most beautiful places I've ever been. I was really amazed to see these carved steps that had been trodden by people so long ago and worn down. Little things they carved out of the rock to get through more easily, essentially to bring fish to the king and hike that up to Machu Picchu, and send messages. All these little outposts for safety for people to stay in in case enemies were coming. Then we took a side trip to a place called Wayna Picchu, I forget what it was called, something with a 'w' in it. It was a ruin that was a days hike out the way, or maybe it was less. It came down this really steep trail and it was slippery and muddy. We were feeling like this is so hardcore and we're slipping. We come across a couple more people coming the other way, local Kehuan guys and they're carrying bags of cement on their head and wearing flip flops so we didn't feel so... That put us in our place. [laughs] Apparently, the Japanese were developing this thing. They were supposedly gonna build a tram to it but I don't think it ever happened. We had this huge ruin, as big as Machu Picchu, all to ourselves and only partially uncovered. We stayed in this room overlooking this amazing canyon. It was so cool. The water systems there are really cool. We looked at those in Cuzco, too, where we walked all around the city and saw all these irrigation systems that they had. In this ruin, too... And there's still even some pieces of bamboo sticking out of these channels to make it pour into the next channel. It was so fun to see that.

Tom: That's amazing. That was two months of just wandering around travelling on buses?

Ann: Yep. And trains. The second to last stage was the Biobío in Chile. People in Chile were super nice, too. They loved Americans even though they didn't like our government.

Tom: Most people like other people. Doesn't matter where we are.

Ann: Yeah. You'd walk down in the city, in Santiago, and someone would just walk up and start chatting and invite you to coffee. It was really fun. Nobody spoke English either back then so it was a little limited cause my Spanish wasn't that good, but good enough to kinda get by.

Tom: Was Fletcher good with Spanish?

Ann: No, he was even worse than me. But Eric was perfect.

Tom: What else do you remember from that trip?

Ann: Going across Lake Titicaca was really beautiful. It was a full moon and there was this little boat or something with polished brass and guys in white jackets. It only held like six people or something. It was really fun. Then we got to Bolivia and it was in a state of revolution. We stayed in La Paz. Everything seemed to be going as usual. Right on the hotel door was instructions of what to do in time of revolution [laughs] because there had been 100 revolutions in 99 years. So everyone was pretty used to it. But it was sort of a catch 22. It was like 'Take a taxi to the airport but don't move from your room'. I forget what it was but it was completely contradictory. But we didn't have any problems. We had made friends with a Canadian couple. You know, people that are touring around tend to visit the same sites. We saw them later and they had been in a taxicab there and the guy that was taking over the government jumped in the cab with them. He said, "Stop it here" and went up to the capital. The next thing they knew they were let out and there were machine guns and the crowd was running. It was pretty scary, I guess. They were fine, but they were pretty shook-up. But that journal I wouldn't mind sending to you if you want it. That one is pretty detailed and coherent, if you're interested.

Tom: Yeah, I'll make a note and we'll talk afterwards about some of that. This is in late 1978. When did you guys get married?

Ann: 1982. We had a shotgun wedding after living together for 10 years. I got pregnant and we decided to marry.

Tom: Had Fletcher learned how to fly by then?

Ann: No. That came about... How did it come about? A friend of ours got a parapont which was sort of the first generation of paragliding but didn't have as big of a glide ratio. He started in Germany. He brought it from Germany, I think. Jeff Parker, he is a kayaking friend, he had close connections with Prion. So, we took it to the sand dunes and tried it out and had fun. Fletcher was hooked and started doing it. Then he got into paragliding heavily. It was after... I'm not sure when that was. But, as he went on and got more and more involved with paragliding... He worked for Aspen Expeditions taking tandem flights. He started taking our son up all the time. I was not very comfortable with that—he was 8 and 9 years old—because I was always aware that Fletcher had a real blind spot as far as danger sometimes. For Leif's 10th birthday, Leif is our son, I gave him flying lessons in a real airplane. I gave him 10 lessons.

Tom: When he was ten?

Ann: Yeah. He really liked it and he learned how to fly. The hardest part for him was learning how to taxi, cause he'd never driven. [laughs]

Tom: Did they give him a pillow behind his back? How'd they do that to get his feet down to the pedals?

Ann: He was pretty tall. I don't know, I didn't go. I was working a lot. Fletcher went every time and was hooked. He decided he wanted to learn how to fly, too. They can't get their license till they're 16, they can't take the written till they're 16. Leif never did follow up but he has the ability if he ever wants to pick it up. Then Fletcher started flying real airplanes.

Tom: Let's back up a bit to 1982. You're pregnant, were you still skiing at the time?

Ann: Yeah.

Tom: Were you working or travelling? What were you doing mostly then?

Ann: Working running the Nordic Center at Sunlight which is 4 miles up the road and also part-time at the hospital. I do cytology, it's lab work looking for cancer under a microscope. Yeah, I was skiing a lot of cross country and some downhill.

Tom: How did Leif coming into the world change your vision of travel and skiing and kayaking and that sort of thing?

Ann: Well, it was interesting. When I was pregnant it was really was a chemical change in how I perceived danger. When I was pregnant, I did a lot of whitewater. We did a high water Middle Fork, I remember, but I was nauseous the whole time. It wasn't all that fun. I did some highwater kayaking, but I had trouble with it. With my stomach I had trouble rolling. So I kinda stopped doing whitewater but we started doing flatwater after we had a kid. Then we didn't have to do shuttles and we'd sorta do it together, just take turns. From the minute he was born, pretty much, he [Fletcher] took him in a snuggly and would paddle flatwater. Well, he'd paddle a flatwater boat, he actually wouldn't paddle flatwater, he'd take it in pretty big waves. But he'd train every day and then bring him into work for me to nurse and stuff. Then we started doing overnight trips in the canoe. We just started doing stuff that was a lot safer, but still tons of outdoor stuff. We still did ski touring even when he was an infant. Just brought him along. We had got a sled. We were into ski racing, Nordic racing. A friend gave a sled so we'd tow the baby in that a lot. He loved that. I still have it actually.

Tom: Very nice, there's a saying I think that says something like, "We as species survive because of moms" and there's some truth to that. It's really neat that you guys were like alright well we're gonna sort of take the danger factor down a little bit but we're not going to move inside.

Ann: Yeah. The other thing we did a lot of Ruby-Horsethief trips, that's a nice Class I/II run near here overnight in the canoe. It worked out, it was fun. And just having a kid to share it with gives it all. Fletcher was always great about being content in doing easy stuff. He just loved to be outside.

Tom: Is that something that you would encourage other couples with small children to consider and embrace and get out and do?

Ann: Oh yeah, I think it's really great for the kids. After he was a toddler and above, we just always made sure he always had a lifejacket. He learned how to hold his breath at a young age. So as long as he had

his lifejacket on and knew how to hold his breath and he'd fallen in a few times, you didn't have to watch him like hawk. Although one time before he could speak words, he must have been 1½ or 2, 1½ probably, we were at the reservoir taking turns training in our flatwater boats and Fletcher was working on the truck, we always has this beater trucks, and Leif had this little four-wheel thing he could roll around on. The water was low so the ramp was very long into the water and it had a lot of texture to it so people could get traction. It was quite rough concrete. Leif had just gone down it the whole way, hit the water and done a flip, and flown out into the water. [laughs] He didn't have his lifejacket on then, I don't think, I'm sure he didn't. Luckily Fletcher saw him and he went running down there. He would go under and then he'd kind of come up and put his fingers up cause he was used to being held up by this fingers and say "Dah", and then sink down again. Luckily I didn't see the whole thing, I was out training. [laughs] Another time he went in we were at the San Juan. We had two other families with little kids from Algodones near Albuquerque that we did San Juan trips with every year. That was really fun. One time it was really high and he had this little floating doughnut, a float toy, it's called a 'snownut'. He had been used to playing with that on our little pond. But he hadn't grasped the equal reactions physics, you know. If you push on something it'll... So he pushed on that to get on the raft and went in the drink and started to get swept away. [laughs] But we got him, he was fine. But, anyway, what I'm saying is these little lapses in our security over him were good learning experiences for him. He incorporated them and learned how to manage the dangers of swift water and the edge of the river and things like that without the helicopter parent thing going on.

Tom: And he's quite the kayaker today?

Ann: Yeah, yeah he is. So is his wife. And they now have a two-year-old. He uses the same style of upbringing. They spend all their summers up at the Hay River in Northwest Territories. They run a big paddle fest up there and teach clinics and guide people. Their son Davis, they just bring him along. He's great.

Tom: Nice, very nice. When was the first time you took Leif down through the Grand Canyon?

Ann: Not till he was in first year of college was his first trip.

Tom: Okay, so late teens.

Ann: Yeah, he was already a superb boater by then. We never got permits or anything while he was growing up. We kinda got out of the loop to get invited, cause... I don't know. We'd turned a few trips down and weren't really doing a lot of whitewater then.

Tom: How did you get Leif up on the slopes to ski?

Ann: Well we both worked at the ski area so he was just brought along. It's a small family area. After he was a certain age we could just let him be on his own. He'd dig tunnels under the deck and be with his friends. The lift operators would kinda keep tabs on him. Everyone knew him and everyone knew us, and they'd tell us where he was and that he was okay. Yeah, it was great. There's also a big bank that all the kids would slide down into the parking lot just on their butts. They'd spend hours doing that. We had

a cross country ski club for kids that met after school. We had a lot of fun with that two nights a week. Had a lot of fun adventures. A lot of times we wouldn't get back till after dark but parents got used to it.

Tom: It sounds like a great way to raise a family. It sounds like all three of you were really fortunate to be able to do that.

Ann: Yeah, I feel very fortunate. It was fun living where we lived and having it all right on our doorstep. Since we were running the Nordic Center we cut the trails, so in the fall we'd bring him in his little pack and just prop it up while we were chain sawing. [laughs] He'd take a nap and trees would be being felled all around him. But it worked out.

Tom: So you were clearing the trail for people to ski?

Ann: For the Nordic. Yeah. We cut some new trails and then we'd have to get the old ones ready, clipping and so forth.

Tom: You had mentioned a river trip with Roger Paris in Grand Canyon. An event that happened at Crystal Rapid and I didn't want to forget that.

Ann: Oh yeah. This was trip on dories Dave Garrett, also known as Poncho, and Waldo, his formal name is Hugo... I forget his last name now. They were the fathers of his family that we did all those San Juan trips with our kids. Really great guys. They had built their own dories and invited me and Roger and one other friend down for a fall trip. Crystal was pretty low and you couldn't do the right-hand run, all the water just funneled right into the hole. This was pretty late after Crystal had changed again.

Tom: So, this would have been late 1980s?

Ann: No, late 90s I think. Well '98 or something like that, '97, something like that. So Poncho went through in his boat. He liked to stand up in his dory when he was rowing, it didn't even have a seat. He went through and it was like he was on a bongo board. Caught in the hole and he just kept going back and forth. Then it kinda let him through. You know how it pulses, so it came down and he made it over. Then we went and we took it just right. We were straight on, powering through it, but it just flipped us straight over. I was in that dory and I was under a long time and pretty disoriented. I finally came up and I was below the boat and we were washing up to the island. Waldo was on top, he said, "Hurry up, get up here." He helped me up and just a second later we hit on the rocks and smashed the boat up. The bow was broken off. Wasn't really anything we could do, there was too much current. We could not get the boat off. We tried for quite a while. Roger was there and he ferried me across to the right bank and we just camped there in the boulders. Luckily we had Paco pads and were able to sleep there. In the morning the water came up enough so that it could possibly be removed. Brian Dierker happened to come by with a motor so we could get back up to it and he helped us get it off. Then we rowed it down to Tuna Beach on the left and spent the day repairing it. They had all the equipment they needed. It was all full of mud and a lot of stuff was wrecked. The whole bow was broken off but we ended up fixing it.

Tom: Fixed it enough to row it?

Ann: Yeah and make it through the trip. They have some pretty great pictures of that. It worked out, it was actually kind of fun.

Tom: Nice, it's an adventure.

Ann: Yeah. Russell was the other one, Russell Sullivan. He's a fishing guide down there. Lives in Marble Canyon.

Tom: And Hugh's last name?

Ann: Turner.

Tom: Thank you. So, it sounds like Roger wasn't just, "don't touch my boat and swim to shore", he would actually like "alright hang on to the boat and..."

Ann: Yeah, he did in that case. But it wasn't uncommon on the Grand Canyon to see him on the side swearing cause his boat was leaking or he was doing a repair or something.

Tom: It sounds like he had almost a daily ritual, first thing in the morning, of climbing up high to get the view.

Ann: Yeah. Well, I wouldn't say in the morning. I didn't see that so much in the Grand, maybe that was earlier. He was probably 76 or something then and whenever we'd take a hike together he'd always be...when everybody was ready to turn around or I was ready to turn around, he'd go, "I'm gonna look one more corner." He always had to go the farthest. It was pretty cute. He did take a fall on one of the hikes on one of those trips. Came back with blood pouring out of his head. But he was okay, it was just a head wound that bled a lot. He got it fixed up. Another time, a pretty amazing story, one trip we took was very rainy. We got to Deer Creek and it was raining quite hard. We pulled over to camp at the next camp on the left. All of us started setting up our tents and Roger put his tent right under a big place where it was obvious it had flash flooded before. We all said, "Roger you shouldn't camp there 'cause it could flash". He goes, "Oh, I'll be fine. I'm right close...", I don't know what he said. And it did flash flood. It was the size of the Roaring Fork River at high water, just gushing over. You couldn't even hear to talk, you had to scream to even hear each other. Big boulders flying over there. We didn't know where he was. We didn't know if he was okay. He came out like a drowned rat. He was underneath, luckily inside of it. It was the only time I've ever seen him shaken up. I had to help him set up his tent somewhere safe after that, [laughs] he couldn't even manage that.

Tom: Wow, that's terrifying.

Ann: Yeah, it was really scary.

Tom: You know when you get wrapped up in that.

Ann: We really thought he was gone for a while.

Tom: What year would that have been?

Ann: It's probably that same year. I did two years in a row around '98-ish with those guys. Just real small trips in the fall.

Tom: Nice. Any other Grand Canyon recollections that you can think of?

Ann: Not really, just wonderful times. Not really stories.

Tom: Well, that's a wonderful thing when you get to the takeout and you got to look down to make sure your feet are still touching the ground cause things went so well. That's a real treat.

Ann: There have been some trips were people didn't get along. People left the trip and things like that. I just learned to be careful who you go with.

Tom: Can you speak to that a little bit? Not just Grand Canyon, but for any outdoor adventure, how important it is to choose wisely who you travel with.

Ann: Yeah, it is important. In a way, the bonds you form when you go through a trial together or a wonderful time together on a trip, the bonds are exaggerated. That's where I've made my closest friends. Sharing something that intense makes for a connection that is irreplaceable. But also, it seems that it exaggerates differences. It brings out weaknesses in people, I guess, and somehow they seem to be exaggerated and cause strife a lot of times. So it's important to know that you're with a team player or people that are honest and know themselves, can manage adversity, that really want to be outdoors. And the ego thing, I guess, is what brings on a lot of the strife if there's a power struggle between the trip leader and someone else. And food issues seem to be another sore point for people. There was one trip we went on where we were just invited, we weren't the core of the circle of friends. The trip leader got into this power trip and wasn't giving the kayaker's any food hardly. I'm pretty thin and I lost a lot of weight. Some of the other kayakers started dropping in with commercials and getting free dinners. [laughs] I remember one time they brought back a bag of cookies to share, it was weird. And then some other kayakers started breaking into the food boxes. [laughs] One time Poncho just made a cake. He was on the schedule for some other meal and he just broke it out and made it. Created all kinds of bad feelings. [laughs] You need a lot of calories when you're kayaking all day and we weren't getting them.

Tom: That's one of the many components of wilderness travel, is food and collegiality and looking out for each other.

Ann: Mm hm. But we survived. It all worked out.

Tom: It's interesting today, in 2019, 50 years or so since you've been exploring the outdoor world. What are some of the biggest changes that you've seen?

Ann: More people, everywhere. More difficult to get permits. In our day, most of the rivers at the beginning we just went. We didn't have to get a permit. Even like for Westwater, you just went up and asked the ranger for a permit and he got it. He drove your shuttle practically and everyone knew each other. I feel really privileged to have been around during that time. It was really like you're exploring the wilderness. Not really wilderness, but it was real adventure just to go down these pretty intermediate rivers. Now they have to go to these remote, high creeks to get that same feeling.

Tom: Well you mentioned even life is up on the Great Slav. You have to go to Canada or you have to go to Alaska to try to find those really remote areas. You have to go way farther away now.

Ann: I've done that, too. I go up there, too, with them in summer. Just for a shorter time. It's like the old days up there. It's a little town, hardly anyone on the river, harder to access. You have to climb up steep muddy banks and carry your boat a long way and things like that. I've done a bunch of far north canoe trips. It seems to satisfy something I like.

Tom: Yeah, it's almost something in our DNA. Interesting.

Ann: Yeah, it is interesting to think of all the people in cities that have no experience at all about that kind of feeling. Really want their creature comforts. But I also think that's probably one of the reasons this extreme sport stuff has gotten so popular.

Tom: How's that?

Ann: I just think people crave being captive by nature, kind of. They don't necessarily find that satisfaction in an office job or taking a run on the sidewalk. The adventure racing type things and extreme sports must be a need for proving themselves or something.

Tom: Besides the population which has gone up, do you have any thoughts on the changes in gear and technology?

Ann: Oh yeah, the gear is just amazing. When I think of those Artic explorers just using leather and fur. It's incredible how tough those guys were compared to us. Cause I know you can still suffer even with this amazing gear we have now. Then the expectations on a Grand Canyon trip if your organizing now are so high for the gourmet food and equipment. That's one of the reasons I really don't feel like organizing a Grand Canyon trip. It used to be so simple and you didn't have to have all these special meals.

Tom: It is different. Just thinking of the stories you told about how to build your own fiberglass kayak, a big long boat where you had to reach way in there. Some of the boats now are smaller than a human's arm span, from fingertip to fingertip. The boats are tinier than that. There's plastic and spray skirts, helmets, and amazing life jackets, and Power Bars. Just some huge changes in gear and, of course, some giant changes in population. The population has basically doubled.

Ann: And a lot more pressure on all the outdoor places that are spectacular. When Fletcher went on his Grand Canyon solo he just taped burritos on his deck, kind of thing. Or when we did a lot of those self-supported trips, we just took real food. There weren't any Power Bars, yet.

Tom: Those were in pretty long boats. I'm just assuming that they were stuffed from tip to tip.

Ann: Well you couldn't put much in the front cause it wasn't accessible in front of the foot braces. Just had a float bag up there. So you still couldn't fit a whole lot in there but at least you could take a sleeping bag and a pad and a little bit of clothes.

Tom: But not much.

Ann: You had to have a beam to hold the deck up cause the boats weren't that strong. So that took up a lot of space. We used to do overnights in our flatwater boats, too. That was really fun. On Labyrinth and Stillwater we'd paddle it in a day and a half, 110 miles.

Tom: Wow. And then catch a jet boat back up to Moab then?

Ann: Yeah. That was a good training run. That was really fun.

Tom: 110 miles in 24 hours or a little longer than that?

Ann: A day and a half of paddling.

Tom: Nice. That's a lot.

Ann: I used to make them stop every hour so I could stretch my back. We did the San Juan race, too. That was fun. I don't know if they still have it where we'd run the whole San Juan in wildwater or flatwater boats in one day.

Tom: Where would you start?

Ann: Bluff.

Tom: And go out to Clay Hills?

Ann: Yeah. I did that once with Poncho in the K2, the flatwater K2 in pretty high water. That was fun.

Tom: What year was that roughly?

Ann: I don't know.

Tom: 80s?

Ann: Yeah, it might have been late 80s. There's a guy in Durango who's a big open canoeist who used to... Nancy Wiley helped put it on. She might remember. Sorry, I'm terrible with remembering people.

Tom: No worries. I'll ask you about it when we're done here. I would be interested to connect up with Nancy. That would be fun. Ann, is there anything else you would like to bring into this interview that we haven't talked about?

Ann: I can't think of anything right now.

Tom: Well if you do let me know, this has been a lot of fun. With that let's go ahead and wrap up Part 3 of Grand Canyon oral history interview with Ann Hopkinson. My name is Tom Martin. Today is Saturday, April 13, 2019. Ann thank you so very much.

Ann: Your welcome.