

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Bill Jordan (BJ)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Seasonal Rangering in the 1950s

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TM: Today is Monday, March 9, 2020. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Bill Jordan. And my name is Tom Martin. We are at the home of Bill Jordan here in Scottsdale, Arizona. And Bill, thank you so very much for your willingness to participate in this Grand Canyon oral history.

BJ: My pleasure.

TM: Bill, can you tell me what year you were born?

BJ: I was born in 1925. December of 1925.

TM: Where?

BJ: Here.

TM: In Phoenix?

BJ: We had a small cattle ranch in the middle of what is now Sky Harbor Airport.

TM: Really? When did your family come to Phoenix?

BJ: Well, they... My family's been in Arizona since 1878. They were cattlemen mostly in Northern Arizona. But my father and mother came to the valley probably in 1923, something like that.

TM: Okay. And they started a ranch...

BJ: Yeah, there was a small feeder lot we used to fatten cattle and sell them to whoever wanted them. And we did that for, well, a number of years. My father and mother actually had a farm or ranch in Chandler, but they lost it during the Depression. And by an interesting twist of fate, the land that they owned is now the western end of the Chandler Airport.

TM: Oh my gosh! So this would've been in the late 1920s, early 1930s?

BJ: Yeah. They lost that land in about 1928, '29, '30—during the Depression. And then they moved to Phoenix, and Dad was able to lease land on which we operated that small cattle outfit. It used to be my job in the summertime to herd those cattle.

TM: Where did you run them? Where did you herd them?

BJ: Well, believe it or not, I used to alternate between the airport and the river. It depended on which way the cattle went.

TM: And how old were you?

BJ: I was about six, seven.

TM: Okay. And you'd just go out with the cows?

BJ: Yeah, spend the whole day out with those cattle herding them, and I had to take better care of them when they were on the airport. 'Cause the pilots were learning to fly. Barry Goldwater was one of those pilots. He used to have to land in and among my cattle.

TM: I mean, would they just make a couple passes to get some cows off the strip?

BJ: Sometimes they did, yes. And then the pilots had been scared by the closeness of the encounter, why, they would taxi over and give me the devil. And I've teased over the years that that's why I learned my profanity. And I'm given to the notion that some men should not use profanity because they fail to understand and appreciate the magic of the music in it. They use it clumsily. I mean, the guy that hits his thumb with the hammer has already told you that he's clumsy. And his language... His use of language doesn't help usually, but... If he's born with a good use of it, then it's music. You feel the nuances and the rhythm. You can use it appropriately.

TM: Okay. And so where did you go to grade school?

BJ: At the Wilson School on 24th and Buckeye.

TM: Okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

BJ: I have two sisters. One older, one younger. I was... Funny thing there. My older sister loved school, and she always did very well. Coca-Cola Bottling Company had a bottling firm in our district—our school district. And they used to have the interesting practice of giving a case of Coke to anyone who had straight As. They would give a six-pack to anyone who got two or three ones. And then a pencil if you got one one. I remember having one pencil once.

TM: And your sister got the case?

BJ: She would always get the case. She was our bread and butter when it came to Cokes.

TM: And what about your little sister?

BJ: She never won anything. She didn't like school.

TM: Okay. And did you guys... well, growing up on the ranch... today, the concept of camping out or the Great American Vacation/Road Trip, where everybody piled into the station wagon... was that a concept that was in your family, or was just life was just what you lived?

BJ: It was pretty slim. I can remember one of the chief irritants—"irritant" is not the right word, but—I have a clear recollection of feeling guilty when I needed new shoes, because I knew my parents couldn't afford it. And I think I'm not untypical from a lot of kids from that era. Our parents had nothing, and yet they were forced to buy us clothing, and shoes, and that sort of thing, and it was a real hardship for them. So it's somewhat guilt-producing to have gone through that experience. Things began to loosen in about 1935, and thereafter things were pretty nice.

TM: So the economy started to pick up a little bit?

BJ: We got a new car in 1935. Up till then, we drove a 1927 touring car. It was a Chevy. Touring car with no side curtains. So that when it rained, it blew in, why, you...

TM: You got wet.

BJ: Yes. The only nice place to sit was in the middle between two other people. Since my younger sister was the baby in the family, she normally got that place. And we got the drenching.

TM: Well by then, you were driving cattle. You were... on the side, there. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, okay.

BJ: One of the other... You know, the interesting thing about that is that I was never bored. You're out there by yourself all day, every day. But I never remember being bored. I would find interesting things to do.

TM: Like what?

BJ: Well, one of the chief things that I remember doing was fashioning a sword made out of lath. Take a board, and you edge it with Campbell's soup cans. Flatten those out and put an edge on the... And you built a hilt and whatnot. And you spend days together, making this sword. And then on the day of battle, when you're going to be fighting as a rearguard action for the army of Charlemagne, against the Serasons, battle would begin early in the morning and go all day.

TM: And it was just you against them?

BJ: Just me and an imaginary friend by the name of Oliver.

TM: Nice, how fun.

BJ: And we would fight all day, and of course, we wounded, and around sundown, we would be wounded so seriously that we would eventually die. And then we would lie on the ground for a while,

playing dead until close to suppertime and then wanted to get up and go home. And it was always a very satisfying thing to look at the acre or two of sunflowers that you had mowed down. They were the Serasons.

TM: Were you still running the cattle then?

BJ: Yes.

TM: Okay. So the cattle were working over the sunflowers, too.

BJ: What the cattle were doing was their business.

TM: Did you get a chance to meet Barry Goldwater—

BJ: Yes, I did.

TM: —as he was flying in and out of the planes there?

BJ: He taxied over where I was...

TM: Did he?

BJ: Where was I was doing something that I shouldn't have been...

TM: With your sword?

BJ: This was on another day, but I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to the cows. I didn't think that that was a real career calling for me. So anyway, I was doing whatever, and he taxied over, and he said, "How's it going, kid?" And we talked for a little while, and he said, "If you can get loose, why don't you come go flying with me?" And I told him that I loved the idea, but I didn't dare abandon those cows because I knew my way to the woodshed from prior experience. And I knew my father would not appreciate that, so I didn't go, but I always thought that Barry, instead of... You know, he was frightened, too, and he had to land among my cattle, but he didn't find his anger. He came over and commiserated with me on what I was doing, what I was up against. I thought that was always... He was always a great man in that way.

TM: That's wonderful. That's a wonderful story.

BJ: Yeah, he offered me the chance to go flying with him.

TM: Nice. And he flew the rest of his life? He...

BJ: That's right, he had a Beechcraft Bonanza that he flew everywhere and took a lot of pictures from up on the reservation. You've seen them.

TM: Yeah, yeah. So then from grade school, then into junior high and high school, where did you go to junior high and high school?

BJ: Monroe Elementary. They had a seventh and eighth grade. And then high school, Phoenix Union.

TM: Okay, and then Phoenix Union. When you were growing up, did your oldest sister go to college?

BJ: No, she did not. She would've an excellent student and an excellent teacher, but she did not. I don't know really why. She could have gone, but this was before the war, and she just, I guess didn't feel that she had, that there was a place there for her, and I don't know really why.

TM: Okay. Was it expected from your mother or father that you or your sisters would go to university?

BJ: No. I always knew that I would go to college 'cause I wanted to be a medical doctor. But I was so good in English that I got sidetracked into that. It's kind of an interesting thing though, Tom. When I was a sophomore at Phoenix Union High School, I did not do well. And the teacher, her name was Miss Stanley Nesbitt... And she called me in, and she said, "Mr. Jordan, I will pass you this semester with a 4 minus minus, if you agree never to take one of my classes again?" So I agreed, and I passed the sophomore English with a 4 minus minus. Well, years passed, and it came time for me to do my student teaching. Where do they assign me but Phoenix Union, and who did I end up with? But with Miss Stanley Nesbitt as my supervising teacher.

TM: And what did she say when you walked in the door?

BJ: She was open-mouthed about it. She took it in good stride. And we worked together for a semester, and at the end of it, her total comment was, "Well Mr. Jordan, I detect some slight improvement."

TM: Well, good.

BJ: And she gave me a good recommendation, and I had no difficulty getting a job.

TM: Nice. So was that your intent to—in English—to become an English teacher in college, or...?

BJ: Well, it changed... Yes, as I said, I did so well in English that I switched over and decided that I would become an English teacher. English and journalism. And I taught for... Taught that at Tucson High School for a long time. I was there for quite a while.

TM: Where did you graduate from college?

BJ: ASU.

TM: Okay.

BJ: I have four degrees, three of them from ASU, including a PhD. And one from NAU, which was an Ed Specialist.

TM: What was your PhD in?

BJ: Philosophy.

TM: Okay. And did you just march through the university system? Doing that from your B.A. to your master's, or did you spread it out, took time?

BJ: --No, I took quite a bit of time. I would go back in the summers and work on my MA. And then I took sabbatical from a district where I was principal and worked toward my PhD in Philosophy. And in between times, why, I took that scholarship at NAU and earned the Ed Specialist.

TM: And what year was that?

BJ: That was in 1952 and 19... Is that right? '52, '53... It had to be '54, '55. And I knew Larry Walkup and...

TM: Did you know Harvey Butchart?

BJ: Yes! Yes, I did.

TM: How did you know him?

BJ: Well, never did share a class with him or anything, but he would come to the Canyon, and we would meet informally. I was a ranger there at the time, and he would come up, and he was interested in hiking into the Canyon, and he'd been in every way you can get in, but he... I particularly remember the time that he told us about going into the... just below the confluence—on a mattress, an air mattress, with somebody else. And that other person was drowned. Does that ring a bell?

TM: Oh, yes. That was Boyd Moore, who was drowned. Was a student at NAU, a student of his.

BJ: I never had a class with Butchart, but I did know him through our experiences of the canyon. And he used to talk about that incident with a lot of regret. He managed to get out. He said that he was... That they got into the river largely because they were on the wrong side. And he wanted to... They wanted to find a way across... Well, they got caught in a giant eddy, and this eddy would not allow them to get very close to the shore. He tried paddling and whatever else, and they just made no headway. But finally, Butchart was kicked out much closer to the bank. I don't know which one, but anyway, he was able to lunge from his mattress to the bank, and he escaped, but he watched with horror, I think, as the other fellow gradually drowned. I don't know just how that happened, but... Anyway, he described it and felt very badly about it.

TM: Okay. Let's back up a bit, because I kind of want to see how it was that you ended up at Grand Canyon. So from graduating from high school, did you then work your summers in school, or how did that...?

BJ: Well, I had a lot of careers. I've done so many different things, but I was a seasonal there at the Grand Canyon, so during the summers, from my teaching experience at Tucson, I would go to the Canyon.

TM: How was it that you got a job at the park to start with or even heard that you could work there for the summers?

BJ: I had a friend, Johnny Tissaw. I don't know if you know the Tissaws. They're from Williams. And he had an uncle who was working in maintenance there, and Johnny went up one year, and then he told me about it, and I applied the next year. And he and I were there for three years together.

TM: How did you know Johnny? Did you...?

BJ: Johnny and I started out teaching together. And we were together... He went to Tucson about the same year that he worked the Amphitheater District. And I was in Tucson High School District. Well, we were good friends and spent a lot of time palling around together, creating mischief or whatever at the Grand Canyon. We would hot-wire somebody's car there, who was on gate duty and go riding around in the park. One day, there was a fellow from Albuquerque who was a park ranger, and he was... Bill was the... less than able to manage his own temper. And we hot-wired his car, and we would run in and out of the entrance station.

TM: While he was in the booth?

BJ: Yes.

TM: And he's like, "This is my car"?

BJ: And we would do it at full speed. He would come out with a whistle in his mouth and hands on his hip, and, boy, he's blowing the whistle at us to stop and come back. He didn't recognize the car the first few times... But he eventually recognized that was his car. We were doing this... And oh man, talk about mad and hot under the collar, and he just wanted to really give it to us when we finally stopped at the entrance, and Johnny and I had a good laugh about it, but Bill wasn't laughing.

TM: I bet he wasn't. Let's put this story in reverse a little bit and back up. So you met Johnny Tissaw, and his uncle was working maintenance.

BJ: I believe, yes. I think that was his job.

TM: And so you would've heard that in the summer, you could work as a seasonal at Grand Canyon. What was the first year you started working seasonally there?

BJ: '57. It was the year after the airliners crashed. And I was there '57, 8, and 9.

TM: Alright, so 1957. The superintendent would've been John McLaughlin. The head ranger would've been Lynn Coffin. What'd you remember about those people?

BJ: I remember that Lynn McLaughlin...

TM: John.

BJ: John McLaughlin was very fastidious. He always had a pair of gloves, and he had never passed a piece of paper or something that somebody had discarded without picking it up and disposing of it. And he asked that of all of us. And that was really the only time that I ever dealt with him, except for the time

that he wanted me to take his car, and go into Flagstaff and pick up a medical doctor, whom had been employed by the park, to operate that hospital.

TM: Was that Dr. Schnur?

BJ: No, the fella that I'm talking about I can't remember his last name, but he only lasted about two months. He was terrible. He had no better judgement than to put a cast on a burn. And he was a drunk. When I picked him up at the hotel in Flagstaff... What's the name of that old hotel?

TM: The Weatherford?

BJ: Yeah, I think it's the Weatherford there that...

TM: Right downtown.

BJ: Yeah, it's the old one.

TM: Or the Monte Vista.

BJ: Monte Vista, that's it. The Monte Vista. That's where I picked him up, and he was drunk then. And I poured him into the backseat of the car, and took him up to the canyon. He went sound asleep, and then he had that reputation. After people visited him once, they didn't go back, and so the park, although they had given him a year's contract, they cancelled it, and paid him his money, and sent him out on a bus. This time, he didn't get to ride in John's car. That's the only time I had any dealings with McLaughlin. Now Lynn was a different matter. He... I remember when he had the gentleman from Washington D.C. who was in charge of the parks... I can't think of his name right now, but anyway, Lynn was showing him around, and they came out to the entrance, where I was on duty. And the fellow from Washington said, "Have you ever been... Has this ever been held up?" And Lynn said, "No, we've been very fortunate that way." He said, "We hope that it never happens. What we're really afraid of, though, is that somebody comes in, and robs the place, and takes the ranger up, and pushes him off into the canyon." Those were Lynn's words, and I thought... I stood there with my eyes wide open, you know... Oh my god, I hadn't thought about that possibility, but anyway, Lynn was a good guy. I enjoyed him. He would always speak to our training sessions and whatnot, although I didn't get to know him really well. Dan Davis was a different matter... Dan was a hands-on kind of a guy. He had been in the canyon every way you can get there. And knew more about the canyon more than almost any other living soul that I ever met.

TM: So did you meet... That first season, '57, a year after the plane wreck, you met the superintendent, McLaughlin, you met Lynn Coffin, and Dan Davis. And as you say, Dan had been there a number of years already. And he had spent a ton of time hiking the canyon by then. '57 he'd run the river a couple times.

BJ: He used to tell me that he had been into the canyon every way you can get there. Through hope, rope, and dope.

TM: Nice. And... Well, what did he sound like? What did he talk like? What was...?

BJ: Dan was very quiet. But very competent. For example, he always kept the radio under his bed at night. Instead of reassigning that to somebody who was a junior to him, he kept it under his bed. And he could get transmissions from the North Rim as well as from the South Rim. So those of us who were on road duty at night, we never bothered him. But the rangers from the north, they had... They didn't know that the radio was squawking right under his bed. So they were on the radio quite a bit. But Dan still had the radio because his feeling was that if he was needed, if it was really an emergency... I called him twice during the whole time that I was there. Once was when... It was during the... The Havasupais were having a party there at the Bright Angel Lodge, out in the parking lot. And the ranger who had gotten there first—that's Bill that I told you about—had no better sense than to pull a gun and tell those Havasupais, "I want this party ended, and I want it now." Well, the Havasupais weren't buying that, and one of them came over and backed him around a pickup about twice and took the gun away from him, and he shot it off. That's when I got a call. And I went over, and I knew the fellow that had done the shooting and whatnot, and I laughed and I just... This can't work. We did a little... You know, go on with your party, but tone it down just a little. They did. No problem. But I never will forget Bill's first reaction was to pull a gun and threaten with it. Well, that was one time that I talked with Dan on the phone. The other was when... As the guys who worked for the uranium mine there and who had a touring sedan—I don't know what it was... Buick or something. Anyway they invited a couple of girls from a happiness tour out of Chicago to join them, and they went to the taverns. And they were headed to a dance out on the West Rim. I've forgotten the name of the place, but anyway, they were going too fast, and they went around a curve and slid off and hit a double-trunked pinyon tree. And then the doors flew open, and the girls flew out of the car, landed on top of one of them, and one of them was killed outright. Anyway, that was another night that I got ahold of Dan and told him that we needed to get an ambulance, and medical staff, and whatnot out there. So only those two times. But what made that funny was that the guy on the North Rim had a comedic sense of humor. He would... He would say, "This is car..." And I've forgotten the number of the car. "...on the North Rim of Arizona's great wonder, The Grand Canyon. I'm going 10-7..." It means out of service. "...at some lodge up there." And then he would come back a short time later... "This is car..." so-and-so. "North Rim of Arizona's wonderland, the Grand Canyon, going 10-8. You can all relax now." At the end of his shift, he would say, "This is car..." something I don't know... "...on Arizona's North Rim..." and whatnot. "Going 10-8 at home. We wish you good night and now, our national anthem." All this while the radio was under Dan's bed.

TM: Oh my gosh.

BJ: But anyway, Dan was the kind of a guy that... He took it upon himself to be responsible for the people that he had working for him in the field.

TM: And he had worked up the ladder, had Dan? 'Cause he was starting at the Phantom Ranch ranger station when they started that position.

BJ: Yes, yes.

TM: And eventually, he worked his way up...

BJ: He was the district ranger when I knew him.

TM: Okay, alright.

BJ: Yeah. Dan was a neat guy. Very quiet, but very competent. And when he said something, you knew that you could take it to the bank. And one night, he got up to have coffee. It was early morning. It had been my shift in my... We used to stand an hour guard, and it rotated through the night, you know. You'd stand one hour every night. And then you had the shift from about five till six.

TM: Where would you stand for guard?

BJ: Well, this was on a search and rescue. You know, we always kept the fire going. And the guard.

TM: So there's somebody there paying attention throughout the entire night.

BJ: Their fear was that somebody might go or would be going berserk down there, and would break into camp, you know, and who knew with what intent? With a rock in his hand or a gun or whatever else. So yeah, we always mounted guard, and we kept guard all night. That's where I had the last guard duty. And Dan got up and joined me at the fire. So in my natural way of doing things, I was like, "What's your search all about, Dan?" And he said, "I got up this morning to have a quiet cup of coffee, and you want me to give you my philosophy..."

TM: Talk philosophy at this point...

BJ: Anyway...

TM: You'd been up all night waiting to talk.

BJ: I'd been up an hour, anyway. And Dan said in his view, we were the new gods. That we had it in our capability to either destroy ourselves as a human race or to take care of our Earth and make it flourish and go and leave it accommodating to people in the future. And he said, "In a way, Bill, we are the new gods on this Earth." And he says, "It's our responsibility to learn how to be competent in that job." And so his goal was... He saw the national parks as a way of bringing people in and enlightening them, involving them in the process of keeping nature and preserving it and, you know, helping people understand their position in life in relation to that. I was... Dan was so competent in a lot of other ways. If you had any difficulty, Dan was the go-to guy. You know.

TM: Okay. What else did you do that first summer of '57? We'll go through '57, '58, '59.

BJ: I don't remember the order so much, Tom, as most of the events...

TM: Okay, and so let's back up for a minute, just for clarity. So the job you got, for a seasonal job, would be a law enforcement park ranger?

BJ: Yes.

TM: And at that time, was it law enforcement park ranger or were you just a park ranger, and you did everything?

BJ: No, there were two divisions, and I think there are maybe three now, but at the time, there were only two. There was a... Well, there's called a protective side, which included highway safety. We used to patrol the roads and stop people who were speeding. There was a jail there, but nobody ever used it. And we didn't write tickets, we didn't carry guns. We would simply stop them and let them know that they were endangering their lives and the lives of the deer, largely, by speeding.

TM: Or other visitors.

BJ: Yes, yes. One day, I stopped a guy who was doing 85 just outside the little town that was there.

TM: Little town of Tusayan?

BJ: No. This was... You know where the Babbitt's store was?

TM: Oh, you mean the village right there.

BJ: Yeah, right in the village.

TM: With Park Headquarters right across the street?

BJ: Yeah, yes. He went by that like a streak of lightning, and when I stopped him, he was doing 85! And I said, "This won't work here. You know, you're..." And I told him why. And he said, "Oh my god, ranger." He said, "I am so embarrassed." Turned out that he was sheriff from Anson County, North Carolina. He said, "If people back home found out that I had been stopped here for speeding, I would never live it down." But that was one of the incidents that happened. I remember some guy came to the canyon, and he imagined that he was some sort of a tree because he took all his clothes off and stood across from the Babbitt's store there in a grove of pine trees stark-naked, posed as a tree. And he stood that way for a long time, maybe a full day, but he was gone the next day because people didn't pay any attention.

TM: Oh my gosh. So there were two divisions. One was protection. Was the other in transportation?

BJ: Interpretive. Now Lynn... What was the guy's name at the interpretive center, I can't remember. Lynn something.

TM: So Lynn Coffin was the Chief Ranger...

BJ: He was protective. And I guess over everything, but... He was in interpretation... It would be interesting to find his name and do a little tracking there because he had an interesting philosophy. He believed that man was the pinnacle of God's creation. He used to use the clock as the symbol. He would point out the fact that time began at zero, and as it marched around, you would have the dinosaurs and land shifts and whatever else. But at the last tick of the clock, just before the second hand hit twelve, mankind appeared. And that was the pinnacle of creation, in the lens of his. He used to have an interesting way of finalizing his speech. He would do this every day at that interpreter center, and his speech always ended with this quotation. He would say, "One should visit the Grand Canyon, not to be recreated, but to be *recreated*."

TM: Now that's nice. I mean, I can relate to that.

BJ: Yeah, and people would leave there thinking that they had had a religious experience.

TM: So let me ask you. You clearly were interested in philosophy and how people worked and what they were thinking. Were there other people at the park that were asking these same questions?

BJ: Well, not to my knowledge, but... As I say, I used to make a nuisance of myself asking... Do you ever hear of Jay Goza?

TM: I did!

BJ: Jay was the head wrangler. And Jay had a funny way about him. He would always use a simile in talking about people and their religion. You know, a simile is things that are comparable. Well, he would say, "Gosh, he was as nervous as a Jehovah's Witness without a door to knock on." Or "he was as unsure of himself as a Presbyterian around a crap table." Or "he was as unsure of himself as a Muslim without his semtex emolument."

TM: Did you ever get a chance to ride with Jay?

BJ: Yes. Not with Jay, but I've been down on the mule, yes.

TM: Can you tell me about that?

BJ: Sure. I took my dad with me, and we went down as part of a string with a guide.

TM: Now your dad knew large animals, you knew large animals.

BJ: Oh yeah. He was raised around them. He had the smallest ankles of any man I ever met. Because when he was a kid, he kept a horse tied up to the hitching post. And if he wanted to go from his house just to the outhouse, he rode. He didn't walk. He would jump on that horse and ride out to bathroom. Do the same in reverse. He had small ankles but a barrel chest. But anyway, Dad and I booked passage on the mules, and we went down. And it was funny because about three quarters of the way down, maybe half-way down, you come to this steep incline, and there's a terrible drop-off on your left. And Dad said to me, "Give your mule this." And he ripped his hand at me in a gesture. "Give your mule this." And I did. I thought it was maybe because the mule began to buck him... Get you up and down. He wasn't jumping sideways, it was just up and down. And finally, he quit doing that, with my encouragement. And I said, "Alright, big shot. Let's see you do it." Well, he was riding a big white mule, and when he did it, that mule jumped once and that was it. But that was a memory I have of Dad. Still... I used to have that picture, but it... You know, where Kolb took pictures of the mule parties.

TM: Yes, sitting there all lined up.

BJ: Yeah, I had that picture for the longest time of me and Dad and the rest of the people. But we went down to Phantom Ranch and turned around, came back.

TM: Do you remember who your trail guide was?

BJ: No, I don't. And I knew many of them. There was a fellow by the name Verne Gibson. But Jay was the only one that I remember.

TM: Shorty, Shorty Yarberry?

BJ: Oh, I've heard that name.

TM: Okay, no worries.

BJ: But I can't remember.

TM: Yeah, yeah. But Verne Gibson, sure.

BJ: But Jay was funny. He would... On Mondays, he'd come to work, usually battered and I would say, "Well, what happened this week?" And then he said, "Well, I went to the dance." And he said, "I had a little bit to drink" and with Jay a little bit was quite a bit. And then he said, "Pretty soon, I quit dancing, and I began fighting using my nose as a battering ram for somebody's fist." He said, "Nothing... Life looks so much better when you're looking at it through the bottle of a..." Who makes the whiskey? Anyway, "through a bottle of whiskey. Life looks better that way." But he was funny. He was hilarious. One day he had a group of dudes, and they always had a set speech. "Keep this mule's head up in the rear end of the mule in front of him." And this one guy said, "Why must I keep this mule's head up in the tail of the mule in front of me?" And Jay couldn't resist. He could never resist. He said, "Well, this mule is blind. He can only make this trip if he stays real close and he listens to the hoof marks of the mule in front of him." And the guy... He got to the head to the trail and he rolled off, and he said he'd be god-damned if he was gonna go to the bottom of the Grand Canyon on a blind mule. And so it happened that Fred Harvey's sons were there that day, and Jay said that he spent the whole day going around explaining the blind mule. He said, "They were about as funny as the Mormon bishop at tithings."

TM: I bet, I bet. But Daggett Harvey would come through with...

BJ: I know. I never met any of them, but according to Jay, there were three. Is that right?

TM: I think so. I'm not... But anyway...

BJ: Yeah, they all happened to be there on the day that he told the blind mule thing, and...

TM: Well, that's a good way to keep people there and together is... Like, you know, I mean, it might work.

BJ: Jay was... He never could resist the opportunity to...

TM: ...tell a good joke.

BJ: There was a time when I was on duty at the trail head. And this nice-looking fellow—he just barely came in under the weight limit... He probably exceeded it a bit. He must have exceeded it because of his occupation. But anyway, he got on a mule, and he was among the first, and he kept saying, "Let's get this show on the road." Well, eventually, they got canteens, a load of lunchboxes, you know. People in

line, and they started off. When he got down about 20 or 30 feet, he rolled off that that mule on the wrong side and pressed himself up against the wall. And he began inching his way out. And when the wall got to only a short height above the trail, he got down on his hands and knees and crawled out. And he went over and sat on the corral fence. That was on my shift, and I went over, and I sat beside him, and I said, "You know, height is not for everybody. A lot of people just can't stand this." And he said, "I shouldn't have done it." He said, "I can't even stand to ride an escalator."

TM: Oh, interesting.

BJ: And he said, "I should have known better, but I just hoped to the devil that I could do this." We got to talking, and I told him that he needn't feel embarrassed about it, because it... I said, "I can't stand tight places. It would get to me in a hurry." And I ask him. I said, "Well, what do you do?" And he says, "I'm a linebacker for the Los Angeles Rams." And I told him, "God, if I had your job, I'd have terminal fright every Sunday." Anyway, we had a good laugh about that, and he went away feeling better about himself. And I can't remember who... should've written it down, but we just shared a laugh and let it go at that.

TM: I want to go back to something you mentioned about Dan Davis. About looking at the society at the time, with the control of nuclear bombs and so much technology as being given a choice, or kind of at a crossroads, if you will... One was...

BJ: Dan literally saw us as the gods. We're in charge of this planet. And we can either take it over the edge, or we can do something to save it and to enhance our place in it.

TM: And he saw the Park Service is playing a role in this?

BJ: Yeah, absolutely. The only service of the park was to encourage people... not the only purpose, but one of the main purposes was to encourage people to become shepherds of the environment.

TM: Do you think that has worked?

BJ: Well, I think so to some... I asked Dan if he thought it was working, and he said it's a mixed bag. He said you never know whether you're getting there or not, but he said it can't hurt. He said, "And we've got to make the effort." When he left the Park Service, he went to Tucson and directed the museum in Tucson. So Dan meant it. He was very much inclined to be part of the environment to enhance it any way he could. Dan was a remarkable man. I loved him very much.

TM: Nice, nice. We talked on the phone. You mentioned that you were part of the search for the Father and the two teenagers that he had with him. Can you tell me a little bit more of what you remember about that search?

BJ: Yeah, it's vivid in my... In fact, I write about it in my own work. Largely because I admired the priest so much. He had been in the Grand Canyon before. But it was maybe 15 years before. And he had, at that time, gone down, I think—it's my opinion, at least—that he went down the Grandview Trail. And there used to be a hotel there. I never saw it, because the Park Service burned it. I think it became an

attractive nuisance, and they burnt it to the ground. And that was either the year... my first year there or my second. I mean, it was either done when I got there or my first year. But anyway, he went on the Grandview Trail, I think, the first time he was at the canyon. Then when he brought the boys with him, he thought he would take them down the Grandview Trail and look at that old hotel. But instead of getting to the Grandview, he got on the Tanner Trail. The amazing thing was that I don't know how he ever found it. We just almost didn't. And there eight of us with experience. First of all, it wasn't where the map said it should be. It should've been at Lipan Point. But instead of that, it was off to the east. Some considerable distance, I've forgotten just where... Anyway, we scrounged around and eventually found it. But it was so badly eroded, we wondered how in the world anybody could go down it or why they would. And they should've seen that it was badly eroded and known that wasn't longer in use. But anyway, we tracked the priest and the two boys.

TM: Bill, I'm curious. What kind of shoes were you wearing?

BJ: Oh, we had hiking boots on.

TM: So leather, heavy.

BJ: With a high top. Laced.

TM: High top, okay. Steel toe?

BJ: I'm sorry?

TM: Did they have a steel toe?

BJ: No, mine did not.

TM: Okay, but heavy boots.

BJ: Heavy boots, yeah. With heavy socks. And very light clothing because it was excessively warm.

TM: Hot. And then were you carrying water? Did you have a backpack?

BJ: Yes, we did. We had canteens. And that's really about—aside from a bread roll and a little food—that's about all we were carrying. We weren't...

TM: And this would've been in a kind of rucksack, no frame on your pack at all? Just...

BJ: Just a knapsack on the...

TM: A knapsack with shoulder straps.

BJ: And I was carrying the radio. It... We always had the practice of the last person to gather at the fire station to begin the search and rescue was the one who carried the radio. And on that trip, I was carrying the radio.

TM: And how big was the radio? What was it like?

BJ: It was a monstrous thing, and it worked so damn seldom that it was almost wasn't worth carrying, but... It's probably 20 by 20.

TM: Wow, so it was big.

BJ: Yeah, it was.

TM: And it must've been heavy.

BJ: It was heavy.

TM: And did it run on the nine-volt, round, circular batteries, or...?

BJ: I honestly can't tell you, Tom. I never got inside it. I don't know, but it...

TM: Well, it would've been heavy and big, and...

BJ: And it wouldn't work real well. You had to be line of sight for it to get through and only usually in the evenings. During the day, it was almost worthless. If you got in the shade and line of sight, then it would sometimes work. But more usually, we would make our report in the evening. Anyway, we followed Tanner Trail down. It kind of comes and goes. It crosses ridges and comes back into Tanner—in and out of Tanner. We followed those three sets of prints down to the water, to the river. And we saw where they had spent the night. And then the next morning, we tracked them up Tanner, on a different trail. On the old trail, the actual... The old... It wasn't a trail there, really. It was just a...

TM: Route?

BJ: Yeah, it's just a course that the water took.

TM: Oh, a little wash?

BJ: It was a big wash. So anyway, we went up there, and the we higher went, the more we could see that there was a growing problem. We kind of suspected that that's what was going on, because there were deviations in the footprints. Finally, at one point, there was the evidence of somebody having taken off and run straight down the hill, towards some cottonwood trees, at the bottom of Tanner Wash. And then there was a trail of the other two following him, one was taking giants leaps and the others were more or less in regular fashion. But anyway, they got down, and we could see where they had tried to dig for water. But there was no water to be found, not at that moment... So we could surmise that somebody in the party was in real trouble, panicked. And they—whoever was in charge that was trying to get them to water—so then they got back into Tanner, and they were headed down toward the river, headed north toward the river. And we... I need to back up and say that when we camped at the river, we saw the message that had been left in the sand. It read, "One may be dead. Fall of 100 feet." And so we knew that there was something going on, but we didn't know what. We didn't know the age, anything about them. Later, they found the car that they had been driving, and there was... Somebody had kept a journal. One of them had kept a journal—I think it was one of the boys—and said that they were going down—they called it Grandview, I think—to the wherever they were going. But they got in

underneath the Redwall, and they couldn't find their way out. You know all those game trails that crisscross down there? So anyway, that was... We got down to the river that night and camped, and we saw where they had camped, and we saw the message. And then the next day, we went up Tanner, and we came across the priest who had fallen over a waterfall and polished. You know, what the gravel dies to rock. It was only about 30 feet, however. It wasn't 100. But just before that, we had... We found a boy a little later when we followed their tracks down Tanner Wash. We found his body on kind of a table-sized rock. And he was just, you know, a look of panic. His eyes wide open, staring and... So then we had the priest and the boy. And the other... The last set of tracks made their way back to the river. And it was he who wrote the message that we had found the first night. So we were just very confused. We...

TM: I'm gonna back up a minute. There was a helicopter involved in this search, is that right?

BJ: Well, yeah. We went in the... There was a crew that joined us. Other members of the crew came in on a helicopter. It was an army helicopter from Luke Air Force Base.

TM: Okay. Was it the rotor in the banana, rotor in the front, rotor in the back, Sikorsky... These were big helicopters.

BJ: Yeah, it was. And it... He landed the other members of the crew, and he took off, and he got about ten feet in the air, and the thing over revved. And it settled back down hard. And it stayed there. The pilot and the copilot were called... They called and... I don't actually remember how they got out. Probably called another chopper. But anyway, that helicopter stayed there for two or three days.

TM: Oh, while they fixed it.

BJ: Yeah, they didn't fix it. What happened was that the Luke Air Force commanding officer came up, and he talked to the pilot. He says, "I want that thing out of here." And the pilot who had the final say said, "I'm not gonna fly it in." He said, "I'll fly it from there to here." And they're at Mather Point. And he said it's gonna come down here, and you can truck it back home. That's exactly what happened. He and the copilot got in, and they took the chance that the motor, you know, had not damaged it so, so badly that it would malfunction because they flew it out of there, put it down at Mather Point, and they came and got it with a lowboy and hold it back.

TM: Took it out.

BJ: So then the one that finally found the boys was from Fort Huachuca.

TM: Oh, that was a long way to come. All the way from the southern part of the state.

BJ: Yeah. But that was the only one available... Luke didn't have another one. Anyway, when we joined up, then we spent the rest of the week looking for somebody. We had no idea his age, or...

TM: And did you know by that time that the second boy had built a raft and headed downriver? Didn't know that?

BJ: No. No, we had no earthly knowledge of where he might be.

TM: Except you know that he—somebody had come back to the river and put a note in the sand.

BJ: Yeah, and the water had come up. And washed out the bottom part of the message. What he said was that he was going to catch a log and go down to Phantom Ranch. But that was washed out. We just saw, “One may be dead. Fall of 100 feet” And that was about it. We figured that it had to be somebody young. Because when the boy—when the priest fell, the two boys made their way around the waterfall and came back into Tanner Wash, but they did not go back up to see if the priest was actually dead. And we figured, based on that, that it had to be somebody young and impressionable. An adult wouldn’t have done that. So anyway... So the next four or five days, we looked for him. And we were in our last day—last day, anyway... This helicopter came up the river, and would you believe they had him aboard because they saw him standing on a sandbar, having made a big “H” out of logs, and sand, and brush, and whatnot. And they could see the “H” before they saw him, and they saw him waving his pants on a flagpole. Climbed on the helicopter by himself, and they took him to the hospital. He was there about 15, 20 minutes, and they released him. Kid was in good shape. He had drunk Colorado River water and lived on Mesquite beans during that time. He’d tried once to make his way out, had cut his pant legs off and tried to make shoes out of them. He only got up about a mile or so before he got thirsty and went back to the river and stayed there. So then the rest of us spent those intervening days looking for him, you know, spread out in such a fashion that we would keep track of one another. We were looking in the side canyons or whatever in the brush.

TM: Did you set up a base location?

BJ: It differed every night. We started up at Tanner, and we’re making our way down toward Phantom. That was miles and miles.

TM: So you were making the Escalante Trail. What today’s hikers know as the Tonto Trail and the Escalante Trail, there.

BJ: Yeah. On the south side of the river—we were on the south side—I’ve never been on that. If there is a trail there, I don’t know.

TM: There is today, but back then, there wouldn’t’ve been.

BJ: There were all kinds of game trails.

TM: Yes. And were there burrows you might have seen?

BJ: Yeah. It was funny, one day I saw this little head peeping out from the brush. And I thought to myself, “I better be a little careful here because mother won’t be very far away.” About that time, she let me know that I was too close to her baby. And I detoured around. So there were a couple of other things that happened there, just very quiet things to me that, from a philosophical standpoint I’ve often thought of. One was there was a small, green plant. It was the most intense green I can ever recall. It was a leafy, little fern-like growth that would grow in a teacup. And right in the middle of it was the tiniest flower you’ve ever seen in your life. And I looked around, and there was nothing else like it. And as I say, from a philosophical standpoint, you’d look at that and you’d say, “My god. How did it get here?”

How does it survive? I wonder if it's happy in this environment." It was such a beautiful little thing. I can see it vividly, even now. And the other one was I had something in my boot. And I took it off. And a shell fell out. Just a small part of a seashell. And I took it, and I threw it into a brittlebush. And I thought, "I don't need that gouging me." And I got to thinking, "My god, that thing has been here for millions and millions of years." I dug it out of the brittlebush, and I kept it for the longest time, just to, you know, think about bridging that time. And I looked at those walls and saw how, you know, what eons and eons of time have passed. That little guy was in a sea at the time that he was born. And now all this rock above him. Miles of... I think they say the canyon used to be a mile higher than it is now, well, it was a mile then. And so, it had stayed there all that time. So when I found it in my boot, I thought, "This is a keeper." Philosophically, you know, I'm kind of bound with this little guy.

TM: Nice, nice. I wanted also touch upon John Riffey.

BJ: Oh, yes.

TM: How did you first meet John or become aware of John?

BJ: John came over from the North Rim, from the Monument. He was part of the Park Service to which I was assigned. He was part of the protective side. So when we had a big meeting, John would come over.

TM: Would he fly over or drive around?

BJ: He would fly over. He had a little Cub. And he would bring his wife, and they'd party for the weekend, and then he'd fly home.

TM: And was that Laura?

BJ: Yes.

TM: And what do you remember of them?

BJ: Oh, they were grand. John was very competent. He was... He could do anything with his hands. Weld, or fix cars, or fly, or do a host of other things. He could fix a pump or whatever was called on him. He was highly regarded by the ranchers up there because if anyone was in trouble, he would come and pick them up and fly them to help. He would drive in, get them, and then fly them to help. Or he would... He and Laura went into Fredonia, whatever. He would pick up groceries for them or do acts of kindness. If there was a fire, he would join them in putting it out. And he was well-regarded. They called him the Mayor of Toroweap. And Laura was interesting as well. She was well-educated. Had been a teacher, as I recall, in the grade school. But she loved the isolation. I wrote a story for *Arizona Highways*. Raymond Carlson was the editor in those years. And I called him, and I asked him if he would be interested in a story about the Grand Canyon Monument. And I told him why I thought it would be interesting. And he said he would be, yeah. So I flew over and got acquainted with... I knew John from meetings that we attended together on the South Rim, but I would fly over, and he would take me around to the top of Mount Trumbull or down to the river, and we would see the bowl-shaped stones in which the... I forgot what they were. Soft shell... What are they? Soft-shelled something. I'll think of it in a minute. Anyway,

their eggs would stay in the dust, in the bowl-shaped rocks. And John said that it had been 14 years since this had happened the last time. And I happened to be at the time when those eggs hatched. And they were gone within a week. Because when the water evaporated from those rocks—they were bowl-shaped—when the water evaporated, those things died.

TM: There were in the potholes?

BJ: Yes.

TM: There were the shrimp? Shrimp potholes?

BJ: Yeah, the soft-shelled shrimp. But before they died, they would lay eggs, and they might stay in the bottom of that for the next ten, fifteen years, and then they would hatch. And the interesting thing, Tom, is that this valley was three quarters of a mile in the air. It stood above the river, three quarters of a mile. And how they ever got there in the eons of time and that they had been there... You know, it just staggers your mind. Anyway, John would take me up to Trumbull or down there, and we'd... There were 170 cinder cones that you can count from the top of Mount Trumbull. It's the place where McKay, the science teacher from Tucson, from the university...

TM: Eddie, Eddie McKee?

BJ: Yeah, I think so. I don't know his first name. I thought it was McKay. It's McKee, isn't it? Yeah, I think so.

TM: So he had been a park naturalist, and then he ended up...

BJ: At the University of Arizona. And he would bring his students up there to see the flora and the fauna. And the geology of the place. Because you can go from the river, which is about 1700 or less, up to the top of Mount Trumbull, which is over nine, and you go through six of the seven life zones. And so it became a training ground for the scientists from the University of Arizona, and I think that ASU probably still does that. I'm sure NAU does.

TM: And many other universities all around the country. It's just a... It's a great—as you say—it's this great elevational spread.

BJ: Yeah. The six miles from the river to the top of Mount Trumbull. Six miles. Goes through every life zone except the jungle. That's amazing. Anyway, Laura was highly educated and cultured. She read a lot. She was an amateur ornithologist, and at that time, had counted 157 varieties of birds that transited that area. And I asked her one night. I said, "Laura, what is it that you found here? What is it that keeps you here? What is it you like about this?" And she gave me the most interesting answer. I ask her, you know, "What do you see? What's your search about?" which is what I was really headed for. And she gave me the most interesting answer. She said, "Bill, until you've been for a while, you wouldn't understand. And after you've been here for a while, you won't need to ask." And that's it. From a philosophical standpoint, that's true of many things.

TM: That's beautiful. That's a beautiful answer.

BJ: Yeah. And you live by your own experience. Anyway, the... It happened that the next night, when I flew out of there to go back to the village, the sun was coming in at just the right angle down on the river, and I could see that the Colorado was gold... And so having read Genesis several times, you know, I knew. The next time, I stood at her sink drying dishes, because you didn't go there to be guests. You went there to do your share. Anyway, I said, "Laura, have you found the gold?" And she just beamed. And she said, "See? I told you. You have to be here for a while before you understand then after you have been here you don't need to ask." And what that is, if you read the second chapter of Genesis, I think it is. Where after they had been booted out of the garden, it makes a statement. The Bible makes a statement, "and they found the gold." And what that means is anybody's guess, but I always thought that it was... Where they ended up was exactly where John Riffey ended up. There were so few trees, so little water... It might have been totally equal. Maybe that was the Garden of Eden. But they created their own life. They created their own fun and their own adventure, their sense of self... Everything was at their creation, and that's what Adam and Eve must have done.

TM: But they also incredibly helpful, and generous, and magnanimous, and knew their neighbors, and seemed to participate in their neighbors' lives—but not overbearingly.

BJ: Just be members, and participate, yeah. I never met any of their neighbors when I was there. It was only John and Laura. So I don't know what their social life was like. He did take me flying with him, but only briefly. And we went over the canyon and then came back.

TM: And so this was in... He would sit in the front, and you would sit in the back, behind him?

BJ: He sat in the back.

TM: He was in the back, okay. Alright.

BJ: And when the two flew, he flew, Laura was in the back. Just as a counterweight and be kind of a balance there between the engine and the empennage. But anyway, he was an interesting guy. I sent that story in to *Arizona Highways*, and they paid me for it. It cost me 500 and some odd dollars to write it, and they sent me a check for 109. So I decided that maybe I could write maybe one more story before...

TM: My writing career is over.

BJ: ...poverty too me. So anyway, that was it.

TM: What else do you remember about these three years you had at Grand Canyon?

BJ: So many things.

TM: What did you remember about the housing? Where did you stay?

BJ: Well, the first year, we stayed in a motor home. It was a trailer. And it was a fairly small trailer, and I had three daughters. A wife and three daughters. That was a little crowded. Second year, we stayed in... We sub-rented a house that one of the maintenance directors lived in, and he was working on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and the house would have sat empty. So he was more than willing to get paid for the use of his house on the South Rim, and it was a nice house. And we had over 20... I think it was around 2,500 square feet, and it was like any house. So it was very comfortable. The third year, I can't remember where we stayed. It must've in the same place. But...

TM: Okay. But you would go up there with your wife and your children?

BJ: Yeah.

TM: Okay. And what would they do during the day?

BJ: Well, they would... They had other children to play with. And they would go out and get all dirty in that red soil. Oh my god, that stuff is like iron. Maybe it is iron. But they would get good and damn dirty, and in the evenings, we would usually go up to the Bright Angel or go to a movie.

TM: Okay, at the Community Yenter there?

BJ: Uh huh. At the Bright Angel, they used to have evening programs. Nutch Talent Shows. They would have... Well, it's the same people put on a program. And that was always fun. We'd eat at the Bright Angel, or the El Tovar, or you know... We'd go for long walks, things like that. So it was... They had fun.

TM: Did you meet any... I'm thinking of Mary Hoover, Buford Belgard. People that were associated with the American Legion, there. And then Emery Kolb.

BJ: Emery, I knew.

TM: Okay. What do you remember about Emery?

BJ: Not a lot. They were rather... They were older at that time. I remember that they narrated that film, endlessly. They would take turns... it used to puzzle me why they would devote their whole life to something that happened, you know, so early in their lives. And they made a career out of showing that movie repeatedly through the day and whatnot. And it puzzled me why they would be so single-mindedly devoted to that. I really didn't know them on a, you know, personal level.

TM: Well, you weren't the only one that was wondering about that.

BJ: Yeah. They were not that much involved... Now, the woman that you mentioned... Mary?

TM: Mary Hoover?

BJ: That rings a bell.

TM: She was working at the laundry. Knew pretty much everybody.

BJ: Was it she who used to take those long walks in the mornings? Or was it... As I recall, one of the Verkamps. I didn't get to know them real well, either.

TM: Okay. Did you know Virgil Gibson, the photographer?

BJ: I'd met him, but I don't have much of a recollection there. But just a brief story about whoever was... I think it was a Verkamp. She came into headquarters one day, and I happened to be there. And she said, "I found a guy hanging in a tree. If nobody claims him in the next 90 days, can I have him?" And sure enough, we went out there, and there was a guy who had hanged himself. And he'd been there for months. And there was very little left of him. I always admired that sense of humor that she... "If nobody claims him, can I have him?" But there was... There was a funny thing that happened. Do you remember—you ever heard the name Phil Iverson. Now he was the one who took over Pasture Wash. He got his start in taking over the ranger position at Pasture Wash while I was there.

TM: Tell me more.

BJ: He was the nephew—the nephew or son-in-law, I think he was the son-in-law of a guy who was in second-in-command there at the canyon. And I can't think of his name. I used to tease him about trading checks. But I can't recall his name. Anyway, Phil Iverson was his son-in-law. And Phil had been around long enough to finally get to the first notch on his career ladder, and that is Pasture Wash. Well, Phil was about 6'6", big guy. Big shoulders and whatnot. Well one day, the Chancellor from Germany came to the Canyon. And of course, the Park Service bent over backwards to roll out the Red Carpet and guard him. And Phil Iverson was chosen to be the guard. And they called me on the radio, I happened to have road patrol that day, and he called me and he said, "Want ya to go over and relieve Phil, so they can have lunch." So I did. And when I got over there, here I found Phil dressed to the nine's in his full uniform. Hat, coat, and whatever. And I was in a shirt, a little more than grubbies. I had my hat and all with me, but... He said, "Where's your coat?" And I said, "First of all, Phil, I don't own a coat. And secondly, if I had, it would be at the house." And he said, "Well, you can't just sit here at the president's door and not be in full uniform." He said, "I guess I'm gonna have to lend you my coat." I said, "Phil, do you have a picture of what I'm gonna look like in your coat? You're 6'6", I'm 5'9". And that coat is going to be over like a tent." He says, "Well, it's got to be." He said, "Why don't you sit down on the chair here... and I'll put it on you and tuck it in." So we didn't have any better sense than to do that. So he tucked it in, and the last thing he did before he left was to take a 45 pistol, the old military-type pistol, out of his belt and put it in underneath the folds of that coat. There I was, on protective duty of the Chancellor of Germany and... So anyway, Phil then left for lunch. He hadn't been gone three minutes when the door of the president's suite opened and out came the Chancellor. Now what do you do? Do you just sit there or do you stand? Well, I stood. You know, the coat just engulfed me. And I grabbed for the gun and missed. And it went end over end over end... and... It landed at the feet of the Chancellor of Germany. And he picked it up and handed it back to me. We both stood there like idiots, laughing at the sight that that made.

TM: Oh, that's good.

BJ: And pretty soon, without a word, he turned and went back into the room, and I could hear him telling somebody about his experience and the two of them laughing. And in the meantime, I took the coat off, and I put it on the chair, and when Phil came back, I said... I told him what happened. "Oh my god. I could've killed him." He said "You need a guard to keep the guard from killing him." Anyway, I've always remembered that. That was funny. And then later, when we went back to spread the ashes of a couple of our friends... Those who had been part of the ranger group. It's the one I write about. I stayed at the El Tovar, and I stayed in the room where the Chancellor had stayed in. It was kind of nice to share the... You know, reacquaint myself with that whole thing.

TM: Fun.

BJ: The people that I went up with—they had to hear that story, and then they were horrified, too. They got a big kick out of it.

TM: I bet.

BJ: I could have killed the Chancellor of Germany. So anyway, that's one of the memories.

TM: Fun. Bill, we've been happily yik-yakkin for about an hour and a half.

BJ: Are you happy with what you got?

TM: I'm thrilled! Are you happy?

BJ: Oh, yeah.

TM: Is there anything else you'd like to cover before we wrap it up?

BJ: Not really. I do remember a lot of the individuals, there was a fellow... Ben Wilson was his name. Ben something, and I think it was Wilson. He used to come up there every summer. And he had been doing that for 20 years before I got in—I met him. And he would not take a camera with him out on the rims. His whole thing was to go out each morning, and he would look at the Canyon walls and spend the day in the presence of God, according to him. And he saw those walls as a great easel, and he would watch the changing colors and the way the formations lent color and shadows to those formations. And he would interact with visitors in the same way, especially children. He would say, "Don't take a picture of the Canyon. Take a picture with your eyes. And remember that. And the next time you come, think of that picture and compare it a new picture." He was great with kids. Oh one day I was on road patrol, we used to in that day, and I imagine they still do, we're at the foot of the El Tovar Hotel there, where Verkamp's is. And we would direct traffic for the Hopi Indian dances. Do they still do that?

TM: I believe they do. I mean, they did it for decades and decades. Yeah, right next to the Hopi House, between the Hopi House and El Tovar there on the little stage.

BJ: When the parking lot became full, you know, you had to keep people directed to other places. And that was a real strain, because people wanted to park and see those dances. I thought they were just commercial trumpery, but people wanted to see them. Why, I was directing traffic there at the bottom

of El Tovar hill, and Ben made his way through traffic, and I thought he was gonna get killed before he got over to me, but anyway, he was just mad, just blue and just about to have a stroke. And I said, "Ben, what's the matter? Why are you upset?" He said, "Bill, you should've been with me." He said, "I have seen kids with bad manners." He said, "I've seen adults who behave like children." But he said, "I've seen it all." He said, "I was out at Mather Point, and this car from New York came in. It's a touring car. Two couples. They left the doors open, the motor running, got out of the car, went up to look into the Grand Canyon, and one of them said to the other..." He said, "Just think of all the New York garbage this would hold." And with that, he got back in the car and left the park. They had driven 78 miles to get there and had to drive the same back just to identify the place as a garbage disposal. Well, what they didn't know was that the garbage that they wanted to throw in there would be down over Ben's walls. And he saw those as the palette of God. So when they were going to put garbage on his paintings, he wasn't having it. He was just darn near death. So I left. I thought it was funny. He finally saw the funny side of it.

TM: But it is interesting it goes back to Dan Davis' vision—of how do we handle what we have.

BJ: Yeah. Dan and I disagreed, but I liked him so much. He had much the same viewpoint that I did. He liked his job. He liked being an... He was much an interpreter as he was protective. Maybe even more so. But Ben was interesting. I heard from him until the year of his death. Yeah, I liked the guy and looked to him. Well, he continued to do that even after I left the park. For how much longer, I really don't know, but I got a... One of my last letters came back to me, and I knew that Ben had passed. He was already elderly when I met him.

TM: So you're teaching at Tucson High School. And in the summers you're at Grand Canyon. Now you've been a seasonal at Grand Canyon for three years, and there must've come a make or break time when you were...

BJ: It did. Tom, it got to be morbid for me. We would go in for people who had fallen in. And we would put them in a body bag and bring them out. And people would be parked up and down the road for half a mile. And they'd be out of their cars taking pictures of us with this body bag. And I thought, "What is it about this that disturbs me and yet attracts them?" And I talked with Dan about it. And Dan helped me... He talked me down off the ledge. He said, "In a way, Bill..." he said, "People are looking at their own mortality. They're not so much considering what happened to that person as what might happen—could happen to them and will eventually happen. They'll be in somebody's body bag at some point. And he said, "It's their way of adjusting to mortality." He said, "That's my take on it." And it came to be mine as well. But that happens so often that the Canyon became a little morbid to me. It wore with the beauty that I saw in it. And I just... I couldn't take it anymore.

TM: This is real interesting, because it seems as though if you have a job at the South Rim, that's very different than what was inspiring a Ben Wilson—the place. Being immersed in the place. And those two things are very different.

BJ: They are. And they don't... They impact one another. Negatively, I thought. And so I chose not to go back. I could've gone back, but I didn't want to.

TM: Well, you were on a track to go permanent with the Park Service it seems, if you'd wanted to.

BJ: Well, that was never tempting to me. I didn't want that. That rigid caste system that is in place... It was to the point, Tom, where if you got a promotion... this Phil Iverson that I was talking about. When he got Pasture Wash, well, he had to move from the home in which he was to the home that was set aside for that position. So then if you got a promotion, then you had to move to the next house. It is not unlike a lumber company town. If you get a promotion, you have to move. And first of all, I didn't want to stay with it that long, and secondly, I didn't like the caste system. You had to be there a long time to be in a position like Lynn Coffin or John McLaughlin. I admired them very much and enjoyed working with them, but it was not for me. So I did not sign up. Now my friend Johnny Tissaw did. But he did not go up. He decided at the last moment that he wasn't going to go, and so he didn't go. But I'd always been in construction in my life, I built houses and worked for people, and so I just naturally gravitated. I always had the interest of education on one hand and building on the other, and I've done them all my life. I resigned the school superintendency to go back into construction. And it was the best day of my life. It really was. And I built a house that was in an area where there wasn't even any power. So I literally built that house with a handsaw and a hammer. And it was a 2,500 square foot house that I built by myself. And it was the most fun I've ever had. It was just that joyful to me to be back in construction. I've never looked back. It's always been a joy... I've been loving—well, I take it back. Eventually, I got a job teaching junior college—English or philosophy. Alternate. I would go down Saturdays. I'd work in a field all week and then go to college on Saturday. And these were people who came back from their jobs through the week, and so they were really good students. They weren't high school kids.

TM: So these were more mature students that wanted that.

BJ: Very much.

TM: Nice, and it's fun.

BJ: It was always fun to do that, and they thought it was kind of neat that somebody from the field would spend his time doing that. And I loved that. But anyway, with a PhD in philosophy and master's in English, I would go back and forth. And did—loved both. Yeah, I found the... I transferred from Glendale Community to Scottsdale because there was a little girl who was 11. Her parents wanted her to go college. She had finished high school at 11. And her parents wanted her to go to college, junior college. But the college at Scottsdale would not accept her.

TM: You're too young.

BJ: And so the president of Scottsdale said to me, "If you come teach her, we'll accept her." So I did. And nowadays, they accept kids of any age. But, in that day and age, they didn't want anything to do with somebody so young.

TM: That's amazing.

BJ: She was fully able. The only difference was that she could not relate well to the other kids in class. And in my estimation, they were wrong in trying to move her ahead. 'Cause she should've been with her peers, where she could form friendships and had the edges knocked off as it was.

TM: And helped educate her peers, right there. That would've been a great...

BJ: It didn't happen that way. She graduated junior college. She was 12. And went to ASU, and I don't know... right now. She travels between New York and Europe. She buys paintings. It's largely paintings that people want, and they will pay her to go over and buy them and transport them here.

TM: Okay. So she's an art dealer?

BJ: Oh, yeah. She is very successful.

TM: I bet she is. Yeah, yeah. Wonderful. Bill Jordan, thank you so very, very much. This has been a wonderful visit.

BJ: Well, I'm glad you came, Tom. It's awfully nice of you to spend the time with me.

TM: Well, thank you. And with that, I think we'll conclude this Grand Canyon oral history interview with Bill Jordan. My name is Tom Martin. Today is March 9, 2020. And Bill, thank you so very much.

BJ: Thank you for coming. Did you get what you wanted, Tom?

TM: I did. It was wonderful.