

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Bruce Wilson (BW)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Bruce recounts his 1942 Grand Canyon river trip with his father Neill, Norm Nevills, Pres Walker, Otis Marston, Ed Hudson and others

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TM: Today is Thursday, January 3rd, 2019. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Bruce Wilson. My name is Tom Martin. Bruce Wilson is normal spelling. Bruce, good morning, how are you?

BW: I'm terrific. Good to talk with you, Tom.

TM: Oh, you too. May we have your permission this morning to record this conversation?

BW: Yes, of course.

TM: Thank you so very much. Bruce, what year were you born?

BW: 1929.

TM: Okay. What were your parents doing and where were you born?

BW: I was born at the old Stanford Hospital in downtown San Francisco. Stanford Hospital is now located on the campus down in Palo Alto, but I was born at Stanford Hospital in San Francisco. My mother was born in San Francisco and my grandmother was born in San Francisco.

TM: Wow.

BW: On the maternal side.

TM: How did your mother meet your dad?

BW: They met after World War I. My dad had just come home from the Army and my mother was working, I guess as a secretary or receptionist, at an outfit called the War Camp Community Service which was, I guess, a World War I kind of USO. My father walked in the door and I guess he had on half civilian clothes and half Army uniform. My mother thought that was pretty funny and she laughed. I guess... That was the beginning of a brief courtship. They were engaged within a few weeks. They married within the year. I'm not sure exactly what year they were married.

TM: What did your father do in the Great War?

BW: Well he was in the Army. He became a Second Lieutenant. I don't believe he ever got out of what he called Fort Lewis or Camp Lewis in Washington State, so he wasn't under any action under fire.

TM: Alright. So, he served stateside.

BW: Yeah.

TM: Did you grow up in San Francisco then?

BW: No, I grew up down the peninsula in Burlingame. My parents built their home in Burlingame, which is halfway between San Francisco and San Jose. My dad commuted to his office in San Francisco, but I spent my whole through high school there in Burlingame, California.

TM: What did your father do in San Francisco?

BW: Well he had a little advertising agency. Actually, he only had one account, but it was a pretty good account. He had the telephone company account. He would go up to his office in the late morning because he really wanted to write full time. He'd been a newspaper reporter before World War I and he really wanted to just write. He would stay home and write in the mornings, then about eleven o'clock he'd go up to San Francisco. He had a secretary and a lettering artist and another artist that worked in that office for him. I think he did pretty well.

TM: Yeah. If your mom and her mother were born in San Francisco, where was your dad from, on his side?

BW: He was born in Minneapolis, but his father was sort of an itinerant insurance salesman or insurance broker. They spent a lot of time living in boarding houses when he grew up. I think he went to eleven different grammar schools and high schools.

TM: Wow.

BW: But they ended up in the East Bay in Alameda in the Oakland area. My dad went to Alameda High School and then to Stanford, he was in the class of 1912. I think that's one reason we stayed put in Burlingame. I think he moved so many times that we just stayed put there in Burlingame.

TM: Okay, did you have any brothers and sisters?

BW: I had an older sister, Nancy Jane, and she was four years older than me. She's gone now.

TM: Okay. Did you guys do camping when you were kids? What did you do for entertainment after school?

BW: Well, in the winters we skied. My dad was one of the first people that skied up at the Sierra. So at an early age, I guess maybe five or six, he would take my sister and me skiing. We'd stay in...there was a funny old hotel in downtown Truckee, California. We'd stay there. Sometimes we'd stay at the Sierra Club Lodge up at Donner Summit, in the Clair Tappaan Lodge. So we skied in the winter. In the summers we'd take trips to Mount Lassen I remember. We didn't really do a lot of camping out cause my mother was not an outdoors person, but we'd spend time in the out of doors, that's for sure.

TM: Okay.

BW: Then when I was in high school, of course that was after the 1942 river trip, I started spending a lot more time in the mountains. We had some good friends, the Rieger family, who we skied with, and they

were also backpackers. You could rent a burro at Yosemite for a dollar a day and just take off into the Yosemite backcountry. We used to do that in the summer. It was really fun.

TM: So this would have been in the late 1940s?

BW: Yeah. That would have been...I know we were back at Benson Lake in the Yosemite backcountry the summer of 1945 when the war ended. We didn't know the war was over. My dad and I hiked out to the highway, which had a place called White Wolf that's in Yosemite Park up on the road to Tuolumne Meadows. We hiked out, I think we did 25 miles about from Benson Lake to get to the White Wolf campground. When we got there, there were all sorts of cars going down the road there. We were really surprised [laughing] because gas had been rationed and there was never any traffic. We said, "What's all this traffic?" They said, "Well, didn't you know the war is over, gas rationing is over, the atomic bomb has been dropped." We missed the whole thing, which really, really bugged me because I'd heard about the big celebration at downtown San Francisco and I missed it.

TM: Oh my gosh. So you would've been twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen then.

BW: Yep.

TM: Roughly?

BW: Yeah, roughly fifteen, sixteen. Something like that.

TM: Okay. Did you backpack a lot with your dad? Did he like to head up in the Sierras as well that way?

BW: Well, mostly, he had done that stuff earlier. I mean, he was a mountain climber. I think he climbed every fourteen-thousand-foot peak, certainly in California, if not on the West Coast. He seemed to give that up when I was a little kid. Maybe he thought it was dangerous and he shouldn't do that, I don't know. But we always had sleeping bags and we were always sleeping out somewhere.

TM: Oh fun.

BW: But the pack trips were really... I think that summer the war ended was the only that my dad and I did together. But I did a number of them after that for many years after with my family and my kids.

TM: Okay, fun. How did you meet the Marston's, what were your first recollections of them?

BW: They were friends of my dad's and I'm not sure how my dad and Ody Marston met. I strongly suspect that it was through the Sierra Club though because they were both active in the early days of the Sierra Club. There was a fellow named Francis Farquhar, he may have even been president of Sierra Club at one point.

TM: Yep.

BW: Later on, he was one of my sponsors in the Bohemian Club in San Francisco, but Ody and my dad certainly were acquainted back in the thirties and skied together. That's where I first remember meeting Garth, was on ski trips and up at the Clair Tappaan Lodge, the Sierra Club ski lodge. I would guess it was either through the Sierra Club or maybe they both belonged to the Olympic club. My dad belonged to the Olympic Club in San Francisco. Used to go there to swim and he'd have lunch there.

TM: Okay. Did your dad like swimming?

BW: He liked exercise. He wasn't a dedicated swimmer, but he liked to stay in shape.

TM: Okay. What do you remember about Francis Farquhar?

BW: I don't remember a whole lot about Francis Farquhar. I know that he was a CPA. He was a very nice guy. He spoke with sort of a Harvard accent. I think the last time I saw him was to go spend a little time with him at his camp at the Bohemian Grove. He acted as my sponsor, I'm sure, because he was a friend of my dad's. I mean he didn't really know me and I didn't really know him. But he was a nice guy. Very studious, sort of a fellow, you know. A great lover of the outdoors.

TM: Okay. Garth, then Garth would've been three or four years older than you? Your sister's age I suppose?

BW: Yeah, he was closer to my sister in age, maybe a little younger. But yeah, I remember I looked up to Garth. He was a much better skier than I was, course he was older. I think I mentioned to you one other time when we spoke, I remember there being a yodeling contest [laughing] at the Sierra Club ski lodge, and Garth won the yodeling contest. They gave him a pair of—I remember this to this day—they gave him a pair of metal ski poles. Well we had bamboo ski poles, I'd never seen a metal ski pole. They were blue and they were the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. He was a good skier and a good guy. But I didn't spend a lot of time with him until that summer of '42 on the river.

TM: Okay. You mentioned the Clair Tappaan Lodge. What do you remember about the lodge? This would've been in the thirties, late thirties into the early forties.

BW: I spent more time there in the forties than at any other time. My dad and his buddies, and that may have included Marston and Farquhar, I don't know, I really don't know. Certainly included another friend of his, Tom Rieger.

They apparently got a forest service lease of a piece of property there at Norden. Which is right up at Donner Summit. There was a train flag stop there and the train sheds that cross the Sierra. They used to go up and go skiing, I never did this, but they used to go up and go skiing in the thirties and sleep outside in their sleeping bags in the snow. They'd stay on that property and they'd ski over what is now the Sugar Bowl Ski Resort because that faced north and had the best snow. They'd cross the railroad tracks there, through the train sheds, and hike in on skis to the Sugar Bowl and ski there and come back. Sometimes they'd sleep in the train sheds if it was snowing hard. But in any event, when the Sierra Club wanted to build a lodge, they planned to build it further down the mountain in Colfax. Not Colfax, what's the name of that place? It'll come to me. It was further down the mountain, it was a lower altitude. So my dad and his friends said to the Sierra Club, "Look, you guys are crazy to build down there cause you won't have snow every winter. Why don't you put it up on this property?" I think that's how that Clair Tappaan Lodge got placed where it is. I presume it's still there, I haven't been there in years. My dad used to spend a week in the summers. He'd go up there when they were building the first edition of that lodge, of course there were a lot of additions made through the years. I think, the story that I recall—again, I wasn't there myself—is that he pulled the big beams up into place with his 1929 Packard.

TM: Wow!

BW: So, I think that's how that Clair Tappaan Lodge got placed where it is.

TM: Nice. Okay. Yeah, I stayed there probably ten years ago and there was discussion at the time about keeping it or not, whether the Club would sell it. I haven't followed that discussion since.

BW: Yeah, I haven't at all either.

TM: It has a great heritage, great amount of history there.

BW: We had a lot of fun there.

TM: Nice. What else—was there anything else that was an interesting story or a unique event that happened before that 1942 river trip?

BW: As far as the rivers were concerned, I remember my dad going off to go down the San Juan River with Norm Nevills and coming back really enthusiastic about it. I don't know how they connected. I have no idea how they connected.

TM: Francis.

BW: Somehow my dad went over there and they hiked around Monument Valley and they slept up on top of the, what is it? The Rainbow Bridge, or whatever they call it.

TM: Yeah.

BW: There's some sort of a rock formation that I've never been to, I've never seen.

TM: So this would've been a trip in May of 1942, organized by Francis Farquhar.

BW: Could've been.

TM: I think it actually might have been a Sierra Club trip. Your dad invited Otis, or talked to Otis about it, but there wasn't any room. For some reason Otis didn't go. But Francis is the guy who set your dad up for that.

BW: Okay, well that's interesting to me. I didn't know that, but I can just visualize that being the case.

TM: Okay. You mentioned your dad was excited when he came back. Do you remember anything he talked about the trip or said about it?

BW: Well, he was really impressed with the San Juan River and the amount of silt that it carried. Said it was just like a moving mud stream. But the water was, you know, it was fun and I think he really connected with Norm Nevills and just felt that he was onto something that was a real treat. He wanted to stay involved. He never went completely nuts over it. It was just something that he enjoyed and, of course, he worked me into it, which was very fortunate from my standpoint.

TM: How did he do that? Why bring his son? Why was that important?

BW: Well, to my knowledge, and again, my dad never talked to me about financial stuff and all that so I'm surmising, but it's an educated surmise because [chuckle] he must've said things that left strong impressions that I recall very strongly. So, my understanding—and I'm pretty darn sure it's accurate—is that Norm was trying to build a business and make a living taking people down the river. He was doing pretty well on the San Juan River but he'd successfully run the Colorado and he wanted to build that

business but people were afraid to go. It was kind of a scary thing. You heard tales about lives being lost, people going in there and never coming out the other end.

TM: Yeah!

BW: So he was struggling to get paying passengers. I never did have any idea how much he charged because that sort of thing wasn't discussed with me. My understanding is that my dad said, "Look Norm, I think if you take my son and maybe I can get Marston to bring his son, you'll get some good publicity out of this and people will be more comfortable about the hazards or the safety of going down a river." So, they made some sort of a deal. My belief is that I rode free. I couldn't prove that, but I think I rode free. My dad paid whatever the price was. I don't know whether Garth rode free or not. But, in any event, the two boys were included. From our fathers' standpoint we were probably included because our dads thought hey, this would be a wonderful trip for our kids, wonderful experience. From the business standpoint I think it was to generate publicity for Norm's business.

TM: Okay. This makes sense from what I've heard as well, is that your dad came back after the San Juan trip very excited and talked to Ody and said, "Hey, get your son, I'll get my son, and we'll do a father-son trip." Ody was a good swimmer and Garth was a good swimmer. Were you a good swimmer?

BW: Well I was a pretty good swimmer for a twelve/thirteen-year old. You know, a couple years later in high school I was on the water polo team. I don't think we ever won a game. I wasn't a really competitive swimmer, but I, yeah, I could stay afloat, that's for sure!

TM: Okay, okay. Well that's important! You liked it enough to go into water polo. You answered that question, which is good. Okay, so this is a journey you know nothing about. Your dad's going and Garth is going and Ody's going, and you know them all.

BW: Right.

TM: What kind of gear did you pack? Do you remember the kind of stuff you brought?

BW: Yeah, well, yeah. We had our sleeping bags. I had a sleeping bag that had been my dad's. It was the first mummy bag that I was ever aware of. I don't know whether he had it specially made years before, but I remember it tapered down. It was a nice sleeping bag and very light. We packed our gear. He went down... There was a sporting goods store on Market Street in San Francisco, Spiros, and he tried to buy little bags with drawstrings that were made of material that was somewhat waterproof. We didn't have the materials available, a lot of them hadn't been even developed yet, but also there was a war on and a lot of stuff was scarce. But I remember having a couple of tennis racket covers. You know, they're the shape of a tennis racket cover that was made of some material that was... It wasn't oil cloth, but it was something that kinda felt like that on the exterior. You could pull the little neck part that would normally go around the tennis racket handle, you could pull that pretty tight. We'd put stuff in things like that. I had another little...it wasn't canvas, it was just some sort of...not completely water proof, but like an oil cloth type of bags we had stuff in. But you know, we didn't take much stuff. We had a swimming suit, pair of jeans, and a shirt. Couple of shirts maybe and not a hell of a lot else. We were wet the whole time during the day on the boat so it didn't make any difference.

TM: Had you been east before? Had you taken the train over to Kingman and up to Flagstaff? Had you been out into that country before?

BW: I'd never been in that country before. The only long train trip I'd ever had was in 1938. Dad and mom took my sister and me to Europe. We took the train across the United States to New York and then took an Italian ship to Europe. That was just before World War II began. In fact, Austria had already fallen. But he wanted us to see Europe before what he was sure was going to be a history changing conflict.

TM: Wow!

BW: So we spent that summer. Going across the country on the train I remember... This really has nothing to do with the river trip but I do remember... How old was I then? 1938 I was eight or nine. He gave me all the train tickets, which came in a long string. They were like tickets to the carnival or something. They were these little tickets all in a long string. He gave them to me and he said, "Don't lose these tickets, they're your responsibility." I had an upper berth and I put them inside my shoe and I wore my shoe to bed in the upper berth so that I wouldn't lose our tickets! [Laughing]

TM: Wow.

BW: So, I'd been on a train before, but yes, getting back to business, we took the train...

TM: Uh, Bruce? Hang on. Before we get back to business, what do you remember about Europe in 1938, as an eight or nine year old?

BW: Well, I remember in Austria these huge swastika flags hanging from every flag pole. Pictures of Adolf Hitler staring off into the...looking forward into the world. I remember my dad said, "Don't refer to him as Hitler. If you want to talk about Hitler, call him Mr. Schultz." Because you don't know who's listening. So we would talk about 'Mr. Schultz' when we wanted to laugh at him or disparage him. I remember [laughing]—this is sort of a funny story—the zipper on my dad's fly broke. So he's [laughing] walking around holding a map in front of his trousers and he wanted to find somebody that would fix his pants.

TM: [laughing] Oh gosh.

BW: There was a Jewish tailor shop, and I'm not sure if this was in Vienna or whether it was in Munich or where it was, but it was in Germany. This Jewish tailor shop had a sign on it, of course, proclaiming that the owner was Jewish, don't do business here. So he made a beeline for that place to give the guy some business and got his zipper fixed. I remember we all got a big laugh out of that. He was big on having these experiences. We also were on the last Matson line trip out into the Pacific in 1941. We took the last cruise. We went to Honolulu and then Samoa and then Tahiti. That was in May or June of 1941. That was just before World War II as well, before the Pacific war.

TM: So, these were some pretty expansive traveling trips for a young man and I think that would serve you well in the Arizona wilderness on a boat.

BW: Oh yeah! There's no question. The sense of doing things that other people weren't doing, that was what we were all about.

TM: Wow. Fun.

BW: My dad never did it with the sense of showing off or trying to be number one and having accomplished something. That sort of thing wasn't important at all.

TM: Was he trying to just give you and your sister a well-rounded understanding of the world, do you think?

BW: Oh yeah! I think definitely! Before we'd go on these trips he'd always put a map of the area we were going to visit, he'd put a map on the wall by the toilet! [laughing]

TM: Okay! Great!

BW: By the time we got to where we were going we were pretty familiar with it, [laughing] acquainted with the geography.

TM: Neat! Good idea. Okay, so did you take the train out of San Francisco or did you guys drive to Los Angeles? How did that work? That getting to and back the river back then?

BW: I believe that we took the train to L.A. and then did another train out of L.A. to Flagstaff. I'm sure we didn't drive. Nobody had gas, you know gas was rationed.

TM: You would have arrived in Flagstaff in the middle of the night and then switched to a bus that was heading north and when the sun came up, you would've been on the back side of Mars. The country would've looked very different from anything Berkeley had to offer. Do you remember any first impressions about that country?

BW: Well, I remember ending up there in Lees Ferry and we rolled our sleeping bags out. Spent the following night there before we took off the next morning. And yeah, it was a lot of rocks [laughing]. The trees were not as big as the trees we had in California. It was different than anything I'd seen, but I had seen pictures of the Grand Canyon and that sort of thing. I wasn't in shock over it, but it was different.

TM: Do you remember piling into the, was it a Chevy sedan, with a boat stuck on the back of it on a trailer going down to the river? Do you recall any of that?

BW: I do not recall in that detail. I do recall the sense of it being real early in the morning when we got off that bus, but I don't recall exactly where we got off the bus and I don't recall exactly how we got down to Lees Ferry.

TM: Okay. On that river trip, certainly, was the people rowing the boats. There was Norm Nevills and Preston Walker and Wayne McConkie. And then the passengers were you and your dad, and Ody and Garth. Did Garth have a nickname or was he just Garth?

BW: He was just Garth, as I recall. Yeah.

TM: And then there were two more Eds. Ed Hudson, the pharmacist, and Ed Olsen, the camera guy.

BW: Right.

TM: I think that was it.

BW: That was it.

TM: So, take it away! What do you remember about that? Then what happened?

BW: Well I remember we got assigned to boats. I think part of it was based on how much we weighed and how much stuff the boat already had stowed in it. But also part of it was probably—and again I can

only surmise this—probably Norm wanted to keep my dad and me on the same boat, which he did. So my dad and I were assigned to the Wen, which was Norm Nevills the boat that he was rowing. Garth rode in the cockpit, in the pointy end. My dad and I rode out on the deck, that square stern that went first through the rapids. Of course, the deck had these lines that were...how do I describe it? They were placed across the decks very close. You could just get your fingers and toes under these rope lines so that you could hang on when you were going through the rapids. You just rode on the plywood decking and that was home.

TM: There was a hatch that went through that deck. Did you have a hard time making friends with that hatch?

BW: You should've wrapped yourself around the hatch! It had a handle and that would dig into you and so there were some edges that would dig into you. Again, it was so much fun! I mean, in between the rapids you just float, it was so serene. Then you could hear this roar, it was like a bunch of freight trains around the corner and you knew that there was a rapid coming up. The anticipation would grow until you came around the bend. Usually, if it was any kind of a rapid, we would pull over to the side, while Norm would get out and give a great study.

TM: Talk about that. And he was smoking sort of a...

BW: Kool cigarettes.

TM: Kools, okay.

BW: He smoked Kools. He was really hooked on the Kools. Yeah, he'd smoke the cigarettes and study the river.

TM: Was he a chain smoker?

BW: I wouldn't say a chain smoker, but he was certainly a pack or more a day smoker. You know, he couldn't smoke too much when he was in the boat. Although as I recall he'd have a cigarette between his lips while we were just kind of floating between the rapids.

TM: Okay. Then scouting, he would spend some time looking over the rapids?

BW: He'd look over the rapids. He'd talk it over with Pres Walker, he'd talk it over with Wayne McConkie. They'd try and figure out which way they were gonna run the rapid. I'm sure that Ody and my dad and everybody else chipped in, too, with their two cents worth. I certainly didn't have much to contribute, but I was there, part of the gang. It was great.

TM: Nice. Then the first night's camp, what do you remember about that?

BW: Well, I remember the sand was blowing but that became something that you just got used to. There was sand in everything. There was sand in your food, there was sand in your sleeping bag. You sorta had the attitude of 'what the hell'? That's just the way it is and that was part of the fun. We kinda laughed at it, really.

TM: Were there lots of sandy beaches here and there?

BW: Yeah, almost every place where the river takes a bend there would be a build up of sand. Usually those beaches also would catch a lot of driftwood. There'd be huge, HUGE piles of driftwood on the

sand bars. My recollection is that they were about the same size as they used to have at Stanford before the big game. They'd have a bonfire rally before the big football game. These things were huge, huge. I don't know how many cords of wood they had. We often just lit them off and let the fire burn and saw the beautiful sight of the lights against the canyon walls from these fires. I suppose now the environmentalists would say that was a terrible thing to do. Maybe it was a terrible thing to do, but it was what we did.

TM: Did you burn any piles of wood while you were traveling during the day? You'd come upon a big pile and say, 'come on, let's light it up' and then head on downstream?

BW: I don't recall doing that. I recall doing that at night.

TM: Okay, alright. There is some film footage of you and Garth and a couple of the other guys sitting on a giant log in the water on the second day or so. Do you remember that at all?

BW: I vaguely remember that. I can't give you any details. Obviously it was a big old tree that was floating down the river and we climbed on it, took a little ride.

TM: I was amazed the four of you, four adult men, basically, sitting on this log, dry. I mean, the log was big enough that you all could sit on it without getting your feet wet. [laughing] The bathroom was just a roll of toilet paper around the corner.

BW: [laughing] That's exactly right. That's exactly right. I remember, it must've been years later, on the Snake and Salmon River trip that Pres Walker was talking about when he fought on the battle of Kasserine Pass in North Africa. He said the worst thing about that desert campaign in WWII was they got ahead of the toilet paper supply. He said the troops were struggling to find a round, smooth stone. Was all they had. [laughing] But anyway, back to work.

TM: Yeah! So, lots of sand, lots of driftwood, lots of water. Was it raining? Did it rain on you guys?

BW: Yeah, we had rain showers. I mean, generally the weather was—cause you know, cause you live in that area—but it was hot. It was 110, 115, maybe sometimes hotter than that, degrees. There would be thundershowers that would sprinkle a little rain on us and it felt good. It never seemed to bother anybody when it rained. It was just part of the scene.

TM: Yeah. Did you get in the water to cool off at all?

BW: Oh yes! When we were going down between rapids, why, you could get out off the boat and hang onto the edge and be dragged along. Or when we were camped on a sand bar right, we'd get in it and be in the water. The water, of course, was very warm. I'm told that now that water is much colder because they built the Glen Canyon Dam. The amount of silt and the temperature of the water has been changed as a result of that.

TM: Greatly.

BW: But the water was warm almost like soup. It was very, very filled with sand. We took a bucket once and let the sand settle, let the silt settle, and it was close to thirty/forty percent sand.

TM: Wow! Did you go to the water to escape the heat?

BW: Yeah. Yeah, we stayed wet. That's how you stayed comfortable.

TM: Got it. Okay.

BW: It was good to be wet.

TM: And the river was silty. I'm sorry, I interrupted, the bucket was a third full of dirt once it had settled out. Do you remember then Nankoweap. There was a clear, running stream there. Big, wide open area with a Indian ruin, way up on the hillside. You'd hike up there.

BW: Yep, that was a beautiful spot. Was Nankoweap where there was a waterfall? I'm trying to remember, I'd have to look at my own journal to refresh my mind.

TM: There was a stream there. Big, wide, open valley, but not a big waterfall. Deer Creek had the giant waterfall. Hundred-foot high, powerful, beat you up there when you go try to get in the water.

BW: Right. Yeah, I remember that.

TM: That's after Phantom Ranch and that's after the flip, Wayne McConkie and Ed Hudson's flip in their boat. So, we'll get there, but not quite yet. [laughing] So, Nankoweap, big fires on the beach in the evening at the driftwood piles.

BW: Yep.

TM: So, let's go to the Little Colorado River. Would've been a side canyon coming in on the left. I think it was muddy maybe when you were there, or I'm not sure if you guys spent a lot of time there.

BW: I don't recall that we spent a lot of time there. I do recall that it was another silt carrier coming in on the left, yeah, on the port side.

TM: During the monsoon season that makes perfect sense it's carrying a lot of silt, then, in there. Then, not too far downstream from there, Wayne McConkie rolled his boat over. What happened there?

BW: Well, it happened very quickly. My dad and I and Norm had come down. I guess Garth was in the boat. We'd come down first through the rapid. My dad was looking upstream and Norm...I don't know which way Norm was looking. Normally he was watching the other boats come through very carefully. But anyway, I remember my dad saying in a very calm voice, which was typical of him, my dad saying, "They're over, they're over." Or something, words to that effect. "They're over, Norm." Well what he was saying is that the boat had gone over and finally Norm realized what happened. Here came the boat and at first we couldn't see any people. One of the passengers was on the other side of the boat hanging on, was fine. The other one was under the boat but up in the air compartment of the cockpit. I can't remember which was who and who was which. But, they both got out of there and came through fine. A whole lot of excitement that day. I would say it was more excitement than terror. There was no panic, it was just, again, it was part of a 'whoops! Here we go!' thing and everybody kinda laughed it off. Maybe the guys who got dunked didn't laugh though. [laughing] Nobody else seemed to take too much measure of it.

TM: Did you have any gear in that boat that got wet or your stuff was in the Wen?

BW: My stuff was in the Wen. In some of the material that you sent, there was some discussion about stuff getting wet, the boats leaking and that sort of thing. I don't recall having a problem with our gear. Stuff did get wet, but who cared?

TM: Right. You cared if you had a camera.

BW: Well that's true. My dad had an Argus camera. I thought that was a pretty neat thing. He was never much of a cameraman, but he was taking a picture and he was standing on the deck of the Wen. I don't know whether somebody suggested 'step back a little further'. [Laughing] Anyway, he went in with the camera. Eventually he gave the camera to me and I was thrilled to get that camera. I've still got the box that camera came in. It was sort of a blue, velvet covered box. I have a collection of old badges and things in it. I don't know where we started this sentence.

TM: Well, we were talking about water and things getting wet and your dad's camera and then him falling off the boat. So, the boat flip there was no big deal. I mean, it was just like turn the boat back over and get back to it, then that was that.

BW: Pretty much, that was that.

TM: Was Wayne a little upset about that or was he, 'okay, fine, no problem'? What do you remember about Wayne McConkie?

BW: What I remember about Wayne is that he was a quiet guy and he stayed to himself a little bit more than most of the people were together. He was a very good Mormon and he wore his long underwear the whole time. I remember that. I guess he didn't show his body. He was just the nicest guy. He was always very good to me. He took me fishing one day somewhere along the line. What can I say? I was not aware of the fact that he was nervous, but reading some of the materials that have been written about the trip later on, I realized that he was new at this and his hands had a lot of blisters on them. He maybe wondered whether he'd gotten a little bit over his head. But I was not conscious of that as a twelve/thirteen year old at all. I just thought he was Wayne McConkie from Moab, Utah and he could handle those big oars.

TM: Nice. It sounds like just every other river runner that's still out there today. A little unsure, a little nervous. So, the big rapids above Phantom Ranch, does any of that ring a bell? Anything else happen in that area?

BW: Yeah, was a Sockdolager rapid up above Phantom Ranch? I think it was.

TM: Yeah, that's right.

BW: I remember coming through the Sockdolager Rapid and just the name of it was exciting. Sockdolager. You could hear that thing roaring before we got there. I did get to run the rapid in the boat and it was... My dad and I would sing while we're going through the rapids. We'd sing songs. There was one song, *Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me*, that was a popular song in 1942. We'd sing that and we'd sing I don't know what else. But water would crash over you and it was just great. [Laughing] It was so much fun. I can't describe it.

TM: Fun. Then you got to Phantom Ranch, this oasis in the desert. What do you remember about that?

BW: Well, I don't remember much about the physical setup there, except that it was a really pleasant break. They had a swimming pool, and of course as a kid that was really fun. You could jump in the swimming pool. The people were especially nice to me. My mother had sent the makings for a birthday cake. I think it was a devil's food cake, which was my favorite. So they had a birthday cake for me.

TM: Nice.

BW: The park superintendent and his wife came all the way down there from the rim, from the South Rim, and had a meal with us and were very, very kind. I think they maybe... Some of those people took a little ride with us as we left Phantom Ranch down the river a little bit to a spot where they could get out and still hike out.

TM: Right.

BW: So, it was a nice break. I don't remember having a telephone conversation or anything with my mother, but it seems to me that when the boat went over, somebody could see that episode from the rim. There was a place up on the rim that had a telescope and they could see the river at that point.

TM: That's right.

BW: Somebody, I think it was a United Press reporter, phoned my mother and said, "We understand there's been an accident on the river and one of the boats had turned over. It looked pretty bad." I guess she was under the impression that maybe we were lost souls down there. Somehow, I'm sure that she was glad to hear when we got to Phantom Ranch, but I don't remember any telephone conversation or anything. I don't even know if there was such a thing.

TM: There was, they did have a phone and that was the typical thing to do. But you're right, the press had seen that flip and they were concerned about it.

BW: Yeah, I think she was pretty worried, cause she had no idea what this trip was all about. [Laughing] She had just, you know, she worshipped my father and everything he wanted to do was fine with her. But she didn't have a clue. She'd thought probably that it was like going down the Mississippi in a river boat or something.

TM: Yeah, a little different than that.

BW: Yeah, it was a little different than that.

TM: So then below Phantom, more rapids, more water. What do you remember now about Pres Walker?

BW: Well, I just thought he was a great guy. He was just a super guy. I was vaguely aware that he had a problem of some kind. He did have a drinking problem, but I was only vaguely aware of there being such a thing as a drinking problem at that age. But, he just seemed to be able to handle himself on the river and he was... You know, I just thought he was a great guy. And I think he was. I think I was right.

TM: Yeah. You've mentioned a story he told about his service in World War II. Do you remember any other tales that he told about that time?

BW: No, I don't. He must've had those experiences after that 1942 trip.

TM: Oh, that's right! I'm sorry.

BW: I must've heard those stories from him when we were on the Snake and the Salmon, cause I think that '42 must've been before he went in the Army. I may be wrong.

TM: No, you're exactly right. I'm wrong on that. You're exactly right, it's between 1942 and 1946. He went into the service right after your 1942 trip.

BW: Yeah. I knew that he'd gone to the Menlo School, which is down, right next to Stanford University. That his dad had the newspaper in Grand Junction. Anyway, he just was a good guy, he was a really good guy.

TM: Nice. What do you remember about Ed Hudson? The druggist from Paso Robles.

BW: He was a big man. You mentioned he's from Paso Robles. My memory is that he was from Banning. Maybe I'm wrong or maybe he had a drugstore in Banning and then retired to Paso Robles later on, I just don't know.

TM: Yeah, I'll have to check. He could've been from Banning at the time. Okay.

BW: Yeah, you might check, cause Banning is sort of the eastern side of California and not too far from the lower Colorado River. I think that he spent time on the lower Colorado below Lake Mead.

TM: That's right.

BW: He had a drugstore with a soda fountain, I recall him telling about that. He invited me to come any time to his soda fountain at Banning and ask for a Sockdolager sundae and he'd give me the biggest ice cream sundae that anyone could ever have. [Laughing] I'm still drooling with that thought. I never got there. [TM laughing] I would love to go have a Sockdolager sundae with Ed Hudson. He was a very nice guy, very friendly. I don't know whether avuncular would be the right description, but he was a very nice guy. He'd also gotten hooked on the Colorado River. I guess after that trip he spent a lot more time trying to run boats up the river, as Ody was trying to do.

TM: I'd like to ask you about that. Otis Marston, in 1950, sort of pondered the 1942 river trip who amongst those people would actually build a boat, a motorboat, and drive it through Grand Canyon. He thought that Ed Hudson was the last person he would think of who would do that out of that group in 1942. Does that kind of fit your recollections?

BW: Yeah, I think he had... First of all, trying to do something like that must have been expensive and you don't think of a guy who owns a small-town drugstore as being in a position to spend big sums of money on something like that. On the other hand, Ed obviously loved playing in that river. When people really love to do something, they find a way to do it. So, you know, I'm not terribly surprised that he continued and got deeply involved in trying to come upriver and all that sort of thing.

TM: Okay. Yeah, it was an interesting observation from Ody.

BW: Yeah, he was a small-town drugstore owner, he wasn't...I don't know how to describe it, he was just a nice man. Just a great big, jovial, nice man. But, I guess this is what he wanted to do.

TM: Did you learn anything new that you didn't know about Otis Marston on that trip?

BW: Well, I always thought of Otis as being a rather serious guy, but always very nice to me. We always got along fine. He was true to form all the way through. He was very intent on whatever he wanted to do. He had a sense of humor, but he was also a serious guy. He had very strong convictions.

TM: How so?

BW: He had strong likes and dislikes. Again, he and I weren't in a position, at my age as a little kid, to be exchanging deep ideas with each other, that's for sure. But I stayed in touch with him in the Bohemian Club until it must've been in the 1980s. He had strong opinions and I didn't... He had strong opinions about Norm Nevills that I wasn't really all that aware of when we were on the trip.

TM: Right. I don't think he was either. [Laughing]

BW: Maybe he wasn't.

TM: In 1942. [Laughing]

BW: Yeah, but I think as the years went by, Ody felt, I believe, that Norm was too cautious and didn't line rapids when he could've run them, that sort of thing. I never really agreed with that because I always felt that Norm's purpose for being on the river wasn't just for recreation. He was trying to feed his family and he was trying to build a business. I respected that he wasn't going to be able to do that successfully if he had a bunch of drowned passengers. [Laughing]

TM: Right. That's right.

BW: I never really debated that with Ody. Maybe a little bit I debated it with Garth. That last time I saw Garth, I think I told you, when somebody else was interviewing both of us. Garth was talking about the same way his dad would maybe have talked about things like this, and we disagreed.

TM: As normal people can.

BW: Yes, as normal people can. We're still good friends.

TM: Yeah, well what do you remember then about Norm on that river trip?

BW: Well, he was the boss and he was our leader. He was our cook. Pres did some of the cooking, but Norm was essentially the cook. I think in an earlier conversation I told you how Norm, he loved mashed potatoes. He had to have mashed potatoes every night. Of course, by the end of three weeks, the potatoes were growing sprouts. [Laughing] A couple of them had gotten a little bit wet in the boats, but that was alright. We had mashed potatoes every night. Norm would do the mashing. He would put that pot between his knees, or he'd put it on a rock or something, and he'd start beating with the potato masher. One leg would start jumping up and down, his knee would be pumping in rhythm with him mashing the potatoes. It'd be a sight to see. There'd be sand getting in them and pieces of wood chips and [laughing] everything else, it didn't matter. We had mashed potatoes and they tasted pretty good. [TM Laughing] It was great. I'll never forget that. I remember the way he handled those big oars always impressed me. He wasn't a big man. He handled those oars, weighed a ton. He could really handle that boat. Quite a guy.

TM: So there was some kind of fooling around on the trip that got filmed between you and Garth. I think Garth is tickling your toe and you're trying to sleep, and then you kinda come up with a start and start chucking rocks at him. Do you remember that? Was that all staged? Was some of this stuff just staged out to show...

BW: I don't believe it was staged. [TM laughing] I don't really remember that particular thing.

TM: Okay.

BW: But I don't think it was staged. The only thing I remember vaguely, and its very vaguely, but I do remember vaguely that we tried to stage something where Garth and I were in the boat and, I don't know, people were hanging on the other side making sure that we wouldn't go astray or something.

TM: Yeah, he's rowing and you're sitting behind him kinda giving him directions, kinda looking downstream, and the boat's kinda cruising along?

BW: Yeah, something like that. I vaguely remember that.

TM: There's another one where Garth throws a bunch of cans up the beach and there's a film of him throwing the cans. And then there's a film of you just sitting there just casually catching these cans, just like 'nothing unusual about this here', you know, 'move along'. It's a great little clip.

BW: [Laughing] I don't remember that. I don't remember that. It was a long time ago!

TM: [Laughing] 1942!

BW: 1942! [Laughing] Oh boy. But we had fun, I mean, it was a fun trip. It wasn't something like an ordeal that we forced ourselves through to go down the Colorado River and run the rapids. It was just a really fun trip.

TM: Yeah. I think everybody felt that way. There's a couple more things I wanna ask you about here as we get kinda close to starting to wrap this up. One is the camp at Bridge Canyon. There was a dam site there. Bureau of Reclamation was doing drilling and looking for a dam site potential there. I think you guys stopped there and got some food. What do you remember about that place?

BW: I remember eating. Dining in... They had chairs and you sat down at a table. It might've had a tent, it might've been in a tent. A big tent. I'm not sure about that.

TM: I think that's right.

BW: They had really good food. I guess you don't send people out on that sort of a job without having a cook and supplies to feed them. So that was a real meal that we had and it really tasted good. I think they had cold lemonade. Oh man, that tasted good. That was a treat.

TM: Then the other thing I wanted to ask you about was the initiation at Diamond Creek. What do you remember about that?

BW: I remember getting whacked pretty good. I think that maybe Pres or some of the guys had been a little annoyed by the fact that here was a thirteen-year old kid that wasn't really carrying his own weight when it came to lining the boats over the rapids that we did not run. They didn't let me partake in that work because they thought it was too dangerous for me. I probably wasn't strong enough to be any good anyway. So, I would take a nap or something and everybody else was working their butts off. So, there maybe have been a bit of little feeling there that here's a chance to even that up a little bit. So, I got a pretty good whack, but again it was a fun time. It was a great experience. I was a member of the Colorado River Rat Society and I was really proud of that. Still am!

TM: Nice. Very good.

BW: I think Pres took a really good whack at Olsen. I don't know any stories/any gossip about that, but maybe there was a little tension between them from time to time.

TM: There was, yeah Doc talked about that. Hey, if you're on your hands and knees with your rear end in the air and someone else is gonna hit your rear end with an oar, they can let you have it if they really want to.

BW: Yeah, I think he gave him a really good crack. I never really felt that I knew Ed Olsen all that well. I don't recall spending any time with him at all on that trip. He's probably a really nice guy. Probably a really good guy.

TM: He was busy filming.

BW: He was busy filming. He was busy filming and he was in the third boat and I was in the first boat. I was probably just sort of a pain in the butt kid on the trip, you know? Anyway.

TM: So, this is probably a good place to wrap up this part one oral history. Before we finish the interview and turn the machine off, I'm wondering if there's anything else about this 1942 Grand Canyon river trip that you would like to mention as well.

BW: Well, I think I would like to mention the trip across Lake Mead. It was an all-night affair. We were towed by Harry Aleson and I mean, that's a big body of water. I remember Norm saying that when Buzz Holmstrom... I think that was his name.

TM: Yes, that's right.

BW: ...went down by himself, made a single guy's trip down there, he hadn't made any arrangements to be picked up. He was out there on Lake Mead trying to get to some civilization. If anybody came by on a bigger ship he'd wave and they just thought he was waving to them. [Laughing]

TM: That's right.

BW: It was pretty stressful.

TM: Yeah. What do you remember about Harry?

BW: Oh, I remember Harry had a little mustache and he had that big power boat. He wanted to go upstream. We watched him buck at the rapids down there at the foot of the/at the entry to Lake Mead. He made a run at it, he would get up, the engine would roar and the engine would roar, and nothing. [TM laughing] He wouldn't make it. But he seemed like a nice guy.

TM: And he piloted you guys across the lake there in the dark?

BW: Yeah, it was dark. He towed the boats and got us over to Las Vegas. Boulder City I guess it is.

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

BW: Yeah, and then we took an airplane home. That was big stuff. That was the first time I'd ever been in a plane when we flew home.

TM: That would've been a TWA.

BW: I guess so. I don't remember the airline, but it probably was TWA and it was a surprise to me. I didn't know that we were going to do that, so that was a big deal.

TM: Wow, first flight.

BW: Yep, first flight. The whole trip was a great adventure.

TM: When you went back to school in the fall in 1942, and somebody said 'what did you do on your summer vacation?'. Wow.

BW: [Laughing] I had some stories to tell.

TM: You did.

BW: You know, I don't remember talking about it a whole lot. People didn't know about the Colorado River. It didn't mean anything to any of the people I knew and I went to school with. So, you know, they weren't all that interested. [Laughing]

TM: Wow, interesting. Well, I have a ton of questions for you, for the next interview, which will be part two. It sounds like, let's go ahead and we'll wrap this interview up here.

BW: Okay.

TM: This is the end of Part One, Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Bruce Wilson. My name is Tom Martin and today is Thursday. It's the third of January, 2019 and that completes Part One.