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**Interviewee:** Donna Gebler (DG)

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin (TM)

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TM: Today is Tuesday, April 6, 2021. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Donna Gebler. My name is Tom Martin. Good morning, Donna. How are you today?

DG: I'm well, thank you.

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

DG: Yes, you do.

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

DG: 1933.

TM: Do you recall how your mom met your dad?

DG: At high school.

TM: Okay.

DG: Granite High School in Salt Lake City, Utah.

TM: Okay. And what were they, so, so they were at high school. What were their folks doing in Salt Lake City. Do you recall?

DG: My father's family lived in the East Millcreek area and had lived there for third (?) generation. His father worked for the post office. His mother was at home. My mother's father was a mortician. They lived on State Street in Salt Lake City.

TM: Okay. Were they also many generations there at Salt Lake?

DG: My mother was a Horne and many generations in Utah since about 1850.

TM: Okay. Wow. Okay, so pioneers there.

DG: Yes.

TM: Okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

DG: I had. I was the oldest, I had a sister and a brother.

TM: Okay. And did you grow up there in Salt Lake City?

DG: I did, in the East Millcreek area of Salt Lake City, which, when I was a child was rather rural. There were cherry orchards, apple orchards, hay fields around. And I was related to probably everyone that lived within at least a one mile radius of me.

TM: So everybody knew who you were.

DG: Absolutely. Couldn't get away with anything.

TM: I'm not familiar with Salt Lake City that well. From the center of downtown, where is East Millcreek?

DG: Well, it would have been in the county, not within the city limits at that time.

TM: North, south, east, west of town?

DG: It lived (?) in east and south.

TM: Okay, so over by the foothills then.

DG: Yes, yes, yes.

TM: Nice. And where did you go to school?

DG: Well, Sherman Elementary School, and then Olympus Junior High School and then Granite High School where my parents went.

TM: Oh my gosh. Huh. Nice. When you were growing up, did your parents go on vacations? Certainly not during the war years when you were in your, well, when you were 8, 9, 10, 11.

DG: No, it was it was unheard of to go on vacation or do anything other than go to a family reunion that might be in the Provo area, which would have been south of Salt Lake City. I mean, that might have been as far as we would go. Or maybe as far north as a town called Tremonton or Ogden that area. Which would have been north of Salt Lake City. No, no vacations.

TM: Did you get out and about where you were, you know (?) where you're up in the hills hiking around or were you (?) pretty much, you know, sort of doing the traditional, you know, I guess - gender, gender bias here - sort of girl in quotes type things, or were you more of a tomboy and out and about?

DG: I was not a tomboy, but we were very free to roam around the countryside. And actually, it was not hilly where we were. It was just plain old ordinary farm country basically. No sidewalks, some paved streets. But we were free to roam around. In fact, most people know the sego lily is the state flower for the state of Utah. Not far from where I lived was what was called The Gully area, which, if you're familiar with the Utah area, it goes up into a place called Parley's Canyon. But that wasn't terribly far from us. And we used to roam around. I've come home with sego

lilies for my mother, and she would be she would be aghast because I had picked the state flower which was a big no no (?). We don't see them now, but they were very common when I was a child. But it was, but we had chores. We had fruit trees and garden, we had to weed the garden, and during the war years, we had rabbits, had to dig dandelions to feed the rabbits. That kind of thing. And we walked everywhere, as children was unheard of to be given a ride to anything.

TM: Interesting. Okay. All right. And how school, how far would your school be from your house?

DG: Let's see. Elementary School was probably a mile but I walked to school. And later when high school and then there was school bus, but we would walk to this school bus pickup point, which would be a couple of blocks.

TM: Okay. What did your father do?

DG: He was basically a gardener, landscape gardener.

TM: Okay, of course, he would have kept the fruit trees going and orchard and whatnot.

DG: Oh, yes.

TM: How many trees did you have, do you remember?

DG: We had pear trees, and peach trees and one plum tree and one apricot tree and two cherry trees. So it wasn't really an orchard, it was a half an acre. So there was fruit trees and the vegetable garden.

TM: But I would imagine when all that fruit came in, it was a big deal.

DG: It was, it was and my father was highly allergic to fruit. Yes, but he wouldn't even eat fruit flavored jello. But he would pick the peaches for mother. Now, during my growing up years, my mother always worked. And so my father would pick like the peaches and we children we have chores and responsibilities from a very young age. And we would have washed the bottles and I remember many an evening sitting on the porch, either shelling peas or peeling peaches and then mother would can in the night and of course get up in the morning and go to her office job.

TM: Okay, and where did she work?

DG: In downtown Salt Lake City. She worked for a government office that I don't really remember.

TM: Okay. All right.

DG: Sort of secretarial type thing.

TM: What were you good at in school?

DG: Oh, everything. I was the model person. I was - well, that sounds a little egotistical. But I was just a good obedient student.

TM: Okay.

DG: Probably too conscientious.

TM: Well, that's good in a way you are good at everything. Then I'll regroup that and say what did you like, what interested you?

DG: Reading, reading. I remember in the first grade, I was reading what they now call chapter books. Hardcover (?) books. One time my parents gave me a stack of books for Christmas, course it would have been a Santa Claus thing. And they were rather dismayed that I read them all very quickly.

TM: Oh, my. Okay, so you were fast reader.

DG: I was, I was a reader. I used to take... We had good bus service where I lived and we, I could take the bus into the closest library, which would be in a part of Salt Lake City called Sugar House. And I would go in the library and I would find the thickest books I could find and bring them home. And I'm sure I read many things that I didn't understand.

TM: Okay. But did that introduce you to the world? You know, reading can do that, it can introduce you to a lot of things outside of, you know, your local community where everyone knows you.

DG: Well, I don't remember that so much. I'm not sure Nancy Drew mysteries would do that or Tom Sawyer or Little Women. But what it did lead to as I was able to - when I graduated from high school - go to college. So I was the first person in my family of origin to have a college education.

TM: Is that something you wanted to do, or your parents want you to do, or both.

DG: That's what I wanted to do. And along with that, in the fourth grade, we were all tested for our music ability. And my sister and I were told we could learn to play the violin. So we did, so I studied violin all through college. So I had that, and my mother sacrificed to buy me my own instrument. And I would get on the bus and go to my music lesson and come home on the bus. For my music lesson. I remember one time. This was in March, and we'd had an unusually hard winter. And I had taken the bus to the bus stop, and then I had to walk on the snow had been crusted (?). And it hadn't been plowed on the little roads that would come down to where I lived. And I remember, and the snow was piled up against the fence lines and I remember walking over the snow with violin in hand to get back home. I'm not sure my family appreciated all those 5 am practice sessions.

TM: The wakeup, the wakeup rooster was the violin. My, my. Did you like the violin? Did you like music?

DG: Oh, very much. In fact, I started out as a music major in college.

TM: Oh wow, okay. Where did you go to college?

DG: University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

TM: Okay.

DG: I have both a masters, have both a bachelor's and a master's degree from there.

TM: Both in music?

DG: No, I changed my major in bachelor time and to child development. And then the master's degree was in widowhood in social work. I was a licensed clinical social worker.

TM: Had you been outside of Utah? By the time you went to college?

DG: No, no.

TM: Okay. What else about your early childhood do you recall with wonderment or with joy?

DG: With wonderment or joy... I just remember a lot of hard work and rules.

DG: I think reading the books, and the fact that we were free to do what we wanted to do. We were much freer than today's children are.

TM: It's funny. I mean, there was a lot of hard work and yet there was free time.

DG: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

TM: When you had, when you had free time, then would you, would you typically pick up a book? Or would you pick up the violin? Or would you walk or play with friends? How did that... what did you do?

DG: Well, there were lots of cousins around and we would play kick the can in the street. I was not necessarily athletic. We would roller skate. I had a bicycle, a two wheel bicycle. When I was in junior high school, we would of course have the bicycles. We had friends. I had a cousin who lived across the street that had the most wonderful paper dolls based on *Gone with the Wind*. And her father was in the sheriff's office and he taught us to play poker. And of course, we had dolls and we'd make doll clothes. So actually, in a way it was a rather idyllic childhood although it was not a privileged childhood. We weren't a family of means in any way. But our meet needs (?) we had the most wonderful Easter baskets, always had a lovely birthday party, course my birthday was always celebrated at a family reunion because it's around the Fourth of July. Nevertheless, we were well cared for and we didn't lack for things.

TM: Did you, did you connect with any of your other cousins or neighbors that were musicians? Did you, you know, form a little group at all and play?

DG: No, my sister and I used to play duets. But they would be mostly at church things, or little recitals that our music teacher would have. No, no.

TM: So it would have been in the early 50s, then that you started to college or throughout the first half of the 1950s. Did you did you start doing any travel? Tell me about your first traveling trip outside of Utah.

DG: My first traveling trip outside of Utah was after I graduated from college, and it was in the late summer of 1955. And a romantic thing had sort of gone by the by, and I had an aunt and uncle who lived in Arlington, Virginia who were visiting in Utah, because they would come home

to Utah to their family of origin place. And they said to me, with what you've learned in college, and what you can do, come with us east and get a job, and you'll get a great job and the district, and so on and so forth. So I decided to do that. So I went with them to Arlington, Virginia. Well, I get there. And a friend said, Oh, I want to come and do that, too. So, a few. We ended up renting an apartment in the District of Columbia. And so kind of doing the career girl thing. I think there were three of us in the apartment at that time. That was my first time out of the state of Utah, actually out of the Greater Wasatch Front area of Utah.

TM: So how did you get to Arlington, Virginia from Salt Lake City?

DG: With my aunt and uncle and then their family. They drove there.

TM: Did they drive you back?

DG: Yes. I went with them.

TM: Okay. What were your thoughts as you drove across America? I would assume this is like all new to you.

DG: Well, actually, I have to back up because I had been out of the state of Utah. When I was about 12 years old. I went with my Grandma and Grandpa Horne to Washington, DC. So I've almost been lying (?) to you. Just remember that, just remember, I'm 87. But when I was about 12, I went with my grandma and grandpa to Washington, DC where they went to visit their children. They had two sons in the area. And so I had done a cross country motor trip with them. And so I had already been to the District of Columbia and driven across the country.

TM: So that would have been 1945.

DG: Yes, it was.

TM: What do you recall about that drive and that trip?

DG: I just remember it was long.

TM: Yes.

DG: Not really much, much more.

TM: Two lane roads. There was no interstate of course then.

DG: And we would have come the southern route back home. More of a southern route. They're the most wonderful grandparents, they were my, my mother's parents. Were very kind and very generous.

TM: Nice.

DG: It was a long ride. I actually don't remember a lot about that trip.

TM: So then this would be your second, your second time to drive all the way across the country.

DG: Yes, it was. I don't really remember much about that trip. But I would have been in a car with a lot of cousins.

TM: Okay, were you driving? By the time you were out of college?

DG: Yes, I was. I had a friend who taught me to drive and I did have a driver's license.

TM: Okay, and I'm assuming that was a stick shift, was not an automatic transmission. Was that correct?

DG: Was a stick shift. But by the time I was in Arlington, Virginia, I was doing automatic transmission because I could use my aunt's car to go in to do things that I had to do for job interviews and so on.

TM: Okay. And I must also assuming it must have been, well, an adventure but also your heartstrings of your family are back in Salt Lake. Did you find that, you know, you were pulled back or was it this is a great adventure and you're on your way.

DG: I think I was more on my way. I was raised to be very independent and to take care of myself. If you fell down, you got up, no one's going to pick you up.

TM: Okay. Okay.

DG: Does that make sense?

TM: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And that's a wonderful skill to have as a young person is, you know, if you want something done you do it yourself. You can do and you roll with the punches. What what job did you land then in Virginia?

DG: Well, I did a lot of job interviewing. But I eventually ended up becoming the private secretary to Bill Marriott, Jr. Of course, that's the Marriott Corporation.

TM: Okay. And and I'm, again, I'm assuming here I'm thinking when I think Marriott I think of hotels.

DG: Oh, yes. They started their industry with more of a restaurant type thing. Yes. But they're hotels now.

TM: And so where they were, what kind of things would you do for him?

DG: I was his secretary. Whatever. That's what they called us in those days. Now, they would call you an personal assistant. But I just took dictation, did his letters, answered the phone.

TM: Okay. All right. And how long? How long did that keep your interest?

DG: Well, I stayed doing that until I became married because I met my husband in Washington, DC. And until we left to go to Rocky Mountain National Park in '58. No '57. The fall of '57.

TM: So this is 1955 that you went to DC. So you worked for him for a couple three years?

DG: Couple of years.

TM: Okay. A couple years. Yeah. Did you play your violin in those couple years there when you were in Virginia?

DG: I don't remember doing that. I used to lead choirs, do things like that. But I don't remember playing my violin.

TM: Okay. And were you still reading voraciously?

DG: Oh, yes. Still do to this day.

TM: Okay. Nice. Nice. So how did you meet your husband? I mean, what was - this kind of a personal question here - What was the dating scene like back in 1955-56 there in Arlington?

DG: Well, actually, we had an apartment in the in the district, and I met my husband in a church setting. And the young adults were very socially active, I think. Nowadays, people do things in groups, but then you dated. You might do some double dating, what we call double dating in those days. But it was you and your date, you would go to the movies, you'd go to a dance, you'd go for a walk, or something like that.

TM: Let's back up a little bit about dancing. How did you learn to dance?

DG: Well, I had a lot of opportunity to do that. In my youth, in high school, and Salt Lake City. Used to be in dance festivals, and so on. Learn to waltz and all those things, and foxtrot.

DG: Oh, my. Okay, well, it's fine. I was thinking square dancing. But what other dances did you do?

DG: It was mostly couples dancing, but there was some square dancing in my youth. Something called the Virginia Reel. Do they do that anymore?

TM: Tell me about it. What did it entail?

DG: Gee whiz, well, it was just sort of group dancing, you know, kind of in the square dancing genre.

TM: Okay. Okay. And so, tell me about this guy that you met that caught your eye. What was his name and what did he do?

DG: His name was Charles Gebler. And he was working as a park naturalist with National Capital Parks. That's with the National Park Service, the US Department of the Interior. And he was a fabulous musician, a very, very talented pianist. And actually how we really met was, it was Christmas time. And the church group I was involved with, we were doing Fred Waring's The Night Before Christmas. And he was the accompanist. And because my husband was basically a jazz pianist, he would improvise. And I became very upset with him because he wasn't playing the music as it was exactly written. But remember, I told you I was sort of a lawyer. And I said, you're gonna mess up the vocalists. I mean, they've got to hear their parts. So you've got to play this like as written. So that's basically how we we met.

TM: Was he obedient? Or did he get out of bounds again, with the piano?



DG: Well, no, he did it right. He had a classical training. He had a classical training, but he had a wonderful ear. People used to come (?) say he played by ear, but he did not play by ear, he would say I play from my knowledge of music.

TM: And so where, where did he grow up? What year was he born? Do you remember?

DG: He was born in 1931 in Hartford, Connecticut, but he grew up in a town outside of Hartford, called Rockville, Connecticut, which was a mill town. Which, in olden days, there would have been a fabric mill there. That's gone now of course, and was gone as he was growing up. But that's where he grew up. His father worked for the post office, never had a driver's license. His mother was in the home. And that was that.

TM: Did he have brothers and sisters?

DG: He had a sister.

TM: Older, younger?

DG: Younger, he was the older.

TM: Okay. So you both were the older, oldest siblings there?

DG: Yes.

TM: Okay. I'm assuming that he had gone to college as well?

DG: He had a bachelor's degree from the University of Connecticut and a Master's from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

TM: In what?

DG: Oh, wildlife management. His father was a great fisherman and he spent a lot of his youth with his father out fishing sort of in a more natural environment. He was a Boy Scout, an Eagle Scout, was an expert at identifying birds. He just had a very strong interest from a young age in the natural world. Spent a lot of his summers doing summer camps that were more nature related.

TM: Did he take to reading the way you did?

DG: He was an intelligent man. I don't remember that he was an avid reader. But he was no dummy.

TM: Right, right. And was the piano his instrument of choice? Or had he...

DG: He had started playing the piano when he was very young. Yes.

TM: Well, I can see there's a band for me here.

DG: Well, he had his own band for many, many years. And whenever we lived in a metropolitan area, he did have his own band. But when he was in high school, he used to tell the story that they would sneak him in, because he would be the pianist for the trio or whatever it was. And

they would sneak him into places through the back door because there would be alcohol there. And he would just be in high school.

TM: My, but he was such a good player that they wanted him in their trio.

DG: Oh yes, yes.

TM: Oh, that's great. And wonderful, huh. So then, you know, he wasn't following the rules. And you got him squared away there pretty quickly. It sounds like with the with the piano at the choir, and then you guys started spending some time together?

DG: Yes, yes. We started dating and going to movies and doing the things that you would do around the District of Columbia. There's a lot there to do, of course.

TM: Like what?

DG: Well, you know, there are museums, the Smithsonian. There's all the monuments and the historical things to do. But he was, of course, very involved with his work with National Capital Parks as a naturalist.

TM: Do you remember? Did you visit him sometimes when he was at work, dressed in his uniform? And what kind of things was he doing at that time? Do you remember?

DG: Well, he was basically, when we were courting, doing something in Rock Creek Park called The Rock Creek Nature Center. And it was a facility based on nature of the area, in an old mansion in the park. And one of the things he had there was some snakes. And when he dated girls, they had to show that they were, they would handle the snakes and not be afraid of them. I didn't ever have to do that test.

TM: Thankfully! My, my.

DG: I don't like snakes. I'm glad. I also have great respect for bears.

TM: Yes please. I'm sure that his other, his other women friends who would have been thinking the same thing.

DG: He did a lot with the school groups and the District of Columbia and the surrounding area, sort of they would have educational field trips to the Nature Center. And my husband used to tell the story about he would be out in the woods walking with the children doing this or whatever you would, a naturalist would be doing and talking about the birds and that he would say the children would look at him like they just wouldn't understand. They didn't know what on earth he was talking about listening to this bird song and then the teacher would say (?), you have to realize these are inner city children. They don't know what birdsong is. So he was a great educator, and very innovative.

TM: Was... I don't know quite how this would work. But oftentimes one's first job with the Park Service was a seasonal position. Summertime only. Was Charles doing that at the time?

DG: At this time now he was a permanent employee as a park naturalist with National Capital Parks. But prior to that, during his summers, he had done seasonal work at Yellowstone but also around National Capital Parks at a place called Catoctin Mountain Park. But when I met

him, he was a full time employee with National Capital Parks as a park naturalist, but prior to that during his summers he would be at Yellowstone as a naturalist park ranger.

TM: Did he ever talk about his times as a seasonal out at Yellowstone?

DG: He loved Yellowstone. It was his favorite place. He just loved it. He had a wonderful time there.

TM: Did he go by Charles or Chuck or John?

DG: His family called him Charles. I called him Chuck and his music people called him Chuck. His National Park service associates called him Charlie. So I always knew when we got a phone call, if they asked for Charles, I knew it was his family, and it probably wasn't good news. Well, back in those days, it was, you just didn't make a long distance phone call.

TM: Right? When you got, when you got one. It was bad news. Yeah.

DG: And his family was in Connecticut. And we were always other places. And if they asked for Charlie, I knew it was work related. If they asked for Chuck, I knew it was either a personal friend or a music related thing. Always knew.

TM: Nice. That's handy, a little code there.

DG: It was.

TM: And was - well, I'll call him Chuck then because you did - Did Chuck kind of want to get away from, I'm assuming he must have if he worked at Yellowstone and was working at Capitol Parks. I'm assuming he must have wanted to kind of get out of the small town that he grew up in, in a way and travel.

DG: Well he was very progressively motivated and wanted to get ahead, actually went up rather fast in his career. Just because he was so motivated and a strong work ethic but a very creative man. So I think just, and of course he had a great love for nature and, and was very knowledgeable. So...

TM: What what attracted him to you enough that you would marry him?

DG: I'm not sure. I sometimes wonder about that, because he comes from an Irish German background. I come from a sixth generation Mormon family in Utah. Very rule oriented and very well, now I told you sir, (?) I'm really good at letter of the law, and I'm trying to be better. I'm trying to be better. But I often wondered how did this girl from Utah who is really not, I mean, she's independent, and she can take care of herself, but she's really not an adventurous meet this man who is really an adventurer, and innovator with this strong German Irish background? I don't know.

TM: It's interesting. Well, I'm thinking about the attraction of opposites. He was a little, a little wild with the jazz and you are stable, sort of a, I don't know, a pillar of stability. You know, it's the letter of the law. Also, I don't know. That's what comes to mind.

DG: Whatever! Maybe someday, if you believe in a life after this one, we can ask him.

TM: Exactly we'll get it all figured out. So I do want to ask you, if you're willing to explore that, I'm assuming that that that Chuck was not Mormon. He was not LDS.

DG: He was raised Catholic, but he did convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. And he had already done that before I met him. And that was because of the Yellowstone experience. ,

TM: Okay, how so? Can you talk to that?

DG: Because when he was at Yellowstone, he met a lot of other young men who were seasonal Rangers that had that LDS background. And they course fellowshipped him and taught him and so on.

TM: Okay. Nice. So that, I think that, that clearly would have been a plus on on his, you know, who is this guy? And do I want to spend some time with him?

DG: Yeah

TM: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. And so when did you, when did you get married?

DG: We were married on June the 14th in 1957 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

TM: Okay. And in Salt Lake, so I'm assuming that there was a trip back. Did Chuck get a chance to meet your parents and how did that go?

DG: Yes, he did.

TM: Did they get along?

DG: Yes, at that point in time, my parents were divorced, but there was no problem, it was good.

TM: Nice. Nice. So he was working at the National Capital Parks. Then did he get transferred out of the east?

DG: Well, after we were married, we returned to the District of Columbia. Actually, we lived on Adams Mill Road and which the Washington Zoo was not far from there. We could hear the lion's roar at night. But in that fall he was accepted a position as Assistant Chief Park naturalist at Rocky Mountain National Park.

TM: Okay. That was '58, '57?

DG: It would have been the end of '57. Maybe September?

TM: Okay. What do you remember about when you (?) just packed up all your stuff?

DG: Yes we did, of course, the Park Service would ship our stuff. That was a wonderful help there. And then we took this interesting drive to get there. We went down the Blue Ridge Parkway. I think if you saw, you probably saw a picture of me sitting in the door of a cabin that's on the Blue Ridge Parkway on that trip to Rocky Mountain National Park. And I think we went to Mammoth Cave. Somehow we ended up in Colorado.

TM: So not not a direct route, but kind of checking out other National Parks along the way.

DG: Absolutely. He always did that. Always. Always. And he always had a camera in hand. He was a fabulous, a very talented photographer. And after a while I got used to all at once the car would be stopped and there would be taking a picture of some eagle or something.

TM: Oh my. Okay. Nice. What do you remember about Rocky Mountain National Park and the housing there?

DG: We lived in park service housing. We had a little log house. We did a lot of hiking, a lot of photography. We, in the wintertime, we went ice skating on the beaver ponds. Was interesting though in the middle of winter, when you're up at that elevation, and the sun was so bright, even though it would be so cold outside, it wouldn't seem so cold. We had a cat named Enos, who was named after some famous Colorado person that I don't remember. So, but we were only there until, oh, maybe August of '58. So we were only there about a year. Lots of snow in the wintertime.

TM: Yep. Yep. Did you have a wood stove in the cabin?

DG: Don't remember that. Our first child was born there. When we lived there. I remember driving down the winding Thompson Canyon Road to go to Loveland, Colorado to do things. We were just outside of Estes Park, Colorado. One time I did some substitute teaching at the high school on Estes Park. (?)

TM: What was the name of your first child?

DG: John.

TM: And where was John born?

DG: In Loveland, Colorado.

TM: In Loveland. Okay. All right. And that was 1958.

DG: Yes.

TM: Okay. All right. So now you're going to be busy. And with, you know, with John, where did, where did Chuck get transferred then in August of '58?

DG: We returned to National Capital Parks where he became the Assistant Chief Park Naturalist.

TM: I'm sorry, run that title again past me.

DG: He became the Assistant Chief Park Naturalist.

TM: I take notes as we go along, Assistant Chief Park Naturalist. Okay. And, and so this is in DC. There would have been a gentleman named John Doerr.

DG: Oh yes.

TM: Who was the Chief Park Naturalist there in Washington. Do you remember John at all?

DG: I remember the name, but I don't remember the person.

TM: Okay. Okay. All right. I'm trying to think of who was the director of the Park Service at that time. In '58, I don't think it was Tolson. I can't recall. I have to look it up. Do you remember any of the other Park Service employees that Chuck would have been working with?

DG: Oh, remember a family and a person but I, fishing for the name. And I just can't find the name.

TM: Okay. And Chuck's duties there as the assistant chief naturalist... what? So he was no longer, I'm assuming, no longer leading, you know, kids on nature walks, but I could be wrong. What was he doing?

DG: Well, as I remember at this time they built in Rock Creek Park a nature center. And I think he was involved with that. So he probably would have been involved in planning the exhibits and the program and he probably did lead a few walks.

TM: Okay.

DG: I'm sure he did.

TM: Nice. Okay. Right. And of course, right there with the Washington office of the Park Service nearby he would have been more or less, I would assume, on the cutting edge of the naturalist programming and development.

DG: I think so. Otherwise, I don't think what Mr. Kowski would have invited us to come to the Albright Training Center. Because that's what happened next.

TM: What year was that?

DG: In '61, in the summer of '61.

TM: Right, so that's right. So that would have been the new Albright Training. Well...

DG: Well, actually, I think the Albright Training Academy was started in Yosemite about '57. But we went there in the summer of '61. And then, of course, it ended up at the Grand Canyon. I think we went to the Grand Canyon some time in '62.

TM: Okay, so let's back up just a little bit. The Albright Training Academy started in 1957.

DG: In Yosemite.

TM: In Yosemite, okay. Do you remember the purpose of the training academy?

DG: I think the goal was it was felt important that permanent employees going to work for the Park Service need to have some training background, some orientation, and some support and help. And actually, I can probably find paperwork on that if you want me to find it, and send it to you.

TM: You know what, we'll talk later. But I do think that material is very important. And I think, you know, I can think of a few places in the Park Service that it would, it might find a receptive home. So we'll talk about that later. Do you know how it came to be that Chuck was invited?

DG: He always had his eye out for opportunities, and it could very well be that he applied. I really don't know. Mr. Frank Kowski was the superintendent. I'm going to call him Superintendent of Albright at that time and so...

TM: Okay, do you remember Frank, do you remember visiting with him at all?

DG: Oh, yes. Knew him and his wife Lois, very well.

TM: What do you recall about them? Your first visits, and then friendship? What do you recall about them?

DG: Well, we were very young, and they were older. So it was supportive and instructional at the same time. I remember them as people but I don't really remember a lot of close interaction. When we were at Yosemite, we often had social events, with the trainees and their spouses that would be with them. And of course, leadership would be there too. So we had like little potluck dinners and social events and so on. The Kowski's were quite social. And very friendly.

TM: Okay. Nice. So at this point, I, you know, I'm sort of thinking that you must have really been attracted to the traveling from station to station as well. Because, you know, it meant forming new friendships with with the people where you went, but it was also traveling... can you speak to that a little bit?

DG: Well, I loved my husband. I did what he did. Actually, I don't remember being terribly shook up about it. I do remember in those young years having the cleanest woodwork in town because some of these social events would be in our homes wherever they were. And so being presentable and clean and neat was really important that I had really young children.

TM: What year was your second child born?

DG: Oh, when was Becky born? '59.

TM: Okay. Was that in in California?

DG: In the District of Columbia, she was born in District of Columbia.

TM: Okay.

DG: And then came Rachel and she was also born in the District of Columbia. So when we went to Yosemite - let's see - it was John, Becky, and Rachel and there were three children under the age of four. So you know, I'd be always wiping smudges off of woodwork.

TM: Yes, pine tar I can think of kids in Yosemite are going to be out crawling around on the ground in the pine pitch is going to be introduced to their lives and your life then.

DG: Well of course, we had no grass or no formal flower beds or anything like that, it was all just the natural world.

TM: So Chuck was invited to join the team at the Albright Training Academy in 1961.

DG: Yes.

TM: Okay. So that works out the timeline. Thank you for, for Rachel and Becky and John. So you showed up in, in Yosemite Valley with three small children? What was the housing like and who did you make friends with?

DG: We lived in a park service housing area called El Portal, which was on the west entrance site to Yosemite. Like if you were going to Merced, California. We had a brand new home, a three bedroom, two bathroom home with air conditioning. Rambler style, it was very, very nice, very comfortable. And of course, there was other people around mostly maintenance staff for the park, I think.

TM: Okay. Do you recall at all Chuck's duties there with the training center?

DG: Well, he was the naturalist training specialist. So there was also a ranger training specialist who was Howard Chapman. So Mr. Chapman would have been dealing with what Rangers do, which is more the protective securities side of the park. And Chuck would have been involved in the interpretive side, the naturalist side, how to have make exhibits and do nature walks and talks and things like that.

TM: Right. Right. Okay, and didn't Howard Chapman go on to be the director of the Park Service at one point? I could be wrong.

DG: That I do not know.

TM: Yeah. I'm not sure about that. Okay. But Howard was there, Frank Kowski. Who else do you recall was there at the time?

DG: Might have been Mr. Moorehead. His first name escapes me at this point.

TM: Okay. What do you remember about Howard Chapman?

DG: Well he was older, I remember he had two daughters. And a wife named Marian, who made wonderful raisin-filled cookies.

TM:  
Oh, wow.

DG:  
It was very compatible, but I actually don't remember much more than that.

TM: Did you make any friends there at Yosemite that lasted with you through the years?

DG: Well, we did but they were more church oriented friends. But of course, there were many park service people that passed through that were trainees that became lifelong associates of my husband's. There was a Mr. Barbie and his family that I remember. I think he eventually became Superintendent of Yellowstone.

TM: Name rings a bell. Yes, yes. Yeah. Who else do you recall?



DG: Oh the artist Thompson? Oh, I'd have to look that up. I think he now lives in Eatonville, Washington.

TM: Okay, yeah I'm drawing a blank, I'm thinking when I think of Yosemite and I think of artists, I think of a photographer who had...

DG: I would think he was a trainee at one time. But I think his name was John Thompson. I think he's now in Eatonville, Washington, of course, we would have had a closer relationship when we lived in the northwest.

TM: Okay. So three small children in Yosemite and then eventually the Albright Training Center is moved.

DG: Yes we moved to Yosemite, I mean to Grand Canyon as far as I can remember. I think we spent two Christmases at the Grand Canyon so I think we would have moved to the Grand Canyon area sometime late in the year of '62. But the training center I don't think was dedicated until sometime in '63.

TM: You know what, Donna, we've been visiting for not quite an hour. Maybe this is a good time to put a comma in this oral history. And we'll pick it up again with your move out to Grand Canyon. Does that sound like a plan?

DG: I'm okay with that, yes that would be good.

TM: Great. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this? At this time, we can always add later to as well. Covering this ground that we've just gone over.

DG: Not that I can think of right now. Perhaps if you have questions, we could address them later.

TM: Okay, that sounds great. Well with that, this will conclude part one Grand Canyon oral history interview with Donna Gebler. Today is Tuesday, April 6, 2021. My name is Tom Martin and Donna, thank you so very much.

DG: You're welcome. My pleasure.