

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: John Parsons (JP)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: 1981 solo Grand Canyon kayak trip, 1983 Grand Canyon high water run, and forming the Northern Arizona Paddling Club

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TM: Today is December 8th, 2018. It's Saturday. We are at the home of John Parsons, and my name is Tom Martin. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview. Good morning John. How are you?

JP: Just fine Tom. Thank you so much for coming. We really appreciate your interest in history of all forms. You're prolific and inspirational.

TM: Thank you very much, John, I'm just following you. John, where were you born and what were your parents doing at that time?

JP: Well, thanks Tom. I was born on November 21st, 1947 in Lafayette, Indiana, county seat of Tippecanoe County. I've always been fond of tippy canoes as a result. My dad was a World War II veteran who served as a top turret gunner on a B-17. Was shot down and spent quite a bit of time in the Nazi prison camps. Weighed 75 pounds when he was liberated. So he felt very lucky to be alive and enjoyed getting outside as much as possible. Just enjoying the wonderfulness of our planet and our earth and green grass and trees and water. He just loved the world because he felt very lucky to be alive. [chuckles] My mom was all in on that. She grew up on a creek called the Wildcat Creek, which is now one of the state of Indiana's heritage streams. Her father had been a fireman on a steam engine railroad, but suffered a heart ailment and eventually died of a heart attack at the age of 47. But he moved out on this creek and built a house on stilts so that when the creek flooded the family could still use a boat to get to the house and actually have a place to live. Then when the water went down, they'd clean out the mud and life would go on. He made his living grubbing the mud of the creek for crustaceans called mussels and then he would take them into Lafayette and sell them for their meager income. My mom was always fond of swimming. She would break the ice in the winter to go swim in the frozen water of the creek. She was really tough. My mom and dad met there on the banks of Wildcat Creek at my mom's house.

We traveled extensively when I was growing up for a variety of reasons, but the one big thing that affected my parents in a very deeply emotional and physical way was high water. So when water would begin to come up in either the Wabash River, which flows through Lafayette, or the Wildcat Creek, well, that meant that everything had to stop and they had to go look at that water and stand on the bank of that river or that creek and watch the river rise. And there were other people that did

it, they weren't the only ones. It was something that was a thing there. It was amazing how everyone could stand there transfixed by the water and the debris flowing in the water. Sometimes there would just be rapt silence. [chuckles] Sometimes somebody would say, "Look, I think it's peaked," and then a murmur would rise over the crowd and arguments would begin. "No, it's still coming up." "No, it's peaked," and their arguments would go on. This was my main memory of my childhood was standing wherever water was flowing and watching it or going and playing in it when it was low and warm. Even today I'm obsessed with what I call picking peaks. So when something begins to rise in the monsoons or in winter runoff, that's when my interest level goes back to my childhood and I began studying everything. I really take great pride in saying, "That's a peak. [laughs] It's not going any higher than that." And in fact, I've gotten to the point where I can predict where that's going to be now. Within a certain range and a certain time, I can say, well, this is where it's going to peak. I have a very good track record of doing that as a result of having it in my DNA and living it as a child, you know.

TM: Brothers and sisters?

JP: No, I was an only child. Mom had a very... She had several miscarriages and probably should have died with me. So they told her, "Well, you can try it again, but [chuckle] not a good thing for you."

We traveled extensively. In fact, when I graduated from eighth grade, I was the only kid in my class had ever been out of the state of Indiana. Eventually went to all of the lower 48 states and camped and whatever. Just went wherever we could, you know. So I kind of grew up as a vagabond in that regard. Went to kindergarten in Georgia and first grade in Florida, and portions of eighth grade in St Thomas, Virgin Islands. Travel gets in your...and adventure gets into your blood.

I've always been fascinated by flowing water, more so than still water. Lakes and oceans are fine, but it's the movement of water across the land that is a mystical thing and creates an unseen energy that goes beyond just whatever the water is or whatever the geomorphology of the stream channel is. There's something going on there that's spiritual and I've always believed that, still do. My river paddling back in Indiana was confined to canoes. I didn't know anything about kayaking. One of the most fun canoe trips I ever did was from the very absolute tip of the headwaters of Wildcat Creek down to its confluence with the Wabash. The tip of the headwaters was a small piece of water in a farm lot surrounded by dairy cows. It was about 18 inches wide and the canoe...I had to kind of tip the canoe [laughter] sideways to slide through this ditch.

TM: How old were you?

JP: Oh, at that time I think I was in my twenties when I did that trip. And the farmer in his bib overalls with his classic pitchfork, you know, was just [TM laughing] standing there shaking his head. [laughs]

TM: When did you first start messing around in a canoe?

JP: Oh, geez. I don't know. I was a young child and my parents were very water oriented, so they had me out in a boat probably before I can remember. It's just part of my childhood and part of my upbringing.

TM: When did you go out and do your own I'm going to put the boat in the water and paddle around a little bit by myself?

JP: Well, we moved to the edge of Lafayette at one time in the 50s, it was probably about the mid-50s. That's when houses were being built and the Amish people were the...

TM: So you would have been 10-ish.

JP: Less, was probably '54/'55, I was probably seven or eight. The Amish guys were building most of the houses and they had routines of how they approached building a house in those days. Most of the cement and concrete that they mixed they mixed by hand. They didn't call in a truck or something. You may have seen them. They had these large metal tubs that were about four or five feet long and about three feet wide. Have you seen one of those? Right. They'd always keep that tub near a construction site. Well, we were at the end of this street that hadn't been finished. It had been excavated to put fill in, but the fill in had never shown up. So there was a big rainstorm and it became a pond. So I got a couple of buddies in the neighborhood and I said, "Let's drag that cement thing over there and see if it floats." [laughter] So we put it in that little pond and it floated so I jumped in that with a pole and I would pole around up that pond and that was my first boat. [laughs] And the Amish guys came to work and they'd see me doing that. They'd all smile and wave, you know, they were wonderful people. Eventually the pond dried up, either that or they needed their tub back, one or the other. [laughter] I moved to Arizona on Valentine's Day of 1979. I eventually was working for the...

TM: I'm going to jump in here cause that was a big jump. Did you go from a concrete tub to a canoe then?

JP: Right. But not very often. I knew how to canoe and I was a natural paddler and there was lots of streams and things, but it wasn't the obsession that paddling became later in my life. It was just whenever I could do something, I did.

One fun time was in the 70s. I got a degree in journalism from Purdue. I wound up owning and publishing a paid circulation newspaper in a town called Zionsville, a suburb of Indianapolis. It had nothing to do with the LDS faith. It was named after the surveyor, William Zion that surveyed it in 1825. Anyway, back in the 70s, there was yet another episode when the Native Americans were getting screwed by the federal government. So members of tribes and nations around the country decided to do a second Long Walk from wherever they were to D.C. to have a mass protest there. I can't remember the year, but I became very intrigued by that whole thing so I took time off from work and I sought out one of their camps over in Illinois. Kinda snuck in at night and stood around a fire and asked them if I could run with him cause they were running relays. They had a bus and you'd get out on the highway and run. And, of course, back then I could run. Novel idea. So by the time we wound up near where I lived in Zionsville, I had numerous friends from this group. I said, "How about if I take you all on a canoe trip?" They'd never been in a canoe. Some of them were Navajos from that little town upriver from Bluff. I can't remember its name right now. It's the first one upriver on river-right. Montezuma, that's it. Oh, they thought that would just be really great. So we paddled down a stream called Eagle Creek and went out into a reservoir and everything. They just loved that. [laughs] I got a very simple note from one of them a few weeks later saying it was the highlight of his whole experience was going out in that canoe. So I was always looking for an excuse to be on the water. But, you know, when you're young and in a career and things like that, you don't really have that many opportunities.

TM: I'm going to jump in and ask a question cause I don't want to miss this. Your degree in journalism from Purdue, was that a good education? Was that a good course at the time? Was it hard? Was it challenging?

JP: Oh absolutely. You know, I've always loved to write. I actually had a neighborhood newsletter as a kid in grade school that I did by hand and passed out to my friends. [laughs] We could go off on tangents about that. But anyway, when I got into...

TM: Yeah, one please.

JP: Well, okay. I had 12 years of Catholic school with the nuns in formal habits. This was before nuns could wear casual clothes, so they had all of the old school haberdashery, if you will. For some reason that I'll never understand to the last day I am alive, they didn't like me in high school. I wanted to write for the high school newspaper and they wouldn't let me. They said, "No, you're not going to be allowed to participate in the student newspaper." They wouldn't let me for four years. So I found other outlets for my writing in high school, but when I got to Purdue, I figured that they would not be as inscrutable or whatever as those nuns were. So I went to the old, old newspaper at Purdue called the Exponent, which I think had been founded in the 1880s or something. It was a very staid and hidebound newspaper where there were unwritten rules as well as written rules. One of the unwritten rules was that no freshmen could ever be a staff reporter for the Exponent. That was a tradition that had been enforced for I don't know, 60/70/80 years. Who knows how long, but I didn't know that. So I went in with the naiveness of a freshman and I said I'd like to be a staff reporter. Well, I could see the snickers but I didn't know what they meant. The person said, "Well, it's highly unlikely that you could ever be a staff reporter, but we'll give you an assignment and if you can complete the assignment, we'll think about it." I went, "Well, sure. Give me the assignment." They said, "You go interview the head football coach." Little did I know the head football coach hated the newspaper, the student newspaper, with a livid lifelong passion. His face would turn red, his blood pressure would go up. I mean, just the mere mention of the name might send him to ER. He was just explosively full of hatred for the student newspaper.

TM: When you got the assignment, did you hear more snickers?

JP: Well, yeah, [TM laughs] you could see what people looking just kind of like this. I didn't know any different, so I went over to his office and asked his secretary, I said, "I'm from the Purdue Exponent and I'd like to interview coach Jack Mollenkopf. She just burst out laughing. [laughs] She said, "Well, that's outrageous. Don't you know what the situation is here?" I said, "No, ma'am, I don't. I'm sorry. They gave me an assignment at the Exponent and I'm just trying to do it." She looked at me like I was a space alien, you know, just like huh? She said, "You really don't know." I said, "No, I really don't." She said, "Well, why would you want to interview him anyway?" I said, "Frankly, the only thing I really want to know is what motivates him. Where does his passion come from? He's an incredibly passionate individual, but I've never read anything about where that passion comes from. I'd like to know." She said, "Well, no one's ever asked that question before." [laughs] She said, "Just a second." So she went in his office and I heard this huge laughter from a man in there. [laughter] She came out, she said, "I don't know what came over the old man but he says he'll do it. You can go in there right now if you want." I said, "Well, heck yeah." [laughs] So I went in there and he was, you could see tears had been flowing down his eyes he'd been laughing so hard. [laughter]

Well, he started asking me questions first about how it was that I wound up in his office. He said, "You don't know my history with the paper then do you?" I went, "No." He says, "Well, we'll skip on that now. You'll learn it later." And then he gave me an interview. I wrote it up and I took it back down there to the paper. You should've seen those people. They couldn't believe it. One of them read it and he just kind of looked at me like... His eyes got real big and he called somebody else over and they passed it around to all the seniors, you know, and they went, "How'd they..." They couldn't believe it. So then they said, "Okay, we're going to make an exception that no one has ever made before. You're a freshman staff reporter." [laughing] So I got to write for them for four years.

TM: Did they run the article?

JP: Oh yeah. Front page.

TM: Wow.

JP: And I actually got a note from the coach that it was well done and really summed up what he hoped I would say.

TM: Nice.

JP: I can't remember what the source of his passion was, but it was something that he learned as a kid that stayed with him that fired him off. It just filled him with the energy to... And he was one of the school's best coaches of all time. But that was a lucky break. Having that really instilled some confidence in me that stays with me to this day.

TM: Yeah, I'm just like, I would like to know more about that. So in Purdue...four years in journalism, and it sounds like it was a really good way to ground you in the business of newspaper writing.

JP: Right. Absolutely.

TM: Where were you thinking you wanted to go with that?

JP: Well, I wanted to be an entrepreneur and I wanted to have my own publications. That wasn't a good time to be a print journalism entrepreneur in the late sixties and early seventies. It was very expensive. The technology to get into the business was ridiculous. It was just coming out of the hot-type era. There were tons of papers that still ran linotype machines back in those days. And the photo offset process was insanely expensive. Technology was a closely guarded secret. Desktop publishing as a concept was unknown in all forms. So I got a job as a managing editor for a small suburban paper in Zionsville, and the paper had been founded in 1860. One of the first stories that it covered was Abraham Lincoln's whistle stop tour before the election. He came through that town on a train. It was an old-school paper, but it was being run by a real egomaniacal power-hungry young man who drove around in a chauffeured limousine and just had a knack for alienating people. So everywhere I went, people said, "You should start up a paper to compete with this guy." I told them, I said, "That's impossible. You know how much money that would cost? It's just not possible." But they kept it up and up and up. So six months later, I quit the job and started a paper to compete with the guy. That was quite a story. About one year, almost to the day, later, I'd run him out of business and took all of his advertisers and subscribers. He defaulted on his loan and cleared out the office in the middle of the night and split. So then the former owner of the Times then sold it to us for pennies on the dollar. So we had the one that we started plus the one I had worked for to begin with.

TM: What did you do with two newspapers now?

JP: We alternatively... We had been doing one, three times a week. That was our competitive advantage to a weekly. So then we went down to two times a week. And our paper, which was called Zionsville Main Street, ran on one of those days and then Zionsville Times ran on the other. So it was a biweekly with two different names. And we changed the broadsheet Times to a tabloid so it'd be easier for us to lay out and print. I'd still be doing that but I went through a very nasty divorce. And that is a common cause of people moving to Arizona. [laughs] It is. Arizona has always been viewed by people in the Midwest as a place to escape the onerous baggage of the Midwest.

TM: Had you been out to Arizona before, though? I mean, your folks had traveled a lot.

JP: I'd definitely been to Arizona before.

TM: If you were going to leave Indiana, which clearly you were, it came to, it's like, all right, I'm leaving. Why was it you chose the Southwest? I mean, you could have gone any direction.

JP: Well, I was offered a job in Tucson, so that...

TM: For the Star or the Citizen?

JP: It was running a newsletter for a financial advisor. You know how some of them are, a lot of money. He had bought one of those ancient few buildings down there in the Old Pueblo that weren't torn down in the urban renewal of Tucson. They're now one of the places where all the tourist goes. I mean, it was authentic and original, working there was really fun.

But I learned that he was a fraud and I can't conscience working for somebody who's lying so I had to leave. So anyway... My first visit to Arizona was 1954 or -5. I think it was 1955, would that be right? Maybe '56. I can't remember. But we went to Grand Canyon and camped there in a tent. My mother was obsessed with going down to Phantom Ranch so she said, "We're..." Oh, they wouldn't let me on a mule cause I was underneath the minimum height. She said we're gonna go there anyway. And this was in the middle of the summer, the worst possible time to hike. We made it to Indian Gardens, which is pretty good for a family of three. But you know how it is hiking out in the summer in the canyon. Boy, all three of us were pretty well wiped out by the time we got back. But of course, that's a memory that stays with you forever.

In my summers at Purdue, I got a job with the Bureau of Public Roads, which is now the Federal Highway Administration. They would fly me out to San Francisco and I would work there in 450 Golden Gate Avenue with the engineers for a little while and then they'd send me to Treasure Island to work in a supply depot. Then each summer after those two little episodes, then they'd shipped me to a project. So in 1966, I was in Southern California working in the San Gabriel Mountains. And in 1967 they sent me to the Happy Jack Project. That's the road from Mormon Lake to Clint's Well, it's Forest Highway 3. Well, when they sent me out there in '67 that was just a muddy basalt-studded two track. So I worked on building that road with many other people, of course, that summer. Of course the project was longer than that and I lived in a little log cabin at Mormon Lake with an Apache Indian. That's quite a story. Every weekend we'd go into Flagstaff from Mormon Lake. We were all young. I think I was still a teenager. If I wasn't a teenager, I was probably 20. But anyway, for some reason being from the Midwest and not wearing a cowboy hat or having a belt buckle that big, everyone wanted to pick a fight with me. I'm serious, I mean, everyone wanted to pick a fight with me. So I wound up with a livid hatred of Flagstaff. I mean, I just absolutely thought that was the worst place on the planet. [laughs] At the end of the summer of '67 I made a personal vow never to set foot in Flagstaff again as long as I lived.

TM: Interesting. [JP laughter] Have you kept that vow?

JP: Well, I got to fast forward, since we're on the story, I have to fast forward. So, I got in with this kayaking crowd down in Tucson and did really well, and that's a long story. So the summer of 1980 they said, "John, we got a permit to run the Middle Fork up in Idaho, we want you to come along." I said, "Well, that's great, but I can't do that." They said, "Well, why not?" "Well, you have to go through Flagstaff to get there and I've got a personal vow that I'm never going to set foot in that town again. I don't care what, I don't care. You can entice me with anything you want, but I'm never gonna set foot in the city Flagstaff in this lifetime." They said, "Well, that's really stupid and we want you to come on the Middle Fork. We really want you to come." I said, "I can't do it because I've got a vow and I keep vows." So time passed and one of them said, "We've come up with a way to help you there." "Okay." "You said you were never gonna set foot in Flagstaff, right?" I said, "That's right." "How about if we leave late in the day so we go through Flagstaff at night and then we put you in the back seat and blindfold you and we just drive through town. Then you never set foot in it again did you?" I went, "That actually works. I'll do that." [laughs] So, [laugh] they get about 20 miles south of Flag, they go, "All right, you gotta get in the back seat." They blindfold me, wrap me up. "All right, we're going through Flagstaff now." Driving along, this is cool. This is really gonna work. And then all of a sudden the car stops. Uh-oh. They open the doors and say, "Well, we fooled you. We're

spending the night in Flagstaff. You'd better get out and go to sleep.” [laughs] And then I wound up living there for 10 years. So go figure.

TM: [laughter] Couldn't have been that bad.

JP: [laughter] Well, I realized that between 1967 and 1980, it had undergone significant demographic changes and was a much kinder, gentler [laugh] city. It wasn't filled with drunk cowboys and idiots.

TM: So from Tucson, you were working for a fellow, that job got you there. Then what happened?

JP: I went to work for the university. I was the night production manager for their student newspaper, The Daily Wildcat. As a result of that, I stumbled into the student club called the Whitewater Explorers. I first went there wondering if anybody went canoeing. They all looked at me and go, “Nobody canoes around here, John. We kayak. We go to the Salt River and we kayak.” I went, wow, I don't know anything about that. So I joined a club and learned how to kayak. That's what kind of changed my life here in Arizona. They got a big kick out of me because they'd take me up there to the Salt and I couldn't kayak. That's a special skill. Of course I'd fall out of my boat and half drown. For my first trip on the day stretch of the Salt, I think I swam nine times. It was just, it was terrible. I couldn't roll the boat. [laughs]

TM: This was 1971ish?

JP: 1980.

TM: 1980. Okay.

JP: Spring of '80, cause I moved there in '79. It was so bad. Some people, as you well know from your river experiences, have a very hard time learning how to roll a kayak. Some people get it the first time [finger snap] and its instinctive muscle memory and they never lose it, and some people don't. I was in that category and I couldn't learn it. So I went to the large high school, I can't remember the name of it there. I think...let's see the Rillito's here, Oracle Road's here. It's kind of the high school kind of in that neck of the woods right there that had a huge pool, outdoor pool. I conned the manager of the pool into letting me tie the bow and the stern of the kayak off in a corner of the pool to the lane rings in the shallow end so that the... Let's draw a diagram here. Here's the pool and in any pool the lane rings are embedded in both sides of the pool so they can change the lanes short or long. So I tied the boat off between these two rings here in the shallow end. Then when I'd roll over, if I couldn't roll up, I'd push off the bottom, come up, get my breath, try it again. Three weeks in the pool it took me to learn how to roll. [laughs] But boy, once I got that roll down, it was you what call a [TM laughs] bombproof roll. So I never had another problem rolling a kayak for my entire kayaking career. So that stood me in good stead.

So, anyway, after we went up there and did the Middle Fork and came back, one of my friends pulled the same number on me. He says, “Well, since you got over your Flagstaff phobia, how'd you like to go run the Grand Canyon this fall?” I said, “Sure, I don't mind going into Flagstaff now. I'm okay with it.” So I did my first trip up there in September of '80. Got off the river, immediately went to Tucson, threw everything in my truck and moved to Flagstaff. I put an ad in the paper, The Daily Sun, ‘Wanted to rent; room on edge of town with athletically minded roommate.’ [laughs] And then I put one of my newfound friends in Flagstaff in charge of screening whoever answered the ad. He called me up and said, “Hey, I got a good one for you and its 100 bucks a month.” I went, “Okay.” So I just drove up sight unseen there on West Grand Canyon Avenue, 610 West Grand Canyon Avenue, one of those little shabby places up there, and moved in with Mark Jefferson. That was quite an adventure. But my first trip down the Canyon was one of those classic private trips. The full number of people and all of the idiosyncrasies of a trip. Ran out of food at the end of the trip. You know how that goes, privates that don't plan well. It was such a classic. We got down there the last two days of

the trip, and the only thing we had left was a bunch of M&M's and that was it. There wasn't any other food. [TM laughs]

There was 18 of us or whatever the limit was. So the leaders had a powwow and decided to split up the M&M's evenly between all of us. They set up some sort of a flat surface and poured all the M&M's out and started moving them out into little bottles. [laughs] Oh, the things river runners do. But the problem was there was six or seven M&M's left over that couldn't be evenly divided. That's when the [laughs] whole group dynamics [laughs]... That's when you learn what a private trip is all about. [laughs] There were some animosities over the split of those final M&M's that took quite a long time to settle themselves out. Some people just held a real grudge that they didn't get [laughs] one of them. Don't you just love river running, Tom? It is just a never ending cultural kaleidoscope of unique and creative and often bizarre human behaviors. I just think it's wonderful.

TM: But it was enough to have you pack up your bags in Tucson and move to town.

JP: Right. Got off the river and just immediately moved up there. That's when I learned about the clique that we were talking about last night or night or so ago. Well, I just thought anybody that ran rivers would be friendly and inclusive and nice people. That's not the way it was. It took me a long time to learn what I consider to be on their part 'antisocial exclusive behavior' was just the way it worked out because of their jobs. I mean, so many hundreds of people over so many years, so many wide-eyed people saying, oh, I want to quit my job and be a river guide. So many people just always with that attitude, wanting to be part of the group or something like that. Well, you pretty much would have to become exclusive just to preserve your own self-esteem and sanity and camaraderie with your friends. But I didn't know that at the time. It was lost on me. I just thought they were really a very snooty, snobby, exclusive bunch of males. There were no females at that time. They didn't want anything to do with me. Some of them kept that attitude forever. Some of them still have it, actually, but that's another story. Anyway, that's when I decided to found the Northern Arizona Paddlers Club [NAzPaC] in March of 1981. Geez the very first meeting we had like 25 people show up so I knew I had a really good idea. We met in the city community center there below Observatory Mesa. I can't remember the name of that park but there's a little building right there at kind of the...not the end of Aspen, but the next street North of Aspen sort of dead ends into that...

TM: The Adult Center.

JP: Yeah. So that was where our meetings were held initially. Boy word got out, the next meeting there was more people and more people. We started showing films. I think the peak attendance we had at one of our events was over a 100 people. And everybody had the same thing to say, "I'm so glad to finally find friendly people that want to get together and do trips on the San Juan or whatever, and don't care if I don't have exactly the right equipment, or maybe I'm not dressed just right, or maybe I don't have the skills or whatever." That was the common rallying point of that club. It really helped change the complexion of paddling in the city of Flagstaff because prior to that time, if you weren't part of the in-crowd as a Grand Canyon boater, you were nothing. There were so many wonderful things happen at NAzPaC. That would be an interesting story unto itself. Anyway, the other thing that was going on there... Let's see that was March of '81 and I moved into Flag in October of '80. So I had become obsessed on that first Grand Canyon trip with solo paddling the canyon. Of course that was illegal at the time, it was highly illegal. You were told in no uncertain terms that if you were caught doing that, that you would be arrested, your gear would be confiscated. You might actually even be sent to jail, but at a bare minimum, you'd be going to the magistrate and you might be banned for life from the park. There was numerous downsides to attempting to do that. Well, I didn't really care. I figured out I'm gonna go paddle the canyon, study the whole thing and go.

TM: Well, I've got a question. To go by yourself through the Grand Canyon means you need a boat big enough to carry enough food unless you're thinking of just trying to paddle all the way through in a day and a half or two as a race. Had you done any self-support, multi-day boating by that time?

JP: I think I'd done one trip on the Verde. I'd never done the Verde before. I couldn't get anybody to go with me so I went by myself. Fun part of that one was I didn't know where anything was. Some of the people had said there was a falls down there. [TM laughs] You be sure and look out for it. I didn't know where it was. So I camped in this one location the first night and got up and thought I was on a lazy river. Didn't even bother to put my helmet on cause I couldn't see anything that would hurt me. Then I'd come around the bend and there's a falls and it's too late to get to shore. [laughs] [whump sound effect] I'm like, I'll bet that's what they mean by the falls. [laughs] So anyway, I felt confident in my abilities in terms of carrying enough food at the time. And back then, I wasn't drinking beer. So that changes the equation a lot, too, if you don't have to pack beer to do a solo trip. And gosh, my body weight was significantly less and I didn't eat much. I had a really healthy diet, so it was okay.

Well, anyway, everybody that I knew that I trusted to tell this, that I was going to do this, they all had their advice. Well, you know, you've got to learn the schedule of the river patrol. You've got to be aware of when they're on there cause if you run into them you're toast. You remember John Thomas by any chance? He was head of the river unit at the time. I learned from his friends pretty much that if John was in Flagstaff, that means he wasn't on the river and that since it was a low budget routine back then, they didn't have duplicate patrol trips. So I just kind of figured I'd wait until I heard he was in town and then take off on the spur of the moment and try and get way ahead of the river unit. If you're going fast and far enough ahead of them, big deal. Well, then I heard that the park had enlisted some of the aircrew people to keep an eye on the river and if they saw a solo boat to report it. So I made these camouflage covers for my kayak that matched the green, the weird color of the river before the monsoons come, so if you look down you wouldn't see anything. I went up to Paria beach at 2:00 in the morning and was rigging my boat. Was totally ready to go, everything rigged, had my wet suit on, the whole nine yards, and I realized I forgot my helmet. Well, you know, I'm not stupid so took everything apart and put it back in the truck. Well, the guy I had been staying with the night before, where I'd left my helmet in his living room, was a private pilot. Was a really good friend and still a lifelong friend today. He got up the next morning packed my helmet in a box of Styrofoam and rented an airplane and flew up and down the river looking me so he could drop the helmet down. [laughs] So I drove back and he was late coming back to his house. That's where I was kinda staying while I was doing that type of thing. He said, "John," he says, "I just spent a lot of money and time looking for you up there. What the hell are you doing here? I figured you'd go without a helmet or not." I go, "Gary, I'm not that stupid." [laughs] We still joke about that even today.

TM: So this would have been in the summer then?

JP: June.

TM: So there would have been other trips on the water. Weren't you worried that they would see you go by?

JP: Oh yeah. Right. Eventually that did trip me up. Not to the point where I got caught though, luckily. So I waited a while and when the coast was clear again, then I went up *with* my helmet [laughs] and put in about 2:00. Ran Badger and Soap Creek in the pure pitch black of night.

TM: Same year?

JP: Yeah. It was just maybe 10 days later or something like that. Whenever I could figure out John Thomas was in Flagstaff, I knew that he wasn't on the water.

TM: So this was 1981.

JP: Right.

TM: Okay.

JP: I just figured if I just paddled hard as I could every day, that I wouldn't have any trouble. I paddled Nankoweap the first day and, you know, just was on that kind of a schedule. I noticed that especially the motor boatmen, they'd kind of look at you cause you wouldn't be with anybody. They would always try to match you up with some trip behind you or some trip in front of you cause they're all gossipy people to begin with. They just you know, "What's that guy in the kayak doing? Wonder why he's got that green fabric on the top of it." [laughter] I wouldn't say nothing to anybody. I didn't stop or socialize. I was just gone. Well I was feeling really confident, probably overconfident. When I got to Lava Falls, I decided that was too big of an opportunity.

TM: Now, that was a fast jump from Nankoweap to Lava Falls.

JP: Right.

TM: So you're making about 50 miles a day.

JP: Mmm hmm.

TM: The next day would have put you someplace below Phantom Ranch.

JP: Right.

TM: Did you just like paddle right on by Phantom, like in the middle of the afternoon like nothing was up?

JP: Oh, heck yeah. I would never stop at Phantom Ranch.

TM: And nobody saw you and that was...

JP: Right. No, just phew.

TM: Wow.

JP: You don't talk to anybody on something like that.

TM: Did you scout Hance? Did you scout anything or was it just ran it?

JP: No, I did not scout anything that I can recall.

TM: Okay. So day two would have been somewhere around Granite, maybe?

JP: Right. And you know, it's...

TM: Day three...

JP: Almost all of those rapids for a kayaker have routes that aren't available for rafters and whatnot and they're pretty safe...

TM: Yeah.

JP: ...unless you're wanting to go for the gusto or the hero waves or whatever.

TM: But you had remembered from September the year before, kind of the routes that would get you through.

JP: Mmm hmm.

TM: So that makes sense.

JP: Oh yeah.

TM: By the third night, you would be somewhere around 150 mile, Upset, something like that, Kanab and then Lava would have been noon day four. Something like that.

JP: That's about right. Very good. Well, by that time I was feeling pretty confident cause I hadn't even had a roll, you know.

TM: [laughs] And you had your helmet.

JP: Lava Falls is a really sensationally wonderful rapid. It has its fear and loathing crowd, you know. But I wasn't in that, even though that was only my second trip. It was like, this is one of the most glorious natural features on the planet and how often do you get down here? So I did scout, I did scout Lava. I thought, well, all right, so I've got a good run here. Made the run fine. I'm down there below and I thought, you just can't leave now. You can't do that. So I took the kayak to the shore and I took all my camping gear out, all my supplies and everything like that, carried the boat back up and ran it again. [both laugh]

Then I get down there after the second run. I thought longest daylight of the year, lots of light left, let's do it again. So I carry the boat back up. [laughs] Well, about this time, a big old Western motorboat comes through and eddies out down below and watches me run it again and a boatman just, "Come here," he said, "what are you doing here? You don't have any gear and your boat is not riding heavy like a loaded kayak would be. What? How'd you get here?" [laughs] He was real astute cause they do ride different when they're loaded with all that camping gear. I just told him, I says, "Oh, I'm just having so much fun. I just really enjoy this rapid. It's a wonderful rapid." He goes, "Well, you be careful now." So of course he started the bongos, the river bongo drums going, and talked to other boatmen. So as I was working my way downstream from there, they had me all figured out by that time that I was on a sneak trip. This one motorboat comes up to me and he wouldn't leave me alone. It was Dave Foster, turns out, from Marble Canyon, and he says, "Hey, I know what you're doing and I've figured it out. We've all pretty much all figured it out. I won't tell anybody if you come and camp with us and tell stories to my peeps tonight." He said, "And I'll feed you, too." And I went, "Well, okay." [laughs] Well, we became really good friends as a result of that. In fact, he loaned me a outboard motor for our 1983 high water trip.

It was just a wonderful time to be down there. It was a time when you could get away with that kind of stuff. And the raft god was somewhat limited in those days as compared to what it is now. The upshot of it was that word got out. That's when Dick Marks was superintendent. He knew he didn't have enough evidence to arrest me or cite me because it was all hearsay and circumstantial. But anyway... By that time I had a job consulting for the Grand Canyon Natural History Association. That's a different story. I'd started doing that in 1980. They would actually bring me up there and put me up overnight for some of those consulting jobs. On one of those trips, he got word through the chief of interpretation to tell me that he wanted to meet with me. So I go, "This is probably not a good thing." So I go on there and he's got his chief ranger and him, and he's real blunt. You probably know how Dick was. He goes, "Okay, Parsons, we know he did a sneak trip down there. We don't have enough evidence to cite you, but we know you did it. We want to make you a deal." "What kind of deal?" [laughs] He says, "Well, we've been thinking about legalizing that. If you could help us understand what's really involved and what we should watch out for, I'll give you my word that anything that you say won't be held against you and we won't use it to arrest you." He said, "You help us determine whether or not this is something that we should do for the river public." I said,

“Great. I can do that.” So we actually worked together for a period of time and then they legalized it in '82 and gave me the first legal permit to go down there. That was a lot of fun.

TM: So they outlawed solo trips in 1956. So '66-'76, it had been 25 or 26 years of no more Buzz Holmstrom's.

JP: Mmm hmm. Yeah.

TM: That was really fascinating. I've never heard that, this is all new to me. So this is great.

JP: Once they realized that technology and skill had conjoined to a point where people could be trusted to do this without becoming a search and rescue liability for the park, that they could issue permits to do that if the people that applied for the permit agreed to the conditions of the permit and that it was a logical progression of use of the river. And it's now a common thing. People with the skills and equipment necessary do it at all times a year. That guy that did it in that Lynx Aire 2 was amazing in January. I mean, that's nuts. But like you said, when he finally got to Diamond, he didn't want to leave. [laughs] And it's January! So anyway, that's one of my big contributions to the Grand Canyon. Somebody would've eventually done it, but it just happened to be me.

TM: Right. Did Marks say whether he was getting any pressure from anyone else to let that rule...

JP: No. He recognized that there was a latent inherent demand for that. And I'm sure that they were contacted by people inquiring about it. They'd have to be. But, you know...

TM: Had you heard of anyone else running it without a permit?

JP: I'd heard of Brad Dimock and his friend that ran the LCR and then got busted somewhere down by Phantom. That's all I'd ever heard about. But I mean, I'm sure there were other people, but people that would do it wouldn't be wanting to talk about.

TM: That's right. [JP laughs] That's right. Unless they got caught.

JP: Yeah. He and I had a kind of an odd relationship. We had quite a few meetings and close contacts and things like that to the point where I went to his grave at the Grand Canyon Cemetery on our last visit and just stood there and looked at his headstone and thought about him. It's like, what a guy. He was, he was different.

TM: Tell me more about Marks. Why was he different?

JP: He was kind of cut from that old-school, macho era of park leaders and managers. My way or the highway, kind of a thing. The idea of collaboration and consensus was not exactly part of his vocabulary. So if it was his idea, it was a good thing; if it was your idea, it was maybe not a good thing. It was most of the time his ideas that would carry the day.

TM: Are you aware of the Yosemite riots?

JP: No.

TM: Not so much. Okay. He was the head of law enforcement. He was the chief law enforcement ranger at Yosemite at the time. So that is kind of a match to what you're saying about your recollections of him.

JP: Right. Right. Well, but you know, that was a fairly common male persona.

TM: That's right.

JP: And he was kind of up from that era. Probably back in the day, he probably would've had a flat top or a buzz cut or something like that. He was just probably one of these kind of people. He was, this is the way it is.

TM: Okay. What else did you do with him? What other...

JP: Oh, it would be impossible for me to remember every little thing. We had quite a bit of interface on our 1983 high water trip. I really, really pissed him off in public when we were down on the river. [laughs]

TM: How so?

JP: Well, you know all the rapids were closed at the big flow.

TM: Let's back up a little bit. Was this like, okay, well, I did the trip in 1980, I did my trip in 1981, did you do any trip in '82 at all?

JP: Oh yeah. Quite a few.

TM: How so? What kind of trips there?

JP: Well, there were some. My next solo trip, of course. And then, of course, the famous LCR trip where I got in trouble with them down there at Tanner. Then I started picking up work from commercial outfitters. '82 was a real down year for the outfitters. I heard that Canyoneers had a bunch of user days and they were real paranoid about not being able to use them all up and how that might affect their allocation and their dealings with the park. Gaylord Staveley was running Canyoneers back then with his wife, Joy. So I went to Gaylord and I said, "Hey, I've got an idea just as a way to use your days. I would like to do the first commercially supported kayak trip down the canyon." That had never been done before. He was real skeptical about the whole thing and I overcame that. We sold out one of his full motor rigs with a hundred percent kayakers, except for the boatman and a swamper. We had the distinction of actually carrying a hundred pound bag of potatoes on that motorboat. [laughter] I don't remember how many cases of beer, but it was a brand new record for Canyoneers, at least, in terms of the number of cases of beer. But there were no people on the boat so that they could really pack stuff in. I mean, there was just two people on the boat and everybody else was in the water. He allowed me to be the kayaking trip leader, so to speak. The motorboat would be the overall trip leader, but I got to be the one that called the shots for the kayakers. My goal on that trip was to teach them that the rapids down there were not to be feared, but to be embraced as just... I mean, you take a rapid like President Harding, that's something nobody pays any attention to whatsoever. It's a rock in the middle of the river and you go past it and you're downriver and you don't think of it. That's just one of the most fabulous kayaking spots that there is. That cushion that comes off, you can surf that cushion that's on the face of that rock all day. And if you figure it out right, once you lose your surf, you can work your way back up and do it again. [laughs]

You know, these people, they didn't have any idea that stuff like that was a joy. They didn't have any idea that running the waves that everybody tries to avoid, like the very worst part of Crystal, or the very worst part of Lava or any of those things, was actually the most fun parts of the rapid and that you could survive those easily and joyfully. So I helped them learn that. When we finally got to Hermit, we spent almost a full day there. People coming back up and running it over and over. The boat was anchored at the bottom, and you know, they'd take beer breaks, then they'd go up and run it again and the boatman would just hang out. I think the most anyone ran it that day was like seven times. The goal that I gave them was, you're not going to get an A rating on this unless we see your boat on the tip of each one of those waves. [laughter] Not the left or the right. [laughter] They'd just

be working, you know, and if they missed the tip on one they'd come back and "Oh, so close."
[laughs]

TM: Walk up, do it again.

JP: Now you go down in the bottom of that hole and don't be scared of it cause it just...if you do this and you do that, it'll take you inside and it'll lift you up like an escalator and then you're out. Boy, once they got that down, oh, it was just... That's all we did for the whole trip. It was pure joy. I did some other trips and I can't remember them.

TM: So that's 1982 and then a fairly good snowpack in 1983 on a reservoir that was full.

JP: Right.

TM: And the Reclamation had no choice but to start...

JP: We had the distinction of karma that year. We were the last private trip they allowed to launch before they closed the river. And as chance would have it, we ran Crystal at the peak and Liz Hymans was down there filming Crystal. You've seen her work, I'm sure. Well, if you go back and review her work, you'll see us in her film going through the rapid. She counted the frames in her eight millimeter film to document the speed of our boats going through her hydraulic jump study area. It was right smack dab at the full peak right there, 100,000 or whatever, nobody knows what it really was. Well anyway, the rapid was closed. There was not supposed to be anybody going through it. But the people they'd sent down... I knew the people that they'd sent down there, each one of them, Hance and whatever, to close them. I'd just go up to him and just con him out of it and say, "Look, nobody's ever going to know. They don't have like surveillance cameras down here. It's like, you're not going to say anything, I'm not going to say anything. We're going to go through that rapid." They go, "All right, get out of here." So, [laughs] we were going through Crystal and just as we're cast off in our snout rig, here comes the helicopter right down to the water level with the side door open and a video camera pointed right [TM laughs] straight, [laughs] right straight at me. [laughs] I mean, right straight in my face. Just like your lens out there, you could look and you could see the lens. It's like oh shit, you know. So, they took the tape back up there, park headquarters, and Marks and his buddies were there and they turned it on. The stories I heard was he just went nuts. He said, "That son of bitch Parsons. Some heads are going to roll." [laughs] I have a video up in Idaho, when I get back up there I'll send you it. One of our people on the shore was doing a video and it shows my boat and it shows the helicopter and it shows the proximity of all of us right there in Crystal. [laughs] The next time I saw him after that trip, he just came right up to me and he says, "You know, you really pissed me off you son of a bitch." [laughter] Oh God. Standing in front of his tombstone, all those memories came back. I kind of liked him. He was different.

TM: What else do you remember about the '83 trip? About the water at that level?

JP: Oh, it was... A lot of people like to say, "Oh, it was high water. We had a really good time." I was terrified. I was just basically scared witless for the whole trip. I tried not to show it to anybody. I remember before we left the ferry... Tom Workman was still there and he and I had to go somewhere. I was in the vehicle with him and I said, "Tom, I'm scared out on my mind. I don't know if I can even swallow." I'm just like, "I'm terrified." He says, "Well, you don't have to go." I says, "Yeah, but you know how it is. It's like, all these people, it's like God help us." He says, "Good luck." [laughter] You know, just so many close calls and so many things that could have/should have gone wrong. The worst for me was that real narrow spot in the river that's above Deer Creek. It's super narrow there. I think that's the actually narrowest spot in the Canyon. Isn't that right?

TM: So it's called Granite Narrows. The river runners in the 50s mark that at high water, the water would boil up on the left and sheet across to the right and then drop.

JP: Right. That's exactly what it does. But beyond that, it creates this ridiculous piece of circular water that is sloped. It kinda goes down into this little weird black hole in the middle of it. You look at that and you just go, "I'm doomed." [laughs] It took the 22-foot snout rig and it just totally smashed it into the right wall and pinned it like this. Anything that was tied to the right side of the raft was destroyed. I just thought... It was me and my parents, just the three of us. My mom was screaming and I couldn't verbalize anything. I'm just sitting back there by the motor and just going, "Well God, do something [laughs] and then let us go." I don't know why... We should have flipped, we should have probably drowned, but it didn't do any of those things. It just surged and let us go. That was the worst spot. I mean, there was other bad ones, but my God, I would never want to see that again. [chuckles]

TM: So the river runners in the 50s at high water would scout that point. They would stop up at the top where the piano is on the right and they would walk down to look at that to get ready for it. But we had lost that understanding because the water had never been up for 20/30 years.

JP: Well, I can sure see why they did it. [laughs] I can see that now plain as it was that day. Ohhhh.

TM: Interesting.

JP: You know, just worrying if you're ever gonna find a camp on any given day. If everybody will be able to get to that camp. One night they weren't, the kayakers for some reason missed it.

TM: So, on that trip in '83, you're driving a motor boat with your parents. What other boats were there?

JP: We had one of those little miniature dories that Randy Fabres used to manufacture. And then we had a great big tube paddle raft, Nancy McCleskey was the paddle captain on that. And then we had some kayakers. That's about it.

TM: Okay. So you're running the motor support.

JP: Yeah. With Dave Foster's 10 horse motor [TM laughs] on a 22-foot snout. [laughs] Not exactly a real smart rig. So, you know, I'd had these nightmares for forever about how I was going to get to Crystal and the motor was going to die. For days or beforehand this recurrent nightmare would come up. So we get to Crystal and look it over. I get back in the boat, start the motor up, turn the throttle—and I'm loose from shore at the time—and the motor dies. Just like in the nightmare, just exactly like it was in the nightmare. But it was close enough for somebody who happened to have a throw rope to throw it and got us back in. That part hadn't been in the nightmare, but you know, it was something. I don't know where they would have passed us, but that's when that Emerald Mile crowd was on the river. The two of them. It was probably at night when we were sleeping. It was quite the...

TM: Did you take out a Diamond or did you go to the lake?

JP: At Diamond Creek, yeah. And several people on that trip have since passed on. I don't know how many of them. I'm thinking four, maybe five. But there's quite a... Most of the rest of us are left and we communicate with each other once in a while. That was quite the trip. All those things are just Grand Canyon river stories. You've got a million Grand Canyon river stories. The fun thing about the Grand Canyon is that it inherently creates a plethora of stories. No matter what the water level, no matter what the season, no matter what the equipment, no matter what the people, no matter what their skills. When you leave and you head down that river, you're heading into storyland and you're going to come back with stories you're going to remember for the rest of your life. Whether you're run at once or whether you run it 120 times. There's just things that happen there that don't happen anywhere else. America and the world is filled with rivers that people run. But for some

reason the Grand Canyon generates more lasting stories than all the rest of them combined. I don't know what it is about that place, but it's just, it's storyland. You go there and you're part of a story. [chuckles]

TM: Yeah, yeah. What else do you have to recall about Dick Marks before we leave him?

JP: Oh, I can't remember very much. I know we had a lot of interfaces, especially relating to stuff with the Natural History Association. He had more of a hands on role on that. For example, my first gig with him was when I went and told him that they didn't have a children's book for the Grand Canyon. Believe it or not, in early 1981 when I went out there, there were no kids books published about the Grand Canyon. Zero. I said, "You know, you owe it to this big segment of your visitor population and their families." Well, they were really intrigued by that idea. That was the first time I crossed his path. He wanted to know what was up with this kids book thing. When I explained it to him, he went, "You know, you're right about that." Well, then the second meeting was I proposed a way to gather data on what the book should be and it violated park policy. So I had to get an exemption from the Pope, you know, which is Dick. I wanted to conduct a survey of visitors and you can't do that. At the time anyway, you couldn't ask them questions. I said I really wouldn't be asking them questions, sort of asking him questions. Dick had to meet with me to approve that. He says, "How do you figure you can get away with this?" I says, "Well, simple," and I showed him. He went, "Alright." It was pretty cool. It was, you lay out four stacks of pictures. First, you get permission from the parents to have a kid come up. One stack of pictures is rocks, people, critters, and the canyon itself. So there's a picture of a close up of some sort of a rock, and then a person, and then maybe a ground squirrel or some deer or some damn thing, and then the big wide open scenics. So the kid comes up and you just say, "Point to which pile you like the most." And they go [sound effect] like that. Then you move that pile down like a deck of cards and spread it open and there'd be like five or six different critter pictures. You say, "Show me which one you like the best." They just only get one choice and then you just tally that. We finally realized that they don't see the canyon. They don't have developed depth perception and they don't know if its 2 feet wide or 200 miles wide, but they see rocks, people, and critters and plants. Yuccas are especially attractive to little kids, ground squirrels, deer, ravens, rangers, you know, flat brim hats and funky big rocks that were close enough for them to touch. That's what they see. So that's how we designed a book. We minimized the adult grand vistas and focused in on this kind of stuff that had their scale and perceptive contact, I guess you could say. So that was Dick and I's first thing was giving me permission to go do that. It was a lot of fun.

TM: Cool. Yeah. I just remember seeing kids at the rim going, "Squirrel!" They're not looking out across, "Hey, is the north rim over there?" you know, "Is that the lodge, that little speck of light over there?" No, they're like, "Squirrel, look, there's a squirrel right here."

JP: Right, right. We titled the book *Where Do I Look?* and then I helped him find an author and a photographer. It won an award, but it's been out of print for a long time. The big telltale marker for all of us was one guy that came up and he had six kids. He was nice, but he says, "My kids don't need to take your survey," he says, "I'll tell you everything you need to know." I said, "How is it that you know everything I need to know?" He says, "Well, we come to the Canyon every year and we have been forever." He said, "What I do is I buy them each their own camera and as much film as they want. They get to take all the pictures that they want and then I develop them and give them all the pictures." He said, "I've been doing this for years." I thought, "Oh, okay, you have already taken the photo preference test." He goes, "Yeah, I've been doing it for years." And he says, "I can tell you right now, none of the pictures that they bring home are of the canyon. [laugh] They don't take pictures of the canyon." He said almost all of them are things that they can get close to and that intrigue them. If they can get a face of a rock squirrel, they're ecstatic. If they can get up close to a

deer, they flip out. He said, "And you'd wouldn't believe the number of dumb boring rocks they take pictures of." It's like [laughter] I said, "You're right. You told me everything they needed to know."

TM: Huh. Very cool. As we kind of look at the time here, we've been at this now an hour and twenty minutes, how time flies.

JP: Yeah, so here's a plan. What we've done here is... We haven't even... We basically got up to about '82 or '83.

TM: And we got there awfully fast because I would like to know a little bit more about Purdue. I would like to know a little bit more about, if you're willing, what it's like to run a newspaper in Zionsville, Indiana. I'd also like to know a little bit more, well, yeah, about certainly your relationship with GCA about that and then moving forward.

JP: Cause they were way different back then. And we didn't get to talk about the LCR trip. We didn't get to talk about, yeah, let's see...the transition between... I actually worked as a commercial guide up to 1988 but my efforts on the Verde started in 1981 and -2. So there was a transition between the big river and the little river that spanned a number of years. I worked for the equivalent of seven years to get sand and gravel out of the Verde and I was successful in '89. But like I said in the message last night, I'd like to get back to the clique briefly and not to let that loose end dangle. Every one of those people that was in that clique group are all really good people and they've all gone on to do really good things. I've reached an understanding of why they behave that way. At the time I didn't understand it. I'm grateful that they were that way because that's what sent me to the Verde. The Verde didn't have any friends and the Grand Canyon had a lot of them. I wasn't welcome or being included in that clique group there in Flagstaff, but I found a way to establish comradery with other people who appreciated other rivers and it really helped facilitate a lot of stuff. If they'd have been inclusive, well maybe I'd have just become part of the clique and never done any of that other stuff. So they gave me a really great gift and I want to express gratitude for that and not resentment, okay.

TM: There's a very positive side to this which is very fascinating.

JP: At the time it was just natural for me to seek an avenue where I could accomplish results so I would always be going in that direction. And the fact that I couldn't get anything done in that direction because of that exclusivity and everything like that. Well, at the time I didn't spend much time agonizing over it, I just went another way. So I'm really glad that that was there because this really needed the help. The canyon has 6 million, billion friends, you know, and these little rivers are lucky if they have any. Back then the Verde had none.

TM: So we have a list for next time here that I've put together. Before we wrap this up here, is there anything else you'd like to add?

JP: Yeah, this will be the first of several times I try to express this. What you're doing both with specific projects and collectively with all of your projects, you're not only documenting historical vignettes and timelines and transitions and so forth in the grand cavalcade of Canyon river running, but you're also establishing a framework and foundation for people today to learn from the past about the continuity of river running as a cultural behavior that has evolved over time with advances in technology and behavior and skills and perspectives. For the astute visitor to Grand Canyon who really cares about these things, what you're doing is beyond invaluable. When I came to the Canyon first in 1980, that didn't exist. I mean, the Association hadn't even hired that guy to do river runners of the Grand Canyon. He hadn't even written that book yet. There weren't all of these books that are available now about everything from the Hydes to everybody who has ever done anything. Even to find out about the Kolbs was an adventure. What you're doing is you're adding flesh to the bones of all that structure. You're bringing it alive in a way that a student and individual can appreciate and

put to personal use. That's the real key to what all this means. This is nothing if it can't benefit an individual in some meaningful way for their own life. It's nice and interesting to learn historical facts and figures, but you are creating a context where the total is greater than the sum of the parts.

TM: Well, since this is going to be an edited transcription, I will say, this has been a wonderful interview. [laughs] Thank you very much, John. This concludes what is going to be part one of a Grand Canyon oral history with John Parsons. My name is Tom Martin. Today is December 8th, 2018. We are at the home of John and thank you very much.

JP: Thank you Tom.