Grand Canyon Oral History Transcript

Interviewee: Roderick “Rod” Nash (RN)
Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)
Subject: Family history, growing up in NYC, First trips to Arizona and the Grand Canyon

Date of Interview: **September 22, 2024 Part 1**
Method of Interview: Telephone
Date of Transcription March 23, 2025
Transcript Reviewers: TM

KEYWORDS
Jay B Nash, physical education, community development, outdoor recreation, Emma Frazier, New York University, camping skills, public tennis courts, Jesse Owens Olympics, stickball, Kolb Studio, Mule Ride, Grand Canyon backpacking, mountain lions, Camp Coconino, Stoneman Lake, All Indian Pow Wow.

TM 00:02 Today is Sunday, September 22 2024 this is a part one Grand Canyon oral history interview with Roderick Nash Rodrick goes by Rod, and I will be calling him that in this interview. My name is Tom Martin, good morning Rod, how are you today?

RN 00:31 Tom, good morning to you. It's the first day of fall. By the way, 5:43 am Pacific time was the autumnal equinox.

TM 00:44 That's right, that's right. Auspicious day. Rod, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

RN 00:53 Yes,

TM 00:54 Thank you. Rod, what year were you born?

RN 00:58 I was born in 1939.

TM 01:00 Okay. Do you know how your mom met your dad?

RN 01:05 Yes, I do. My mom was a physical education student in a field that was just burgeoning at New York University, and my dad had a distinguished career in what would now be called Community Development, but at the time, was sort of called Health, Physical Education and Recreation, and he was a professor at the University. And as far as I can tell, they didn't talk about it much, but as far as I can tell, they had a kind of a classic student teacher romance, and they were married at a late age. My mother was over 40 when I was born. My father was 53 when I was born and had had a child prior on the West Coast and then had reoriented his career and obtained a PhD from New York University. He was quite a giant in his field, as your father was. He was responsible for, just to give you an example, the idea of public tennis courts. Up until that time, tennis courts were private things in clubs, you had to

be members, and you certainly didn't want to be Afro American to play on them, but my father thought everyone should play, and he thought that should be part of the responsibility of the community to not only develop tennis courts, but golf courses and maybe even outdoor education programs, maybe even camping skills, maybe even trips into the Sierra that he made in California, one of them to a place called Hetch Hetchy Valley, which later was flooded.

TM 02:50 Hey, Rod, what was your dad's name?

RN 02:53 Jay B. Nash and everybody called him Jay B, but that's the name on his many, many books.

TM 03:07 What were his folks doing out in California? Was he born in California?

RN 03:12 He was born in Ohio, went to Oberlin College, the first person, first member of his family, to go to college, And after that, moved to Oakland, California, and began to work for the city government. He attracted attention for his belief that education, as we taught it in the public school should be more than the three R's, and should include creative use of leisure time, development of skills, passions extending all the way from dance and art to and through athletics to camping and outdoor recreation.

TM 03:58 Whoa, wait a minute there. Didn't Oakland have a camp off in the hills or in the Sierras somewhere that the kids went to?

RN 04:06 Yeah, that was his camp, it was in the hills. And he would, he would bus people, he'd take people up there and would teach them camping skills and expose them to the outdoors. And just to follow through segway ahead a little bit on that, he became a contributor to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, which was organized in the 1950s and you may vaguely remember that Wallace Stegner’s famous wilderness letter of 1960 was written to that commission, part of that effort to assess what America had in the way of outdoor recreation resources.

TM 04:57 Okay, let's keep backing up here a little bit. Right, so, your dad was born in Ohio. What were his parents doing in Ohio then?

RN 05:08 They were farmers.

TM 05:12 And did they stay in Ohio when your dad went to California?

RN 05:20 Pretty much. Some stayed on the farm.

TM 05:22 Like his mom and dad, your grandparents?

RN 05:26 Probably, and some of his siblings. I remember visiting the farm. I was a city kid. I was sort of an athlete, and I went out there and tried to buck some hay. You know what I'm talking about... throw those hay bales on top of a pickup truck, the load gets higher and higher, gets harder and harder. Yeah, and I can remember my uncle J B's brother Garfield, watching me struggle with that. He said, you know? He said, you got gym strength, you're not country strong. Out here we have country strong

boys. They usually go to Iowa State to play linemen. And I never forgot that, because I was struggling to lift those bails and so, yeah, they did stay on the farm, and he was the first member of his family to obtain a PhD.

TM 06:21 What do you remember about your grandparents on your dad's side?

RN 06:25 Nothing, nothing. A few had faded photographs...

TM 06:29 Had they passed away by the time you were introduced to the farm there in Ohio?

RN 06:35 Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Remember, I wasn't born until my father was 53.

TM 06:43 All right, so they were farmers, and they stayed there on the farm. But your dad broke loose and went all the way to the Pacific.

RN 06:56 He followed Horice Greeley's advice to go west young man.

TM 07:00 Did he serve in the First World War?

RN 07:03 No, he did not, although you'd think he would have been, he would have been eligible for that. He graduated from Oberlin in 1911 Okay, and shortly thereafter, went west. The first American involvement in the First World War began in 1917. I don't know if he was married then. He was married not to my mother, but to a woman on the West Coast. They did, have a child.

TM 07:34 So that might have done it if he had a child, and he was doing a productive job for the country at the time.

RN 07:42 That kind of deal. And, of course, wow. I mean, you know, we think about the Spanish flu in connection with COVID. We think about how many young men died from that so called Spanish flu.

TM 07:57 Did he talk about the influenza?

RN 08:00 He didn't talk about much of that with me. Didn't talk about much of his West Coast experiences. I have a few pictures. I have one hanging on my wall right now showing him hiking in Hetch Hetchy Valley. You flashed on that Oakland camp, and it became kind of a model for a camp he developed in New York called the New York University camp outside of New York City. Many people came there for summer sessions to obtain graduate degrees, in what we would now call recreation or community development.

TM 08:36 Did your dad graduate from Oberlin in 1911 and then that year, go to California, go to Oakland?

RN 08:46 I believe he did. Within the year he went to California and ended up in Oakland, I ended up well connected with some of the Oakland progressives, who were, you know, looking askance at the

trusts, and were thinking about the rights of working people and thinking that society should do more for working people than just give them the three R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic. And maybe they should introduce them, these being very urban people, to some outdoor skills and experiences.

TM 09:28 Okay. Who did he meet up there?

RN 09:35 So Jay B. Nash met Emma. Emma Frazier, who was a graduate student at the university. Emma is a very distant descendant with a name spelling change to this is going to rock your world a little bit. Simon Fraser. Simon was the third man across the continent. They named a river after him, called the Fraser River. It enters. Pacific in Vancouver, and Simon and his family were Tories. They moved out of northern New England. Moved into Canada. He grew up in Canada, a bright young man in the Hudson Bay Company, the Northwest Company, age 34, the same age as Powell, same age as Shackleton, age 34 people do High Rock things. He said, we'll find a navigable route to the Pacific. He failed to do that. He got into some serious white water and had to obtain help from the natives. He finally got to salt water, but he realized this was not going to be what Canada hoped it would be. That was Simon Frazier.

TM 10:48 Was he before or after or contemporary with David Thompson?

RN 10:54 Good question, before. Okay, David Thompson was one of the trappers who began to penetrate into the rivers and a tributary of a major tributary, the Frazier River is the Thompson River, and there's some serious white water in Hells Gate Canyon. There's also a statue of Simon Fraser. And I stood next to it, and people said, Look, you have his nose. Anyway, there was a spelling change. I spell my name, F R, A, Z, I, E, R. Simon spelled his name, F R, A, S, E R. But of course, it was some, just some clerk writing it down, the word comes from the French word for strawberries. And Simon wasn't a very great leader. He doesn't have the Kent Canadians think will think well of him, but he doesn't have the aura that Lewis and Clark do. For example, even though he was just a year or two behind them in crossing the continent, saw water, and so he didn't even know where he was. He thought he was at the mouth of the Columbia River. Somebody later told him, Simon, I think you found a new river. He said, “Well, let's name it after me,” which they did. So my mother, who never trucked in that stuff very much at all, was something of a pioneer.

TM 12:26 Well now hang on Rod, just a minute, because I'm confused. Now, your dad's first wife...

RN 12:31 Yes, his first wife was divorced and left in California.

TM 12:39 Let me make sure I get this right, this is Emma Frazier?

RN 12:49 Emma Frazier was the woman he met in New York City.

TM 12:55 Who's going to become your mom?

RN 12:55 Who became my mom and became his second wife.

TM 12:56 So hang on, because I was asking about your dad's first wife.

RN 13:01 I know very little about her. I think her name was Gladys Caldwell, but I know very little else about her. Their marriage was not successful, and he had the opportunity to come back to New York and work on his PhD and head their effort in what was a new field. This wasn't just your traditional college disciplines and departments. This was a new field, and it was very much oriented in the progressive manner toward improving the life of the so called common man.

TM 13:41 Hang on a second. I don't want to leave this quite yet. You mentioned that that Gladys and Jay B. had a daughter. And did that daughter go with her father or stay with her mother?

RN 13:59 Stayed with her mother? She later became a Captain in World War Two in the Army, Captain Janet Nash, and I never knew her very well. She was 20 years older than I was, okay. I never lived with her, but that was his first child.

TM 14:22 Did they stay in touch throughout the rest of his life?

RN 14:26 Yeah, yeah. She moved fairly near New York City. We used to go out there on weekends when I was a kid and talked to them, some of her children, and she was a great bridge player, tennis player, but we were never close. I never really got much information from my father about that life. It was almost as always, sort of put a barrier when he recrossed the continent. He'd gone west, and he was going east.

TM 14:59 Did your dad ever say why? I understand relationships don't work. But did he realize that he wasn't happy with the Sierra in California and decided, well, I should go back east again? Did he ever say why he did that?

RN 15:15 I think he did that because he was a very gregarious person. Most people thought very well of him, loved him, and she was apparently not that way. Okay, not did not like associating much with other people. That's about as far as I ever learned. He missed the Sierra. He missed the wildness of the Sierra. You know, he was tramping around up there. John Muir was still alive, He remembered going to a lecture in, I think, Berkeley, California in 1914. Now get this, at that lecture, you and I would have gone because at that lecturer was John Muir. He died in 1914 this was, I think, in early 1914 and maybe 1913. In that lecture was John Deere, and also someone who would have interested your father. Ishi, the man from two worlds who Kroeber wrote about the last of the Stone Age natives who emerged from the lava tube country of Northern California, huddled in a corral and couldn't speak English, and people didn't know what to do. They brought him to the museum. Kroeber learned a little bit of his language, and he lived in the museum for a short while because that's what he liked to do. He said I want to live in the museum. And people said, well, you're keeping him as like a zoo. That's what he wanted. And he was on the stage with John Muir, and the narrator said, “How long do you think it'll take Ishi, to build a fire? We have some materials on the stage here. How long do you think it'll take? Make some bets as to how long you think it'll take him.” He used his toes, his toes. He never wore shoes. So he held the thing that you rub the stick on to generate heat, held that in between his big toe and the rest of his foot, and then he used both hands to twirl it. He made a fire in less than a minute. And so it was

Ishi and John Muir together on the stage. So there must have been a lot to enjoy out there, but he moved back East. He was called back east by some of the pioneers in the field of what you might call physical education, and that, you know, translates in some people's minds into gym classes or into football teams. But it went way beyond that, and it really was a recognition that the communities and the schools owed their members some life skills and some abilities to find passion, maybe even to run the Grand Canyon.

TM 18:16 So he then took a job at NYU in the middle of New York City?

RN 18:20 In the middle of New York City. And I was born in the middle of freaking New York City. I was born on the island of Manhattan. And, you know, there's a little snobbery there. I mean, people say they're from New York, and you begin to ask them, Well, we're really from New Jersey. We're really from Long Island. If you're a real New Yorker, you got to be born on the Island of Manhattan, and it was a miserable place for a child to grow up.

TM 18:52 I'm going to ask you all about that, but not just yet because I want to know now about Emma, about your mom. She's in New York City. She's gonna meet your dad there in he's the teacher. She's the student. But where were her parents from? What was her background?

RN 19:12 Well, her parents were from Lynn, Massachusetts, north of Boston, and she was one of the few, few women of her generation who went to college. She went to a college called Mount Holyoke, graduating in 1919. She was a very good athlete.

TM 19:36 What did she graduate in?

RN 19:39 Well, I'm not sure what she graduated in, whether there even was a major being chosen, but she played field hockey. And later, was a part of, and I'm not sure how far she went in it, maybe all the way to be a starter with the United States field hockey team. And you know, no one wore face guards at that time. Man, it was pretty rugged. She took a ball in the face, knocked out all her teeth, and remained a very good athlete. Beat me in tennis when I thought I was pretty good around 12 years old, knocked me off, Bageled me. In fact. And I remember I was very, very mad. But she, you know, in many ways, I think, wasn't all that comfortable with a child. She always had a female companion around who sort of helped. And I think, in retrospect, maybe she had tried to have a child. Lost several children. Went to the Jesse Owens Olympics in 1936 with Jay B., Jesse Owens Olympics, and on that trip, may have lost a child. I don't mean lost a child, she had a miscarriage. So they tried one more time, and I was born in 1939 which was not only a miserable place to be born, New York City, as far as a child goes, but was a miserable year to be born. If you think about it, 1939 was still in the Depression. Hitler was moving. America wasn't in the war yet, but some dark days were ahead.

TM 21:41 I want to back up for a minute. You mentioned that your mom and dad had gone to the Olympics in Germany in 1936 I think that's when that was, I'm not sure about that, right? And, and, did it? Did they talk about that? Why did they want to go.

RN 22:02 Well, they wanted to go because my father was a professor of physical education. And he had a great admiration for those people who train sufficiently to be in the Olympics. He had a special admiration for the young man. They called them the Wandervogel, the wandering birds or wanderers of the Nazis. And the Nazis for a long time, you know, it's now sort of a dirty word, but in their early 30s, he looked at what they were doing in their schools, and he said this is a model for what we should be doing with our younger people. They're not only educating them, they're educating them physically and they're educating them with skills and with passions for their life. And so, so they did go, they took a study tour of graduate students to the Olympics, which are also known as the Jesse Owens Olympics. Owens set three records there. Allegedly shook hands with Mr. Hitler and said, Mr. Hitler's not about black and white, it's about fast and slow. Hitler was pissed. I mean, you know, because he thought the Aryans were the fast race.

TM 23:18 That's right. Did your dad appreciate Hitler and the Nazis and what they were doing?

RN 23:28 No, like most Americans he was, became quite frightened of it. I think there were a number of Americans in the early 30s who thought, and this, boy, this, resonates a little bit with some of our present politics, who were rallying behind this phenomenon, this political phenomenon in Germany. Adolf Hitler, you may remember because you saw the Boys in the Boat film. They cleaned up the city pretty well for the 1936 Olympics. Remember that? The Boys in the Boat rode their eight person skull to victory in that Olympics, and they cleaned things up. But it was only a couple years later that things really went to hell over there and the discrimination and bloodshed began against the Jews and my father, along with, I think a number of Americans had to, had to suck in and change their minds about Hitler, but in the beginning, there was considerable enthusiasm for him. I'm not going to mention current political names, but there are some parallels that have been pointed out in many editorials.

TM 24:45 The operations of Germany, you know their educational systems, etc, apart from their politics, you know their emphasis on learning, on arts and crafts and culture, things that we look back at today and go that's pretty amazing stuff. But, you know, there are tyrants among all of us everywhere,

RN 25:16 You're right, but, you absolutely are right in saying that Tom, there was a lot about German culture that was very attractive. Don't forget, Hitler began his political rise in the 1920s so he had about 10 years there, and my father, among others, admired some of the things that he was doing but had to retract and pull back from that admiration later, as World War Two began.

TM 25:50 So I want to go back to your dad for a minute. He was doing these pretty amazing and really neat things in Oakland, to get kids that were basically growing up in the concrete jungle, to get them out into the real jungle. Did your dad try to do something similar in New York City?

RN 26:13 Well, not, really, not on the public school level, which he did in Oakland. But he did establish a camp, which was called the camp on Lake Sebago in New York, fairly near New York City, up in a place called Bear Mountain Harriman State Park, And there he had a large graduate student operation that came in 30s, 40s, 50s, and took courses toward graduate degrees. And these people spread out from there seed bedding through the country, spreading this new message of responsibility for physical education as well as normal education. And, you know, I just saw the movie, I think you and Hazel

probably did too, called King Richard, where the Williams sisters, you know who I'm talking about, the tennis players, yeah, were denied entrance to many tournaments or playing time at many clubs because the color of their skin. And one of the things Jay B. Nash did was say, hey to the communities, we've got some we've got to make some public tennis courts where everybody can play. We've got to draw some circles that keep people in, that include people, not exclude people. That was an idea that came back to haunt me and reminded me, as I jump ahead to my interest in Aldo Leopold and the land ethic, we're going to put other things into our moral circle, and we're going to put black tennis players in there, and gave the William sisters a chance to play which they did, and they became, as you know, champions, World Champions. So that was a very good example of the sorts of things that he did, not only that he did, but he taught the people who went out into the dark fields of the Republic and created those opportunities. Take tennis and golf, they're two perfect examples and swimming, a perfect example of things that just weren't available to the so-called working classes, and certainly not to those demographics that were the colored demographic.

TM 28:43 But to city people, I mean, basically, it's tough for farm kids, people growing up on rural farms of rural America, to deal with tennis and golf and swimming. It goes back to your uncle, who said, you know, there's a difference between city strength and country strength. There's city swimming and country swimming. Because, you know, there's a little pond over there, and we go swimming in the pond.

RN 29:10 We swim in the pond. And you guys have a pool and learn how to do flip turns, but we know how to, how to swim around roots,

TM 29:16 Right, kind of interesting connection. Now, I want to go back to go back to your mom for a minute. She was from Maine?

RN 29:26 She was from Lynn, Massachusetts.

TM 29:33 What were her folks doing?

RN 29:35 They were involved in textiles and manufacturing in Lynn. I think they made a good deal of money, and I think also suffered, one of them suffered, perhaps her father, from tuberculosis. And like people were told, then often, go west, go into the desert. That's where you'll heal. It's in the desert. And he went trucking out to Los Angeles about 1900. She was just a child as she was born in 1898. He went out to Los Angeles with the idea of buying up some land in Los Angeles, which was a desert community, you know. And he came back and the family story is that he reported, you know, it's pretty out there. There's oranges growing on trees and yet, there's one big problem with Los Angeles. There's no water. Well, they hadn't met William Mulholland yet, and the engineers who began to bring water in from the Owens Valley, from the Colorado River, of course, as you know, and from Northern California, down the state water system. And so, you know, had my dad opted to buy three, four square miles in downtown Los Angeles, I'd be, you know, I'd probably own the Los Angeles Lakers,

TM 31:02 I wouldn't be talking to you, because I wouldn't have the cred to do that. That's right.

RN 31:06 Well, we'd go shoot some baskets. But it was, you know, that was their response. They went back to New England. I never really knew them, which is one reason I'm very proud to have two great grandchildren right this minute as we speak. Nice. I have two great grandchildren. I never met, I never met my grandparents,

TM 31:29 Either on your mom or your dad's side?

RN 31:31 Either side. So I wrote a special little letter to both my granddaughters when they were born, and gave them a little book called Paddle to the Sea. And to me, that was a very great privilege to be able to have that family connection going back all those generations. I might also mention since it'll probably come out at some point that my father was the first person to go to college in his family, the first person to get a PhD in his field, really, I got a PhD. My daughter, Laura, got a PhD in music, and is now dean of a college, and my granddaughter, Caroline, has a PhD and is now very busy in the field of aquatic restoration, riparian repair, fixing, arroyos and things down in your part of the country and elsewhere. So we have a string of four PhDs in a row right there. That started with Jay B. Nash having the courage to leave the farm and buck in the hay and go west.

TM 32:52 Oh, very nice. Okay, let's see. I was thinking about your mom's dad. So he went to LA, he recovered from his TB, and then came back east?

RN 33:08 Well, my knowledge isn't too clear about all this. You remember, I never really knew these people. And she was over 40 when I was born, and so they were gone by that time, but the bottom line was that he had a good instinct to go to LA and he should have, he should have hung around, bought a couple 100 acres,

TM 33:23 But he didn't and in theory, his health improved, and then he went back east again.

RN 33:36 Possibly, possibly it improved. Maybe he died from it, but he didn't stay in the west and along came William Mulholland, and things changed.

TM 33:53 And your dad met your mom when they were both in New York University. And so you were born there in Manhattan. What are your earliest memories of the place your parents were living in when you were a very small child?

RN 34:11 Well, it was a apartment on 10th Street on the edge of Greenwich Village, community in downtown Manhattan. Again, a lousy place for a child to grow up. It was a concrete jungle. There was a concrete wall against which I could throw a ball. That was about it. It was a city where a young person couldn't ride a bike, you know, you wouldn't ride a bike across Manhattan and through Manhattan streets. This was a busy place and that's where I was, and so I remember living there, fortunately, my my parents did, did eventually, as I got older, began to send me off to summer camp, okay, and which was in their tradition, in their philosophy and the importance of getting city people. So it's giving them some camping skills. Theodore Roosevelt, who grew up a few blocks from me, went to the Adirondacks. Bob Marshall also went to the Adirondacks and climbed. Roosevelt, you remember, was on top of an Adirondack peak when he came back after the assassination of William McKinley and so

these are all New York kids who gravitated toward wild places. And I was very, very fortunate to be able to do that. I was sent to a boy's camp south of Flagstaff. You probably know the place called Lake Coconino, which I think, what the name of camp? I think the lake was called Stoneman Lake, right down Route 17. I think, right,

TM 35:49 Wait, because I want to ask you a ton of questions about that. Let's back up for a minute.

RN 35:49 Yeah, that's important, because I want to tell you about that.

TM 35:53 Were you guys in a walk up, kind of 10th floor flat? Or What? What kind of apartment did you have?

RN 36:05 Yeah, it was about a 10 story building and we were on the third floor. I almost never took the elevator. I ran up the stairs and down the stairs, but instead of running out into the woods like most kids did, I ran out onto 10th Street and Fifth Avenue and traffic.

TM 36:27 Okay, so did you get good at, like, weaving in, dodging through traffic, jaywalking kind of thing?

RN 36:33 Well, you know, like all city kids, I I picked up some skills on how to survive. One of them was my mother saying they're going to be a lot of people sort of talking to themselves when you go around out there or maybe trying to talk to you and don't talk to them, we would call them bums. Now today, I think they call them homeless, but back in my era, we call them bums, and I can remember sort of dodging that, that demographic. And I definitely learned as a Darwinian skill of looking both ways when you cross the street, okay, and not playing stick ball in the middle of a street, you know, and going back for a high drive and getting wiped out by a Fifth Avenue bus!

TM 37:24 What was stick ball? Talk me through it. Like, what size was the ball? Fist sized, or tennis ball sized?

RN 37:27 Stick Ball? I'm surprised you are asking. (Laughs) That was played most famously by Willie Mays, who just died recently, and it was played with a little, little pink rubber ball, Yeah, tennis ball size, but it didn't have a cover on it. Like, tennis ball, okay, pink, high bouncing ball, and this, and the bat was a stick, like a broom stick or a mop, a mop handle that you'd hang on to and you would, you could hit the ball a long way. And we would create various imaginative diamonds. First place would be that Pontiac over there. And second base is that hydrant. Third base is over here at Mr. So and So's shop. And then here's home plate. And famously, Willie Mays actually, on a couple occasions, came back from his storied career and joined some of the kids playing, playing stickball on New York streets.

TM 38:34 So is this like baseball, which had bases and you'd run around, or what? How did it work?

RN 38:40 Well, as I said, first base is like a Pontiac over there. Okay, so the idea is you just run as fast as you could to that Pontiac, touch it, and then you'd run, run over to the to the next place, which might be a fire hydrant. That was second base. This is called Urban adaptation, and it's pretty sad when you

think about the opportunities that Jay B. Nash believed were important and that other kids had, of being able to ride a bike and being able to juice the animals other than dogs, and to be able to camp out, learn how to camp, be able to play on a green field and have real bases. We didn't have that in New York.

TM 39:27 Was there a pitcher? Would someone underhand this pink ball at somebody with their stick as a bat?

RN 39:33 Yeah, that was one way to do it. Another way was, and I'm getting into the esoterica here, but you're a smart guy, and you'll understand this. We had brown stones with steps on them going up six and eight steps. And if you threw the pink ball just right at the step and hit the absolute corner of the edge of the step, the ball would take off and fly. But if you missed it by just a little. Bit, you'd have a foul ball and then maybe you lost your turn. So occasionally we had no pitcher. We were very adaptive, you know, depending on how many people showed up, we had no pitcher. So you would stand in front of the brownstone and hurl this pink ball at the step. And if you hit it just right, it would go soaring over the Pontiac and be bouncing down the street where somebody would be dodging taxi cabs and trucks to try to field it. So that was another way to play stick ball.

TM 40:31 Meanwhile, the person who had thrown the thing would be running around the base?

RN 40:36 Running around the bases, touching the hydrant, touching the Studebaker, running around the bases. And of course, we were dreaming all the time of the big league, the big-league players like Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays.

TM 40:55 Where did you go to grade school?

RN 40:57 I went to Hunter College Elementary School, a progressive school that was supposedly for kids with an IQ of over 180 or something like that, 160, and I went to that which was sort of a learning place for people going to Hunter College, 68th Street, East East Side, New York. And I got out of there after the 6th grade, and then went to McBurney school, finding myself woefully behind in such things as basic arithmetic, but I could figure out an income tax return. So, you know, I had this strange, strange assortment of skills and lack of skills, but I caught up.

TM 42:00 What was the concept of the Hunter College Elementary School?

RN 42:03 It was that you would apply. If you had a so called gifted child. The word back then was a gifted child, you would apply. And there was something called an IQ test, which I think is still around. And this IQ test, the child would take the IQ test, and if they performed well on it, they would be accepted into the school. And probably was a private school with tuition paid, and I went there for six years. Okay, not a public school. I went on from there to another private school.

TM 42:43 I'm assuming that you learned to read and write...

RN 42:48 We learned to read and write, but we learned a lot of other things too, whereas, perhaps in the so called Public Schools, people were digging a little bit more into their math and spelling. And I remember when I came to the next school, I was like a deer in the headlights, I just didn't have certain skills, but I picked them up pretty quickly. That was the idea of the first sixth grades. Was to give children a very alternate kind of curriculum, which worked in some ways and didn't work in some ways.

TM 43:26 Okay, this is going to be 1945, 46 to 53 somewhere in there?

RN 43:41 Yeah, that'd be right, kind of 51 or so. Then I went on to McBurney school.

TM 43:47 Okay, were there any teachers in your first one through sixth grade that really inspired you?

RN 43:54 Can't remember. I really come up blank on that at 85 years old. I had some teachers in high school that I remember, one of whom said that you've got to read this book by Henry David Thoreau called Walden. I read that book with great interest. And by that time, I was being sent to camp in the summer, and I wanted to kind of wrap this interview up talking a little bit about that, that camping experience that occurred when I was 11 and 12 years old.

TM 44:29 Let's do that.

RN 44:33 This was down on Stoneman Lake when I was out in Arizona.

TM 44:36 When you were 11 or 12? Does that mean that you were still in McBurney?

RN 44:43 I was probably in the transition between Hunter College Elementary School and McBurney School. So maybe I was in the seventh grade and I went out to Stoneman Lake where there was a horse camp. There were mountain lions around. And there was a famous mountain lion hunter who we were sort of taught to think of as a great hero. And I later, later began to change my mind about that. But one of the things we did that became pretty important in my life was we walked across the Grand Canyon twice, once from North to South Rim, once from South Rim to North Rim. The whole camp, which only was about eight or 10 kids, and the counselors, we had reservations. We stayed at Phantom Ranch I believe. And for me, it was one of the hardest physical things I'd ever done, harder even than bucking hay and also one of the most moving things. So I had been down to Grand Canyon on a burro prior to that, when I was about eight with my father and his famous picture taken from the Kolb Studio, you know, the kind where mules all line up, and we were there, and I was right behind the Wrangler, which they, I guess, thought was the safest place. My father was back in the line, and we did a down and back mule trip to the river, and I can remember eating the best orange in the world down along the river. I just wrote about this as an introduction to a Grand Canyon book that you've probably seen that Grand Canyon Expeditions kind of commissioned, and that was when I was eight, and so I was, I kind of gravitated back to the Grand Canyon and then walked across it both ways when I was 11 and 12 might have been one of the few people in the world to have done that at that age.

TM 46:54 Okay, so, so hang on. I now I'm sorry I need to back up, because if you're doing a Rim to Phantom and back on a mule with your dad, your dad must have been drawn to Grand Canyon.

RN 47:08 Well, I guess he thought it was one of the things that should be done. I don't think he was particularly drawn to rivers.

TM 47:19 No, not rivers, but, just, you know, incredibly, oh my gosh, I mean, you know, it's the Grand Canyon.

RN 47:26 Well, you could see a father who had some of his values for outdoor recreation, thinking, you know this, this is important to send my son to a camp that that features contact with the Grand Canyon, and not just contact, but actually walking the trail. This was, this was a long time ago. Yeah, we were talking here about maybe 1950.

TM 47:55 And so you took the mules down first, before the rim to rim walks?

RN 48:01 Took the mule down when I was eight years old. Took the mule down and the mule back. And I've got the picture from the Kolb Studio. Cool picture with me and my father and the other people on the mule trip going down the Bright Angel, and then I came back and walked in both directions.

TM 48:29 So did your dad find out about Camp Coconino on that first trip out when you did the mule ride?

RN 48:40 I don't think so, the way it's funny, you should come up with that name, because that was exactly what it was called, Camp Coconino on Stoneman lake. And there had been a counselor at a boys camp I went to in New Hampshire when I was eight or so, and he struck off and started a new camp called Camp Coconino down on Stoneman Lake in an old ranch building, and they had a string of horses brought up, and each kid had their horse and was taking care of their horse. And we also did some of these extraordinary backpacks, which was, you know, before even Colin Fletcher, and we were putting together packs and trying to make our way through all those vertical feet.

TM 49:33 So the rim to rim hikes, was that a backpack then?

RN 49:44 Not a day hike. It was long. I mean, you know, for a kid, yeah, for a kid, even an 11 year old, that's a long way.

TM 49:53 Did you stop at Cottonwood? Or was it one long push from the. North RAM lodges all the way to Phantom?

RN 50:04 Gee Tom, that pushes my memory. But I agree with you, that's the pretty long way to go. Maybe we stopped along somewhere, camped along the north Kaibab. Is there a place called Ribbon Falls?

TM 50:19 Absolutely and that's Cottonwood Campground. And there would have been a campground there in the early 50s.

RN 50:27 And I think we camped at Indian Gardens (now Havasupai Gardens) at one point, maybe we bypassed Phantom...

TM 50:33 This would be a great three night. You go to Cottonwood, you go to Bright Angel campground at Phantom, and then you hike up Indian gardens, and then you hike to the rim. Now Indian Gardens are no longer called Indian Gardens are they.

RN 50:45 Correct. It's called Havasupai Gardens. Thank you very much for that wonderful correction. That would make sense for a three night journey and it would be considered very rough and rugged at the time, Cottonwood to BA to Havasupai Gardens and then out. It's a long pull, and I admire these people who do rim to rim-to-rim runners, but for a kid like that, carrying a backpack at that time, it was probably not done too much.

TM 51:26 Not done too much at all. I mean, how would you even relate to your stickball friends back in the big city,

RN 51:31 (laughs) Those stick ball guys unfortunately, probably didn't have the opportunity to do that.

TM 51:39 No, oh my gosh, that's really fascinating, because your father is now doing what he preaches with his son, I mean, he's sending you out to get what he thinks is a very important connection to the greater world out of doors.

RN 52:01 He did, and he wrote to me in the preface of a number of his books that he authored, and one of them he said, he said, Roderick, you've had many opportunities that I never had at your age. And he was right about that he was an Ohio farm boy, and I don't know exactly what influence, what influencer he had, getting him into Oberlin College, or directing his attention to Oberlin College, which was a very liberal place, by the way, an anti-slavery place. So, yeah, you've got, you've got that pegged Exactly right.

TM 52:45 So let's back up a bit. Can you tell me a little bit more about the camp at Stoneman?

RN 52:51 Sure, I can tell you about that camp at Stoneman Lake. Stoneman Lake still there?

TM 52:56 Well, we, I mean, we see it on the highway every time we drive down the road. We think, you know, Stoneman Lake. We never drive in there. We never look around. I never knew there was a camp there.

RN 53:05 Well, there was an old ranch there, and there was some bunk houses. And it really was a ranch. It wasn't a new place at all. And the camp was really small. They're only about 10 or 12 kids, okay, involved in the camp. And the mother of one of the counselors was to cook, and we didn't have traditional sort of camp activities like archery or tennis or something like that. We had projects. We took care of all horses. We did trips, backpack and horse pack trips, and we did chores around the camp.

TM 53:50 What horse pack trips did you do?

RN 53:54 They were done from Stoneman out into the P and J, or is that Ponderosa there?

TM 54:02 No, it's PJ. You're exactly right, Pinion Juniper woodland but if you went a little further north, you would climb right up into Ponderosa Pine.

RN 54:12 Oh, thank you. That was good. Yeah, I had the feeling Stoneman was a little lower. And so we would do, we would do short trips and learn how to care for the horses. Okay, this was very new to me. I had hardly seen a horse up until that time, and I still don't have a great affection for horses.

TM 54:38 They can step on your foot and hurt you badly,

RN 54:40 Or kick you or even bite you and they're a lot bigger than an 11 year old, and they their brain is the size of an almond, a pea or something. So, you know, there's, there's problems with horses, they'd run away. They'd break their tethers. They'd run away at night. You'd have to spend all day following their trail.

TM 55:06 Are you speaking from experience here, from camp experience?

RN 55:10 Yes, trying to capture the horses. I became a believer in backpacking. I thought, well, at least my backpack never breaks his tether and runs away.

TM 55:22 (Laughs) Yeah, the backpacks not going to run away from you.

RN 55:25 Backpack doesn't run away. That's what we did at Camp Coconino. That's Stoneman Lake. I'm glad you and Hazel drive by Stoneman Lake on occasion.

TM 55:35 That's absolutely fascinating to think. I mean, this is sort of liability city, is how I think about it now. You're going to have, you have an 11-year-old working with a large animal that is not known, I mean, clearly they would have worked to try to find horses that were gentle, more or less, but still, you know the horse walks away, well, you've got to go find it that's gonna make that happen.

RN 56:05 It's not unlike, to go back to a common denominator you and I have, it's not unlike a river trip, right? A Grand Canyon river trip. Your horse can get away from you and he can buck you off, and you can get hurt by it, and the companies and parents involved seldom want kids, 11 years old to do the trip.

TM 56:32 What's fascinating, though, with this is this was at a time when America really was in, well, they'd already fallen in love with the automobile and it left horse travel far, far behind.

RN 56:48 Well, yeah, that's true, but of course, we still have great interest in horses. You saw the Olympics. We have the dressage, we have the eventing but it's become a very upper class activity.

TM 57:04 But the skills to try to remind kids, this is how you saddle a horse. This is how you know, this is how you have to do this to ride this animal, or carry equipment on this animal safely without hurting the animal or you. That's that, wow, that was pretty good.

RN 57:23 And the big thing, the really big thing Tom, the big feather in your cap, was to be able to throw a Diamond Hitch. God, I couldn't do it now. A Diamond Hitch is not something that we really do on a river, I don't think. But it's, it's, it's a complicated knot that ties, ties gear, yeah, to the back of a pack horse.

TM 57:44 And you needed to learn how to do it one handed and quick?

RN 57:48 In the dark. So that was, that was a Diamond Hitch, and you're right. Here was a skill that was rapidly disappearing from American culture. That's how we got around.

TM 58:04 Did you like that? When you came back to the city and it was months later, were you still thinking about that place?

RN 58:12 Yeah, yeah. I thought about that place. I thought, I thought a lot about the mountain lions. We had a mountain lion Hunter based at Stoneman Lake, and he can come by and he'd take the boys out occasionally on one of his hunts. And he hunted them with dogs. And he would try to, he would try to tree a mountain lion with the dogs and then kill it. And I think that's still done in some places, maybe even by politicians in Montana. And I came away not liking that idea too much. I came away thinking the Mountain Lions were beautiful. They were native to the area, and it was not a level playing field to have dogs chasing them up trees and then shooting them out of trees. So, you know, they called them varmints. And it was on only later, but interesting how these threads run through your life, they called them varmints, and only later, after I'd read Aldo Leopold and wrote the first article ever published about Aldo Leopold, which we'll get into next time at the University of Wisconsin, where I was only later that I realized varmints was a word like nigger, a word that you should be intelligent enough not to use.

TM 59:50 Well the lack of consciousness about the color of people's skin, or the lack of consciousness about Keystone predators. You know, has been with us for a long time, unfortunately. So the total change in wildlife management, understanding ecosystems, just wasn't there.

RN 1:00:17 You're absolutely right. And of course, I got caught up in all that as I began to write about Aldo Leopold and his interest in wilderness.

TM 1:00:28 Hang on a second right now. I'm still stuck on the camp. Did they have you do horse camping out just right out of the ranch house there and then come back to the ranch house.

RN 1:00:47 Right, no trailers just right out of the Ranch House.

TM 1:00:50 Did they have you do any other horseback camping or backpacking anywhere else?

RN 1:00:58 Well you know, you're pushing me here a little bit, but I do remember going to some mining camps on the Mogollon Rim. Okay, give me the name of a couple Tom... Jerome?

TM 1:01:13 Jerome, absolutely. Jerome is just across the Verde Valley. Yeah, the Verde Valley. Maybe we went to Jerome, maybe we went to several other places in the Verde Valley. You have gone up to Mingus mountain, Prescott, the Chino Valley area there.

RN 1:01:29 We might have done that, again, you've got to realize, and you do realize, because, because it's, it gets back into your life, to the country was pretty wild in the early 1950s. You know there was, there were not that many roads. And you say you rode right out of the ranch, yeah, you rode right out of the ranch, and you didn't go into a Walmart.

TM 1:01:57 Hang on a second. Now I'm really backing up going, oh my gosh, wait a minute. How can I forget this? The interstate was not there to get to Stoneman Lake. You would have had to come in off of the Sedona Flagstaff road somewhere like up Schnebly Hill, and then overland.

RN 1:02:14 Yup, I think that's right. Well, that's why I was wondering, does he interstate run by Stoneman Lake now?

TM 1:02:20 it does. It is east of the Oak Creek Canyon, where the road was, where the road going up to switch backs was, and where Schnebly Hill Road was which was there before the switchbacks were put in.

RN 1:02:41 We were definitely in those places. We're in Oak Creek Canyon, Oak Creek Canyon was sure a place we went to.

TM Do you remember the apples at Slide Rock at the Pendley ranch?

RN There were orchards there in Oak Creek, there was some wonderful fruit there, in season. Of course, if you guys were there in the summer, you might have been just a little before all that was kicking off. Well, I just remember that it was still kind of frontier, And I also remember we went to an Indian Pow Wow outside of Flagstaff, I guess

TM 1:03:24 The Flagstaff Fourth of July Pow Wow and Rodeo,

RN 1:03:26 Rodeo, yeah, and pow wow. And back then the native people came in, made camp in the P and j, the sweet smell of juniper was in the air, and I can remember walking through the campground saying hi. The natives were pretty shy. Even though the kids were our age, they wouldn't talk to us, but we watched the rodeo.

TM 1:04:05 Did you see the marching bands? Did you see the parade?

RN 1:04:08 Yeah, yeah. We went up and it wasn't that far. What is this? Stoneman Lake is about an hour and a half from Flagstaff.

TM 1:04:14 Well, by horse, you know, it's more like, I don't know. I want to say, a half days ride, maybe. By car it's 30-45, minutes. 40 minutes.

RN 1:04:27 What about no interstate? Now you are like an hour. Yeah, going, you and Hazel, going the fast way. Yeah,

TM 1:04:39 That's exactly right. We're booking, and we don't think about it anymore, but to go from Stoneman Lake to Flagstaff, yeah, that might have been a day's journey by horse. A nice easy days ride I suppose.

RN 1:04:52 Well, I suppose some of the native people came several days to go to the Pow Wow.

TM 1:04:57 Oh, absolutely. They would have come many days ride to come in off the Reservation there.

RN 1:05:00 They came days and there was dancing, and there was in the rodeo grounds and I can remember that distinctly. I remember the smell of the Juniper. And you know how it smells, certain smells can evoke, bring back memories, and it's something I'll never forget. I still, if I smell Juniper burning, it just triggers my memory back to walking through that P and J forest, where the people were camping with horses tied to the trees. It's pretty special. Caught the end of the frontier. There just a little bit.

TM 1:05:43 Just a little bit, you bet, absolutely lovely, a little bit. Hey, Rod, I wonder if this is a good place to put a comma in this interview series. Because I think what I'd like to do the next time we visit is I want to just start with Flagstaff in 1950 51 and then go forward from there, back to New York City, back to the west, back and slowly go forward. But I want to give you a little more time to ponder what you remember about your summers in northern Arizona.

RN 1:06:22 You really opened up a lot of windows for me. You really have, I mean, just talking to you, coming up, coming up with names that I'd forgotten, and like Juniper, you're like, Juniper smoke, man. You sort of brought that stuff into the air. And as I start to think about it. I can remember. I can remember the lion hunts and thinking to myself like an 11-year-old kid would, I don't know. I don't know about this. You go to bed. I don't know about this. What did the lion do that was wrong? Why did we have to chase it and kill it. Thinking about that kind of thought, which, you know, was, what occurred, you know, when Leopold shot the wolf, right? He began to think like a mountain. I was starting to think like a mountain. Okay, mountain lions. Think like a mountain lion. Okay. Very, very good interview. I see what you're doing now. You are very skilled, and you definitely have conjured up things that I hadn't really thought about very much. So, thank you.

TM 1:07:36 Well, hopefully we'll do more of this in the not too distant future.

RN 1:07:41 So what do we do? Just call each other or something like say when do you want to talk again?

TM 1:07:46 Rod, I'm going to wrap up this interview and turn the machine off. Don't hang up. To wrap this interview up, we've talked about your parents, we've talked about stick ball, we've talked about a little bit about you growing up in New York City, which I'm still kind of curious about in the first sort of 10 years or so, and then, and then we've talked about your dad getting you out of the city and into the desert and into the Badlands of of America. What was left of them at the time. Is there anything in what we've covered that you were like, Oh, I got to tell Tom about such and such? And there may not be anything.

RN 1:08:22 I may come up with something you certainly brought up. You certainly brought things up to me. And I can visualize the dust on the Bright Angel Trail with a backpack. I can visualize how little water we had, or it seemed, and how the councilor said you can only take two swallows of water before we get to Indian Gardens.

TM 1:08:48 So next time we're gonna pick up right there and go forward. With that, let's conclude what is part one of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Rod Nash. Today is Sunday, September 22, 2022. My name is Tom Martin and Rod, thank you so very much.