

Transcription: Grand Canyon Oral History

Interviewee: Charles "Butch" Farabee (BF)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Butch recounts marriage mismanagement, family life, and daily duties in the Park Service
Part 10

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TM: Today is Sunday, June 21, 2020. This is Part 10 of a Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Charles "Butch" Farabee. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Butch. How are you today?

BF: I'm good, Tom. Thank you.

TM: Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed for this series. May we have your permission to conduct this interview over the telephone?

BF: You certainly do.

TM: Thank you very much. You had told us this amazing story of rappelling down El Capitan.

BF: See, I don't think it's that amazing myself. It's sort of interesting, maybe.

TM: Well, then I'll put it in this perspective: how many people on the planet do you think have rappelled down El Capitan?

BF: Oh, I understand.

TM: Can you give me thirty? How many people have done this?

BF: Well, actually, probably a fair number but not at one time like that.

TM: No, just over the entire scope of rope, how many people have rappelled down that thing? Climbers climb it and they walk off the top, they don't turn around and rappel back down.

BF: No.

TM: So, thirty, forty? Do you have a number roughly?

BF: Oh, well, if you're putting it that way, I would say fifteen.

TM: Thank you. So having done something that more astronauts have done...

BF: Oh, come on now.

TM: I know, but you put it in perspective. And, of course, your answer should be, “Yeah, but astronauts are smart, and this is not necessarily a smart activity.” *(laughing)* That’s why so few people have done it.

BF: I thought the reader would understand that.

TM: *(laughing)* But no, it’s fairly amazing. What else was going on in Yosemite during the ten years that you were there that we should know about?

BF: Well, one thing I’d like to mention and spend a couple of minutes doing is... I feel awkward about doing any of this, really, Tom, as you well know but once you get me going I’m fine. But the thing that I’d like to mention is sort of my mismanagement of my marriage. It goes more or less like this is I got married in 1968 to a wonderful, beautiful woman but I was so anti, not anti- but marriage-phobic like a lot of young people are, including young men, that I figured that if once I asked her to marry me and we got married then what else would she need to know?

I wasn’t real good about reinforcing “I love you” kinds of stuff. So having prefaced this, when I got to Yosemite in particular—and at this point when I got there we didn’t have any kids—she was working and we both had separate but together lives. We did a lot of traveling and stuff as well, but along the way we got so busy for five/seven months a year, for any number of reasons shortage of manpower and just wall-to-wall kinds of incidents, some big some small, but mostly had to be all dealt with. I felt that I needed to be right in the middle of that for any number of reasons, but partially I was selfish. I liked the adrenaline, I liked the being able to accomplish things. I should say I liked helping people, but I think I more enjoyed just the challenge of all the nuances that were taking place on a daily basis, which there were lots and lots. I don’t know that we drifted away particularly, but... My first boy was born in 1973 and was stillborn. It was a full-term birth. That impacted both of us, but her more than me as she was carrying it full-term. And I had a whole life that I was living with trying to get things done and supervising people and trying to manage programs or whatever, that I just wasn’t very good about being there as a family person. Then my next son, my oldest son Lincoln, 1975, I was a father and I think I was a pretty decent father, but I don’t think I put the priorities where they should have been which was paying more attention to the family than to the work.

I got suckered into the black hole of they need me and I need to be doing this and ended up working a lot of 60-hour days, most of which were never compensated. I had this obligation of trying to help out my fellow rangers and trying to deal with all the situations that were taking place. Yosemite, in those days at least—absolutely no whiz-bang on all the other parks, overtaking all the other parks—but Yosemite seemed to be on a different level in terms of just workload and interesting, bizarre things that needed to be dealt with. So along the way I didn’t set my priorities. I ended up working too much, paying too much attention to the job, not enough attention to my wife and my family. I had a second son in 1978, Adam, who teaches and is terribly successful as a teacher in Saudi Arabia right now. Moving to Guatemala, actually, in the next few weeks, if he can get in. And my oldest is an emergency room nurse up in Bellingham, Washington. So, in any event, the end product is I was actually pretty successful as a father but during the time leading up to my divorce I just wasn’t there. I wasn’t there full-time anyway, not like I should have been.

So when I talk to the younger students at the ranger school other places, but mostly in the last 20 years it’s been at Northern Arizona University at Flagstaff. They have two sessions every year with roughly twenty-one, -two, -three younger people who aspire to get into the National Park Service. One of the

ways of getting in is though being credentialed as a law enforcement ranger. They have a very disciplined, long—it takes like 16 weeks, perhaps even longer—school there at NAU. I end up doing the introductions for them. The first four hours I'm the lead speaker and it's my job to not only talk about the history, but of course I throw in philosophy and ethics and other aspects. Here I am, 35 years with the agency and still have my finger in the pie today. So I allow these younger people an opportunity to help answer questions for them and stuff. One of the first things I say in the first 30 minutes is start talking about living in a fishbowl. When you're a park ranger, in uniform, in a marked patrol car, everybody's looking at you from different angles. It's just like being a policeman today. As you're driving down the street you see a policeman and when he doesn't turn on his turn signals and makes a turn then there's a little teeny tiny checkmark, at least for me, anyway, that that wasn't the right thing to do.

So part of my pontificating for them is to talk about not paying attention to your family, not setting your priorities right. I use myself as an example. That at the end of about 9 ½ years in Yosemite and then accepting a job at the Grand Canyon, I was kind of oblivious to the fact that my marriage was going down the tube slowly, and not totally directly, but slowly. And a lot of it had to do with me not paying attention. I try to at least mention this without trying to shed too many tears, which I often do. I'm not going to take the full responsibility but a lot of it was my fault. It was just like I caught up with the job. And I don't think in retrospect, and of course that's easy to do, Monday morning quarterbacking, but I don't think I set my priorities properly. Things have worked out okay. Both of my sons lived through this all very well and have done very well for themselves professionally and personally, but it took a tremendous toll on me. I didn't realize just how impactful that divorce and the lessons that I learned from it were going to be to me.

TM: Butch, can I ask you a question? You remind me about some of the law enforcement rangers that I worked with at Grand Canyon in the 1990s and into the 2000s who were going from event to event to event. Some traumatic, some there's a cat in the tree, but some are there's a body splattered all over a cliff, but it was just never-ending and it seemed as though they were always short-staffed and people who were in theory on their off time were still working. And that was at Grand Canyon. That wasn't Yosemite.

BF: Yeah. Well, I was part of Grand Canyon as well.

TM: To what extent did you see this happening to other families as well?

BF: I saw it, but truth is, I wasn't smart enough to put it back on myself as well. I think I mentioned early on one of the things that happened for my oldest son was when all this big noise would take place, a jet plane would fly over, a thunderclap, or something, he'd go into hysterics. My wife finally realized it was because every time he saw his father, meaning me, when a noise would happen, which was generally the helicopter flying in, I was in controlled chaos. Of course, I had things under control. I was going into my garage and I was throwing things into a rescue pack or for overnight and my wife would be handing me two peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches and then I'd be off. So he associated that with all this noise. Of course we finally got that resolved by taking him over and letting him watch the helicopter when I wasn't on it to see that things were much more civilized or controlled. It wasn't as chaotic...

TM: As it seemed.

BF: ...as I was leading him to believe, I guess.

TM: And today we have, help me if I get this wrong, is it after-action debriefing to help people with the stress, the trauma, not take it personally, and not take it home. So I think there are some steps in the right direction, but do you still see this as a risk for...

BF: Sure. Like in every relationship, it's a compromise and you have to understand your obligations and what's happening in the relationship as well. I'm like the antithesis of being a good relationship manager, understanding a person, so I'm not going to pontificate about that except to just relate my personal story. I'm sort of a living example of not what to do, in some cases. Now in many cases I was terribly successful. I'm not going to denigrate my contributions either. I was, I think, an excellent manager and did some good things. But I did some bad things when it came to my relationship, that's for sure. And it had nothing to do with abuse, well, I guess maybe it does. Maybe it is sort of emotional abuse. I wasn't there.

TM: Yeah, but I think that's not unique to the National Park Service. That can be any partner who devotes their all to the business or the job or whatever they're...

BF: No, you're right. I agree.

TM: ...they're wrapped up in. So a relationship can suffer.

BF: So your question had to do with...or at least you were mentioning the after-action debriefings, the PTSD kinds of things that they do today, but in my day, it was just part of the job. You go out on a body recovery mostly. There might have been other things that we got involved with as well that were, in today's climate, maybe should have been addressed. But what we would do is... And some of this I know I've already mentioned. I'm not a drinker, I don't like alcohol. I'd always be one that they'd always come to find for some bad wreck because everybody else had been at a party or something. I was willing to do that and still would be. That would be perfectly fine. But, we would have these gatherings afterwards and sometimes there was...not primitive but as simple as everybody involved would be sitting on somebody's picnic benches behind their home talking about it. People would be having beers and I'd be having my Coke.

Then also, what was one of the nice things about a community like Yosemite is that the spouses, the wives in this case mostly, would often know that we'd be off the mountain or the rock or the thing would be over with by a certain time and they'd have a potluck supper. It wouldn't be particularly fancy, but it would be more just the comradery and the ability to share with each other what's going on and share with our families as well. The wives, I don't know so much about a 7-year-old kid, but the wives are always right there in the middle of it. And everybody knew everybody which is also one of the dangers of living in a place like Yosemite or Grand Canyon. It goes back to this fishbowl perspective where you do know what's going on in somebody's bedroom practically. You work with these people professionally, socially you know them very well. In my case, my time in Yosemite, I lucked out because with very few exceptions everybody was totally simpatico with each other and empathetic and was very willing to help out and support. So there was a lot of that. But generally, that's part of my little diatribe to the young people at NAU is remember you're in a fishbowl. Everybody's going to be looking at you.

TM: To that end, the Park Service seems unique in that it provides housing for its employees. The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, you're responsible to find your own housing in the communities adjacent to the areas where you work. But the Park Service often provides housing at their larger parks. And then suddenly it is a fishbowl because your next-door neighbor is the

head of maintenance or some other position, and you can hear there's something going on over there. Instead of your next-door neighbor works at the engineering facility down the road and you hear something going on over there. It's a little different.

BF: Yeah. You're mostly correct, Tom. Now make sure that whoever might be reading this or hearing any of this understands the Park Service didn't give me free housing. We rent.

TM: No, thank you. Free housing meaning the housing at Yosemite in the valley, you paid for that, but it came with the job and so you didn't have to go outside the park to rent a house somewhere and then commute. That made sense, I think, in the early days, especially—19-teens, 1920s, 1930s—when these parks were out in the middle of nowhere. And they had hospitals, they had schools, and they were basically their own towns. Generating plants, et cetera. Stores. It was a company town, if you will.

BF: Yeah. That's mostly correct. There are nuances and asides to all of what you said. But for a place that's isolated like Yosemite, if you were on sort of "required" housing, or "required" position, or "required" occupancy, then the government would furnish you a home commensurate with the size of your family. The further up the totem pole you were from a management standpoint, maybe a little bit better house. Most of them were 1920/1930-era log cabins. The first home I lived in in Yosemite Valley was a Mission 66, which is a program started right after World War II, principally. They called it Mission 66 with the idea that a lot of this would be completed by that point. They were decent homes, but you paid rent. The rent was, at least for most of the time, was much more minimal. When I lived in Death Valley, I was like paying \$14 every two weeks. But it was a CCC home and I lived 30 miles from the nearest neighbor, except for one neighbor, and I was 60 miles from the nearest grocery store, and I was a hundred miles from the nearest medical anything.

TM: So \$28 a month is not bad for living in the middle of nowhere.

BF: If you're young and healthy, then that's perfectly fine. I guess if you were old and not healthy, they probably wouldn't put you there to begin with.

TM: Right. *(laughing)* That's right.

BF: But in Yosemite, as you say, we had the little hospital. We had a market. There were some amenities there. What's not to like about living in Yosemite Valley, except that after a while you might want to go to a movie theater. You might want to have more than just a minimal grocery store. You might want some department store kinds of stuff. Even though there was a doctor and they were terribly good at what they did, they were limited in what they had to offer. So this is a part of the operation that people don't understand. There are places in the Forest Service as well as BLM where this also takes place. There are fairly isolated Forest Service operations, but they are more inclined to be with a city or a town than some of the Park Service areas. Of course the Park Service does that as well. Not everybody that lives in the National Park has to live in the park.

TM: There is no housing at the Statue of Liberty, I don't think.

BF: Yeah, well, there's some rangers that live actually on Ellis Island itself. There's some uniqueness to that. Twenty years later they will look back with their families and say, "Geez, that was pretty neat living in New York Harbor." But at the time, there is inconvenience and you're a captive to that particular spot.

I don't know too much about the operation, really, but I don't think you probably have your own personal boat to get back and forth. You'd have to use the tour boats.

TM: I guess the thing I'm thinking is, if I'm a dispatcher and I know who's living in my park and I need some help, I can call you at two in the morning. I know you're supposed to be asleep, but too bad. I know you're working day shift and we need some help because we're short staffed or whatever, and there's been a terrible incident and everybody's drunk. So we're going to come talk to you.

BF: Well, sure.

TM: I wonder, is it more "unique" to the Park Service than the other federal land agencies. I don't know.

BF: I would say that because of the jurisdictions, principally. A place like Yosemite, which had basically exclusive jurisdiction, you did not have the sheriff's office, or the highway patrol, or an outside fire department to help out. That was one of the beauties from my perspective. One of the real beauties, I guess, is a good word for living in a place like that is that you got in on everything. Now some people don't like the infringement on their privacy and when five o'clock rolls around and their shift is over they're gone. There's probably a little bit of that. But in Yosemite Valley in those days that didn't happen very long. The rangers particularly, which are the people I'm talking about mostly, the rangers they were very willing. When they signed up, they signed up to be tough. That's what they were going to do. If they got called out at four o'clock in the morning because a fire alarm went off, that's what they did.

In Yosemite, it might be worth noting that in the summertime for bunches of years, I think pretty much the whole time I was there, for the summer months we had a 24/7 operation in terms of somebody being on duty, patrolman. There's actually some fun historical ways that they accomplished this even before my time because there actually were rangers doing stuff like this before me. We had a thing called MOP patrol which I've always known as midnight-on-patrol, but I think there's actually another reason for that name. Frankly I can't conjure it up at the moment so I'll leave it as midnight-on-patrol. But we'd have two or three at the very most, usually only two, rangers who'd be available let's say from midnight till eight if that were the midnight shift. So the dispatcher knew they could get hold of them for something. Generally by midnight or two o'clock things had calmed down. There'd be an overlap often. We'd have other rangers working on the swing shift who might work until one or two o'clock. Usually by that time in the morning all the hoopla-ing and chaos and partying and all that sort of thing has sort of wrapped itself up. So these guys on MOP patrol just sort of patrol the valley. They kick people out that were overnight camping where they weren't supposed to and that sort of thing. Go in and quiet down a party that was still too loud, perhaps.

But the rest of the time, the other let's say seven months to sort of define it, the other seven months of the year... For the time I was there I almost always did the scheduling. I'd have people working till one o'clock, a whole crew. There might be one person that's held over till two. Then from two till, say, six in the morning, there'd be somebody on call. It was the procedure, the SOP, that somebody the night before would put a patrol car with a handset radio, perhaps, in front of this person's house and they'd put the keys on the front left tire or something. So when that ranger who was on call went to bed, and it might be somebody who actually had just been working until one o'clock anyway, at three o'clock in the morning if there was some reason, maybe a medical kind of a thing cause we did all the medical transports and stuff, too, if there was some reason or necessity, then the dispatcher would know to call that ranger. That ranger might end up, depending on the situation, might end up having others called out to help on a bad wreck. I know that I've been out probably a dozen times for fatalities. At three and

four o'clock in the morning somebody fall asleep driving into the park, maybe, or something. So there was the manpower that was available. If you went out at four o'clock in the morning and you work for a couple of hours and the sun's starting to come up, you might go home and try to catch an hour of sleep before you had to go back to work.

And in my case, since I was the Assistant Valley District Ranger, I had a lot of autonomy. I unfortunately, in retrospect, would put myself in so that other people wouldn't have to be obligated or imposed upon. It wasn't like I was super altruistic, it was just that I could see the shortfalls in the scheduling and I could tell that somebody was going to be maybe having to do a certain thing in the afternoon of the following day. So I would say, okay, I will be the one on call or I will be the one that will work late. So that had an impact on my family and my wife in particular. I think I mentioned once before my wife used to call the little handset radio which... We went from a two watt to a five watt radio, which doesn't mean much to anybody except that the five watt was smaller, more powerful, and it was almost always on, to a certain point. When we went to sleep I would turn it off. She would call it coitus interruptus. That was her way of saying, "That freaking thing's on all the time and you're listening to it more than you are to me."

TM: Besides your wife, did anybody else try to give you a little heads-up? Did anybody else see this happening to anyone else and try to say something.

BF: Well, if they did, Tom, I was oblivious to it. It didn't register. I'm not going to swear that there were a lot of people banging on my door telling me I was a total idiot.

TM: No, but when you're a fish in the fishbowl, you don't necessarily see you're a fish in the fishbowl and it takes somebody kind of outside to look in and go, "Holy cow, you guys need to take care of yourselves and your relationships and your families because this is consuming you."

BF: Yeah. Well, then there was another thing that in retrospect, again... I have a lot of retrospects, right? In retrospect, my not drinking, which I think is a good thing personally but it's not something I tell everybody else about. It's just something that I don't do. I just never acquired the taste for it. Taste's terrible to me. But my wife, who was beautiful woman, she liked to party. She wasn't at every party with a lampshade on her head but she liked to loosen up and I wasn't that way. I was pretty boring when it came to that sort of a thing, actually. Sort of stoic, I guess. So she ended up being attracted to a fellow ranger. I won't get into any names or anything, but eventually a good friend of mine and a good friend of hers, for that matter, probably her best friend at that point, anyway, recognized that this was going south. After this is all said and done years later, we would talk—I talked to her on the phone a couple days ago—she said, "I knew this was happening. I knew that you were in trouble, that..." My wife was named Anne, was sort of sliding off into being attracted to this other guy. But I didn't know that. It wasn't really until we got to the Grand Canyon that this all hit the fan. That's, again, another long answer to your question. I don't know that anybody really came up to me and said, "Wake up and smell the flowers, buddy, cause things are happening." And I don't know much I would have heard them. It's hard to say and it's easy to kick myself while I'm down.

TM: Well, this gets back to a message to the students, which is: this is real, this is dangerous, and you won't know it's going to clobber you until it's already happened. This is the thing because you set young kids up with adrenaline and lots of action. That can be pretty seductive. It can also be pretty destructive.

BF: Right. You're a hundred percent correct.

TM: It's great. I think it's wonderful that you're actually first off telling this to these young kids. And things have changed now. There's different programs. I'm sure the agency has recognized this as a service-wide problem, I would like to think, and try to figure out some good ways to deal with it.

BF: Just as a sort of minor correction to what you said. You are terribly insightful. You've got a good handle on a lot of the stuff that's taking place.

TM: Not like you.

BF: Reading between the lines. So I don't mean to correct you, but...

TM: Oh, please do.

BF: ...trying to straighten the record out a teeny bit. And this is probably not very important, but when I talk to these young people for four hours, the very first thing I do, actually, the first thrust for the first fifteen minutes is try to talk them out of becoming a park ranger. My job, at that point, is say, "If you really..." And this goes back to my old-school, flat-hat, Smokey the Bear, friend-to-everybody kind of approach to park rangers, as opposed to being a sheer law enforcement ranger. I said, "If you want to do 24/7 law enforcement, then go do it. But don't do it in the Park Service. Go become a sheriff's deputy. Go into the federal FBI. Go become a policeman someplace." I said, "I did it and I did it for three years so I got it out of my system in some ways. But, if you think you're going to go into Wupatki or Saguaro or lots of other national park areas and think you're going to be doing 24/7 law enforcement, then you've got another thing coming. You're going to be frustrated, bored, your job skills are going to deteriorate. There's all kinds of bad things."

There are a couple of exceptions to that. Yosemite Valley might be one of them, Lake Mead, Boulder Beach perhaps is one, a few places. You're not going to do that at Navajo National Monument but what you are going to do is you're going to have a hell of a good job if you do a little bit of this, a little bit of that. Some SAR, some EMS, some resource management, some interpretation, some fire, as well as law enforcement. If you think that's attractive because it's just sort of a potpourri of different duties, all of which are interesting. You can roam around the backcountry sometimes, you can fly in helicopters, and ride ATVs and horses, you can hike and all kinds of that sort of thing. That's what makes the job so much fun. But if you think you're going to be a policeman 24/7 in a smaller national park area, it ain't going to happen. So that's where I start off first, actually.

TM: Okay. Good.

BF: And I've had people give me feedback after that. Over time I've run into some of these people in various other national parks, just traveling through. I wouldn't remember them, but they would remember me and they'd bring that subject up. I'd say, "Was there anything I said about anything that made any difference to you?" Surprisingly, and pleasantly, a number have said, "Yeah, actually. When you talked about the entirety-of-the-job sorts of things, it made a big difference." So, anyway, I didn't mean to correct you, that was just...

TM: No, please do. You've got to jump right in there. Don't feel shy.

BF: Minor asterisk to the conversation there.

TM: Yeah, because I think this is still a problem today, possibly, with short-staffed employees at parks whose visitation keeps going up and up and up.

BF: Yeah. Right.

TM: So, have to be kind of careful with that.

BF: I think I sort of shot my wad without being too, not melodramatic, but morose about not paying attention to my wife and my family and my marriage responsibilities. I'm just hoping that the people understand that I think I screwed up. I don't think I was totally at fault, but I do think that I should have been much more there. And I don't know, unless you've got some questions about that, there's much more I can really add on without kicking myself more.

TM: No, thank you for your candor and your willingness to entertain what is clearly something typically personal and people don't talk about but is a real threat, I think, to agency personnel that can be consumed by their jobs. That's an addiction, that adrenaline journey. Getting away from that or being able to detox from that—I'm not sure what the right word is—takes some work. It's a very difficult situation to try to navigate without having it damage you. A life with adrenaline.

BF: Yeah. There's actually more to it than just adrenaline, per se. That was certainly a big part of it, but a lot of what I did was pretty mundane. I don't know that we touched on it as much as you wanted me to touch on it. It was really an obligation to my job. I felt like I needed to do the best I could, whatever it was: training, or organizing training, or doing things on the job that should be done. I wouldn't go home at night, this is sort of not the literal translation, but I wouldn't go home at night until I felt like things were under control as far as what I needed to be doing. So it was a commitment to my professional responsibilities, I think. And sometimes I went overboard and that's part of the big problem. I would end up... There'd be a weekend where I literally would have the days off, although I would have a radio with me. I'd have a wife and two little kids at home and rather than us packing up and going up to the high country and taking a picnic or something, I had an opportunity to, say, make some sort of a climb with some good climbers. I wasn't all that good a climber but I wanted to learn a lot of it. I would choose to go do that. I guess I just assumed that my wife understood. I think she did for a while, but at a certain point it's like no. Anyway, okay.

TM: Interesting. And again, I think it's the same at Death Valley and Lake Mead. The attraction to go out and explore the resource is pretty strong.

BF: I've always contended, when I teach at NAU, rangers need to range. If you don't know what's out there to protect, how do you protect it. I know it sounds like an old—it sounds pretty simple, but we don't do much of it.

TM: But in your wife's defense, she might say, "Yeah, but you got to protect your family, too. That's a part of the resource to be protected." I think it's important to make sure that future rangers hear that message.

BF: Yeah. That's a hundred percent correct.

TM: So how did your day-to-day mundane operations go, speaking of those? You weren't acting Chief Ranger, what was the description of your job?

BF: In Yosemite I went there as a shift supervisor.

TM: Shift supervisor, okay.

BF: That was from Death Valley. I went there in June of '71. June 21st, I think, was my enter-on-duty date. June 21, '71. Roughly within the year I was elevated a little bit to the Assistant Valley District Ranger which I guess sort of sounds important. I oversaw pretty much the day-to-day operations of 12 or 14 permanent rangers, and in the summertime a whole bunch of seasonals.

My boss, the District Ranger, was more into the management. He had the more final word on what was taking place. But again, I had a lot of autonomy. The mundane part of the job might be me doing the schedule, which could easily take four or five hours to fill out a schedule because I was conscientious enough. I tried to get ahold of people and say, "Well now, do you want to go do this, or do you want to go to that training, or would you like to... I can probably work it out so you get a three-day weekend because you've been working your tail off uncompensatedly for the last week." I'd want to touch bases with those people before I put them on the schedule. Same thing with finding out who I could rely on for being on call after the rangers officially had ended their shift. When I first got to Yosemite—sort of backing up really quickly—for three or four years, there were many, many, many days where I would be working at night and I wouldn't get home until the sun came up. That is literally true. I'd be walking up to my home trying to get there before it got too bright so I could try to go to sleep. Our bedroom had the obligatory aluminum foil on the windows to block out the light and had an air conditioner in the room that would drown out noises and stuff.

So the mundane part might be scheduling. That could take a fair amount of my day. There might be an issue with moving some small fee-collecting booth out in a campground. So I'd be out there helping to supervise that or make recommendations. A lot of what I did was I develop training. I really got caught up in this. I don't know that anybody else would recognize this, but I think I did a huge amount of extra training or organizing. It wasn't that I trained, but I organized training of things that these guys would never be exposed to.

Not too long into my time there I became one of the captains, and then basically the first captain on the big firetruck. Yosemite had...the park had, in those days, two structural firetrucks and then the company had another structural firetruck. I was the first captain, I guess, if you would say it that way. The chief ranger and I would always try to beat the other one. When the fire alarm would go off (*TM laughing*) we would race to get the firehouse. And in my case—this is the honest to God truth—I had a Volkswagen van, 1973, and I lived at the top of this little hill. If I were to walk it, it wouldn't take much more than, say, five minutes to get the firehouse. But if I was on a bicycle or in my Volkswagen van, I could be there in thirty seconds. So downhill, and there were numerous times when the fire alarm would go off. Now today they have pagers and cellphones and things, but in those days it was an audible fire alarm that sounded throughout the valley. There was no paging system. You did not get a radio thing, you just heard the fire alarm. I'd have my Volkswagen pointed downhill, and there'd be a foot of snow on the ground, and I'd be running out there in my underwear, barefooted, getting in that Volkswagen van, and almost coast to the fire station so that I could be there before the chief ranger.

TM: Trying to get your turnouts on to at least to have some clothes to wear.

BF: Well, yeah. I'd be running in there barefooted and jumping into my turnouts. Everything was cold but you didn't even think about that because if a fire alarm went off at two o'clock in the morning, oftentimes there was a real reason for it. Just using fire as an example, if I knew that the Ahwahnee Hotel, which is the big, I don't know if it's five-star but it's a classic hotel in Yosemite, or in the Park Service, if I knew that they were closed down for a month in December because of renovations and retrofitting and whatever, we would schedule and I would take upon myself to get hold of the officials and say, "How about if we conduct a couple of days' worth of training here on the Ahwahnee Hotel?" Of course they understood the necessity for that and were very willing to cooperate. But it just doesn't happen overnight and in a vacuum. There's a lot of coordination and touching bases with a variety of people about this. So that was just a minor example.

One training that I'm really proud of that was way ahead of its time, is that I put together—and I say put together—I came up with a basic curriculum and I had a couple of experts help me on death investigation. This was a week-long school in Yosemite. It was open to other rangers throughout the West, or at least in the region that I belonged to. My real expert in the \$64,000 booth, which is an old whatever it is for people my age would remember that TV show, but he was an FBI agent. He was an attorney who had been working at Quantico at the FBI academy. He was in Sacramento and he was a very nice guy. He loved the parks and he was happy to help give me advice. He's the one that had all of the bizarre death investigation kinds of scenarios and training. So I relied on him, but I structured it so that at the very end for several hours, I'd have people who'd come in and talk about how to deal with the families, and how to make death notifications, and how to protect yourself, the PTSD sorts of things. It was a week long. It was 40 hours. It was way ahead of its time. I don't know what they've done really much now. This would have been in the late 70s. We were having so many people die in Yosemite. It wasn't that we could prevent them all. That wasn't the intent. It was really to figure out what so happened here and how do we deal with it from a technical standpoint because none of us had any training as a coroner, which I was. None of us had any training on a lot of things relative to all this trauma that was taking place around us. I'm kind of sad that I don't have some of these curriculums that I designed, or put together, or memos sent out to the other parks that actually identified some of the things that we did. It was pretty much cutting-edge.

TM: Fun.

BF: That's sort of just two examples of some of the mundane things that I did. They had a lot of importance, I think, certainly in the climate of the Park Service in those days. It could take a month working on something like this intermittently to get everybody's schedules lined up. Then the park medic program, which I think we talked about...

TM: We did. And I had a question, too. I think we talked briefly about this off recording, but I did want to kind of bring it back up. This would have been about the time, I think, you were working for the Tucson Police Department that employees of the Park Service, the interpretive rangers of today, would help in maintenance, and would help in fee collection, and would help in some resource management issues, and would help in some law enforcement issues. Just as the maintenance people would help in law enforcement, or search and rescue would help in some resource management issues or would help in a little bit of interpretation. It seemed like the individual was at the park but they could fill in for others or they could help in other areas outside of their specific job title.

BF: Yeah. A lot of that has to do with the supervisor and the climate at the time.

TM: And then it seemed as though that started to change and people became much more compartmentalized in their boxes. Now, I could be wrong on that. Again, I'm not...

BF: No, I don't think you're necessarily wrong. From my perspective, sadly, in some ways the protection rangers turn into the law enforcement ranger. I think that horse is out of the barn, but that doesn't mean I can't whine about it. It seems to me that what was so enjoyable and part of the, really, beauties of being a park ranger in my era and before was that you got to do a little bit of everything. I'm afraid that a lot of these younger people think that law enforcement is the end-all, which I can't quite understand how people could get really excited about giving somebody tickets for 20 years for speeding. That just wasn't my thing, I suppose. So, you know Tom, I get off on these tangents and I have no idea where I'm going and forgot what you asked.

TM: This is fine, because this something I've been kind of pondering, is the collegiality of the team and your ability, as you say, to get out of your box and to learn about a different part of the park. A different part of the aspect of how Park Service works to protect these incredible resources versus the compartmentalization where, "I'm a law enforcement ranger and I don't do anything but this, that, and the other thing. You need somebody to go do that? That's not me." Now some of that I think I can understand just based on the demands of operating these parks are huge and personnel are small. So somebody needs some help, they're going to call out to another individual, but that individual's overrun doing what their other stuff is.

BF: Well, I think in a big park like Yosemite or Yellowstone or Glacier kinds of things, there's enough job demand within their own specialty that they don't need to be, or don't want to be, out doing other stuff.

TM: But if somebody did? Okay, so I'm the solid waste manager and at the end of my shift somebody else comes to replace me cause this is a 24-hour deal that's going on here. Now I've got a lot of free time, so I'm like, "Hey, I can go hang out with the climbers, or go hang out at the clinic, or go hang out in admin. Or where else can I use my energy and my time to help out?" I just wonder if that's changing and happening less and less.

BF: Well, I'm not so sure that that was, in my experience, as prevalent as you make it seem. There are a couple of asides to this, particularly from the maintenance standpoint, a lot of them...and I'm not trying to be too general about this, I suppose...but many of them, anyway, that was sort of an eight to five job for them. The exception to this might be some of these guys really did get into fire, into wildland fire. They understood their responsibilities and their interests and obligations, I guess, to helping out with, say, a wildland fire. But some of them did get into being on fire teams that would be sent elsewhere. So that might be an exception to what you're talking about. None of them ever had any problem that I recall, actually, of being called out after hours to go take care of a broken pipe that's flooding a street or that sort of thing. If it could be delayed until the next day, I think we tried to do that. I don't know that anybody bitched and moaned about it too much. So I think there was a lot of that.

One of the beauties that I enjoyed at Wildrose, when I was in Death Valley, is I actually did more maintenance work than I did any kind of protection other than roaming around and discovering stuff. I didn't really do that much law enforcement, but I did do a fair amount of minor maintenance around my part of the world there.

TM: It's funny. And I'll use that as an example. Were there any maintenance people that weren't doing much maintenance but were doing a lot more law enforcement? Again, thinking about the, what's the word here, sort of cross-pollination, if you will, of duties.

BF: No. Not really. But there were a few maintenance guys that showed an interest in search and rescue that ended up sort of defecting from the maintenance division. Of course we knew of their interests. We knew they had a skill that we needed. So some of them were converted and made into protection rangers. Later on in life they went to law enforcement schools. So they ended up becoming that. But I don't know, technically from 1905, they had the legal authority to do law enforcement. I don't think I ever witnessed any of that just because even with the minimal training that we had in those days you could still get yourself in trouble. I don't know that it was something that a lot of them wanted to bite off and chew.

One good example about this cross-pollination is that I have a very dear friend, who I still know very well and keep in touch with, Larry Fredrick is his name. He was the Chief of Interp at Rocky Mountain with some details where he was the acting superintendent of various places like Wind Cave I think. When I worked with him in Grand Canyon he was an interpreter. He was a district interpreter or something, but he was also a full paramedic. He had an interest and he went out and got credentials. He did it all on his own time. Traveled back and forth to Flagstaff and Phoenix to get this training because he was interested in it. I knew this and my job as the Assistant Chief Ranger at Grand Canyon with search and rescue and EMS as a responsibility, he'd be the first person on my Rolodex. "Larry, can you go?" Generally he had enough autonomy for himself that he could go. So there was a little bit of that. Reflecting back on your original premise, it wasn't as much cross-pollination as you're, I think, leading us to believe.

TM: I guess my question is, when it was happening is it still happening as much today or not? You've been retired for a while, but I still think you've still got a pretty good pulse of what's going on. You mentioned someone like Larry who's in interp but helps in search and rescue with his medical skills. I'd like to think that that's still happening today, but I don't know.

BF: I don't have a finite answer for you. I guess my sense is, no. I guess I would like to see more of it. But I didn't see that much of it, really, during my era either. So I'm not so sure that there's that much of it. And a place like Yosemite and some of the bigger parks, the job demand and the visitation has doubled since I was in Yosemite, that you just sort of don't have time to do some of this even though you might like to. If you were a maintenance man and were on the road crew, eight hours of your day was out there doing whatever you do on a road crew and you were probably way behind the power curve in terms of getting it done to begin with. So I don't know that you did too much of that after hours. I'm sure that there were occasions when...particularly when you live in more of the isolated outreaches of Yosemite... When I got out of Yosemite I was the Mather District Ranger, which meant I lived in a little, small, probably six- or seven-family little enclave that was roughly an hour's drive from Yosemite Valley. You sort of relied on people then, particularly when it came to a medical emergency. You could get one of the maintenance men to come out and help flag traffic at a car wreck or something like that. So there was that. But I think in today's world with less staffing, relatively speaking lesser budgeting, but greater by twofold, at least, visitation, I don't think they have the opportunity to do that much cross-pollination.

TM: As Assistant Valley District Ranger, did you do payroll?

BF: No.

TM: So someone else did that.

BF: Yeah. We had our secretary. That was part of her job, part of her mundane job. And it was always a “she” at this point. I don’t know if they’ve got males now, but at that point she was the secretary to the Valley District. Each of these places had their own people like that, an admin person, if you will. Of course they answered for some of their job standards to others further up that had more experience, or at least more authority. So, no, the answer is no. I can’t remember if I would tell her who had worked, or something. Maybe in terms of overtime, “Okay, we’re going to submit John Doe for six hours for a rescue, and make sure that’s reflected in their pay.”

TM: *(laughing)* So doing the scheduling, employee schedule, work schedule, training. What other mundane things were you doing?

BF: *(laughing)* Well, if they were really high in my memory, I’d remember them. Let me think about this. Oh, geez. I think as a supervisor you want to go out and just let people know you love them by visiting with them and seeing them at work and maybe working alongside them. I really enjoyed—which I don’t think we do enough of this days—I’d go into the visitor’s center. I wouldn’t be working with my people that I supervised but I thought it was important and would be fun and interesting to work there at the front desk. What are people asking? A lot of them just want to know where the bathroom is, of course. But there was a way that I could contribute and I’d get to know other staff members that weren’t necessarily part of my little domain at the ranger station.

TM: Right. It’s a great way to get to know the interop folks who are dealing with that same “Where’s the bathroom” question eight hours a day, every day.

BF: I always thought that was important. I’m not sure that you remember... I’m not even sure if I remember telling you about breaking my wrist jumping a horse.

TM: No.

BF: Because part of what I did was oversee the horse patrol, too, as the Assistant Valley District Ranger. This has been sort of intermittent over the years, but in the late 60s they developed a pretty classy horse patrol with all matched Morgan horses that were well-trained, I mean super well-trained, to the point where they have been working around the presidents of the United States. They were in the Rose Bowl Parade several times. They were pretty well respected.

TM: There was a ranger at Grand Canyon named Ken Hulick, and Hulick had a Tennessee Walker. He would ride that horse to Phantom Ranch. So, yeah, the horse patrol, the horse presence, is a really beautiful thing, fascinating thing. Long heritage of that.

BF: Ken was a good friend of mine when I moved to Tucson. He helped me sort of get organized back into retirement. So, the story about me going to visit this work unit. I think there were eight seasonal rangers and one permanent on this horse patrol. Most of them were schoolteachers so at the end of the season they’d be off teaching school. What they would do is one day a week they’d spend three or four hours together as a unit. The guy that was the wrangler who was an old-school cowboy who knew a lot about horses and knew a lot about how to get the best out of the horse and match it with the rider, and that sort of thing, he’d be there and he’d put these guys through skills, just riding skills. Put Visqueen

down on the ground and let the horses run through it, make sure that the horse is under control. Little minor firecracker kinds of stuff, and jumping which leads me to this little funny story which is that I went over to watch these guys work out one afternoon. And, of course, I was cocky enough knowing that I spent a lot of time on horseback and had my own Quarterhorse for a while. I thought I was God's gift to riding but I'd really never done much jumping, certainly never in an organized, formal way. These guys, they routinely would use three-foot poles. We had the little stands that you put the poles on and stuff. Regular thing. So I get over there and they're jumping. He doesn't like me anyway, but he says, "Butch, do you want to try this?" Of course I'm not going to let that pass. *(TM laughing)* I knew actually zero about really what to do. He put me on one of the Cadillacs of the horses, whose name I've forgotten, but one of these legendary, beautiful patrol horses we had. He says, "Okay this is what you do," and he described to me once you get close to the bar, give it its head and do a little kick in the side, a little flank kick stuff, and the horse will do all the rest of it. Okay, well, what could go wrong.

TM: That sounds easy.

BF: Yeah, it sounded pretty easy. So I'm doing this, and of course I've got six or eight seasonal rangers watching me and this other guy. We get up to the bar and the horse balks. I haven't been controlling it quite properly, apparently. He gets up to this bar and stops. He sort of slides in. I'm not at a full gallop but I'm moving pretty fast.

TM: And I'm assuming you're leaning forward.

BF: Yeah, but probably not correctly. So we get up to this bar and the horse comes to a 99 percent stop. I lean back and sit back into the saddle thinking, "Well, okay. We got to go round and try this again." As soon as I lean back, I don't know what happens, but the horse jumps over this thing sideways. Sort of crow-foots over, I'm not sure if that's even a real term, but he just sort of leaps sideways and clears this bar. Well, I'm not prepared for that. I'm not in the saddle well enough. I'm not even holding onto the horn. The next thing I know, I'm flying through the air and I land on my hands. I've already got one broken wrist from a high-bar from when I was 17. So I end up hitting the ground. I'm not sure at this point how much damage I've done, but I'm not going to let anybody know I've been damaged. We probably talked about it for a minute or two. "How did you not do this correctly?" I probably demurred off, I don't know, said, "Well, okay, I got to go back to work," or something just so I wouldn't have to try that again. Now, in fairness, I've learned to jump a lot since. But at that point I knew zip. And as it turns out I'd broken my wrist. Course, I didn't get it set. Didn't go the hospital for...

TM: Didn't go to the clinic right down the road.

BF: No. Maybe I wrapped it. But I lived with it. To this day, both my wrists they're not a 100 percent screwed, I have no strength in either one of my wrists. I don't know how mundane that was, but it had to do with visiting, and working with, and letting the people that I worked with and for know that I was willing to get out there and get my hands dirty as well. So that was sort of a mundane thing that I did. I think it's a good trade of a supervisor, to get out and let people see you and work with you and figure out who the heck you are. I don't know it that answers your mundane question at all.

TM: No, I agree with that. I think it's very important. It helps build teamwork and face recognition, especially in a large park where there's lots of employees. The people in this department might not necessarily know who's working in that department.

BF: Yeah. Now from a ranger standpoint, a protection standpoint, a Valley District standpoint, it was sort of a closed community. I've got, I don't know, five or six class photos, if you will. You had the obligatory everybody-get-together-and-have-their-photo-taken, which was generally when we'd have seasonal training because most people would be on, and they'd be around, and they wouldn't have other commitments. That was one of the mundane things I did too, was coordinating these "We're going to have this class photo," for a lack of a better term, "in the meadow at two o'clock. Be there in uniform and get your flat hat on. Make sure that you're there and if you're not, then tough, you're not going to be in that photo."

TM: How would you get the camera up in the air to get the picture of everybody?

BF: It wouldn't be quite that fancy. We'd get somebody that knew what they were doing with a camera, generally one of the interpreters. And the park, actually, at least for the summer times, often first years that I was there, actually had, I think they were getting paid, but they're still like interns, too, where they would go around and take photos of stuff. So there was some of that, but in this case no. Somebody might be standing on a chair.

TM: No APS guy with the picker truck and a bucket putting somebody way up in there with a camera to...

BF: I've done that, but that was at the Grand Canyon.

TM: It's very common at the Grand Canyon to get that picture. Get all the vehicles out there and everybody dress down in their...

BF: And then you've got the Canyon in the background. What wouldn't be good about that?

TM: Exactly. It's really, really nice.

BF: So there were a lot of mundane kinds of stuff. I'm sort of scrambling to think of other mundane things I did, but there was a lot of day-to-day stuff. There wasn't always wall-to-wall adrenaline.

TM: Right. Thank heavens. Catch your breath.

BF: I suppose that's right. You sort of forget the mundane stuff and all you remember is the adrenaline.

TM: Right. Well, once again, it's an hour and seventeen in here. *(laughing)* Is there anything else you'd like to bring into this part that we haven't covered?

BF: No. The most important thing is to be on record to say that from a relationship standpoint, I am not the poster child on this deal. There are a lot of things that I did wrong. I wasn't always bad, but I could have been much better. Who knows how marriages last or don't last. Park Service, unfortunately, I've always had this thing in the back of my mind and I've voiced this numerous times so this is not novel, but I always thought it would be kind of an interesting study in sociology to have this big wall with somebody with a magic wand that could put on this wall all of these relationships and marriages and the incestuous if-you're-not-married-to-that-person-now-you-will-be-in-three-years kinds of diagrams to see what had happened. I don't know that we're any different than any other police agency or maybe even the military, perhaps fire departments, places where people are under a lot of stress for various reasons. But it always seemed to me that the Park Service, certainly Yosemite, had more than its share,

statistically, of marriages that went wrong. It might be they weren't strong enough to begin with. I've never gone into that kind of detail, but I do know that we had a lot of problems as an agency, I think, in general. I wouldn't stand here in front of everybody and say that we're any worse than any other like that. But it was a lot.

TM: No, I would think any agency that has high demands, high stresses, lots of activity, and is short of staff is going to have this. In the defense of the four of you, your two sons and the woman who reared your children, I think all four of you did fairly well especially looking where your sons are now.

BF: I'm pleased about that.

TM: The world is full of what we should have done and could have done, but here we are.

BF: I'll tell you some stuff after you turn this thing off.

TM: Okay. With that, let's go ahead and conclude Part 10 of Grand Canyon Oral History Interview with Butch Farabee. Today is Sunday, June 21, 2020. My name is Tom Martin. Butch, thank you so very much.

BF: Well, I guess it's my pleasure, Tom. I don't know. We'll see.

TM: Hang in there.