

Voices from the Past

Mountain Climbing in Idaho

Interviewee: Arnold Woodruff Miller, Richard Kim Miller, and Bryce Thatcher

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Tape #73

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

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Harold Forbush: A project of oral history of the upper Snake River Valley in Idaho. The subject of the interview this evening is the mountains of this area and mountain climbing. It's a privilege for me this Sunday evening the 10th of April, 1983, to welcome a panel of three gentlemen here that we might talk about the mountains of Eastern Idaho in what we call the Mountain River Country; and also the impact of these mountains, and mountain climbing; and all three of them have done some of this. Wood, we'll start with you, the oldest; will you indicate your full name, where you were born, when, and then as I've indicated something about the Miller name in this upper Snake River Valley?

Arnold Woodruff Miller: Okay, I was born on the 31st of August 1913, and I was named Arnold Woodruff Miller. Arnold, which is an old name in the Miller family of the Arnold name of my grandfather's mother, and I was named Woodruff because Wilfred Woodruff was a special friend of my grandfather. And, also, Dad sat on his knee many times, and he had such a kind look in his face, he thought maybe he'd like to name a son after him. Our family had four girls, and Dad thought there would never have a boy, and eventually one came along. And, so he was named Arnold Woodruff Miller. Now, Granddad Miller first came to this area in 1883. He was a freighter from Utah; Corinne, Utah up to Bozeman, Montana and Anaconda. And he used to go through Market Lake, and one time he came over here and looked at this valley, and he said, "I like it," so he built a log cabin. And, the next year he went back to his home base at Farmington and brought his wife up in a one roomed cabin, carried her across the threshold and said, "Mary, this is your new house." She wasn't too happy about it, but that was the way it went. They had already four children. My dad was nine years old when he moved here, and has been here ever since.

HF: Now, were the Millers a polygamist family?

AM: No. There were three Millers, cousins of my granddad, who came and they had children in this area and are still here. My grandfather's children all moved to various places; Oregon and so forth, and none of his family is here except me.

HF: That's interesting. Frank Miller, the attorney, was he a kin?

AM: He is my father's brother. Father was the oldest, and then Burt Miller, the lawyer, you probably know, and then Frank Miller, the lawyer, and then Stan. They were born in St. George. They came one year to Farmington, stayed there one year, and then by that time Grandfather located here on Egen Bench over by Parker. And, that farm is still in the Miller name to my cousin who lives in Annapolis, and four of his sisters own it. I've seen the deed on it, and it is a Deed that was given to Grandfather Miller as a Homestead Act Deed.

HF: Now, Kim, tell me your background, your age, and where you were born, and who you are.

Richard Kim Miller: Richard Kim Miller, and I was born in Rexburg here in March 9th, 1952, which makes me 31 years old, and I've spent almost my entire life in Rexburg.

HF: Are you the oldest son?

KM: I'm the youngest of a family of four.

HF: You're the youngest.

KM: Right.

HF: I see, and you're employed as more or less the manager of the...

KM: Racket ball and Health Center.

HF: Racket ball and Health Center here in Rexburg?

KM: Right.

HF: At the present time. Are you married?

KM: Married and have two children of my own; a son, five years old, Marshall, and a daughter, one year old, Janey.

HF: Great. Now, the third member of this panel is a young man who just got back from a mission. Bryce Thatcher, what about, where were you born, and your age, and something about the Thatcher name and whatever you know.

Bryce Thatcher: Okay. I was born here in Rexburg, and I've lived here all my life. I know that the Thatchers originally came from the Logan area and then moved here. My grandfather lived in Teton and Sugar City, and he was the superintendent for the schools for a long time over there. The one thing I know about the Thatcher name is it's originally from England, and Thatcher is just they were the people who would thatch the roofs on the house, and that's how we got our name, the Thatchers. But, I don't know that's it.

HF: You're the, what, the second boy and the third child of Gordon and Beth?

BT: Yes, that is right.

HF: And, his father is an attorney and outstanding man here in the Rexburg area both community-wise, and church, and his profession. Now, you fellows have something in common which is a lover of climbing, climbing mountains, and it's a challenge. What ever got you started into this, and, maybe it goes back quite a ways there, or does it come about when your son Kim started doing climbing? Tell me a little bit about the background, what motivated you in mountain climbing?

AM: Well, Kim did. I knew that I needed to and wanted to be close to Kim in all the things that he wanted to do. And, we hiked together, and we walked from here through and came out at Jenny's Lake, and that was a wonderful experience. And, we saw the Grand right from the bottom. And, so the next year, I said I would climb it, and I got up to the saddle and it was cold

and miserable, and I chickened out. And, he went on, and it always made me a little bit sore, a little bit disappointed in myself, so I said, “well next time, next year I will.”

HF: What year was that when you first, when you got up to the saddle?

AM: Oh, gosh, what year was it?

KM: The first try was 1968, and the year that you did it was 1969.

AM: Yah.

HF: In '68, and how old were you at the time? Let's see 13, you'd be 55.

AM: Or six, something like that. I think I was 57 when I climbed it or maybe that was, yah. We practiced out here at Heise on a rock, and I overcame that fear of height. And, of course, when you're tied onto a specialist in mountain climbing you have no reason to fear. And I...next summer we went to the saddle and stayed there overnight, under a rock, sort of a cave like deal, and the next day we went to the top, and it was a wonderful experience. We didn't stay on the top very long because a thunder storm was coming in, and we didn't want to be there in that kind of a situation. So, we came back down to the base camp, and Kim and I stayed all night, the rest of them came on down. And, Kim and I came down the next day, and we had a wonderful time together, not in a hurry, but just looking around and taking our time. And, it was a wonderful experience, which I treasure very much for lots of reasons, the fact that Kim and I did it together, and the fact that I accomplished it made it great.

HF: That's super. And, prior to that in 1967, you really hadn't done climbing much?

AM: No, we had only hiked. And, Kim said he was going to climb, and I said sure you are. I didn't believe it, but he did with a friend, and neither one of them knew sicum about it. They'd done some practicing a little bit, but they made it.

HF: Kim, what motivated you in mountain climbing? Does it go back to when you were just a youngster or what?

KM: Well, I've always liked to climb. I think what motivated me as far as the fact of climbing mountains was my sophomore year in high school. I read a book, which is one of the first books I ever read from cover to cover other than my assigned books in classes, called the White Spider and it was a story of the first people who climbed the Eiger in Switzerland. And, then I read another book in the library called, Climb up to Hell, which was also about the first descent of the Eigerwand in Switzerland. And, that got me started to think about climbing as a sport of climbing. And, of course the nearest mountain to climb that had anything like the Eiger was the Grand Teton, particularly the north face of the Grand, which was over my head at that time, but we could still climb the Grand. So, I went over and took a half a day of mountaineering school there above Jenny Lake; it cost \$15. I met a fellow from Boston who went to MIT, who had also never climbed. And, we had a half a day of school, each of us, and borrowed some equipment from some people he was traveling with and bought a guide book and climbed it three days after

we went to that school. The day after school we climbed the smaller peak called, Disappointment Peak. It's technically not difficult at all, but gave us an experience as far as altitude and how fast we moved together.

HF: Was it part of the Grand Teton?

KM: Well, it's part of the range; it sits right due east of the Grand Teton. It's called Disappointment Peak because from the valley, Jackson Hole valley, it looks as though you can walk up this peak and continue on to the top of the Grand, but then there's about a 300 or 400 foot drop off and then the Grand continues. So, it's a satellite peak of the Grand, The Spur, they call it.

HF: And, you can't gain the Teton by going up?

KM: No, you can't. You'd have to drop back down to the valley floor and go up again.

HF: What year was this?

KM: That was sophomore, that was after my sophomore year, 1968, and I climbed it that summer, the Owen Spalding route. And, the next year after that, after my junior year, I climbed it by another route.

HF: Now, did you have, how about Quinn Passey, wasn't he?

KM: No, this was before Quinn was involved. Quinn wasn't really involved with climbing too much until after I came off my mission in 1973.

HF: Okay, and then you fellows did quite a lot together, didn't you? We'll get into that later. Bryce, was it Kim who motivated you? [laughter]

BT: He probably was a lot. I'd done a lot of hiking as a younger boy with my father. At the age of six, I climbed Table Rock, and then at the age of 12 I climbed Mount Bora, which is the highest peak in Idaho. And from that, you know, just all my life living by the Grand Teton, I've always wanted to climb it. And I went up to the college library and checked out books on mountaineering and stuff, and me and a couple of my friends learned how to do some of the basic things such as repelling and stuff like this. And from that, I kind of ran into Kim, and we've just done things from there. But, my father was probably the one as far as being in the mountains and being in the woods and doing things like that, we were the ones that started together.

HF: He has seemingly been a physical therapist, hasn't he, and one who wanted to keep his body good and strong?

BT: Yes

HF: All of his life, and he's done quite a lot of hiking and mountain, but not so much mountain climbing.

BT: No. He has never gone with me as far as using ropes and stuff. Hopefully, I'll get him up. I'd like to take him up to the Grand this year. He's done things. Mount Bora has a couple parts on it that are, you know, you'd consider mountain climbing. We didn't use ropes on it at the time, but there are parts that are scary and give you the feel of mountain climbing on Mount Bora. But, he usually just does hiking.

HF: Now, did he go with you to Mount Bora?

BT: Yes.

HF: And, did he climb Mount Bora?

BT: Yes. He and my two brothers and I did it. And, that was when I was 12, so that would have been about eight years ago.

HF: About what, 1975?

BT: Yes, somewhere around there.

HF: Well, now in this area that the tourism department refers to as a mountain river country, what outstanding mountains or peaks do we have starting from, say the lofty Tetons to the east, which literally are part of western Wyoming, but have a fabulous impact on all of us here in eastern Idaho? What mountains are in that range that are significant as climbing material?

KM: The Tetons, of course the Grand Teton, which is the most famous mountain in the United States, the lower 48.

HF: Is that the tallest?

KM: No, it's not the tallest by a long shot, but it is...

HF: In the United States isn't it?

KM: No, no it's not. There's several peaks in, well there's over 40 peaks in Colorado alone that are over 14,000 feet.

HF: Oh, I see.

KM: And, then there's Mt. Whitney in California that's also over 14,000 feet. But, it is the most famous mountain because of its aesthetic shape and also there's not an easy way to the top, whereas most peaks have an easy way to the top and the Teton doesn't. So, that's why it's probably famous and then other mountains in the range such as Mt. Moran, another famous mountain.

HF: Why is it so famous?

KM: Well, because of again its aesthetic beauty. It stands by itself; it's square, it's blocky, it looks impossible from most sides and doesn't have a very easy way to the top. In fact, the Grand Teton was climbed before Mount Moran, and the people who climbed the Grand Teton tried Mount Moran several years later and still couldn't do it.

HF: Okay, others in that range?

KM: Well, the hardest of all the Tetons to actually get to the summit is Mt. Owen, which is directly north of the Grand Teton and also the second highest of the range. And it wasn't climbed until the late 1920s after several attempts, and it still today by the easiest route of all—of course most of the peaks have 20-30 routes on them. But, if you took all of the easy standard routes on all the peaks, Mt. Owen is still the hardest to get to the summit; whereas, the middle Teton and south Teton, south of the Grand Teton, are very easy and one can go by themselves and also just scramble to the top. There's no climbing involved on the easier routes.

HF: You don't have to use...

KM: Ropes or equipment.

HF: Ropes or equipment?

KM: No.

HF: And, so forth, but now must one still use ropes and so forth to get to the Grand Teton?

KM: Well, it depends on your ability and how much you've climbed. The statement comes up all the time, in fact I had someone tell me the other day: "I hear the Grand Teton is easy," which it is if you're a climber. If you've never climbed before it's not easy. It's technically harder than the Matterhorn in Switzerland, which has been, of course, probably the most famous mountain in the world. If you're a climber you can get to the top of the Grand Teton by yourself without a rope, as I've done several times, Bryce has done, and be in little danger at all. If you're not a climber, you probably would reach a point where you wouldn't go on just from your own fear because there's at least 700 feet on the easiest route of the Grand Teton where if you slipped you probably wouldn't recover. It's that steep, whereas, on the middle Teton you can slip and slide a ways and recover.

HF: Now, Bryce you've been up to the Grand Teton a time or two, probably more than that. How many routes have you followed?

BT: I've done the Owen Spalding and the Exum Ridge, and the North Ridge of the Grand. Those are basically the three routes I've done on the Grand.

HF: Are they on the...which side?

BT: The North Ridge just kind of takes the north skyline from this side, the Exum Ridge kind of goes up the South Ridge and kind of takes the south skyline, and the Owen Spalding route starts up kind of the south skyline and then it comes around a little bit on the west face near the top and goes up to the top. And that's the three routes that I've done on it, basically.

HF: Are they all equally difficult, would you say?

BT: No, the North Ridge is probably...well it is the most technical route I've done on the Grand, and it probably is one of the most technical routes on the Grand. It's steep and hard.

KM: At the time the North Ridge was climbed in 1931 it was the most difficult climb in the United States.

HF: In 1931?

KM: 1931.

HF: Who did that?

KM: Robert Underhill, who was a professor from Harvard who had climbed a lot in the Alps, and a fellow who was the geologist and park ranger of the Tetons at that time, Fritiof Fryxell, climbed it. And it had been attempted several times before and it was at that time dubbed the greatest line on the Teton and the last challenge.

HF: Let's go back to the first time that the Teton, the Grand Teton, was climbed. Do you have the history of that?

KM: Yes, it's been a quite a controversy over the years and most recent books have pretty much pinned down what the feelings are. Just to back up a little bit it was first attempted, as far as we have record of, in 1843 by a French fur trader named Michaud who didn't get very far and didn't give us very much records about what kind of difficulties he ran into. And then it was...the first time that it was seriously attempted was from the Hayden Survey Party, who was doing work in Yellowstone Park, and came down to Pierre's Hole around where Driggs is now, and about seven of them started up, leaving the Idaho side, climbed up through around Table Rock—would have gone right under Table Rock—and reached the lower saddle of the Teton, which is about 11,600 feet. And four of them left that point where they probably camped and headed for the upper saddle at 13,200 feet, two of which quit on that point, so it left two, one named Langford and the other Stevenson. And they reached the upper saddle then ascended the western spur which is called the Enclosure. At that point they found a man-made circle of stones that were laid up, and this surprised them that they'd find something there that was obviously man-made. And their records go on to indicate at that point that they looked across and saw the bigger higher part portion of the Grand and then ascended it, saying they found flowers within 125 feet of the summit. They also found an ice covered sheet of rock and they described how big the summit was. Now, at that point, they came down and people thought that it had been climbed. In 1898...

HF: Yah, their climb was what, '72?

KM: 72, 1972. It was assumed and published in some magazines that the Grand had now been climbed and their account was published. It wasn't until 1898 that four fellows from Jackson, William Owen, who was the spear header, Franklin Spalding, Shrive and Peterson, all four from Jackson, one was a reverend, climbed it to the top and found that the summit was not described adequately by Stevenson and Langdon; that there was no ice fill near the summit, that the summit that they had described was bigger or they had described it bigger than it actually was, and they left no indication that they'd been there. Now, Owen's major complaint was that they were with the survey team, which they were, they always left a cairn or a stack of rocks on any summit and there was no evidence of anyone being there. And he said certainly they would have left a cairn at least to prove that they would have been there. So, Owen decided that they hadn't climbed it. It's common belief now among most mountaineers, and also historians, that they didn't; that they only reached the Upper Saddle and then went to the top of what is now called The Enclosure, which is the western spur of the Grand—it's about 500 feet below the summit—where they found this circle of stones, and they didn't get to the top. Now, something else emerged in 1959 that made it even more interesting is that they found in William Owen's personal journals and histories that he had a letter from a guy named Phifer who claimed that he had climbed it five years earlier in 1895, and he gave some fairly good details that he had maybe reached the summit. So, maybe Stevenson and Langford did it, doubtful, maybe this Phifer did it in 1893 by himself, you don't know, but for sure the four fellows from Jackson: Owen, Spalding, Shrive, and Peterson did climb it in 1898. There was one other attempter in this time, also in the 1880s, by a fellow named Wilson, who was the first person to climb Mt. Rainier, and he had a rope and he had a lot of climbing expertise, and he was turned back with his knowledge and with his rope, which makes it unlikely probably that the first fellows from the Hayden Survey party, Stevenson and Langford couldn't find it. So, we don't know really. We know for sure who did climb it when, but we don't know who was first. Evidence that there was a stone circle made on The Enclosure made by Indians years before leaves you with the option maybe that Indians had also got to the summit of the Grand itself because they had gone up and built the stone enclosure where the young braves would go up and receive their visions and fast and meditate. And, that's what that was there for, and that was there prior to 1872.

HF: Well, now the Owens, Owen name, what...has there been...has he left his name up there?

KM: Yeah, they carved their name in a rock which you can still see today.

HF: No, I mean there's the Owen, I think Bryce mentioned, there's one route called the Owens route.

KM: It's the Owen Spalding route, and that's the route that they climbed. That's the easiest route on the west side.

HF: On the west side?

KM: Yes.

HF: That would be on the Teton Valley, Idaho side, wouldn't it?

KM: And that's because you can get closest to the summit with only scrambling and that leaves approximately 700 feet of climbing to the summit, which is the shortest climbing route on the Grand.

HF: Do you use these pitons? Is that what they call them?

KM: Well, there's plenty of them there from early ascents. In fact, the second ascent of the Grand was not until 25 years after, 1898. In 1923, there was three boys from a college in Montana came down, climbed it in a day from the Valley to the top and back and didn't have a rope or pitons or climbing expertise, but they left the record on top that they were there. Then it became popular because it became possible to the common person and then over the next three or four years they estimate 70 people climbed it to about 1931.

HF: Wood, did you ever know Clarence Murdock from up in Driggs? The band teacher?

AM: No.

HF: Clarence Murdock?

AM: No.

HF: I think he climbed it.

AM: I think those Miller boys-

HF: In 1924 and I think probably Chet-

AM: Yeah.

HF: -and Roy and Fred-

AM: Yeah.

HF: -probably have climbed it.

AM: They've been all over that area. When I was talking before I forgot to mention that Kim and I climbed the middle before we climbed the Grand, so that sort of prepared me for climbing the Grand; plus his encouragement. I've climbed five of those peaks up there: first the middle, and then the Grand, and then the south, and then Teewinot and then Owens. And I agree with Kim that Owens is the hardest one to climb. It's real difficult. I climbed three of them, I think, while Kim was on his mission in New Zealand. At Teewinot I took Woody up there. Incidentally, Woody could be responsible for Kim's mountain climbing beginning.

HF: Now is this your older boy?

AM: Yes, that's the oldest one. He worked up there to Jackson Lake Lodge and he climbed the Grand, he and his friend, and then we bought a book by...Shenard?

KM: Ortenburer.

AM: From Ortenburger.

KM: Leigh Ortenburger.

AM: Leigh Ortenburger, which Woody referred it to us and recommended it and Kim read it and got him started, so I think Kim kinda got Woody, or Woody got Kim interested in it and then Kim took me. And while he was on his mission I told him I would climb the Cathedral Group,—yep—Grand Teewinot, and Owens, which I did.

HF: Separately or in the same day or-

AM: No, I think one each year or-

HF: I see.

AM: -I think one year I made two of them with Don Decker and various ones from here.

HF: Is Decker...did he climb the Teton quite a bit?

AM: Oh, yes.

HF: He, he was a...tell me a little about Don Decker. Of course we know that he fell to his death last summer-

AM: I think Kim can tell you a little more about Decker than I.

HF: -in 1982.

KM: He was a Seasonal Park Ranger in the early 50's in the Tetons and became acquainted with several of the greatest American climbers at that time and one was this Leigh Ortenburger who later wrote the guide book. Another was Willie Unsold who was one of the first Americans on Everest and some other great climbers; and they, together in the early '50s climbed one round in particular on Mt. Moran, which at that time was the most difficult and longest climb in the United States, South Buttress of Mt. Moran and he also made a early ascent of the north face of the Grand. So Decker was one of the best climbers of his time in the early-

[Tape cuts off and goes to Harold]

HF: To complete and to continue and to complete the interview, please turn over to side two of this tape.

[Side two of Tape] ***

HF: Side two continuing the interview with Wood Miller, his son Kim, and Bryce Thatcher. Now, you know, just before Bryce left on his mission in what? 1981?

BT: Yes.

HF: 1981 he did a spectacular...made a spectacular ascent of the Teton, Grand Teton. Tell us about it and your timing. What motivated you that morning? You must have been feeling super well or something when you...Go ahead and tell us about it, Bryce.

BT: Okay. The first time I climbed the Grand I can remember it was between my 8th and 9th grade year in Junior High. I climbed it with a couple guys from around here. I can remember them telling me—we were planning on doing it in two days and I can remember them telling me about a guy named Jock Glidden who had climbed the Grand round trip in four hours and 11 minutes and I can remember specifically saying, you know, “he must be crazy” or “he,” something like this, and, but I can remember thinking, also, that, that I’d like to do something like that someday and then I got into climbing really a lot after that and I always had a—I liked to go a lot, and sometimes I like to go by myself. I’d go and do ascents in the Tetons, like the middle Teton, or other things just by myself just, just for fun. I like to be up there by myself; it’s fun just to sit there and think and stuff. But I decided that it might be possible for me to set a new record on the Grand, which would be a speed descent from the parking lot at Lupine Meadows to the top and then back down. And as I mentioned, Jock Glidden’s record was four hours and 11 minutes, so I decided that I was going to try to do it and my goal was to do it in under four hours. It was on August 26 in 1981 and that’s about, about two weeks before I left on my mission, I guess. I just went over to Jackson and checked in at the Ranger Station and then-

HF: Tell your folks what you’re gonna do?

BT: No. I told them I was going to—I told them—they knew that I wanted to set a record on the Grand, but my original intent had been to go over and I was going to rehearse the route a couple of times. I’d never done the particular route which is the Owen-Spalding route and I was going to take time at intervals. I was going to run like up to the Saddle and see how long it took me and then I was going to time myself from the Saddle to the Upper Saddle and then I was going to climb the technical climbing part of the route a couple of times, so I would be familiar with the route, so I could come back and do a speed ascent. And that was my original intent, but after I had started off running I felt real strong, I wasn’t tired, I had a lot of energy, and I decided after a ways that my time was good enough that I might as well just go for it that day and so I ran and I made it to the top of the Grand Teton in-

AM: Two hours and four minutes.

BT: -two hours and four minutes and I met a climbing party from Salt Lake on top and I had them go down to the Ranger Station and verify that they had seen me on top and then I descended the route in I guess it'd be an hour and 43 minutes?

AM: Yeah.

BT: Yeah. Then I ran down in an hour and 43 which made the total time from the parking lot to parking lot in three hours and 47 minutes. And that's just the speed ascent.

HF: And that surely must be the record? And that was the Owen-Spalding Route?

BT: Yes. Yes. That is the easiest route and as Kim said it's the easiest and shortest, but it does have—it does have 700 feet of technical climbing on the route itself.

KM: It's interesting to note that he did the climbing route having never done it before and only had a map that I had drawn him the night before. He did those 700 feet in 14 minutes. And that's climbing with hands.

HF: Now when you say technical climbing, what type of equipment did you have to use? Did you have to use any particular type of equipment?

BT: No, I didn't. I didn't bring anything with me. All I had was I had a light backpack with some extra clothing and a little bit of food in it, but as far as climbing equipment I didn't have anything. I just—I was runnin' in tennis shoes and short pants and a T-shirt. As Kim was saying earlier the Grand can be done without climbing equipment. It's, you know, we don't suggest it or anything. You need experience to do so.

HF: This is the Owen-Spalding route?

BT: Yes.

HF: But other routes on the Grand Teton requires equipment?

BT: Uh-huh.

HF: Absolutely?

KM: Yes. There's some, there's some routes, some ice routes that require a lot of equipment and the north reach of the Grand Teton, which Bryce and I had done four days before he set his record, required equipment; ropes, and not pitons, but they're called chocks which work the same as pitons, and, so it's just a vary in difficulties.

HF: Was Mr. Decker killed in ascending or descending the-

KM: He was ascending and they were un-roped at a time and a place where they possibly should have been roped up.

HF: On the Grand Teton?

KM: No, it was on the Saddle between the Middle and the South Teton.

HF: Oh.

KM: And he pulled the lose chock off and fell with it. Had he been roped up he probably would've been fine.

HF: You fellows, all of you know Ed Williamson.

AM: Williams.

HF: Williams. Ed Williams. Edmund Williams of Ricks College. Now he's climbed it a few times, hasn't he?

AM: Umm-hmm. Yes.

HF: Have you ever been with him when he's climbed?

KM: My Dad and I have been with him on the Middle Teton and my dad's been with him on the South Teton together.

AM: And I think he was with Decker and I on the Owen's at least—No he wasn't! It was Decker and all his boys, about four of 'em, and his daughter.

HF: Decker's daughter?

AM: Yeah, went to Owen's with us and the guy that she later married was with us. But Ed Williams wasn't on that Owen's climb. He likes to hike a lot and climb. Has he done the Grand, Kim?

KM: Ed?

AM: Uh-huh.

KM: Umm-hmm.

AM: Has he done Owen's?

KM: I don't think so.

AM: He didn't go that day.

HF: Well now, what are some other peaks in the area that—actually I guess they don't present any great challenge, but maybe we should mention some peaks that are climbed occasionally, but it isn't anything super in the area, the mountain river country.

KM: There's two peaks. I'm not sure if they're in what we would consider the Bitterroot Range or what's the other range straight west of us?

AM: Sauty—umm...

KM: No, I know they're not the Sauty. It's either the Bitterroot or the [snaps his fingers]-

HF: Lost River?

KM: Lost River. They're right above Arco and Howe. And one's called Saddle, Saddle Back or is it—Saddle Back Peak, which is fairly often climbed and the other is called Diamond Peak, which is right above Blue Dome; the town of Blue Dome. And they offer very little technical challenges, but are high, almost 12,000 feet, and a lot of people climb them just to get on top. I think they're in the Lost River Range.

AM: How 'bout Baxter Pinnacle?

KM: Well that's the Tetons. There's infinite, infinite amount of climbs in the Tetons. There's a guide book to the Tetons. It's over 600 pages. The Grand Teton itself has 26 routes to the top and lots of variations on every one of those routes.

HF: Now Mount Moran is a mountain with its obstacles. When did you say it was first descended?

KM: I think it was 1924.

HF: And who did that?

KM: The first ascent was Blair C. Rich, who was a relative of the dentist here, Blair Charles Rich and some other people, and they climbed it. I'm not sure exactly what the route they used. I believe...do you know what they was, Bryce?

BT: [inaudible]

KM: I believe it was up the Skillet Glacier, which is on the east face of the Grand Teton.

BT: Of Mt. Moran.

KM: Of Mt. Moran, sorry. But they were the first ones to get on top and it was 1924.

HF: Now, let's, let's just mention some rather noted mountain climbers like Petzl.

KM: Umm-hmm.

HF: Maybe he, in your opinion, isn't the greatest, but he's, uh, I think he ascended with a young fellow, the Grand Teton in 1924—1923 or '24. But he's been up many, many times and I suppose he has won his acclaim by ascending it in the winter time.

KM: Umm-hmm.

HF: What can you tell me about the man?

KM: He was the first person in the Tetons to make a living guiding people. And you're right, he started in the late '20s, mid '20s, guiding people for a fee to the top of the Tetons and by 1931 he had hired a partner to be his partner in the guide concession in the park there named Glenn Exum and Glenn Exum later came to own the school until just several years ago. In fact, Glenn Exum still is alive and lives in Jackson and on his 70th birthday he climbed the Grand Teton with a bunch of friends, one of which was Mont Laider from St. Anthony who was a very good friend of Glenn Exum. Mont Laider has climbed quite a bit in the Tetons.

HF: Has he?

KM: There was another fellow from the Upper Valley here and his son. Petzl was the first person to climb the Teton in the winter in the '30s with his brother Elvin Petzl, and that's something that at that time wasn't done and even into the late '60s really wasn't done very much. It's a whole different story in the winter.

HF: I suppose one of the very noted accomplishments of him was when he went up there and I suppose he was hired to, to reach that mission plane that crashed-

KM: Umm-hmm.

HF: -on Mount Moran in, I'm guessing now, in 1954?

KM: Right. Umm-hmm.

HF: And he tells about it. I, I have a taping of that detailed account of his; very, very fascinating. He's turned out to be quite a lecturer.

KM: Umm-hmm.

HF: Now, are there others?

AM: Uh, Decker was with Petzl when they went up there to investigate that airplane that crashed on the top of Mt. Moran.

KM: They went up the next spring, or the next summer to pick up any of the remaining things. Petzl went up with another fellow on November 5, which is the day or two after the plane actually crashed.

HF: But they didn't reach it?

KM: They reached it and found out that, of course, there were no survivors and there was nothing really that they could do. So they came back down and then they went up and cleaned the mess up the next summer and Decker was-

HF: And Decker was with him?

KM: You bet. Yeah.

AM: The second summer. The next, second summer.

HF: Oh.

KM: And then they closed the climbing route for five years after that.

HF: Any others?

KM: Yeah, the most famous Teton climber in early times was Robert Underhill, again, who was one of the first American mountaineers to use the rope extensively. And his ascent of the North Ridge into the Grand, the Underhill Ridge of the Grand and also the East Ridge of the Grand. The East Ridge was the second route done on the Grand. And so he spent all of his summers out here climbing late '20s or early '30s. And after he, kind of, went out of the climbing scene, he was replaced by a fellow named Jack Durrance, who was a medical student, came from Austria, learned to climb in Austria, and Jack Durrance took over and did most of the hard climbs up 'til the mid '40s. And then Durrance, who had been the big climber of the time, was replaced by several fellows: Pownall,—Richard Pownall was his name—Art Gilkey, Willy Unsold, and some of these fellows, who later turned out to be the more famous climbers of the late '50s and '60s. And that's where they got their training is in the Tetons.

HF: Now, there's a fellow that I think is from Washington, state of Washington, a Latter-day Saint fellow, who is presently in Nepal, I believe, and intends to climb the—is it the south or north side of Mt. Everest?

KM: I believe it's the north side this year of Mt. Everest...or no; it was the north side they tried last year.

HF: They tried and failed.

KM: And failed. And so this year they're going to do the standard route which is the South Col route.

HF: Right.

KM: Right.

HF: Now, can you think of other climbers from the valley; Eastern Idaho, that have become quite noted in climbing?

KM: Decker was probably the most famous. He wasn't from this area when he was climbing, but he settled here and I've got many books that have his name in them. The route that they did on Mt. Moran in 1952, which I've already mentioned, turned out to be—there's a book published today called *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America* and this is one of the 50 classic climbs some very good mountaineers have assembled what they think the 50 best climbs are in North America and the south-

HF: And that's one of them, huh?

KM: That's one of them and he was on the first ascent of that.

HF: Interesting. Now, after you came back from your mission, Kim, you had teamed up with the Passey boy.

KM: Uh-huh.

HF: Did Passey do quite a lot of climbing?

KM: He did there for a year or two before he went on his mission, so it was in between our missions that we climbed together. I think it was just one year and we climbed quite a bit and then I started climbing after he left on his mission more with Grant Modle, and Grant and I climbed together for the next several years.

HF: But where have you climbed? In Utah, maybe, some?

KM: Yeah, Utah and California and Colorado; and Grant isn't involved much with climbing now. And there seems to be three of us that are still climbing quite a bit and that's Bryce, myself, and Blair Rich. And we've been doing the most lately.

HF: Has Blair become quite experienced and-

KM: Yeah.

HF: Has he?

KM: Yeah, he's a quite a good climber these days. It took him a while to figure out if he wanted to do it or not. [laughs]

HF: What is it about it? What is there about it? What is it about climbing? When you get up there, I mean, it must be a special thrill comes into your mind and your whole soul to make you feel very satisfied.

KM: Yeah, that's it. It's hard to, you know, it's hard to say what it is cause I don't know what it is exactly for sure. I know it's just the most rewarding experience you can be involved with and that's spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally. It seems the more you sacrifice the more satisfaction there is and climbing definitely takes a sacrifice. Plus, not only is it a physical sacrifice, but it's a mental sacrifice and then there's also the factor in there of overcoming the fear and the chance of a—there's the chance of death and maybe because of that that puts your life in better perspective; closer perspective. And aside from all this it's just fun. I mean, just the thrill of climbing three feet is fun, and that's why kids like to climb trees. I don't know. I don't know what's so fun about it.

AM: Adventure.

KM: Yeah, it's an adventure.

HF: Well, that's good. Do you have any comment about that, Bryce?

BT: No, it's-

HF: How did you feel after coming down after three hours and 47 minutes?

BT: Tired.

HF: And yet you were exhilarated.

BT: Oh yeah.

HF: Knowing that you have set a record.

BT: Yes. I was real excited. I was physically worn out, but I don't know, it's hard to explain. Just real excited just knowing that I had done that. I think I called Kim didn't I?

KM: Yep.

BT: Yeah, I think I called Kim from the ranger station there in Jackson or Jenny's Lake. I was pretty excited.

HF: Now, do you fellows have plans for some more climbing?

KM: Yeah, we've got every weekend lined up 'til October.

HF: The two of you?

KM: Yeah, and Blair Rich.

HF: Is that right?

KM: Yeah, I got a kick out of it the other day. Bryce's dad picked up his calendar that we had just written all our plans in and had obviously figured out that he'd better look for new manager of the club this summer as we have a lot of plans. We're going to Las Vegas the 20th of this month for a climb there.

HF: Out of Vegas?

KM: Out of Vegas it's called Red Rock Canyon.

HF: Have you ever climbed it?

KM: Yeah, last year I climbed there; not this particular climb.

HF: But this will be your first in that area, Bryce?

BT: Yes.

HF: Now, what specifically do you do when you are aspiring to, you know, make a real challenging ascent of a mountain? How do you prepare? Get your maps, I guess. That's very important to know exactly what you're going to do.

KM: Yeah, today because it's such a popular sport it's kind of in the last five or six years climbing has experienced the same thing that skiing did 15 years ago; a real boom. And today there's so many climbers, very few of them stick with the sport very long, but almost everyone gets in and tries it a little bit, but there's a lot of technical equipment available and the biggest advances in climbing in the last 20 years, of course, have been in the technology. And that's why we've climbed so many things in the last ten years. It seemed impossible 30 years ago 'til the advance in technology and so we can get easy guide books, you can get maps, just like a highway map that tell you exactly how hard every inch is and you can buy whole books like Yosemite Valley in California. You can buy a book that's just one map after the other of every route and it tells you what—how long the particular rope length is, it's 130 feet, it tells you what kind of equipment you're gonna need in that 130 foot section, how hard it is, what kind of difficulty it's going to be, if it's a finger crack, a fist crack, or what exactly—and so you know exactly what to expect, you have the technological backing from the modern era, and somehow, and a lot of people's complaint with that is it takes the adventure out of it. So I think the, to a certain degree, the adventure that used to be in mountaineering and the go- what they used to call the golden age of mountaineering was the '40s and '50s, is lost because everything has been climbed and every route has been climbed, and it's been done at night and in the winter and everything. So some of the adventure's gone. You just can't go out and find the first ascent like you used to. The golden age of mountaineering today is in the Himalayas and that's where there's still adventure and the technological advances aren't helping that much in the Himalayas

with the severe conditions. And as far as the Tetons, what used to be a big adventure now is a three hour, 47 minute trip for Bryce Thatcher.

HF: And has that particular achievement been publicized?

KM: Sure, you bet.

HF: In?

KM: Oh, in mountaineering journals and climbing magazines and stuff like that. Plus most people who are aware of things like that would be aware of that fact. It's doubtful that record will be broken in the near future, if ever. A four hour and 11 minute record of Jock Glidden who was a great marathon runner plus a mountain guide for 15 years was deemed impossible to ever even get the same time, and yet Bryce beat it by nearly 1/8th of the time.

HF: That's fabulous.

KM: Yeah. That's the most incredible thing I've seen in 17 years of climbing. That's the most impressive to me.

HF: Well, Bryce, we certainly wish you well in your future climbs. I hope that you'll always be blessed to use prudence-

BT: Umm-hmm.

HF: -and wisdom. You know, sometimes I think it's a truism we are so overwhelmed by the success we almost do things, maybe, well, I wouldn't want to use the word necessarily, but I'm sure your Mom and Dad counseled you a number of times on this. I think this is fabulous, though. It's tremendous; a young man with a tremendous amount of motivation. Well, Woody, what's your feeling of the experience you've had of mountain climbing? Would you recommend it to people, a lot of people?

AM: Yes, except I'd say start about 40 years earlier and enjoy 40 years of it. I was, oh, almost 60 years old. That's kind of long in life to be doing that monkey business, but nevertheless, it was a challenge and it was an adventure and it was scary, but it was worth it all. And what Kim says about it being a spiritual experience is really true because you place yourself in someone else's hands. And also, I might mention, you say a few prayers along the way, which helps, whether it quiets your nerves or whether it helps otherwise, I don't know. But it kind of makes it possible. And I think those are wonderful experiences. I wouldn't have missed them for the world and I'm glad that Kim made me go. But you know, you can't beat it in any other sport because this is not a team sport—well, it is a team sport, but it's not a group.

HF: But you're on one on one, aren't you, really?

AM: Yes. And your life is in somebody else's hands quite often.

HF: Or somebody else's life is in your hands too, I guess.

AM: And you cannot, for a moment, lose the fact that someone else is in your hands and forget what you're doing. I know, Kim and I were going up the Fritch and Pitch one time and a husband and wife team was climbing and she was doing something else, but holding the rope, and boy, we never heard anybody get cussed out so loud in all our life. He said, "You idiot! Hold on to that rope! That's what you're here for, not to powder your nose." And so a lot depends on your partner and in critical times they can't be goofing off.

HF: Well, Bryce, what—you fellows have mentioned that virtually every weekend until October your plans are to do some climbing. Do you plan to go back up into the Tetons, Bryce?

BT: Yeah, I'm planning on doing a lot of stuff in those Tetons, maybe kind of in between our other climbs. I like to get into the Tetons. It helps you out physically getting into high altitude and I just like to go and run around the Tetons on the trails and stuff. It's a lot funner than running around the roads and stuff of Rexburg; more scenery and excitement and stuff. But this summer we've got several climbs planned in the Tetons and, I don't know, we'll probably do those, though, around July or August.

HF: That time of the year seems to be the most propitious, the most favorable for weather conditions I guess.

BT: Yes.

HF: Too much—well, usually when you get up there, even on a clear day down here you experience quite a lot of wind?

BT: Um, it usually is in the high altitudes. There's wind and it's cold, but there are occasions when it's really nice. I've had days when it's been really nice, but then you've had days when it's been really bad. It's really unpredictable. That's what's, I don't know, it's neat in a way, but that's what's weird about the mountains is you really don't know what's going to happen. The weather's kind of unpredictable and it just comes in really suddenly, so you always have to be aware and be on your toes.

HF: Now, when you go over there to climb, must you register and check in with some-

BT: Yes, at the Jenny's Lake Ranger Station there's a place where you check in and you tell them where you're going and when you will be back, so that if you don't come back then they will know where to look for you.

HF: It's sort of like a flight plan.

BT: Yeah.

HF: You're compelled or under the regulations you must check in.

BT: Yes.

HF: Well I appreciate; fellows, this experience and putting down on tape some of this. We've recorded a quite a few names of individuals who have done a lot of climbing and indicated some, I think, some very profound records made by you fellows and that you've done and so on and I, I think this will be a very valuable asset to those who would aspire to climb. Possibly some youngster ten years from now will learn about this and want to read and listen to this tape and get some ideas and inspiration in what you fellows have done. Thank you so much.