

Harold K. Pryor
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 28, 1989

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Jeff Frank: My name is Jeff Frank. I'm interviewing Harold K. Pryor from Minersville, Utah. September 28, 1989, at the Zion Nature Center, Zion National Park. It is 11:35. Sounds like a courtroom. Well, welcome back to Zion National Park. Do you make it down here to visit much?

Harold Pryor: I've been down here three times in fifty years, so that isn't very often.

Jeff Frank: Is that one during the CCCs...is that one of those?

Harold Pryor: No, first time after the CCs was after World War II. I was in the United States Navy during that time. Then I brought my family through here. Let's see, I was working in Farmington, New Mexico, ten years ago. Then I came through another time with my family. Then I brought my wife's sister and her folks up through here a year ago. They're from the east coast. They enjoyed it very much. To them it was really something.

Jeff Frank: You mean it isn't something to you when you come through here?

Harold Pryor: You bet it is. I got some good memories here.

Jeff Frank: Do you?

Harold Pryor: You bet I do. The CC Camps. I think it made a responsible person out of me.

Jeff Frank: You think you were irresponsible before that?

Harold Pryor: Well, I was pretty young. I left home when I was twelve years old and worked. I went to school to other places besides my home 'cause it was just too much for my father to handle at that time. I joined the CCs and I give him a few dollars and it give me a few dollars.

Jeff Frank: Did you have brothers and sisters at home?

Harold Pryor: I had three brothers besides myself and two sisters.

Jeff Frank: You left when you were twelve years old. CC's wouldn't take you at twelve years old.

Pryor: No, I went to work for Jimmy Rollins on a ranch. I worked in the summer time and went to school there.

Frank: At the ranch?

Pryor: No, we rode a bus into Milford, Utah, at the school, about eight miles each way. I stayed with Jimmy till I was sixteen. Maybe not quite sixteen, but very shortly after I was sixteen I joined the CCs.

Frank: I'll be darned. Did you join it up there in....

Pryor: A fellow by the name of Merv Edwards there in Minersville signed me up and brought me down here.

Frank: What year would that have been?

Pryor: I've looked at some pictures here today, in '39 and '40. My picture's not in the group pictures so it might have been '40 and '41. It couldn't have been '41. It had to be '39 and '40 'cause I joined in October and got out in March the following year. So I thought it was '39 and '40. I lost my discharge in a flood. It took all our stuff. So I don't have an actual record of it. But I think that's right '39 and '40 was the time I was here.

Frank: You come here when you were sixteen years old, that's pretty young, to some of the fellows that traveled through here in comparison.

Pryor: I talked to some today that was here at that time at that age. I think what it did, it put a few dollars in dad's pockets and then give us eight, we got eight dollars a month and dad got twenty-two. My twin brother was in this camp too. He come in three months before I did.

Frank: You had a brother here while you served?

Pryor: Right. Yes.

Frank: So when you came in here and got signed up they give you a bunk in the barracks, that sort of thing.

Pryor: Clothing. Oh yeah, they gave us clothes and assigned us to a barracks, and a bed number.

Frank: Your friend who signed you up brought you down here in his own car?

Pryor: Brought us down in his car. Merv Edwards was the name. The old man's still alive today. I think Merv's in his ninety's right now, a very fine man.

Frank: Up in Minersville?

Pryor: He lives in Beaver now, but he was in Minersville at that time, raised his family there.

Frank: So did he just open the car door up and say "Get going fellas" or did he talk with the commanding officer?

Pryor: No, he brought us down and stayed till we was signed in. Course they gave us clothing and that the next day. They give us a bunk bed that night, something to eat.

Frank: They give you a blanket when you first got here?

Pryor: Oh yes.

Frank: Did you walk up to a counter or...?

Pryor: Walked up to a counter and they handed us a couple of blankets and some sheets and a pillow and a pillow slip.

Frank: Did you have to sign for any of that stuff?

Pryor: Oh, I think we did if I remember right, yes, we signed for all of it.

Frank: Then the next day what did they do? Give you a uniform and all that?

Pryor: Give us a uniform.

Frank: What was that like? What kind of uniform?

Pryor: Well, it was like an army uniform same thing as army wears today I believe. Kind of rough old pants. Course it was starting to get a little cool; it was about this time of year in October, I don't remember exactly what day it was.

Frank: Shoes and socks and boots all that sort of thing.

Pryor: Shoes, the whole works.

Frank: Did they?

Pryor: You bet.

Frank: What kind of shoes did you get was it?

Pryor: Regular work shoes, lace shoes.

Frank: I don't suppose you have one of those uniforms buried in a trunk.

Pryor: No. I don't think I'd fit in them now. I weighed a hundred forty-seven pounds then. I weigh about a hundred and eighty now.

Frank: Forty pounds. So when you came in here to work, what side of the river were you on?

Pryor: We was on the east side of the river Company 962. Now the barracks number, I just vaguely remember Number 4. That might not be right.

Frank: When you got your uniform and you were going to get a work assignment now, you know your sixteen years old and they're going to put you to work. What did that feel like?

Pryor: I wasn't afraid of work cause I'd worked all my life. I was pitching hay or manure or hauling wood or something, mixing cement, or something all the time. My dad made sure we didn't sit around so work wasn't exactly new to us. When I came in here, the first job I got was at the rock quarry. We split these rocks for these buildings here in Zions, dormitories or whatever they called them at that time. I split them for probably, just off the top of my head, probably three months.

Then in the dead of the winter we trapped deer. Me and a fellow by the name of Scott Zabriski I believe his name was if I remember that right. We had these traps up here and we caught deer and hauled them out of the park.

Frank: I'll be darned, live traps.

Pryor: Live traps, yes. Hauled them down here below Rockville or maybe just a little above Rockville. I remember they called it the Petrified Forest. We hauled the deer back in there and we always turned them loose which I've got some pictures around and they took a copy of them. We'd turn them loose around the pole corral and we'd do that to see them jump the fence. We was just kids and we got quite a kick out of that. In fact, I give them a picture today of myself holding a deer today and Scott also. It was quite a novelty then. Then I worked in the blacksmith shop for a period of time. I don't remember just how long but this man, I don't even remember his name, but he taught us how to temper steel and how to cut it and this was doing it the old way, the old fashioned way. Cut all these out by hand and then picked them up and shaped them.

Frank: Was he an old Utah boy?

Pryor: I believe he was, like I say, fifty years is a long time ago, I can't remember any of their names to tell you the truth, except there was a couple of them I met while I was in the Navy that I was here with.

Frank: Is that right?

Pryor: Yeah, I just bumped into them. One of them I bumped into they called him Tano and Leon Miller, I believe his name was. Run right into him and then I never seen him until the day I got discharged. I was going out the shoemaker and they was coming in. By golly, it's hard to believe. I don't even know whether their alive now or not.

Frank: I heard you've had three jobs here. You started out at the quarry. Where was that?

Pryor: The quarry was down below Springdale here and then off to the west of the road back up in one of those canyons there.

Frank: You know where that bend in the river is where all those trees are planted would that have been it maybe?

Pryor: The quarry was right up next to some ledges and they'd blast these big sheets, slicks of rock down. Then we'd take these little wedges and put a little hole in the rock every six inches or so with a pick. Then you'd start these wedges and just go around and tap them like this, just down and come back with them and pretty quick that'd break that rock. It'd break them straight.

Frank: Like these slabs?

Pryor: Yeah, like these slabs. They built these homes up here, these dormitories out of them. If they needed one over the top of a sill of a window, why we'd make one long slab. They were very fussy, you know.

Frank: There's a couple of lintels up there now when you look at them it must take about, oh I'd say several hundred pounds. I don't even want to get into quarter tons or tons and you would chip those lintels out.

Pryor: We'd shave them and then they'd pick them up with a cherry picker and set them on the trucks and bring them down. Then of course the masons would place them and build homes out of them. They'd give us a dimension to go by, the foreman up there he'd mark them off, then we'd chip them and get them in the right shape. It was quite interesting to do that and see how they done it.

Frank: On the work side, the fellas, you and whoever, you were actually splitting the things, but the equipment you had aside from the tools ... we were talking about this a couple of weeks ago looking at those lintels, but they had cherry pickers in fact and were they crane trucks and they would lift that up on to a flat bed. There might be just that one lintel and they would take that one piece or they had a stack.

Pryor: They also had skids up there to get it out of the quarry, you know, they'd bring them down on these skids and just park it and then you'd chip them. Some of them we did right on the site. Course they were blasting them up there so you couldn't very well work. They'd bring them down where it was safe to work on them. Like I say, I was sixteen years old or a little better, I don't remember all the details, but basically that's what we was doing.

Frank: We were wondering how possibly they could move a piece that massive, you know, especially for that house up there.

Pryor: If I remember right, these cherry pickers had a boom out in front. It's like a Cat. They had a boom on the front of them and they'd pick these pieces up and move them, one with a dozer on it down there. When they'd get that all cleaned up, then they'd lay another bunch down. Course we didn't handle any dynamite or anything like that. They were a different crew. Some of the older guys could probably tell you more about that than I do.

Frank: Well, it's interesting that this is who, so far at that time, I'm not saying, you know, "You're just a kid." They're some fellas here that were older, some people were younger and the kinds of assignments that were given out, I'll bet that was something you're going to read about real closely in your account, Harold.

Pryor: My nickname is "Slick."

Frank: I apologize for not remembering your name. It's interesting seeing these kinds of assignments and the details of something like that again, like a couple of weeks ago we were looking at that one lintel and scratching our heads over that bloody thing. And then you said something else that was very interesting, they would put them on skids and now I see that they would take the pieces, the rough pieces and then you fellows would come down and work on them.

Pryor: Let's get them down where it was safe for us to work on them or move them out down to where we could work on them. Course when they blasted we'd all leave anyway.

Frank: Well, there you are sixteen years old and it sounds to me like you were getting the job done. Were you picked on much on those job sites?

Pryor: No, like I say, I was never lazy. I was not lazy. I'm still not a lazy person. My wife gets on me for it all the time. In fact I'm a mechanic for the John Deere Company there in Minersville now.

Frank: Are you?

Pryor: I work in the summer months a little bit, you know. I don't want a steady job.

Frank: With a nickname like Slick, did you get that when you were in the CCCs?

Pryor: I got that from stealing watermelons when I was about nine.

Frank: So another watermelon thief? Where did you go to steal your watermelons? You steal here?

Pryor: No, no, Minersville.

Frank: Minersville.

Pryor: They had a cop there; his name was Faye Colton. They had a little cafeteria there. They sold ice cream and candy bars and groceries across like this and over on the other side, they had a kind of a beer fountain over there, you know, so the older guys could have a cold beer right in the same building. This cop was bragging to these guys about, he said, "I got a melon under my bed down there." They slept right out in the patch in those days. He said, "I got a melon down there in my yard; I'll just give \$5.00 to the guy that steals it." I don't know what made me to do it to this day, but I walked out that door and went down and got that melon. He lived alone down there, and I brought it up and give it to him. You talk about one mad cop now; he was mad.

Frank: You get the five dollars?

Pryor: Yeah, them guys made him give it to me. About ten of us kids and we bought up them two cents chocolate squares. You used to get more chocolate in one of them than you do now in a whole candy bar now for fifty cents.

Frank: There's more bloody watermelon thieving stories in this country, I swear.

Pryor: That was a pastime. I raised some melons this year there, and one guy says, "I'm going to steal them." I says, "Well, give me a call on the phone and let me help you eat them." I couldn't say anything 'cause I've stolen them too.

Frank: Here in the forty's now, this would have been a full blown cafeteria. Did you fellas ever come up here?

Pryor: We didn't have the money. I never did eat in one of these places. We ate at camp 'cause eight dollars wasn't much money and I smoked cigarettes then. By the time you bought your tobacco, your shaving gear, and a few things you needed, you know, eight dollars didn't go that far. So we pretty much ate at camp. At least that's the way I remember it.

I do remember going to Hurricane. We'd put a dollar on the fence post and we'd come back and there'd be a gallon of wine there. You never seen the guy you were buying it from.

Frank: I'll be darned. In LaVerkin, huh, they had a little bit of wine making going on down there.

Pryor: They made homemade wine down there. I got real lit on that one night and crawled on my hands and knees from Springdale right to camp here and the next morning my hands was raw and my knee. But I was so numb that night I didn't even feel it.

Frank: Didn't want to talk about either.

Pryor: I've never drank wine since then.

Frank: Oh really?

Pryor: Never have. I drink a little drink of whiskey once in a while, but not wine. So that cured me from being an alcoholic I think.

Frank: I know that they were making wine down there, but I've never heard leaving a dollar on the fence post and come back.

Pryor: Some of them would take ten dollars. Each guy would throw in a dollar a piece and leave her down there and they'd leave the wine there. You never seen anybody.

Frank: It'd just happen.

Pryor: They'd just bring it up, set your wine there, and take the money. Pretty honest about it. A couple of times I went down there, course they didn't know I was with them 'cause they wouldn't have sold it to me.

Frank: So when you were done with quarrying, they sent you up on that other job.

Pryor: I went up trapping deer in these traps. Now that was fun.

Frank: Who did you work for there? Was that the Park Service?

Pryor: Park Service. Like I say, I can't remember the names.

Frank: Was there a ranger that went with you?

Pryor: No, no, a guy that worked right with me, Scott Zabriski.

Frank: You were receiving your orders though.

Pryor: Right from camp, from the captain.

Frank: From the commander?

Pryor: Right, either that or the superintendent of the camp.

Frank: That would have been in the forty's now.

Pryor: They called him Pappy Roselle; he was superintendent of the camp. I think he's the guy that gave us the orders. When we caught these deer, we had to tag them with an ear tag.

Frank: Is that right?

Pryor: We'd haul them out, throw them out. The one deer we caught twice. He'd come back to camp and we caught him again. I'll never forget his number, 196. All these years and I remember that number.

Frank: Would this have been in the winter when you were trapping?

Pryor: Yes, well I went in October and got out in March see, the last of March so it would have to be, it was cold weather. In spring the water would come over these cliffs. It was pretty, beautiful.

Frank: After you tagged deer you were talking about a third thing you did.

Pryor: Blacksmith. Well, I worked in the blacksmith shop prior to trapping the deer. I worked in there probably a month or so, something like that or maybe a couple of months, I can't remember.

Frank: Were they building in the forties now, 'cause if I'm not mistaken the houses, the wood frame houses way up into the canyon and the dormitory which is...

Pryor: They were rock, the ones in the bottom here and that's where they were working.

Frank: In the forties...

Pryor: Thirty-nine and forty. If I remember right when I went to work up there, the structures was partly up, as I remember it in my mind. I tried to get on one of the trucks 'cause my dad had a milk run when I was young and I drove that truck all over the place. I couldn't get on the trucks; there was too many guys ahead of me.

Frank: Those jobs were assignments you had to wait in line for.

Pryor: I remember one time one of the guys, one of the sergeants or corporal or whoever he was said "All you guys can drive truck, take step one foot forward" and man I

stepped out there for three yards. Took us all out and gave us a wheelbarrow. I didn't volunteer any more.

Frank: Didn't volunteer again. Nineteen-forty one rolled around, so you must be now seventeen years old, got a CCC under your belt and the war's breaking out. Did that have anything to do with you getting out of the CCCs?

Pryor: No, I was out of the CCs before then and I joined the Navy. I was sworn in February 20th 1942. I stayed in there till October 20th, 1945.

Frank: So that was almost a year after the three Cs, you went into the Navy. Meet many fellas while you were in the service from the three Cs?

Pryor: Just those two guys is all.

Frank: How about other fellas that were in the Cs, maybe not necessarily in your camp? Did you find a lot of the men.....?

Pryor: Oh yes, the sailors, oh lots of them was in the CCs.

Frank: How did they feel about the CC's, did they talk to you about it?

Pryor: They thought it was great. They talked about it often, sometimes the topic of the conversations.

Frank: Is that right?

Pryor: A lot of the guys from the South served here in Utah. I ran into several of them. Some from New York served right here in this camp.

Frank: There was a fellow here, he was in just prior to you and he said there was some fellows here from New York and that didn't work out too well.

Pryor: Oh, it didn't. Course they was kind of thinned out when I came in. I heard the stories about the fights and guys from Utah had to travel in pairs 'cause if they didn't they'd gang up on them.

Frank: New York fellows would gang up on the Utah fellows? Was there any reason that you remember?

Pryor: I guess just a differential of opinion whatever. There was a lot of fights over it. Some of the Utah boys take pretty good care of themselves, especially those Escalante boys over there. I remember them, course like I say I was just a kid and I stayed clear of it.

Frank: They were a tough bunch from Escalante?

Pryor: They wouldn't take no guff from nobody. They stood their ground; they didn't take no guff.

Frank: I heard stories sometimes if there was a disagreement on a Saturday night or sometime during that day you went out back and took care of it amongst yourselves.

Pryor: Yeah, they done that too. I never did have to do it. I was pretty good natured.

Frank: There was a few, not many, but sometimes you hear about some of the dates with the pretty women, the gals would come in with some of the local fellows and would be a little distraught at having the CC fellows come to the dance. Did you experience any of that or some of the dating?

Pryor: I never was much of a dancer; that twin brother of mine was. He could hoe them down. I never did dance much don't know why either.

Frank: Did you ever go to them?

Pryor: Oh yes, go down and get a drink. I don't remember going much down here, I might have went to one or two dances, but I just don't remember socializing that way.

Frank: A lot of it is interesting like here you are in the Navy and the fellows here at the tables are talking about what that meant to them, you know. I don't think you'd see that today, there isn't any one common denominator when you get a group of people like that you get somebody from New York, somebody from Utah, and they get together at the same table, they got something they can talk about immediately.

Pryor: Right.

Frank: Whereas I don't know if you find that today in most situations.

Pryor: Well, I don't know. You know right there in Minersville there were several of us that was in the CCs. Some of them wasn't in this camp. I thought Harl Griffiths was, but evidently he isn't cause he isn't here today. We talk about it quite often amongst ourselves. We all feel it was one of the finest things they ever did in this country was to get the young man doing something besides laying around thinking about something bad to do.

Frank: Did you think prior to the thirties, prior to Mr. Roosevelt coming in did you think that there was that much idleness in the economy in the workforce?

Pryor: When he went in office in '32 I was nine years old, I was born in '23. I do know that a dollar was awfully hard to come by. My dad split a cord of wood for one dollar with an axe, I mean that. When Howard and I came in here that give him sixty-two dollars a month to feed the family. Howard and I are the oldest boys and we had a sister that was older than us.

Frank: So that money that came in, at that time it would have been a raise.

Pryor: We got eight dollars.

Frank: Thirty dollars went back to the family. So that family back home you knew while you were here that what that money was doing back there was helping dad and the kids.

Pryor: Well, I'll tell you dad got twenty-two dollars off of me and he got twenty-two dollars off of Howard; that's forty-four dollars. I'll tell you dad was having one hell of a time. When I came in here, I'll tell you, a man his age couldn't find a job 'cause they'd hire us kids. They could hire us for less money. I pitched hay for fifty-cents a day, not an hour a day, and was damn glad to get it. Sometimes I didn't get it 'cause they didn't have the money to pay after you worked.

Frank: Did you go back and talk to them about that.

Pryor: Didn't do any good.

Frank: So how did dad feel about his two sons bringing in the cash money now for the family?

Pryor: Well, I think dad appreciated it, I really do.

Frank: Did he ever talk with you about it?

Pryor: No, dad wasn't that kind of guy. He was a stern man. I think he appreciated it, I don't never remember him telling me "thanks."

Frank: How about mom?

Pryor: Oh mom, she thanked us a million times.

Frank: How about your kid brothers and sisters?

Pryor: Well, I don't think they was old enough to realize what was really going on at that time. My brother Mick, just younger than I am, he was in the Cs when the war broke out. He was over to Burbank, Utah. He was in spike camp over there. Him and I and Clyde Bradshaw joined the Navy the same day.

Frank: Do you feel that the three C's, right where we walked in here you were talking about how the effect it had on you direct, do you think that you are alone in that?

Pryor: No, I do not think that. I think every person that served in, with a very few exceptions, would have to say that it made a more responsible person out of them. I really believe that. There's a certain few, there's one kid there that got kicked out of here that was from Minersville; he got a dishonorable discharge.

Frank: From the Zion Camp.

Pryor: But he was an irresponsible person when he came in here and he was an alcoholic and there was nothing you could do with him, so they kicked him out. I still like the guy, I don't want to mention his name because I wouldn't degrade his family for anything in the world and I was working with his brother yesterday.

Frank: Right shortly after the CCs, while the CCs were still going on, a war broke out. A lot of men, prior to that never saw anything from their backyard and so on and so forth, there you all are at a table somewhere in the Pacific or wherever you're at and your talking about the three C's, would do you think about, is there any success this county had, what are you thinking?

Pryor: I think it got the economy moving. It put a dollar in circulation. Just like he did with cattle, Roosevelt bought up all the cattle, the government did and killed them. Bought up a lot of them, right there in that little town they shot them and buried them. They give the owner so much a head for them and he in return spent that money and got this economy moving. Same way with us guys in the CCs; they paid us a low wage which was a lot more than we was getting.

Frank: More than nothing.

Pryor: Right, right. We spent that money and that got money moving. I think Roosevelt was a great president.

End of interview.