

## **Family Activities**

Interviewers: Savannah Robinson (great-granddaughter) and Jessica Robinson (granddaughter), 4/3/24

Savannah

Okay. Grandpa, I have a question for you. Where was your favorite place to go like your favorite vacation growing

John C. Elsey

Oh, well, the first one we went to on the trip with my parents was to Zion National Park. I loved it. It was really good. The first time we had taken a motor trip, we drove down from Salt Lake and I had a map and I marked off all the towns that we went through.

No freeway, so we would go through these little towns and then we went to Bryce Canyon. So that was my first one. That's your favorite. I always liked Zion's.

Jessica

Did you guys camp there?

John C. Elsey

No, we stayed in the lodge, the motel, that was nice, the lodge right in the park.

Savannah

What do you remember seeing when you went to the National Park? That was my favorite. Did you see any, like, monuments?

John C. Elsey

I guess just the towering cliffs there in Zion's and I think on that one my dad and I walked up to Angel's Landing too. Have you been on Angel's Landing?

Savannah

No, we've never... Have we been to...?

Jessica

Sav is a little bit scared of heights right now,

Savannah

..but if I went there, I bet it would be fine.

Jessica

I bet you would be just fine. It's fine. How old were you when you went?

John C. Elsey

I think I was about 10.

Jessica

See? Same age- you could probably go

John C. Elsey

Not sure my brother went. I think it was just my Dad and me because they thought he was a little young

because he was only 8 or 7 or something like that.

Savannah

Where do you remember going with, um, like, Papa or Kristin? Where do you remember going with them?

Jessica

what were some of the trips that you guys went on with like Papa John and Aunt Kristin?

John C. Elsey

Well, one of the first ones we did was... we rented a little- I called it a "bread truck" - it was a small RV, and it slept all of us, we all went up to Death Valley in the winter time over Christmas holiday. So we went Death Valley and were up there.

Savannah

What did you guys do there?

Jessica

What did you do? you just slept in the trailer?

John C. Elsey

There were a lot of places to see in Death Valley, one place was some sand dunes and we made, everybody wrote their name on the sand dunes.

Savannah

Oh, that's fun.

Jessica

That's actually fun.

John C. Elsey

Well, your dad, your grandpa had a black hat that he wore that kind of had a stovepipe, it was kind of rounded, it wasn't a stovepipe, but he remembered that black hat that John wore, and we got a picture of him at the top of the sand dunes, him standing there against, silhouetted against the sky with this black hat.

Mavis L. Elsey

The letters were so big! How many feet would you say- 3 feet...?

John C. Elsey

Well, they made it in the sand. They were probably 15, 20 feet on the high end. There's a lot of sand in there.

Savannah

They wanted people to know that they were there.

John C. Elsey

Until the sand wiped it all out, the next time it stormed it shifted it all.

Jessica

Did you used to go skiing a lot with them or just...

John C. Elsey

Yeah. We started skiing when I was 43. I grew up in Salt Lake, it was a big ski area. My brother went skiing all the time, but I never did. My parents never did. And when we were in California, our son Mike was with some adventure guys at the scouting program then, and the leader got them all hyped up about going to Utah and going skiing.

And then it turned out that he couldn't go for some reason. And Mike said, Dad, will you take us skiing? I said, Are you kidding? I never skied in my life. And he said, Well, you can take us. So we had a cousin, Jack Lucas.

He may remember, maybe your mom may. He was a part of a Powder Mountain ski resort, so I called Jack and we arranged to go up there and we learned to ski. That was a lot of fun. We had a good time.

Jessica

You're brave because I would not do that right now!

John C. Elsey

You would not ski?

Jessica

No I feel like I'm too old.

John C. Elsey

Oh, I was 43 when I first got on skis.

Jessica

I feel like I'm too old, I feel like I would break bones if I did that right now.

Savannah

Did you go with Papa any time when Papa was growing up?

John C. Elsey

Did I go with him?

Savannah

Yes, skiing at like any time.

John C. Elsey

Yeah, we'd go a lot of times.

We'd go camping up in the mountains around California and in the Sierras with the scouts, the boy scouts, when he was the boy scout. We spent a lot of time hiking, camping, and backpacking.

Savannah

What was the funniest that happened?

John C. Elsey

The funniest thing that happened? Well, your dad had this comment about...

Jessica

Grandma's giggling

John C. Elsey  
About the Sierra syndrome?

Mavis L. Elsey  
I was thinking about the hamburgers

John C. Elsey  
Oh- that was an interesting one.

Mavis L. Elsey  
But I think you already told that one

John C. Elsey  
I don't know if we have or not

Jessica  
What was the Sierra syndrome?

John C. Elsey  
Well, we take the boys, the Boy Scouts, they had about 10 of them, I think, on that trip.

We were trying to go 50 miles on the John Muir Trail in the Sierras, so we would start at one point and we would hike up to another point. So we had to put the cars, there was another leader and I, and so we dropped the boys off at this lower point and we drove up here, he and I, and put a car up here.

We each had a car, we left a car up here at the end. And when we got there, it was Devil's Post Pile and this was in the Sierras, there was really no commercial buildings, there was no stores, you're out in the woods, basically.

But at this place, there was a little store or a little shop that had hamburgers. So they, and I said, how long, how late are you open? And they said, we're up until seven o'clock, they had hamburgers and milkshakes and fries and stuff.

So, we were going to go from Saturday to Saturday and we got going and on Thursday we told the boys, we said, well, you know, if we can make this 20 miles and get there by Friday night, then we can have hamburgers and hot dogs and milkshakes and stuff.

So they said, "oh boy, let's go". That was 20 miles that last day, which is, we weren't doing nearly that many miles each day, but they were all hopped up to go and usually we would stop and rest and the boys, one boy didn't even take his pack off, he'd say "come on, we got to get going, we got to make it there".

We covered that 20 miles and got to the, well, it's just before it closed, I think, it was about quarter to seven when we got there... and they had hamburgers, but they were hopped up and ready to go.

Jessica  
Oh my goodness, that is so funny.

John C. Elsey  
The other funny thing with your Dad, was I was going to take Grandma and the other kids on a backpacking trip because I'd gone with the boys and I'd gone with some guys from work. And so on Labor Day weekend, I was

going to meet another fellow from work and his family were going to hike in a ways, I got Grandma some boots and everything.

So we drove up there and it was night dark when we got there. It was about ten thousand feet, so it was fairly high. And it was kind of cold. So I said, well, John and I, your grandpa, and I would sleep out on the ground and the other kids, Grandma and Kristin... Susie didn't go with us... but Kristin did and Mike, they could stay in the car and sleep in the car.

So we got out on the ground and we stretched out, laid our sleeping bags out, put the canvas over the top of us, about three o'clock in the morning, I kind of woke up and I felt something on my face. It wasn't really rain, but it was kind of wet and I said, I wonder if it's snowing.

So I turned the flashlight and looked over and it was snowing. It was a little bit of snow and I saw that, oh man. So I got out and pulled the covers over your dad, the canvas and stuff, and went into the car and left him out.

And he never forgot that [he'd say] "you abandoned me in a snow storm and left me on the ground". And the others said, well, in the car, I remember getting there and they said, we want to sleep on the ground too. And I said, you go to the bathroom and come back and tell me if you want to sleep on it.

They went there, it was cold, so they didn't, so anyway, we did not hike in, we drove home. But your dad's always accused me of leaving him in a snow storm.

Jessica

I have been surprised, I have never heard that story before.

John C. Elsey

Oh, really? Your dad will remember that.

Jessica

Probably.

Savannah

And he's still accusing you still.

Jessica

Oh, that's funny. Oh, man.

John C. Elsey

Do you have any other questions?

Jessica

Oh, for you. I think that's it.

Savannah

Do you have any other ones? Um... I don't think so.

Jessica

OK, because I got a lot more for Grandpa. [Death Valley??]

Mavis L. Elsey

Ubehebe crater- I hated that place

John C. Elsey

Yeah, that's right.

Savannah

What? Why do you hate it Grandma?

Mavis L. Elsey

The crater - I didn't think I could get out of it

John C. Elsey

Death Valley had a lot of interesting stuff.

Mavis L. Elsey

If a helicopter would just come across and just dropped a line, I could have grabbed it, you know, but there was no rescue.

John C. Elsey

Well, it was a crater from, was it a volcano?

Mavis L. Elsey

Maybe it was a moon landing. I mean, I'm a meteorite crater.

John C. Elsey

I don't know if it was a meteor or a volcano, I can't remember. But it had a big hole on the ground that was probably a quarter mile across and a couple hundred feet down. And this loose ash-like stuff that you walk down.

So going down was easy. So we got down to the bottom of the crater, but coming back up, it kept slipping on this loose dirt, loose rocky kind of stuff. Grandma was struggling.

Mavis L. Elsey

I have to take one more foot, put your foot there.

John C. Elsey

And then you slide back to them. Some boys should step up and then slip in the stuff and come back in.

Jessica

Oh my gosh, that's so...

Savannah

It's like quicksand...You keep trying to struggle out, but just keep it going.

Jessica

okay, Nan, are you gonna go play with hank? okay so thank you

Savannah

Thank you for your time.

Jessica

Okay, so another question we had was, we wanted to hear about any adventures you had with the Lucas Clan.

John C. Elsey

uh yeah we had we had a lot

Jessica

Or misadventures, I should say. Misadventures. Or some of your favorites.

John C. Elsey

I don't know if we had any real misadventures.

Jessica

I know you got up to some shenanigans with them.

John C. Elsey

Say what?

Jessica

I know you had some shenanigans with them.

Mavis L. Elsey

Shenanigans.

Jessica

See? Grandma knows. Whatever, I know.

John C. Elsey

Well, Jack, Lucas, took us down to Lake Powell. He used to go in there all the time. I think he was a guide to some extent, had a powerboat, didn't have a houseboat, but we had a powerboat. And he took us, all of us down there, all the four kids went, and we pitched a tent on the sandbar on the shore there.

He had a tent, and we went out to the boat, took boat rides- that was really nice, really fun.

Jessica

What about when you were little, when you were younger? Cause you had your Christmas, you used to spend Christmas with them, right?

John C. Elsey

We did. Well, I guess the funny one would be, we were younger, Ken and I. I was five years younger than Frank, who was the youngest of the four boys, and he was five years younger than the next one up. So Jack was the youngest of the older three, and he was about ten years older than me.

So we'd spend Christmas, we'd go to Ogden every year, and they had a big front room where we'd all gather, then two bedrooms in the back where the boys slept. And we didn't have beds, we slept on the floor in a sleeping bag or blankets, I can't remember.

And they would typically, on Christmas Eve, send us to bed. We were, I don't know, we went there from probably when I was three or four up to twelve or thirteen or more. So we were so excited for Santa, though, that we couldn't sleep, and we made them give us a clock and a flashlight.

So we'd lay there and then Ken would say "what time is it?" "I don't know" "look at the clock" "Okay" so I turned on the flashlight and I looked, and the other boys would come to bed by then, they were in bed, and they'd say, "you kids, turn that light off and go to sleep!"

We couldn't go to sleep, we were too excited. We kept going another hour or so "What time is it?" "I don't know" "Turn the light on" "ok" "You kids turn that light off and go to sleep!" That was Christmas Eve.

Jessica

Did you, okay, so that was one of your traditions as you went out to their house for Christmas, right? What other, what other family traditions did you have any traditions growing up with your family?

All right, so family traditions growing up. Did you guys have any family traditions?

John C. Elsey

Well, we spent a lot of time with the Lucases, and it was my mother's sister's boys, they had the four boys, and we would always go deer hunting in the fall, and we would try and get a deer, and then that was our meat for the year.

Jessica

Oh, really? A whole year?

John C. Elsey

We would get, hopefully, enough deer for everybody to have a couple of deer's worth of meat, and I remember one year, they would shoot them in the mountains and clean them, get the innards out, but then we'd bring them down to the—our cousin had a lumber yard, so they had a big area there.

They would hang the deer in different places in the yard, and I remember skinning the deer, and I'd been pulling the skin down.

Jessica

Oh, gross.

John C. Elsey

It wasn't gross at all as far as I remember, I mean, I wasn't grossed out, but then they were tough.

Jessica

How old were you when you would do that?

John C. Elsey

Oh I don't know, I was 12, 13 or 14. I remember I would go with them- I wasn't old enough to carry a gun, but I would go with them and hunt. And I got older and carried a gun and hunted with them and shot something as well.

Jessica

You did you went hunting with your grandpa too though, oh not your grandpa your dad?

John C. Elsey

Yeah.



We would hunt quite a bit. Dad and I we'd go duck hunting and pheasant hunting, dove hunting a few times. Yeah, every year we would do that.

Jessica

Did you say you had a, maybe I'm not remembering, but did you say you had a shooting in your basement? Did you guys have like a shooting range or something like targets?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, we had a 50 -foot range where we shot 22s. The house wasn't long enough by itself for 50 feet, but when Dad remodeled the house, we put concrete pipe, 24 -inch concrete pipe back about 20 feet behind the house and had a little concrete box with backstops, steel plates that would deflect the bullets down into the sand trap underneath.

We had a carrier motorized that would carry the target out and put it there and then we could shoot and pull it back in on the pulley system.

Jessica

What career did your dad have? What did he do for a living?

John C. Elsey

My Dad?

Jessica

Yeah

John C. Elsey

Oh, well, he eventually worked at the experiment station in the University of Utah and the faculty there. But prior to that, he had a machine—he was—he graduated from college in the middle of the Depression, and he was an engineer by training at the University of Utah Engineering Graduate, but there were no jobs for that.

He worked as—whatever he could find. He was a surveyor for the state of Utah for a while, surveyed roads. Then he was a machinist at the Salt Lake Small Arms Club during the Second World War. But he had a basement with a lot of tools, had a lathe, drill press, had a little furnace actually where he melted brass and made a rail for his railroad.

He was a model railroader. We had railroads all around the basement, a track all around the basement of our house. He did a lot of stuff with model railroading and he built some of his own engines and cars.

He was quite into it until he got active in the church, and then he didn't have time. He didn't spend the time down there, lucky enough, before.

Jessica

I mean, when you were describing how the range worked, I was like, that is, he had to be very smart to do that, right? And I mean, that actually, describing that to me, I was like, that is grandpa. That is how grandpa's mind works.

He has to know, like, because he figures out how something works and how he wants it done. And then how, I don't know, and describing the basement, that is how your basement is, all of the tools and everything.

Grandpa is his father, is that right?

John C. Elsey

Well, we always had tools. Yeah, I like that. You like to build things. And I remember I made a couple of little guns, little pistols that actually fired a .22. I designed them from... in the sacrament meeting I would sketch out the trigger mechanism. How is it going to work? I would drill a hole for the barrel on the lathe and take a chunk of metal around and drill a hole through it for the barrel and worked out the trigger mechanism.

I enjoyed working in the basement. Dad had a lot of stuff there, so we learned a lot about working with tools and stuff.

Jessica

That's really cool. Well, I mean, you helped me build my easels and I don't think I learned anything from that. No, that's not true. Lindsay and I are still determined to make easels together and I'll see if I can figure out how to do it by myself.

I don't know if I can, but thank you for coming up with the engineering behind that because I would not have been able to do that by myself. So, did you see they used it or they used those again?

John C. Elsey

Oh, really?

Jessica

They've been used multiple times.

John C. Elsey

They're still holding up.

Jessica

Oh, yeah, no, they've held up so well. They use them for girls camp. We use them for trek. They use them on that 5K fun run. They put them all along the canal.

John C. Elsey

Oh, really?

Jessica

Oh yeah, I keep seeing them being used.

And I was like, me and my grandpa made those. Mostly my grandpa, and I still can't- I can't drill straight, but that's okay. So... All right, let's see. What do I have? Oh wait, no. Do you have any more traditions?

I got sidetracked. What other traditions? Or what traditions did you create with like my dad and your family growing up? Like what other traditions did you like that you guys had?

John C. Elsey

Well, we took road trips with my parents, a couple of them, and that was always fun. We took that with your family, too. We took the...

Jessica

Oh, that one was fun.

John C. Elsey

... family church history trip back east, rented that big motor home and gone for a couple of weeks, I think.

Jessica

Yeah, it was like two weeks.

John C. Elsey

We were all here back to New York.

Jessica

Yeah.

John C. Elsey

And on the way back, stopping at Kirtland, and Nauvoo, and Missouri, and yeah.

Jessica

That was, that was really, that was a really neat experience. Like, I don't know that looking back, that really helped my testimony. So that was good. Yeah. Thank you for that.

John C. Elsey

You're welcome - I'm glad you remembered that. I'm glad it was memorable

Jessica

It was- very memorable.