

## **ALTA**

### **Bill & Suzy Rytting**

#### **Bill:**

My name is Bill Rytting. It's a Scandinavian name.

#### **Suzy:**

My name is Suzy Rytting.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Suzy, you came from Ohio. Why don't you tell us a little bit about how you came to Utah.

#### **Suzy:**

Well my parents brought me. My father had a job at the time and it was just the early war years and he was sent out to develop the minerals and mining exploration and eventually ended up in oil, which was very interesting. So my parents were young, they were 18 or 19 when they had me and they liked to do lots of outdoor things. They played tennis and in the winter we used to ice-skate and toboggan back in Ohio. So we came out here in January and I turned 12 in Denver in January and we proceeded through Rabbit Ears Pass and my parents saw the ski tracks in the mountains there and they said "Oh, we've got to learn to ski" and I thought it was a dumb idea because I thought if you went west you got a horse. So I got skis instead the next year.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

With that, why don't you tell me a little bit about some of your first experiences of going up to Alta.

#### **Bill:**

Okay, my first recollection of going to Alta happened when I was a boy scout. The Salt Lake Council had a program where they would take Scout Troops on overnight trips to different places and one of our favorite places was Tracy

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Wigwam up Millcreek Canyon and that's the first place I learned how to ski. My parents bought me skis, boots, bindings and poles. It was a package deal for \$9.95 from Sears Roebuck and I signed up to go with a group that Alf Engen was taking up to Alta for an overnight and we walked up the road; there was no lifts or anything up there then, as a matter of fact Alta was really shut down. So we went up on the road and climbed up and all we did was just ski down the hill by the side of the mining camp there. We went straight down, nobody knew how to make a turn. We couldn't understand why they would want to make a turn anyway. The idea was to go as fast as you could straight down the hill. So that was my first experience with Alta. Then later when they built the lifts up there I learned how to make a turn and ski'd and then I worked up there for a short time.

### **Joey Prokop:**

When you worked up there you worked at the Alta Lodge?

### **Bill:**

I worked at the Alta Lodge in about '41 and in '41 one of my recollections is standing in a lift line up there on a Sunday and they announced over the loud speaker that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and we didn't even know where the hell Pearl Harbor was. Nobody knew where it was but it soon became evident what was happening. So I joined the Navy as an Aviation Cadet and became a pilot in the Navy and that was in 1942 and that winter I went to work at Alta in the lodge. And I did whatever they wanted me to do – built fires, drove the station wagon, took tours, did some teaching. I taught a bunch of colored guys from the south how to ski. That was an experience I'll tell ya.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk a little bit about that station wagon. You know nowadays if the road is not open at 9:00 people freak out, tell me a little bit about physically trying to get around Alta.

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#### **Bill:**

When I'd take the station wagon down, we usually would go down in the afternoon and pick people up at the train station and I never knew whether I was going to get back or not. It was always a gamble whether you were going to make it back up if you got down. The road conditions were just horrible. Usually the snow was way above the top of the car and you didn't have snow tires then. We had chains we had to put on and several times I got stopped and couldn't get up there and had to stay downtown overnight with guests from the lodge. Yeah, it was a lot different than it is now I'll tell ya.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Suzy what was maybe one of your first recollections of going up to Alta to go skiing?

#### **Suzy:**

Well as I was saying it wasn't my choice to learn to ski but I certainly soon learned to love it after we got good skis. It was very different than it is now and there was the Alta Lodge and they had the tow down in front which they were very nice and would let us beginners go up and down and practice on it. Then my parents and I finally took a few lessons and Alf had the ski school then and that was 1943. I started out thinking it was a really dumb thing to do then I realized that turning was fun and going fast was fun and by time 1944 came a friend suggested to my mother that I ought to learn to race. So she loved competition and thought everyone should compete and the next thing I knew I was entered in a race in 1944.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Tell us about the story that you were in the Watson's and somebody lined up a slalom course with coke bottles.

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#### **Suzy:**

There were some ski patrolmen and they set up coke bottles, this would be an open gate and this would be a closed gate and then several of those in a row...closed gates would be a flush and then you'd come into another open gate all the way down to the finish. In those days too there was not sophisticated timing. You started at the top, there was a man with a stop watch and a pole with a flag on the top and he'd wave at the man at the bottom and then they'd all check their watches and the man at the top would wave and the man at the bottom would wave and then they'd finally say "five, four, three...go". That was it. It was very primitive.

#### **Bill:**

One little story about Suzy and her racing...the first race she ever entered, her dad went up to the race officials and said "I've got a daughter who wants to enter the race" and they said "fine it's two dollars to enter" and he said "okay" and they said "what class is she?" and he said "I don't know what classes are there?" "Well there is 'A', 'B', and 'C'." And he said, "What's the best one?" and they said, "The best one is 'A'." So he said, "let's enter her in 'A' then." So she was never anything but an 'A' racer.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

With that how did you do in your first race?

#### **Suzy:**

I came in last.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Apparently that did not deter you. Let's talk a little bit about how you progressed through into really becoming a serious ski racer.

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#### **Suzy:**

Well I have to say too that Alta back in those days was one of *the* places along with Sun Valley in the west and Jackson Hole was another and also Ogden and Brighton had races too. But Alta had most of them and they had *big* races. So it was very exciting to have all of these people coming from all over – Canadians and Easterners and the western people competing. So when I finally learned to turn a little better; I started out doing better in downhill because I didn't turn but then when I learned to turn better I progressed in slalom and moved up and didn't always come in last. I started coming in up in the top and then finally first.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Why don't you describe where the racecourses were up at Alta?

#### **Suzy:**

Of course there was just the Collins lift and they would start at the top and come down Rustler and run down the Collins area and down over the top of Corkscrew and then you would also have to hike way up on Rustler and they would come down Rustler. The 1951 National Giant Slalom, which I won, was run down Wildcat and that was very exciting to go down that. In those days too you didn't have machines that kept the mountain in shape and packed the snow. People had to be recruited to boot pack and if you would boot pack and slide the course (and the racers had to do it too) they would give these people many times free passes at Alta or some of the resorts so that they could ski.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Was the side stepping of the course a way for you to kind of pre-run the course and see what turn was going to get you?

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#### **Suzy:**

That's right. We would also...with the slalom...hike up and then sideslip down to check and figure out where you were going to turn and that sort of thing, you know that's how we figured out the race.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

So you would hike to different places up at Alta?

#### **Bill:**

Well one experience that I had was when I was working at the Alta Lodge as a young boy and I was waiting to go into the service. Claudette Colbert and her husband Dr. Joel Pressman came up with a party, I don't exactly remember how many there were but I think there were six or eight of them there and there was also an Austrian woman and a young girl she was teaching to ski. The group wanted to go on a climb, a hike, in the powder. So the day before we had a big storm and Chuck Bishop the manager of the lodge said "I want you and Jack Reddish and Jack Durrance and Jim Harrington to take these people and go up the side of Baldy with them. Take some wine or some beer and some bread and cheese and have lunch up there with them". It was a beautiful sunny day, so we climbed up and we got up to the top of the Peruvian ridge there and we thought we'd have lunch there and we all put our ski's in the snow and we turned around after we got things ready for them and all the girls had stripped down to their waist and they were all leaning against their ski's. As young boys we couldn't believe what we saw. You know, we're 17, 18 years old to see bare breasts like that. They didn't think anything of it. It was wonderful.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Suzy, you still ski to this day.

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#### **Suzy:**

I do.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

The skiing equipment we have now is quite different than when you started skiing. Why don't we talk about how the equipment has evolved and basically the difference between the planks that you had to the turning things that we have now.

#### **Suzy:**

Well Bill used to install the edges in a ski shop. You worked in which ski shop?

#### **Bill:**

Well there were essentially three ski shops in town – Hibbs Clothing, Mullet & Kelly and Wolfs Department Store and they were about the only ski shops around and I worked in Mullet & Kelly, I ran the ski shop there with Deb Jennings for one season. And when you'd come and buy a pair of ski's they wouldn't have edges on them. You'd have to buy the edges separate and have them put on. Most ski's, 99 percent of the ski's didn't have edges on them and they were just wooden so the edges made a lot of difference in how you could turn. I think we used to install edges for something like 15 dollars a pair.

#### **Suzy:**

They weren't offset either, that came in the 50's so the first race I went into in Sun Valley it was just sheer ice on the slalom course and so you would go...they had one room over in the Inn and that was for waxing ski's and I realized then that some of the men from our area were very nice to me and they offset my edges. And what they did, was they took a very sharp knife and scraped the wood away and then you sharpened the edges with a file and so that was the first offset edge. Of course after a few years you'd get enough wood scraped

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away and everything so the edges started falling off. So then in the 50's they did produce an offset edge, which everybody has them now. Which makes a great deal of difference in holding.

#### **Bill:**

Boots were all leather then too. No plastic.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

How about talking a little bit about the boot/binding setup.

#### **Bill:**

Bindings? Well the first bindings I had were an elastic band that went around my heel and over the strap and the next ones were...the real bindings I had on the skis that my mother and dad bought for me for \$9.95 were called "Bear Traps". They were just leather with a clasp that you snapped forward on and locked your foot in them.

#### **Suzy:**

And a cable around the back.

#### **Bill:**

No there wasn't a cable on mine. The next bindings that came out about in '40 or '41 were cable bindings and cable bindings had two places to attach the cable. One forward and one backward and you would put the cable through the front and the back and up to the heel and that would keep your heel down but if you just kept it on the front you could lift your heel up and that's what you used if you were going cross-country.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

With that, you worked for a very short time with Fred Speyer. Let's talk a little bit

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about Fred Speyer and the operation of the original Collins chair.

#### **Bill:**

Well the first time I met Fred Speyer was when he was a mechanic at Crystal Palace Garage on South Temple and 200 East. He worked for my cousin, Fred Evans there. I got to know him and I worked there one summer and that next winter Fred left and took over the lift up at Alta. That was kind of my opening for getting a job up there, Fred recommended me and I went to work in the Lodge. But Fred was a real taskmaster, oh he was tough, we had to go over and shovel the lift out every time it would snow because the chairs would be down in the snow. You had to make a tunnel for them to go up. People can't believe that but that's how low they were to the ground then. But one thing that used to happen was when the lift would stop, and it stopped frequently, people would sit there awhile and they'd get tired of it so they'd jump off and when they started jumping off the cable started bouncing up and down and it would bounce off of the pulleys. They would have a heck of a time getting the cable back up. One day we were on the lift there and it stopped and some of us jumped off the lift and the cable snapped and went off the pulleys. Fred saw us and he said "don't you ever do that again, if I ever catch you again you're never going to get back on this lift." It was a pretty reliable lift though actually. I don't think there was any real breakdowns. I'd say it ran about 90 percent of the time anyway.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk about the original Collins chair and how that was all put together.

#### **Bill:**

The original Collins chair was a mine tram. Some of the tram was still there when they decided to make a lift out of it. Essentially all they did was take the buckets off of the cable and put on chairs and the towers were all made of wood. They were just pine logs that they put together up there and they worked pretty

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well for quite a long time. I'd say almost into the 50's. But they had to replace the cables, I know that and that was quite a job.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk about how exciting it was to have a chairlift at Sun Valley and this one I guess was the second chairlift in the country. Did they have them in Europe at that time and then they wanted to build them here or was this something new?

### **Bill:**

Oh yeah, there were all kinds of different kinds of tows over in Europe. In Switzerland in particular they had sleds that you could get on and they would take about ten people on the sled and take it up but it would have to be brought back down before you could get on and get back up again. And they had some tows. But they were all pretty primitive; they weren't anything like what we have today by any means. Most of them were rope tows.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Did the chair move very slowly which made the lift line back up a little bit?

### **Suzy:**

Well it didn't move all that slowly, it went fairly rapidly I think as single chairs as opposed to now where you have a six pack and a four pack and you can get more people up, but Buck Sasaki and his family were in charge of selling the tickets and the passes for the day in their little wooden shack house. It was down in the valley and you'd buy your ticket and then you'd start lining up and those lift lines, especially on weekends or on Christmas or Thanksgiving, it would wind way down the valley and Fred Speyer kept a good eye on that and you didn't dare cheat or try to get ahead of anybody. Everybody talked and it was very convivial and not all that bad unless the weather was terrible. But Fred would watch and if he caught somebody cheating and they'd get up there and

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start coming up on the platform, he actually a few times chucked people off of the platform onto the snow and said “you’re never coming back”.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Let’s talk about how the chair would swing and you’d have to get loaded onto the chair, maybe it was not as gentle as it now.

### **Bill:**

Those chairs used to hit you in the knees.

### **Suzy:**

It came fast, it came around fast and they had attendants there who were supposed to take a hold of it and try to hold the chair a little so you could get on but it didn’t always work. A lot of times it would hit you right in the back of the calf, which was not always comfortable. It could knock you down.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Did that obviously change when the snow was higher or lower depending on how much the ramp was dug out?

### **Suzy:**

Well they tried to keep the snow; you know they’d shovel that off so that was always pretty uniform. Just as you started going up a lot of times, like we were saying, the snow would get so deep sometimes, you would be going through a tunnel with your ski’s riding along the snow.

### **Joey Prokop:**

I saw that picture of you in the newspaper with Mayor Watson. Did you know Mayor Watson very well?

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#### **Suzy:**

I met him and of course everyone knew Mayor Watson and he was the most friendly...and loved Alta dearly and had a home that in the wintertime was under the snow and people would have to go in...my mother got to go in and she was so excited and he would serve a very special drink, a 'Snow Ball' that he would serve you with a piece of pine with the needles still on it stuck into the glass. I never got to go in.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

I've heard tell that he was very secretive about what was in the 'Ski Ball' and apparently they were pretty potent.

#### **Bill:**

They were very potent I can tell you that!

#### **Suzy:**

I'm not sure, my mother was not much of a drinker but she got out. She got up the stairs and got out. She had a wonderful time and you were very special if he you got to go in, if he invited you in. But I think I was just too young back in those days. I got my kiss on the cheek as you saw in that one picture from him. He was a dear man.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Talk about how the chairlifts have changed over the years. There was the Collins lift, there was the Peruvian chair that went to the Wildcat ridge, the Germania chair that went in and had been moved over in the 70's. Let's talk about the various incarnations.

#### **Bill:**

Well the Collins lift, that was the only lift they had up there for many years and

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finally they put a rope tow in up on Peruvian and it didn't run all the time, as a matter of fact it only ran on the weekends. You had to buy another ticket to ride on that one. It wasn't included in your pass from the Collins lift. One day we were skiing up there one weekend and a fellow named Burt Ryder who was an old tenth mountain guy and a real good skier and he grabbed onto that rope to go up the Peruvian tow there and he didn't notice but the rope twisted around his parka and it kept twisting and twisting and when he got up to the top he let go and his parka was so wrapped around the rope it pulled him right around through the pulley, around his neck and it's amazing it didn't cut his head off. But he came out the other side and all he was a very sore neck and a very bad bruise. It didn't even break the skin. Oh we just expected him to come out of there with no head at all.

### **Suzy:**

They used to have...you know they'd warn women especially who had scarves. We wore lots of scarves in those days around our heads and around the neck and with long hair or braids or anything, and they'd warn you to be very very careful and try to stay away from the rope with that sort of garment and hair.

### **Bill:**

Yeah, there used to be a rope tow...as a matter of fact I don't know if it still exists or not, between the Peruvian Lodge and the Collins lift, it's not there anymore. I think Peruvian Lodge built it for their guests and a woman from California came up one time and she was going from the Collins lift back to the lodge and she had long red hair and it wrapped around that rope and killed her. Scalped her.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk a little bit about how skiing changed

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#### **Suzy:**

Skis are so wonderful and bindings and I raced...finally Earl Miller developed a safety binding and he was the man who went all over the west and east and took terrible falls and would show people that his binding would release. I loved them, they had screws in the back and screws on the front and you'd put your foot in and it held your foot down. It was the first binding that actually kept your heel down. I raced in them. They were just wonderful. I think Alan Engen raced in them too.

#### **Bill:**

In 1960 there were 10 Olympic teams that used Miller bindings. Practically every team that ski'd in the '60 Olympics used Miller bindings.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Well that's quite a testimony right there.

#### **Suzy:**

It is, they were wonderful.

#### **Bill:**

But they didn't use them as safety bindings either.

#### **Suzy:**

No, we had them tightened down.

#### **Bill:**

They'd use the toe iron and they'd use long claws on the back so they weren't safety bindings at all. But they would break your toe away if you had a bad fall. That was one thing, of course the ski was strapped to your foot and it would whirl around, it was like a Samurai it would about take your head off if it got you.

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#### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk a little bit about what it was like to ski on that kind of old wood equipment and the fact that they didn't groom and you know you see those old signs that say "Fill your Sit Mark" and that sort of thing.

#### **Suzy:**

Yeah that was very important. If you fell there were signs everywhere that said "Please Fill Your Sit Mark" because that could be very dangerous. I remember a friend and I pooled our money, we didn't have very much – nobody did in those days – but we pooled our money and took a racing lesson from Alf Engen and he just took us over to the face which was the main run and stuck the poles in the snow and it was snowing like crazy, I think that during the hour that we took our lesson it snowed like a foot, and we just you know that's what you had to do. That was what we had to do, so we at least got the rudimentary instructions about how to go through the gates. But you ski'd on everything and whatever kind of conditions there were. Nowadays it's absolutely wonderful, they can go groom and make the runs wide and they're smooth and they're lovely.

#### **Bill:**

I was just going to say that one of the things we used to like to do was take a hike up to the huts, there were several huts around the mountains up there that had been built by volunteers. They were Quonset huts and one weekend a group of us decided that we'd all go up and stay overnight. Well we were going to go on Saturday and the skiing was so good Saturday we just ski'd to the very last end and then got our packs and started up the mountain to the cabin, to the shelter. We ran into Alf Engen and he said, "Oh you shouldn't be going up there now it's going to snow. It's going to be a big big storm." We said "oh no, it's nice weather." Well we started up and sure enough boy that storm came in and it snowed and it blew. Oh the wind was 100 miles an hour I swear going up around

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Baldy. We finally got up to the shelter and somebody had broken in and knocked the door off. The place was filled with snow. They'd knocked the stovepipes down. We finally got the stovepipes up, got a fire going, got the door back on, shoveled the snow out and we decided we'd better get something to eat and we tried to get the food out of our packs and it had all frozen. The canned goods we'd taken up were frozen; we had to use an axe to get it open. And they say wine won't freeze? Baloney, our wine was all frozen. The whole bottle. I had a cold that night and it got worse and so the next morning, oh it was a beautiful morning.

#### **Suzy:**

I told him it wouldn't get worse but it did.

#### **Bill:**

Deep, deep powder and I said, "Look, you guys go skiing I'm going to go back, I just don't feel good enough to ski." So I ski'd down and went over to the Alta Lodge and I walked in the bottom and there was Chick Morton and I said, "Hi Chick" and he said, "Oh Bill what are you doing?" I said, "Oh we've been up to the cabin up there but I've got a very bad cold, I need a cup of coffee." He said, "Well if I gave you a cup of coffee I'd have to give everybody a cup of coffee. I can't do it." At that time the Alta Lodge had gone from a public lodge to a private lodge so I was really upset. So I went up to the car went down to the Peruvian Lodge and saw Ted Gibbs there and he gave me a cup of coffee and he said, "you can have all you want." So after awhile I went back to the car and went up to get Suzy and as I was going up the road I saw a car with the hood up and steam coming out of it and a guy waving his hands at me and I stopped and pulled up and it was Chick Morton. He said "Oh I'm glad it's you Bill, give me a ride back up to lodge will you?" He said, "My car's frozen." I said, "Chick do you know if I had to take you I'd have to take everybody, I can't do it." I rolled up the window and drove off.

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**Suzy:**

We remained friends though over all these years.

**Bill:**

We did remain friends.

**Joey Prokop:**

The funny thing about Alta is that nobody really ever got a free pass up there.

**Bill:**

No such thing! I don't want to talk about it except that there were no free passes.

**Suzy:**

Bill finally got one...it's been about 12 years ago they have a group called 'International Ski History' and we belong to it and we still do and they put out a magazine quarterly and anyway they had the meeting and reunion here at Alta and they did give all of us free passes and Bill had to tease Connie Marshall about it saying he'd got the first free pass he'd ever had.

**Bill:**

I said, "Connie, could I have two – one to put on my pants so I can get on the lift, the other one that I could frame." It was the first free pass that I had ever had in my life.

**Suzy:**

And it's framed.

**Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk a little bit about how you guys met and your relationship and how it

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blossomed up there, skiing and that sort of thing.

#### **Bill:**

Well I didn't meet Suzy skiing believe it or not; I met her really from tennis. I used to play tennis with her mother. Her mother was a championship tennis player and I played a lot of tennis with her and one day I saw Suzy up at the University and got an introduction to her and that's all it took.

#### **Suzy:**

He said he fell in love instantly. I was dating a friend of his at the time so...but Bill seemed to be thunderstruck and it was nice because he ski'd and I ski'd and that had to be something that since I was very involved in racing and skiing I had to have a boyfriend that ski'd too and was good. And Bill was good so that worked out.

#### **Bill:**

We just celebrated our 58<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary just a month ago.

#### **Suzy:**

Well we were engaged at the Alta Peruvian Lodge the first year it opened. That was in 1948? Christmas of '48. And we were engaged there.

#### **Bill:**

On New Years Eve.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

With that let's talk about what makes Alta such a special place.

#### **Suzy:**

It's beautiful. I don't think any of the other areas really...it is just breathtaking

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with Superior Mountain and Baldy and the way it is nestled into the valley, I think it makes it an absolutely lovely lovely place and when we started skiing there it was very small and very intimate and you knew everyone.

#### **Bill:**

I'd say two words...Terrain and Snow! Nobody else can touch it.

#### **Suzy:**

It does have the greatest snow on earth there.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

I'd have to agree, we got some of that great snow yesterday when we were trying to shoot on the mountain. Why don't we talk a little bit about the storms and it seems that you'd drive down to Snowbird and it's not doing anything but here at Alta it's dumping.

#### **Suzy:**

Alta always does seem to, if you still look at the...you would think that Brighton and Alta would always get the same amounts of snow. But Alta would seem to...they'd announce that Brighton had so much snow and low and behold Alta would have from inches to a foot more and Zane Doyle from Brighton used to absolutely get so furious. He'd say, "They can't have more snow than we do! We're both up there in the same mountain range." But Alta always seemed to have a little more and a little dryer and a little lighter.

#### **Bill:**

The explanation I got that Alta had so much snow and good snow was that the way it's positioned in the mountain up there, the weather seems to come off of the Great Salt Lake Desert and to make snow you had to have a nucleus – either a little dust particle picks up salt out there and that little salt molecule that forms a

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snowflake makes the snow so light and airy and because of its position as it comes off the lake it goes right up that canyon and it gets the first snow of any place and it's high. You'll notice a lot of times they'll say it's going to rain down in the valley and snow up there or else it's going to snow on the mountain and not going to do anything down here. Because of its altitude there it picks up a lot of snow.

### **Joey Prokop:**

A lot of snow means a lot of powder skiing. Talk a little bit Suzy about powder skiing and the feeling that you get when you can get one of those good days where you can stick 'em right down and just fall right down the fall line.

### **Suzy:**

And I bet you've done exactly what all of us...scream! You'd just yell at the top of your lungs it's so exhilarating and so fabulous and so much fun. Coming down and finally getting up onto the top of Wildcat when you were used to having to hike up there and hike up race courses and coming down it was just so exhilarating, so fabulous. It's like nothing else.

### **Bill:**

We ski'd in a lot of areas – Sun Valley and Aspen and Vail and the Bugaboo's up in the Canadian Rockies but you just can't touch the snow that we get at Alta. You just can't! I don't know what it is but you just can't. It's never like that and the terrain up at Alta, when you know the area you can always find some powder if you want to.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk about some of the characters that you've met over there over the years. Obviously Alf Engen.

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#### **Suzy:**

Alf and of course you mentioned Mayor Watson and Jim Shane was one of the...he and his wife built The Gold Miners Daughter eventually but he was one of the first ski patrolmen too and rescue people. He and Gordy Alcott was one of the ski patrolmen and first rescue people and Elfreida, Shane and the ski instructors.

#### **Bill:**

From Dick Durance. I ski'd with Dick Durance; he let me buy a pair of his first skis. Friedel Pfeiffer, I ski'd with him. Gordy Ren, Barney McLean, Si Brand, Fred Rucker and of course the Three Musketeers – Dev Jennings, Dick Movitz and Jack Reddish. They're all Alta skiers.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

Those Three Musketeers were pretty good ski racers?

#### **Bill:**

All of them.

#### **Suzy:**

Definitely, yeah. There used to be some very interesting people – Ryden Skinner and Suzanne Antony. Suzanne came out just a couple of years ago, I think she'd turned 90 and ski'd and again Alf took her out and she and Ryden Skinner, and this was very shocking way back in the '40's and the '50's, they lived in Hell Gate Cabin which was up above where the Hell Gate Condo's are now but on the other side of the road up where avalanches come down. They lived there together for year's unmarried. They were very nice but it was shocking.

#### **Bill:**

One of the greatest characters ever at Alta was Mrs. Howard. Mrs. Howard was

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the cook at the Alta Lodge and she was, I don't know how old she was then, she was in her 80's I know, but she was the cook at the lodge and when the war came along they couldn't get help and they hired two Japanese people that had been relocated. We couldn't say their names so we called them Pat and Murphy, the two of them and those two with Mrs. Howard did all the cooking at the lodge and in the evening after dinner we'd all go up to the Sits Mark and every night there was a poker game and Friedel Pfeiffer who was teaching up there then...I don't think Friedel ever won a hand, Mrs. Howard used to beat him. Every night she took all of his money from him and one night he got so mad he stood up and threw the cards across the room he was so damn mad at her and she laughed and laughed. She was a real poker player. She lived to be about 95 years old.

### **Suzy:**

Still cooking.

### **Bill:**

And still skiing.

### **Joey Prokop:**

Let's talk about that ski race where Jill Kenmont hit the tree. Let's talk a little bit about the course, etc.

### **Suzy:**

I was six months pregnant with our second daughter and we had gone up to see the race and it had snowed and snowed all week long and just you know that day the sun came out and we had gone to Finn's Restaurant the night before. There's another family – Finn and Greta Gerholt and their children were all interesting people. Finn had cooked at the Alta Peruvian Lodge when he first came over here from Norway. Anyway we had all been to dinner at their restaurant the night before and the California group were all there having dinner

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together and Jill was with them and she was just absolutely beautiful and radiant and I'm sure after the whole week of snow and trying to practice on that new race course that we had which is a fabulous place to ski. And anyway I think that the day of the race she miss judges the speed she would gain and she was trying out for the Olympic Team. Try outs were coming up and she went for it and hit that transition place before you would come down into lower the lower corkscrew and she flew (Schuss Gully). She flew and flew and hit the back of her neck into a tree and Dick Movitz was up there was one of the people that were there and she immediately tried to sit up saying, "Oh what have I done". I think she hit people didn't she too?

#### **Bill:**

Well I was standing up on the ridge there when it happened and I saw her fly and she went through the air...she was airborne. She hit a tree that was about three or four inches in diameter and broke it off. That's how hard she hit, it broke the pine tree right off and Dick Movitz was the first one to get to here and they tried to get an ambulance up to get her but there were so many people up there the road was all blocked, they couldn't get the ambulance up. So it was a long time before they got Jill down to the hospital. A very good friend of mine was the therapist that took care of her down there, Bob Green. But she was never able to recuperate from it.

#### **Suzy:**

Well Dick said that her first reaction was to try to sit up too and say "what have I done, what have I done" and he kept trying to keep her still and other people came over to try to keep her still but it was such a tragedy. She was so gorgeous and a fabulous skier.

#### **Bill:**

In the late '50's, early '60's we were living up in Yakima Washington and I was

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representing some ski companies and Jill was teaching skiing over in Seattle so I went over to see her one day when I was over there and she was just wonderful. I couldn't believe that she had such a great attitude on life. She was terrific. She could move her hands a bit and she was in a wheelchair, couldn't walk but she could move her hand and she could just barely get up to the bar and write on the board. But she taught school for many years. Many many years.

### **Joey Prokop:**

I think she also became kind of a motivational speaker. She hit the circuit so I think it goes to show that as a skier and you know this being a skier that a lot of it's mental. You can do so much physical but if you don't have the nerve to either let them run or push what the limit is, you're not going to go anywhere.

### **Suzy:**

It's not for everyone and I've been very fortunate in my career that I've had only a couple of sprained ankles and my knees have held up and as I said, I've been fortunate and still skiing.

### **Bill:**

Jill had some real tragedies that were so unfortunate. She was engaged to a guy, a skier who was a big skier and a racer and they were going to get married and he was flying his own plane and he did something he shouldn't have been doing and he crashed into Lake Tahoe and killed himself so she never did get married.

### **Joey Prokop:**

I guess I don't want to end on a tragic note so let's talk about your family. Your daughters and skiing and their daughters and skiing and how it's a big family...I mean you walk in your house and one thing you notice is that it's got a Western flavor to it but you also notice that you've got your ski archive over in your old

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coat closet. Let's talk about the importance of skiing and family and closeness.

#### **Suzy:**

Well I think when Bill and I met too we both realized that the person we were going to pledge our lives to forever had to ski and we had to be here and we did live away in Washington State for six years and that was very interesting.

#### **Bill:**

It was all because of skiing.

#### **Suzy:**

It was because of skiing Bill took a job that had to do with skiing but anyway we came back here because we felt that this was the place to be. But the girls just had to ski, that was all there was to it and I have a little sister who's 25 years younger. My parents were very young when they had me and they had her later and my parents were skiers and my sister had to learn to ski and the husband's had to also ski. So now we have grandchildren who ski and it is very important and my ski birthday was last Sunday – my 78<sup>th</sup> Birthday. We also had a junior racing team out of Alta that was back in...we started that in '69 or '68 and my girls both wanted to race and Robyn had been racing with another team and so when Jane said she wanted to I said, "well I don't think I can afford to have you both on this team." But I said "I can enter you in races and why don't we just do it that way." So they thought it over and they came home from school a few days later and they said, "You know we have a lot of friends that would like to race too. Could they?" And I said, "Oh yeah, that would be fine."

#### **Bill:**

We had maybe 30 of them showing up.

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#### **Suzy:**

I said, “tell them to come over Sunday afternoon and we’ll start working out and talk about doing this.” Well there were about 30 that showed up, darling kids and so we ended up with the last racing team out of Alta called ‘United Alta Skiers’ and that was just a marvelous marvelous part of our ski life and endeavor and I still see those young people and now they’re all middle aged. But anyway they remember those fun days. Chick Morton was wonderful, he let us...he said, “Yes you can have a racing team here”.

#### **Bill:**

Alta gave us a break on lift passes.

#### **Suzy:**

Yes they did, they gave us a break on lift passes. One day though I said, “we’ll have to have little donations from your families to do things.” Like we needed slalom poles because we needed to send away for these bamboo poles to practice slalom. So we got the poles and we kept them under the Alta porch I think, they let us keep them there. I asked Chick the first day out, I said “okay Chick where can we and set up our poles and practice slalom.” And I was thinking he’d say lower Rustler but he said, “no, go up on race course”. So we trucked those poles up the Collins lift and the Germania lift and got all those kids and the poles over to Upper Race Course and that’s where we practiced slalom and they still tell me that that was the thing that made them become good skiers. They had to do it up on that very steep course and pack snow.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

I guess one thing that really strikes me is that some people get it and some people don’t. Can you talk about skiing as a lifestyle?

#### **Bill:**

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Well there's no money in it.

#### **Suzy:**

There's a lot of money in it now. I think it's interesting, I was thinking earlier when we talked about the runs at Alta and the progression of the lifts and now we have a six pack that goes all the way from the bottom all the way up to the top of Germania right under Baldy and the new Watson Shelter and we used to stand in all those days when you stood in a lift line and we'd say "Can you imagine if there was ever a lift that went all the way up! Could you imagine if there was lift that went up over here on the Sunnyside area and up Albion area up by Secret Lake? Wouldn't that be fabulous!" And gradually it's happened and it has been absolutely a marvelous thing to watch it happen and watch all of the other areas develop around here and I'm glad that we're still alive and could have watched all of this. It is a way of life.

#### **Bill:**

We were over in Europe in Switzerland and we were just amazed at these cable cars that would go up to the top of these mountains. We'd got so we'd look for the tallest mountain and there would be a cable car going up there. Everyplace we'd look and that's what's happened here. When Ted Johnson decided he was going to build a cable car up there we said, "It will never happen." But he did and it's still the best and the biggest one in the country.

#### **Joey Prokop:**

One thing that I'd like to talk about too, we were poking around on the porch of the original Watson Shelter yesterday, it's still there and the patrol uses it as old sign shop. What was it like to go into that place?

#### **Suzy:**

It was the only place on the top of the mountain.

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#### **Bill:**

They didn't have flush toilets for one thing.

#### **Suzy:**

No they didn't. The clothes back then too, you know nothing was waterproof and you'd go in wet and cold most of the time and I remember they had a huge round cowhide covered...It was a seating thing in front of the only fireplace and you'd just fight to get to be able to sit on that. That cowhide thing, they finally put some chairs and tables in later. But that was the only place that you could go in other than the Snow Pine Lodge up the road, you could get lunch up there too eventually. But that was...clothes were wet and boots were wet and they were all leather.

#### **Bill:**

That reminds me of one other little story, it's not about the Watson Shelter but when I was working up at Alta and the war was on and there were two guys that came up and they ski'd...they weren't really very good skiers but they took some time to ski before going into the service, before they had to report back (they were already in). We had a big storm, oh gees it was a big storm and these two guys said, "we've got to get back and catch a train." I said, "Well you're just out of luck because the road's closed. There's no way you can get there." And they said, "Well we've got to, we'll be AWOL if we don't get there." So Chuck Bishop said "Bill would you take them down?" And I said, "I don't think I want to." He said, "Well they've got to get down there." So they were going to go by themselves so the next morning I said, "I'll take them." So another fellow Pat Kearns decided to go with me too. We started out from the Alta Lodge and we got as far as where Snowbird is now and both of them had not taken the hitch off their cable bindings and their heels in their boots had rubbed up and down up the back and rubbed right through their socks and right through their heels and oh

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blood! They were bloody and crying and oh it was horrible. We found a little shelter and got them warmed up a little bit and we said, "let's go back, there's no sense in going on." They said, "we can't, we've got to go on." So we said, "well okay, if that's what you want to do we'll go on." I had called my dad and told...

[Interruption]

That was another thing I did up there, Utah Power and Light and the telephone company hired me to walk the pole line up there and dig the snow out from around the poles because the snow would build up behind them and knock the poles down eventually. So I did that for a couple of times and then I went into the service so I didn't...it was just a couple of times but it was tough. And I'd go up there all by myself. I must have been crazy!

### **Suzy:**

On the road to Park City was a two lane and that's how we entered Salt Lake Valley when we drove over from Colorado when we came here from Ohio and I remember the last turn out of Parley's. To me it looked like we were going to fly out into the valley, you know "my life has ended here". But there was Engen Hill up there, Ecker Hill and there was a tow, the Rasmussen Hill and there was a little tow up there.

### **Bill:**

And then the Summit. That's where kids used to go. That's were my dad used to take us.

### **Suzy:**

Take you and you'd just hike up and down and you'd ski. Alta was better!