

ALTA

Bill & Mimi Levitt

Joey Prokop:

You're on a ski trip that's going on 20 years now?

Mimi:

I was going to be out here for a year or two before I went back to New York. I majored in Early Childhood Education so I was going to be a teacher, so I was going to be here for a year or two and it's been 42.

Joey Prokop:

So coming out from New York to Alta, Little Cottonwood Canyon tell me some of your first impressions as you came up the canyon.

Mimi:

As I recall coming up the canyon it was a raging blizzard and I went for what I thought was miles and miles when I got to the telephone which I don't if you knew that there used to be a telephone at the bottom of the canyon but it wasn't even quite at the bottom – where that first house is, that first house that you hit. So I thought I had gotten all the way to Alta and I hadn't. But anyway, just totally amazing! I've never ever gotten tired of this place, it's you know I mean I can go out in the blizzard, I can go out in a sunny day, in the summertime, the wintertime. It's got me in the heart and I never get tired of it.

Bill:

I thought I was the one that got you in the heart.

Mimi:

You did! You're the reason that made me stay. Alta is just fantastic!

Joey Prokop:

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Let's draw out a little picture. Say it's your ideal ski morning you're going to get up, it's a perfect powder day if that's what you like or if you could have any run what run is it going to be?

Mimi:

Well I think we would probably go across the high traverse, cut into Gunsight. Ski down Gunsight, come over and come down Gurley Hill.

Joey Prokop:

Then take the rope tow back?

Mimi:

Um hum.

Joey Prokop:

Why don't you kind of paint a picture to me when you go up Gunsight and you come to that little notch, when you see it and it's a nice sunny powder day.

Mimi:

Hopefully untracked snow. But I'm not sure exactly where that's going. Look down...I'm not sure what...

Joey Prokop:

Just getting to describe the 360 views that you can see. You can see Baldy, you can see out towards the west. You can see down this big expanse of open snow...powder.

Bill:

What about the groomers? You ski that too you know.

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Mimi:

Groomers are nice.

Bill:

That's where you show off.

Joey Prokop:

Tell me a little bit about what keeps you here...I mean obviously you're married to Bill and you love it here but get a little bit into the...kind of what makes Alta special.

Mimi:

You know the Alta Lodge is one very special part of Alta. Historically I think it was the first lodge perhaps maybe after the Snow Pine which was just a day facility and I think Bill might speak to this later but the tradition of a small mountain where people come and they can relax and rest and then they can go out and ski in the fantastic snow here in Alta and just sort of regenerate, regroup and get on with their daily lives in other places of the world.

Bill:

There's a lot more things than just the skiing in Alta. I don't know if you know this but she's also the President of the Friends of Alta, but she's been working very diligently to check and preserve all the great beauties of the area. So the summers become her big importance.

Joey Prokop:

Within that context of Friends of Alta, what is so important about saving Alta?

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Mimi:

Well aside from the incredible beauty and the flora and the fauna and the snow, it's a watershed area for Salt Lake City. I believe I'm about right when I say 20 percent of the population of Salt Lake City gets their water from this canyon and it's excellent water. We're very desirous of protecting the watershed and also preserving open space. And it's also kind of a playground for people who live in Salt Lake City and want to come up to the mountains. These are their mountains and we don't want to see it messed up.

Joey Prokop:

That's a very noble and at times a difficult position to be in because there are city groups and as people with more money come in, you know this is a limited resource and I'm sure there are people that would love to develop. That would you know, 'Why can't we stick a bunch of Condo's up in the Albion Basin'. Let's talk a little bit about why that's not a good idea.

Mimi:

I'm trying to think how to go at that. It's a beautiful area up there and you don't want to see the open spaces with lots of condominiums and houses and mansions.

Bill:

We've had plenty of development in Alta but the one area I think that you're mostly concerned about is the Albion Basin area which is world famous and it's one of the few places left that hasn't been spoiled, or relatively hasn't been spoiled and so we can combine the continued use of it for skiing, for people to come up and paint, people hike. They camp up there, all of these things and there's such a small amount of topsoil up there, you know it's a great retention basin for the watershed. Once you cut into that and that goes then the whole

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area goes and we've survived all the mining claims that have been here and that has been pretty much repaired. We don't want to see the new kind of mining where you mine the land not for productivity but for profit. The people doing it don't need it and the people of Utah do need it. They need to keep it as it is.

Joey Prokop:

I think what's very important too is that we get to the concept of Alta over the years. It seems almost quaint. Look what's happening down the canyon at Snowbird, look what's happening across the ridge over at Solitude, look what happened at Park West and they turned that into a destination of merchants. But Alta still seems to be able to hold onto the past a little bit and kind of keep it the way it was. How do you think that that dynamic has worked?

Bill:

Can I speak to that? I think that what you're seeing is an example of a group of people who started the area, who cared about it and felt it was important to maintain it so that the people who were coming and generations to be will be able to enjoy it as much as they were able to enjoy it when they were here. The best illustration of that came to me when I sat at a meeting of the lift company where they were talking about what they should charge and J. Laughlin who basically owned the lift company and from whom I bought the lodge said at that time that he wanted to know what price they should charge assuming that we had a normal year to make a reasonable return and somebody said...well that would be...I think it was 16 dollars at the time. He said, "fine that's what we'll charge" and somebody said "well you know these other areas, Snowbird, Park City, all over the country are charging two to three times that." And he looked at them down his long nose, he's a big tall guy he said, "I'm not interested what those people are going to do. We have obligations to the people of Utah and we have people in the valley who need this place to ski in. We will keep it at that level." And that has been the basic principal. It has been inherent in everything

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that the lift company has done, the lodge has done and the people of our community that make up the town has always had that concept and that's why Alta is a 'State of Mind' as somebody put it rather than just another development. It is not like any other ski area and maybe there are some but we don't know where they are. But we're proud of it and I think there's a great sense of pride here that we are not being second rate Aspens or those kind of places. We are Alta and we want to see it stay that way!

Joey Prokop:

Well what's amazing too is that it kind of has a 'Mom & Pop' feel about it but if you travel around the world you may just run into people who know about Alta. Can you tell me about maybe your travels in Europe and running into people?

Bill:

It's almost incredible...I've traveled quite a bit and certainly in Utah everywhere I go and they heard that I was the mayor that they..."oh did you know my uncle, did you know my cousin", some of them who..."oh my Great Grandfather used to mine up there". Everybody in Utah knows about Alta but incidentally when you travel anywhere in this world, all over France, Germany, Switzerland and so on I remember one time we were in a remote place in France and we were talking about Alta and he pardoned himself and spoke and said, "did I hear mention Alta?" He says, "I wonder if you know my cousin, he skis there all the time." And of course we did know him, in fact he was a guest at our lodge. And this has happened in one form or another in many places and we communicate with people who have been here and live in Europe and they want to know, "is Alta still Alta?" Because when they haven't been there for a while and they see what's going on in the rest of the world and they get very nervous. Is it able to change here that much or have we been able to hold it? Essentially we've changed it but we've changed it in such a way that you don't feel the impact. If you look around...when I came here...actually in 1956 I built the fourth house in

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Alta. The fourth house! We've had quite a bit of development but it was done properly and it was done with a great deal of care so that we did not impact or change anything by doing it. Right now we have a fairly well established group of people who are able to be here and live here and at the same time continue to serve the people of the valley and the rest of the country. It's a nice compromise that we've made and while it's not satisfying...there's always those who can make it better if you understand what that means in their terms, I think that we've done pretty well.

Joey Prokop:

One thing that I really do want to touch on that one thing that makes Alta Alta is the people. So many people that I've met here are some of my greatest friends. People who have gone on that I would never have associated with unless I met them on the ski hill and all of a sudden you feel this bond. It's almost like being in a secret club.

Bill:

You know that great bond is also the people who are no longer with us. When you think about Fred Speyer who basically built the area and was the original owner of the lodge and the General Manager of the area and J. Laughlin who was a great poet and publisher but also loved mountaineering and he was the original owner of the area and Joe Quinney of course the family has been here and served as the President of the Alta Ski Company for years. Then you have people who have been here...Chick Morton who came here to work here, he worked here loading chairlifts and eventually ran the Alta Lodge and then joined me in buying the lodge and then when he became the General Manager of the lift company I bought his share of the lodge. I'm trying to think of some of the other people but most important of all the people is Alf Engen who is world known. Not just as a great skier but a *great* teacher. Something very few people realize that he has an instinct of ability as a ski instructor that he could just look at you...you

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hardly had to go five feet before he knew exactly what was wrong and how to fix it. I'll never forget, on any day whether it was the most miserable day in the world Alf would look around and say "Another beautiful day in the Wasatch!" And then he would look around and say, "but stay close to the trees". He had that little thing; he could not ever say it wasn't a wonderful day. When you think of those kind of people who cared and were here and made the tradition and so my coming a little bit later...I didn't get here until 1954 so I'm basically a new comer. But buying the lodge and the time I've served as Mayor, I always felt that my main job was to maintain that tradition and so that has been the main focus of my effort as Mayor and owner of the Alta Lodge.

Joey Prokop:

Let's talk a little bit about Fred Speyer. He's an Austrian guy, very...I guess gifted with machinery and things...could make that chairlift run.

Bill:

He took old machinery and put it together. He could fix just about anything but he was also an intellectual. He was a skier that read books...it's not so often these days. But a true gentleman, a wonderful man, a wonderful family. His wife Coke was...everybody loved. But Fred was tough and he ran the place the way it had to be run. I remember there used to be at the entrance to the Alta Lodge, there was a post that was sticking up for some unknown reason and some of the guys got together and decided that it wasn't useful so they cut it down. When he saw that he very quietly called them all together and said, "you will replace this now or you do not ski." And they had to go put it back because they cut it down without asking him first. But you know, he was also so good-natured and there are these great stories that you sit around some evenings and one person will top another with talk and that. Now that's gone but I think I should have mentioned the most important was George Watson who was my predecessor as Mayor, who was elected by the largest majority in history – one to nothing. He

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was the only guy up there; he said, "I'm the Mayor." He was quite a guy. He was able to convince the Federal Government that it was very useful to acquire this area here and he would be happy to swap it with them for all of his mining claims on condition that they would allow a ski area to be built that would be serving the public. He and others would always go skiing. They'd go drive up to Brighton and ski over the top, ski all the way through Alta, all the way down the canyon and that was a very common experience. But they all knew that Alta was the place to ski. So he was able to manage to get the Forest Service to come in and forgave him some of his debts and took over the whole area and allowed the ski area, but he had also convinced the Federal Government that a Public Works project would be a good idea. So he got them to build a road, this road that we still travel was built by the Public Works Administration...not WPA, PWA it's a big difference and gave a lot of employment to people. But that's how this area became accessible so it's not much different today than it was then. It's a little bit bigger but not much. So that's how that all took place. He also owned the Alta Lodge and so when you think about people like that, he and others...he was an old miner and a hard working person then you have all the people who are quite well to do. So there's this general mix of the population that started it but they all loved the mountain and they loved Alta. Alta is such a special place, they even named the club downtown after Alta – the Alta Club and not just Utah but throughout the ski world in those days certainly Alta was *the* place. That's where...you didn't want to die without having ski'd Alta and many people expressed it just that way and some of them said "I don't intend to die unless I ski Alta again." With all the people coming now who are new, many of them don't know this great history and what it was about. You know the second chairlift in the country was built here in Alta...the old single chair. And the Baron who came out looking for a place...Mr. Harriman came to Salt Lake, came up here and he thought this is marvelous, marvelous but it's too close to a big city so he went up to Sun Valley and that's where they built Sun Valley and it took Sun Valley about 70 years before they were able to get out of the red because nobody could get there. But everybody here...you know it's incredible to think that within a half an

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hour driving up this road on a normal day you can be in a mountain atmosphere that rivals, if not is better, than any you could find in all the Alps. When the people are here, this becomes the great romantic place. This is romantic Alta. You know as Mayor I must have married at least a hundred people and many of them met here and we had always one thing...that was if you got married in Alta it was forever. Because if you weren't prepared to do that then go and get married somewhere else. I have a pretty good record, very few losses. They know if they don't behave we won't let them come back!

Joey Prokop:

Let's talk a little bit about what a community you have here. Basically you probably get a crop of new kids every year. You get a lot of people that return. Talk about the safe haven that is up here.

Bill:

You know, Alta is...we say it almost as a joke I tell the people that "now that you've been here you're an Alta person." And then I suggest to them that the world has gone to hell in a hand basket and I've never had anybody who didn't agree. I said "the time may come when you may have to flee and if it does happen, get yourself together with your family and get to the bottom of this canyon, we'll have your names. We will let you up with your family." I said, "We've got these big avalanche guns, the bad guys aint coming up after you." And they all laugh about that and then I say "what I'm really trying to tell you is that Alta is a haven and what it means is that if at some point you like everybody else wakes up and wonders 'I've just got to get out of here', your biggest problem is where do I go." I say "when that happens, wait till we have a big storm and find out that we have fresh powder then you get out here as quickly as you can. If you get out in that powder and you're still thinking about your troubles, you're going to be in real trouble. And if it happens to be in the summer, go by Secret Lake up here and be in almost a wilderness of wildflowers and it's so beautiful

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and the air is so pure and everything is crystal clear and if you're still thinking about your problems, they get to be a lot less important." So Alta has gotten to be a place where you can get away from it. Where it enriches and enhances your life and that's what we love about Alta because you have no idea. You know we have 80 percent of people come back here from all over the world and when they come in here they look around "has anything changed" and when they see that nothing basically has changed there's almost a sigh of relief that there is still some place that is still the way it was. And I've had people who have come here as children and who have grown up and they say, "Isn't it so wonderful to think there's one place left (that they know of) that hasn't been disrupted, corrupted or 'Improved'."

Joey Prokop:

I guess there's a certain aspect of Alta, the nuts and bolts of getting this place to go in the morning. Say the wind is blowing all night or we had a huge dump and the wind is blowing – the avalanche control, how that has changed over the years and how it has developed here. Can you talk a little bit about snow safety and some of the people who have really made this place a Mecca of learning about snow safety, avalanches, that sort of thing.

Bill:

Well, even before I came out in the earliest days avalanches was always a problem and they used to just have to sit and wait it out and then they decided that after they had some rather serious situations here that they better start looking into it and the first really critical person was Monty Atwater. Harvard educated, very bright and he decided that the best way to deal with avalanches was to start using weaponry. I like to put it that...you know the biblical sense that you beat your swords into plow shares is the same idea as you take these weapons that have been used to kill people and now use it to save peoples lives. You see, what a nice concept. They start out with 75 Howitzer's and some of

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them were from World War I, you know the old French Howitzer and without getting into some of those great stories they really started to learn and had spent a lot of time watching what they did in Europe. Shortly after he came here the great man arrived Ed LaChapelle. Today he is the great dean, he's written books about it, was a great student and started understanding that you had to understand what the snow pack is consisted of. They would go and measure the snow, weigh it, see what the water content was, decide which areas, what happens when the wind blows. Tremendous amount of information in all of that and so it became a real science and we got better equipment as time went by. There's a little story that I have a little fun with because we used to use...we got a new weapon, at that time it was a 75mm recoilless rifle and if you understand what they are, when you fire them a blast goes out with the shell and the back blast goes this way. Well nobody had ever seen one of them before so they were trying it out and they blew the doors off the guard station up here. I was the only guard at the time that had been in the military. I had to go out and show them how to run the 75 mm and so when I retired they gave me a nice plaque and they had recovered the back of a 75 shell and polished it and put it on the plaque. But what I'm trying to say that all this time there was a constant study and even to this day we have classes now and avalanche control working to help people who go back country as well just of the ski areas. I found it interesting that people come here to learn about it from Europe rather than us going there and whenever there's an Olympics the people from the Olympics come here to learn how to deal with avalanche problems. I know Monty Atwater was hired by mining companies in South America to go and study some of their problems with the high mountains. So that whole avalanche thing was working with the Forest Service in those days and then as the Forest Service abandoned and just became advisors the state of Utah came in and we were able to set up an incredible organization called 'The Little Cottonwood Road Committee' which has representatives from the Federal Government, State Government, Local Government, private industry all working together on this one little road here. And that means Snowbird, Alta and the people in the valley and we help the

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backcountry...Bruce Tremper who runs the Avalanche Forecasting Center. All of these came out of the work here done by the pioneers of Alta and it's been a remarkable experience.

[Audio upcut]

Bill:

I want to talk a little bit about...we've talked a little bit about the town, I want to mention a something a little bit about ski school and things like that because don't forget the Deseret News Ski School was one of the earliest activities that I know of in the ski world where it was sponsored by a newspaper and Alf Engen ran it and he brought all these kids up from the valley and gave them free ski lessons and sometimes when it was early and didn't have enough snow they'd even have it down in the valley you see. So it was, it was an idea of serving the community and this is where Alf Engen shone because if Alf Engen asked you to come and help, nobody ever said no to Alf Engen, you know you just couldn't. He was this immense guy that had such a great face and he was so decent and wonderful that he didn't...all the things he did were legend. I remember he once came over and said, "Bill, looking around, don't mention this but I don't its ski able today." We had breakable crust and unbreakable crust at the same time and then he looked at you "but don't tell anybody." So when we first started and we tried to get the ski school and always dealing with the government you always have some problems and people wanted to come in and do their own skiing and have their own ski schools and there became issues of liability and all kinds of problems with it. So we had a really difficult time getting Bill Ash, Junior Bounous, the early people working with Alf and trying to develop not just the Austrian type of thing or the French or Norwegian, but an American thing. So they started talking about making an American ski technique which was interesting because all ski teaching was then what they called 'The Beast', nobody should get out in the steep stuff, it was too dangerous and here we were at Alta skiing in the so called deep stuff and so we sat around and we would have

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these sessions and people would argue...”does the ski turn the skier, or does the skier turn the ski?” That was old Jim Shane who would be coming up with these great concepts and “you un-weight on the up or un-weight on the down”, we’d get a scale and practice. And then we’d have Junior Bounous demonstrate all the different moves in skiing and they would trace pictures of him and that became the basis for the American Ski Technique which was started right here in Alta and was adopted all over the country. When it came to skiing powder...how do you do...everything was a lot of heel thrusts and so on, they revised all of the different techniques and it was a wonderful scene to watch these people who considered skiing wasn’t just for fun or just romantic, it was also something with a great teaching experience. It was this wonderful experience for me to come here and join into what was already established and feel...somebody once asked me, I think it happened the first time I ran for office and the question was “how do you envision Alta in the future, say 20 or 30 years from now?” And the only thing I could say was “oh I hope my children or grandchildren will be able to find it and enjoy it the way I did when I first found it.” And I can tell you it has and I’ve asked my kids and they all have said, “It couldn’t be any better than it is today.” So that’s an interesting concept.

Joey Prokop:

I think for me what makes Alta really special is the people that you meet here whether you...you know when I ride the lift if I’m riding single and I find myself on a chair with a tourist I always want to find out where they’re from and what made them come to Alta and that sort of thing.

Bill:

You know we’ve had not just local people, we’ve had...well I know at this place we’ve had ten Nobel Laureates, I’m sure many more in the other lodges as well and we’ve had Ambassadors, Presidents, we’ve had every kind of college professors, great novelists, poets...all have been to Alta...big industrialists have

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come here. In fact as Mayor my problem was always dealing with people who were coming here and I would always ask them “Do you wish to have publicity? Do you want to have the press? Would you want to meet with the Governor?” Almost invariably they said, “please can you hide us, we need a break.” And quite often people would be here and people never knew they were here. We never let them know until after the people left. One little story about a friend of mine, Norman Mailer the great writer who just recently died, he was staying here and we were sitting in the dining room eating and one of the guests kept staring at him and she said “you look like Norman Mailer” and he said “you know I hear that a lot” and he went right on eating. I don’t think the day she left she knew that was Norman Mailer that was sitting next to her. So Alta is like that, we’re not pretentious but the feeling here is of pride. Being a ski bum at Alta, we don’t use that word anymore because in the early years nobody could afford to pay anybody but to be here is part of growing up for a lot of people. I can tell you what I tell the young people and I get these eight and nine year olds, and twelve year olds and I tell them, “you know there’s something you’re going to have to do” I said “when you get to college you gotta get there and be doing well. After a year or two take a year off, the colleges will approve of that and come here and work for Alta.” I said, “Four things will happen to ya” I said, “the first thing is you’ll find out that it’s work and it’s hard work. Work is hard, that’s why they call it work. The second thing you’ll find out is it’s a wonderful thing to earn your own money so you don’t have to keep asking your parents.” I said “the third thing that’s gonna to happen is that you’re not only going to become a good skier, that’s obvious but you’re gonna learn everything there is to know about the mountains. You’re gonna to learn the geology, your gonna learn the flora the fauna, the avalanches. You have to learn how to snowboard, ski. You’ll have to ice-skate, you’ll learn everything there is to know in the winter and then in the summer you’ll learn the flora, the fauna. You’ll learn how to take your families when you have a family to go camping, protect them and explain to them all the wonders of nature.” I said, “It’s going to be a great thing to learn.” And somebody said, “What’s the fourth thing?” I said, “That’s the toughest one of all.”

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I said, "There is some possibility that by being here and doing all these things you might actually decide what it is you want to do with the rest of your life. That will be the hardest decision you'll ever make." And the parents loved this you see and the kids love it too. And I mean it! I've seen it with my own kids. So Alta is a learning experience. A learning one and a loving one because the people come here have had...this is romantic Alta that my predecessor Mayor Watson.

[Audio upcut]

Bill:

Mayor Watson...if you said "Alta" to Mayor Watson without prefacing with the word 'Romantic' he'd fine you two-bits right on the spot and I've thought about doing that sometimes but it wouldn't be worth it because two-bits aint what it used to be. But the point is of course that...there's a picture of him over here, he was just an old goat but he loved romance and Alta to him and to those who were with him, Alta was romantic and it still is.

Joey Prokop:

Let's talk a little bit about how difficult in the past and it still is a little bit just to get up the canyon...what it takes to get the road open and the pressure to get the ski area open so the public can go skiing.

Bill:

Well it still can be difficult because you can't have this much snow without the accompanying possibility of danger, which is avalanche, and we take it *very* seriously. As I mentioned we have this working group which is unique in the country where you have the Federal Government, State Government, County Government, Town and private industry all working together without nobody even in charge so to speak but everybody decides who is the best person for each part

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of the jobs that we do which is to determine when there is a danger, to decide when to close the road, when to use explosives to see if it is going to slide. If it does slide how do we get the State to come in and clear it out, how do the police maintain the control on the traffic. It is complex and we had communication problems some of which were almost insurmountable because we have all these dead spots in the road and we've had to workout all these different problems. I don't want to waist all your time but we had one experience trying to get some help when we first started (this is our great dog) with the Federal Government and they had a program called (how does it go) 'Fund to provide to assist communities throughout the country to reduce fatalities on natures highways' and we applied for funding. We got local areas to agree to it, Denver approved it and it gets to Washington and it gets turned down. We couldn't believe it. I called them up and my wife Mimi was on the other phone listening and I phoned the desk of the guy that turned it down and I said, "Considering what our problems were here, how come you turned it down?" He said, "Well you don't meet the requirements." He said, "it's right in the title – you're going to reduce fatalities on natures highways, you didn't have a fatality therefore you don't qualify." I said, "Well if you get out here, we'll start qualifying it real quickly." Anyway we finally got it, a three-year program if we agreed we'd only apply for two years. I mean this is what you had to deal with in those days. But it gave us the basic funding which allowed us to put a vehicle up here, build a communication system which is critical within this one canyon and then we sat down and decided who was going to do it and interestingly everybody including Alta decided that the best guy that we could have that the Federal Government had withdrawn was the snow ranger from...who was the snow...not the ranger but the Snow Safety Director for Snowbird – Liam Fitzgerald and he's still our main person. So we didn't get into these jealousies and who's in charge kind of thing. Everybody realized the danger and what we had to do in protection. So of course I've been a long time advocate for putting up snow sheds. The costs are so incredible. That's the biggest problem. We've talked about everything by changing the roadside, we've done a lot of work on this, now they're working on a new program called 'Gassex'

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and we're hopeful that that will be the...The main point that I'm talking about that despite the fact that it does impact us economically this is never allowed to be an issue. That road is not open until we are absolutely as much as we can be that it is safe and that issue the critical issue. So that you don't have to come in here wondering if you're going to come out alive. If you don't get out it's wonderful because you're going to be able to ski when the road is closed and this means you've got the whole mountain to yourself. So all the guests hope that we'll have a road closure while they're here so they can go skiing and of course that doesn't happen that often because they do a good job. It used to take sometimes as much as three or four days to get the road open, its very rare now that it takes even one day, you know overnight and considering that we have over 500 inches of snow on average I think they do a remarkable job and risky one. You know what they do going in and checking it out and it is somewhat dangerous but it's not dangerous to local citizens, the people who...the police, the snow people, the Forest Service people, those are the people who put themselves on the line to make it safe. It's a great example.

Joey Prokop:

I think one thing that kind of strikes me too is how even though Alta isn't...you have the ski lifts, you have the various lodges but it's a community. Talk a little bit just about the community of Alta. You'd think that they'd be a little bit of bickering here and there but ultimately it works. How do you think that it survives in spite of itself?

Bill:

Because this is one community and as one community we have our differences but if you say anything about Alta boy we come together. You know it's not a good idea to publicly start putting Alta down because during the presence of somebody here they'd take care of it. However this is also different in the sense that what we have up here is you don't have to come and drive to the place. The

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lodges here are pretty much in the old European tradition. People come and they stay overnight, they don't have to have cars, they don't have traffic problems and so on. The only traffic problems that we have is coming in and going out but once you're here you get up in the morning and just go out and be on the mountain. There's nothing like it anywhere! There may be other places but the other thing is you just come up and people should understand this – why doesn't Alta allow snowboarding, everybody else is, think of the economics involved here how much money they could make because it's the fastest growing thing. Well we went and checked with our old guests in all the different lodges, people who have been coming here for years, 94 percent of them said "please don't" and so we had a big meeting and we were talking about and somebody said, "if 94 percent of our loyal guests don't want it why are we wasting time talking about it" and the lift company said, 'well we'll lose money, the lodges will, the restaurants will lose money, everybody if we do this so I want to make sure that I'm hearing from you. I want a show of hands.'" Every hand went up. It was all the business people here, "if the people who have been coming here don't want it, we don't do it." It was fascinating you know when you think about it, where else can this thing happen? Most ski areas are run by a big mother hen, they own everything and lease everything out. Alta is different, the lift company runs the lifts that's what they do and they do it well. The lodges are run separately. We have condominiums here, they're run separately. The shops are owned separately. So it's a real community it's not one big corporate situation and that makes it possible for us as you say – do we bicker? Yeah we bicker, we fight, we argue, we have elections and so on but we are one community and I love to remember when we celebrated the millennium the beginning of our next century, we had the biggest party you ever want to see. We had bonfires, we had 1,000 people, the lift company put up an immense tent. We were dancing, we were singing, it was just...everybody had their arms around everybody. We were looking to the new century when everything was going to be better. Unfortunately 911 came along but the sense that we were this great community...there was nobody disliking anybody, you just loved everybody and it was one of the great parties of all time

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to celebrate New Years. And what it did was reminded all of us of our past, who was responsible for creating this marvelous thing and what it is for the future because the new people are saying “I want it to be this way too.” I don’t know anyplace else that’s like it. Some people say there’s someplace back east that’s similar – Mad River Glen. It is similar but what’s interesting, some of the first people at Mad River Glen came from Alta and possibly had some influence there.

Joey Prokop:

I think the only thing that I really would like to cover that we haven’t touched on too much was the single chair, the original Collins chair, what it would be like to load that chair. You know how it would whip around and hit you in the back of the legs and that kind of thing.

Bill:

I mean it was one of the first chairs you understand. When I first came out here I was just learning to ski and at that time my then wife was even less and she saw the chair didn’t have a bar on it...”Wow”. The point was, it didn’t have a bar on it for very good reason because more people got tangled up with the bar than anything else and besides which we have so much snow, if they happen to fall out you wouldn’t fall very far, you’d have to be dug out. They’d have to dig you out. But it was the great old early Collins lift and everybody spoke about it, in fact when they replaced it people bought those chairs and put them in their places as a stark monument. It wasn’t that complicated once you got on them. It was lonesome. We like it now to have somebody on the chair with you so you can talk to them, but don’t forget we had very little at that time. A chairlift was an interesting part. The other thing was of course it took everybody up to where the powder was and one of the reasons we learned to ski powder was that you could always ski powder because there’d never be any crowd because nobody else would try it. It was kept kind of a secret. But you know the ski’s...even...I came

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late, I came in 1954, I was skiing on seven foot six inch skis. Some of us old timers like to think about all these hotshots now, “let’s put ‘em on some of those old ski’s and see how they do by golly”. But of course they’d probably do pretty well because the skiers, they’ve found powder now and nobody’s going to ever give that up. It’s addictive. Once you get in there and you find out what it’s like...the other thing people don’t understand about powder, it’s less dangerous because when you fall it doesn’t hurt. The hardest thing about powder is putting your ski back on.

Joey Prokop:

Sometimes finding it.

Bill:

Or finding it, yeah!

Joey Prokop:

As I sit here and listen to you, you’ve pretty much covered all the bases where I want to go. Are there any kind of little nuggets, little important aspects that maybe we haven’t talked about? You talked a bit about the avalanche control, a little bit about the lift company, I guess we could...I don’t know if you want to get into the whole how Mayor Watson consolidated the mine claim and...

Bill:

No, I don’t want to get into all of that, there are other people who know that stuff better. I do know that Alta has been the parent of a lot of ski areas. Snowbird for example – Ted Johnson who started Snowbird was the manager at the Alta Lodge at that time. If you go to various places throughout the country you’ll find people that started ski areas there after having been working here in Alta. So...oh I remember skiing in Vail one time and it was one of those Blue Bird days, it was beautiful and we were in the back bowls and I’m skiing down and

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having a good time and I hear somebody say “hey Bill!” I turned around and it was a friend of mine who used to be in the ski school with me here and he comes skiing over yelling “aint it great today, just like Alta!” And everybody looked like ‘where is this Alta?’ If it’s any better than this they wanted to know about it. Well it was better in Alta. That’s kind of...Alta has always been the measure, if you have great skiing well ‘boy it’s just like Alta’. It’s just not the powder, it’s just not the snow, it’s the atmosphere. It’s what Alta’s like. If we can save one part of one small canyon then it’s a worthwhile piece of work that all of us have participated in and they’ve got the whole rest of the country to screw up. Let’s not have them do that to this one. That’s my message!