



Our Memories of Flowing Rivers

Community stories about Tucson's creeks and rivers
Collected Fall 2020



So much of the Santa Cruz River Watershed has changed. However, we rarely hear stories of what the creeks and rivers looked like as they were changing, or how the community experienced these changes.

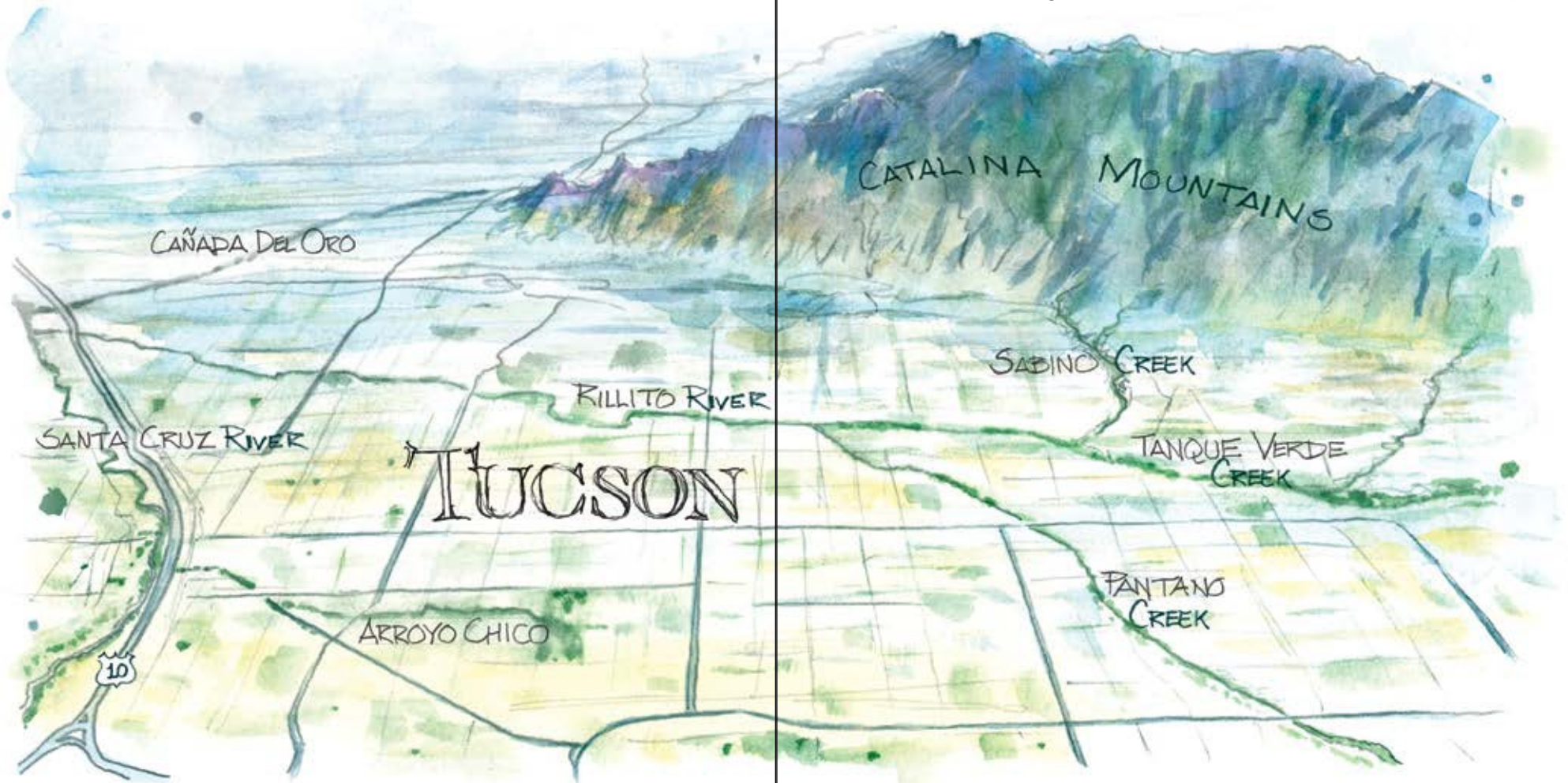
In response to this recognition, and with an eye to renewing community pride in our heritage of flowing creeks and rivers, Watershed Management Group's River Run Network launched a storytelling and story collection project titled Our Memories of Flowing Rivers.

In our watershed, there are voids in the story about the community's connection to the Santa Cruz River and its tributaries as people responded to the decline of groundwater from the early

to mid-1900s. While the decline of groundwater is part of our current recognition, the experiences of community members during this immense change is not centered in the written record.

These stories work to expand our collective memory and current relationships with the Santa Cruz River and its tributaries. We hope that by sharing these stories, we will create new traditions of passing down stories from generation to generation in our community.

To learn more about WMG's River Run Network, restoration vision, or share your own river story, visit: Watershedmg.org/Storytelling. Thank you for sharing your stories and helping us build our memories of flowing rivers.





SABINO CREEK

Sabino Canyon on a Sunday Morning

When we arrived in Tucson in 1967, the population was about 250,000, and Sabino Creek was essentially a perennial stream. During the hot (rarely over 100 degrees) summers, a favorite activity was to drive up Sabino Canyon and park along the roadside and enjoy the stream.

On a Saturday afternoon, Clara would call and say, “Let’s have breakfast tomorrow morning in Sabino.”

“Sounds good,” I would reply, and we would agree to meet around eight. They would drive from their house on Roller Coaster Road, and we from Hawthorne near Magnolia. We would find a shaded place by the stream. Clara would get out her cook stove and soon there was bacon sizzling in the frying pan as I whipped up eggs to scramble. The coffee pot was percolating, sending out that wonderfully fragrant steam, letting us know it was ready. Glen and JD would find comfortable stones to sit on as the five, seven, and nine-year-old children explored the streamside, looking for a place to build a dam, taking their shoes off to go wading. Soon we had all eaten, the kids were ready for serious water play, and the parents relaxed with more coffee and the Sunday paper under the shade of the sycamore trees. It was heavenly.

Alas, as more people discovered this treasure, by 11 on a hot weekend day, the road would be parked up on both sides with people enjoying the stream, and the canyon echoed with the laughter of children playing. The Forest Service personnel were concerned about the human impact on the resource; they set up a guard station at the foot of the canyon and started counting cars. After 100 or so, they would close the canyon, turning away

disappointed picnickers. One year, a big storm swept through the canyon, knocking out several of the bridges built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, so the canyon was closed to cars. As the bridges were repaired and restrooms built, there was a lot of discussion about how to manage Sabino Canyon. After public involvement sessions and resource analysis, a decision was made to keep the canyon closed to private vehicles and only allow a tram to take people up the canyon.

Our children had outgrown that love of wading in the stream, but we would still have loved to repeat those peaceful Sunday mornings listening to the stream run past the rocks, under the shade of the Sycamore trees, reading a newspaper and enjoying a cup of coffee, listening to the birds. Now that exists only in our memories.

Margot
1967, on a Sunday morning

Seven Falls Trail

We are a family that does Christmas in a big way—tree, decorations, presents for all, and lots of cooking. That means we are busy up to the last minute, which undoes the contemplative side of the Christmas holiday. We had some very good friends who made it their holiday practice to go on a hike on December 24th to get away from all the busyness. They invited us to join them one year.

We made the commitment to leave that day free so we could take a hike together. We drove up to the trailhead of Seven Falls in Sabino Canyon about 10a.m. with our knapsacks filled with lunch. We were a party of two families: four adults and four children aged eight to ten. It was a lovely mild December day with lots of sun, but not too hot. There was water running in the creek as we hiked up the trail. We saw the famous skinny-dipping pools surrounded by rocks, so useful to lie on to dry off. There were a couple of people enjoying them. We got to the top fall and enjoyed our lunch. We had fun crossing the stream on the rocks trying not to get wet. But of course, splashing and getting wet is part of the fun of this hike.

We returned relaxed, ready to celebrate the birth of a child, the hope for the new year and feeling the warmth of time spent with good friends.

Margot
December 24

Sabino Creek at Bear Creek and Snyder Road

We started going out there in the '50s, and we would go to Sabino Creek. Sometimes, we could not get across Bear Creek because they were both running right at the entrance to the Sabino Canyon National Area. Later, my dad bought the El Sabino Ranch, which had 650 acres. It had a mile of Sabino Creek on it, and Bear Creek forked into Sabino at the intersection of Snyder Road. That's where it is. So there was even more flow south of Snyder Road because both of them would come together. But that creek, when it roared, would roll over boulders that were like five, six feet in diameter.

Now we didn't have the boulders down in the Santa Cruz because Sabino coming right out of the mountains up there would just roar, and that was a rocky, stony area. It would change the look of the river when we had big floods. So way back, that water would channel to farmland below, and they would use the old sloughs to drain the water down to where the flatter land was, where they could raise crops. Then that ran into the Rillito and together that became a real water source for the whole city.

John
1950s

Cañada Del Oro or Sabino Creek

I do remember taking my kids hiking and always thinking that they really didn't like to go hiking unless there was flowing water where we went. Now they both love to hike, but for whatever reason, when they were kids, they preferred playing in the water to actually hiking, so that did direct us towards places like the CDO or Sabino Canyon, places where there was likely to be water.

Kathy



TANQUE VERDE CREEK

Family ranch off Tanque Verde Creek, now La Cebadilla Estates - Pantano Floods

During the October 1983 flood, I was house-sitting for my parents, who had gone to Phoenix for the weekend. My grandma, Adelina Carrillo, who lived close by wanted to go to Saturday evening mass. I had to drive her since she didn't drive. In the car, we were talking about all of the rain and how Tucson had started to become an island because of road closures. As we crossed the Pantano Wash at the Speedway bridge, she told me the story of traveling to the family ranch in the summer when she was young. It was located off of Tanque Verde Road where La Cebadilla Estates is now. They would spend every summer at the ranch. In order to get there, they would pack up horses and travel from their home in downtown Tucson out east to the ranch. She told me that if there was water running in Pantano Wash, they would have to spend the night until the water went down and they were safely able to cross. This amazed me since I had only known that journey as an easy drive across town.

Betsy
October 1983

Tanque Verde Creek

- Collecting Toads

As a kid, my brothers and I spent much of our time outside. We collected everything: rocks, lizards, horny toads, fishing worms, and more. My dad encouraged us, paying us a penny for every four snails we pulled out of his flower bed and smashed in the street. He enjoyed being outside with us, and one of my best memories was when he would take us toad hunting. After a good monsoon storm, he would take us out towards Tanque Verde Creek near Tanque Verde and Wrightstown Roads. In the puddles and light provided by his headlights, we scrambled around catching the toads that came out with the rain. We brought a few home to keep as pets. We were really careful not to get Colorado River toads because we had a curious dog, and they are poisonous to pets. My mom always put up with my brothers and me catching toads, but she preferred it when we went lizard hunting. She welcomed the lizards and encouraged us to put them in her rose garden to eat the aphids.

Betsy



PANTANO CREEK

Pantano Creek

I know that in the rivers during the off-season, there'd be a lot of growth in there, and when it rained, it would take all that growth out and scour the bed. I think the city, or the county, had been doing a lot of projects trying to clear out all that growth because then it tends to flood when they have all those trees and everything growing in the river.

There's been several projects that they've done, mostly in the Pantano. I haven't seen much in the Santa Cruz. They go in there with big bulldozers and just clear everything out.

[And that makes it flood less?]

Yeah, that makes the water flow slower so it goes higher, and then it would tend to flood with all that stuff in there.

Anonymous

My Mom's house near 5th and Craycroft (near Pantano Creek and Alamo Wash)

- Monsoon Moments

Summer monsoons in Tucson have always had a magical quality for me. Just when you can no longer handle the oppressive heat, the skies darken, the wind picks up, lightning flashes, and the thunder booms. My mom was dying of cancer in the summer of 1995. My dad had passed away two years earlier. Luckily, we were able to let her remain at home, where my siblings and I were able to keep her comfortable with visits from hospice nurses and the family helping

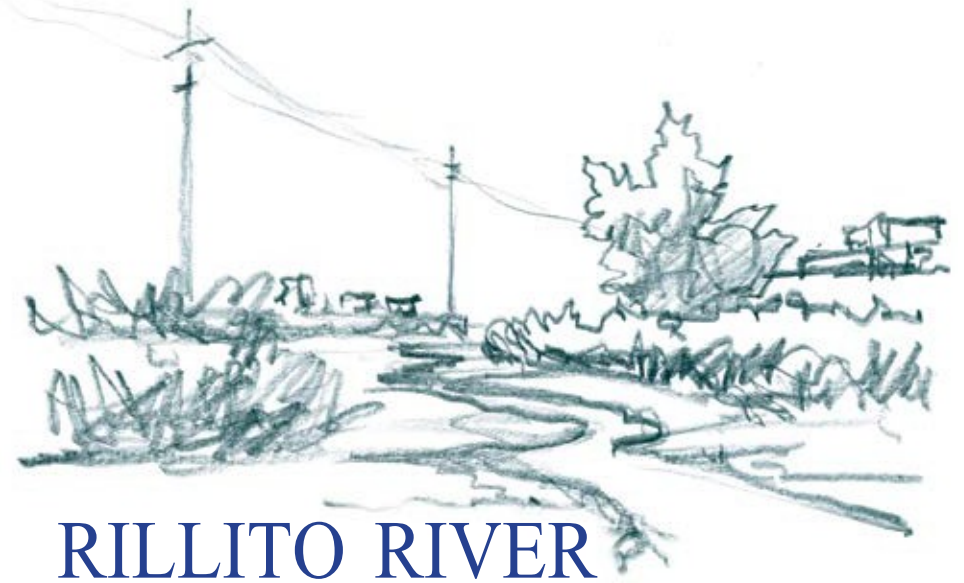
out. My sister and I would trade off times during the day where we would spend time at my mom's house or watching each other's kids. My mom and I were blessed with an afternoon monsoon storm on one of those days. She felt strong enough to go outside. We sat on her front porch and enjoyed the monsoon experience with the Catalina Mountains in the background. The temperature dropped, we captured rain in buckets for her plants and reveled in the beauty of life at that moment. It was her last summer monsoon storm, and always reminds me of the preciousness of living life in the moment.

Betsy
Summer 1995

Pantano Creek at Prince and Country Club

My stepdaughter was living in an apartment, I think in the vicinity of Prince and Country Club. During one of the floods, it took half of that apartment building off, for the flood, and everything she had was in the apartment. And they got people out just before the flood came, but the whole half of the building went into the river.

Anonymous
1986 or '87



RILLITO RIVER

Rillito River at Sabino Canyon Road - Winter flooding

I remember one December. It rained almost every day. I drove home across Sabino Canyon Road, where the creek, Rillito, ran underneath it, and the water was lapping on the bridge. That was around Christmas or New Year.

Oh, yeah, and it was running bank to bank and just big-time flooding all along both sides. But Sabino was roaring, Bear Canyon was roaring, and the two of those then come together to meet the Rillito. By the time it got to Sabino Canyon Road, it was lapping [the bridge]... I got out of my car, parked in the middle. It was like midnight, and I was going home probably around '65 or '66 somewhere in there. It was a record December rain year, I remember. But the water was just really coming down the mountains.

John
1960s

Rillito River at Craycroft

I remember losing a lot of trees. I owned the land on Craycroft and the Rillito River, and a big flood we had back in the '80s washed all those huge trees down into the river. We had big cottonwoods and some mesquites that were lost in the flood.

By then, we had the big bridge going across on Craycroft. And it was about to wash the bridge out. So John Bernal, the county engineer, had just dozens of trucks hauling dirt to try to protect the bridge. The bridge never failed, but on the north bank, it was really, it was really in jeopardy. Bernal kept hauling dirt and dumping it on both sides of the bridge. So the dirt would wash out, but it never got to the foundation of the bridge.

John
Summer, 1980s

Rillito River at First, Wetmore, and Country Club

The first big flood that I remember was in October of '83, it rained for like two or three days, and everything was flooded. I'm gonna say it started maybe on Thursday or Friday, but by Saturday, I was really tired of being home. So I went to the grocery store to get food to cook. I spent the day making food. I remember that I made salsa. I don't remember what else, but I went to my friend's house and brought her over for dinner because I'd been cooking all day because I was so bored. When I took her home, it was after dark, and she lived near where Tucson Mall is now. As I got to the First Avenue Bridge up by Wetmore, I could see all these red flashing lights, the police had it blocked off, and right after that, they closed the bridge. So that's how much water was rushing under.

Earlier in the day, when I'd gone to the grocery store, I had a Volkswagen bug at that point, and I had to go through a wash. The car ahead of me stalled out, so I pushed them out with my little bug because the engines in a bug are in the back and they're high, so they don't flood nearly as quickly as a standard American car in those years. When I got home, I realized—this was when in Arizona, we had license plates on the front and the back of our cars—I'd lost my front license plate in the floodwaters.

During that same flood, one of my friends lived in a townhouse on the north end of Country Club, where the Rillito does a big curve there. She lived in a second story townhouse with a baby grand piano in her living room, and the end of her complex was falling into the water. They lost apartments, and she was just beside herself; she didn't know how she could save her piano. I never forgot how amazed she was that the water stopped before it got to her unit, but it was a close thing. That was a huge, huge event in the desert.

Oh yeah, and those rains were statewide, I think; there were other freeway bridges up in Phoenix and up towards Prescott that washed out, and then south closer to Mexico. There was a lot of damage along the river. I know old ranch houses were threatened, and I think the Tohono O'odham lost some farmland they have right along the river. It was, it was a huge, huge event.

Berta
October 1983

Finger Rock Canyon in the Catalinas, the Rillito River along the Loop

It rained a lot in January, just rained a lot and a lot. I remember two things distinctly.

One was that my girlfriend and I went hiking. It was early one Saturday morning or something, we went up to Finger Rock Canyon on the south side of the Catalinas. It was raining kind of mildly when we showed up at the trail, and we just kind of wanted to see what was going on with the water. We started hiking and got to a point where you have to cross the creek bed, the water was flowing like crazy, and we couldn't hike anymore. We just had to stop, and the rain started coming down a little harder. Usually, if you look up the canyon on a dry day, which is almost every day, you see Mount Kimball—which is like 7,500 feet—and you can see it really clearly because it's, well, I don't know whether it's changed with this year's fire, but normally there's ponderosa pine, there might be a little bit Douglas fir up there, but anyway it's pretty green. This morning, there was all this mist rising, and the rain was coming down. It was kind of foggy, which is unusual for Tucson. It was really humid, and it felt, with all the mist rising up, I imagined that I was somewhere like in the headwaters of the Amazon River or something like that, some very exotic place.

During the next few weeks, we would go down to the Rillito and the water was pretty close to the sidewalk level. It was a little below it, but it was high, and there were these standing waves, waves on the river, which was pretty unusual. You don't get that very often.

The other thing that I remember is that we had a friend visit in late April or early May, and we drove up into the Catalinas. There were still patches of snow the first week of May, which, I mean,

you can't imagine that now. That was quite a wet winter, and I remember very distinctly seeing that.

I also remember listening to the public radio station, and it rained almost the whole month of January into February. I remember listening to the news reports, and they just kept talking about the flooding along the Santa Cruz, and the San Pedro flooded all the way to where they have their confluence with the Gila River. So there was a lot of flooding. I remember also that was the year they had to let water out of the Coolidge Dam because they were going to lose the dam otherwise. So much water.

Gregg
January 1994

Rillito River, at Craycroft and River Road

There was a lot of erosion along the Rillito on the east side of town. There were these big cottonwood trees that got uprooted when the river bank eroded. They got rafted downstream. I went down in the springtime with some colleagues from the tree ring lab where I was studying, and we went to the intersection of Craycroft and River at the river. We went down, we found these big cottonwood trees, and they were all toppled over. These trees were somewhere between four and six feet wide. I mean they were really big trees, and we climbed up on them. We were speculating how old these things must be. Cottonwoods grow right along the river, you know, they've got their feet in the water even, and their roots can go down pretty deep. So when Chris finally sampled the tree, we saw that the tree rings were three inches wide. Each year was like three inches, so the trees weren't that old, but they were huge. That brought home to me that these trees that grow by the water, wow they really grow fast. Now there aren't that many big cottonwood trees along the Rillito.

Gregg
Spring 1994

Arcadia Wash

B: And that same flood, and maybe before that [referring to the rattlesnake story], we went more east, there's a wash that goes through a lot of Tucson called the Arcadia Wash. That's a pretty big wash that floods. And of course, you couldn't drive or walk

across it, so we're just kind of standing there in the street looking at this water rushing. And here comes this young guy. He's so excited. He's got his kayak, and he's like, "I'm putting in." Do you remember if he had a helmet? I think he did.

G: I think he did, yeah.

B: I think he had a helmet. We talked to him, we wished him luck, and we saw him zoom off, and then later, I saw something-

G: Like a video or something.

B: -that he made it all the way up to Marana before he finally parted company with his kayak, he got bounced out. But he was just thrilled.

G: It had to be like 20 miles or so.

B: Yeah, this was river running at its finest, but it was really, really zooming along, and that was a good adventure.

Gregg and Berta
Summer 2006

Rillito River at Campbell

B: It had rained quite a bit, and we thought, wow, with this much rain, the rivers have got to be flooding. So we got in the car with another friend, and we went up to Campbell on the north side of the river up by where that Trader Joe's is. There were a lot of people amazed because the river, like Gregg said, had waves. And, at that point on the stabilized bank, there was a rattlesnake, and he was slithering his way up to get out of the floodwaters because I'm sure he'd been down in the riverbank, and it was amazing because we were probably three or four feet away. We were very close to the snake.

G: But it was a steep bank.

B: A steep bank. The snake had done this [mimics the motion] to kind of hold on and get away. I still have this very clear, visual memory, and it was definitely a rattlesnake.

G: I've never felt so safe near a rattlesnake because there was no

way this snake could get anywhere near us. It was just hanging on for its dear life. Just maybe like a foot above the water. That was pretty amazing.

Gregg and Berta
Summer 2006

Rillito River at First Ave

I remember the flood in 1983, which was shortly after we moved here. I was one of the people that stood on First Avenue and watched as this hotel fell into the river. It was this massive flood, and it was on national television, actually, this hotel crumbling into the river. It happened after it wasn't raining anymore. The flood was just huge, and there was a great big crowd watching. I'll never forget the people—people cheering when it went in, which was pretty weird at the time. But I think what we were cheering for was that the river was winning. If people had done really stupid things to the banks of the river and built a hotel where there shouldn't have been one, then the river won that particular battle. Though, obviously, it subsequently has been restrained again. Anyway, that was a pretty dramatic episode.

Kathy
1983

No location, historical story, maybe the Rillito River

Oh, I do remember, granddaddy Roy Drachman told me about when the water would run shore to shore, people could not get back and forth. So, they rigged up a cable. You could get in a cable car, a cable chair, and they would shoot a harpoon from one side to the other. Then they would lift the cable up above the water, and people would get across the running water on that cable. That was way back. And granddaddy Roy Drachman was born here in 1906.

You should be a good swimmer in case it drops you. Yeah, that was the people, it was very important for them to get across. That was the way they'd do it. So they had like a harpoon, he called it, and they could shoot this cable across the water. And then they had some kind of towers on each side to hang it on. You could get across the river that way.

John

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ARROYO CHICO

Near present day Arroyo Chico at Wilson Avenue

There were great big cottonwoods. The water would flow through the wash after a storm, and we'd get to play in that. The real source of swimming was done at Himmel Park because they had a swimming pool in that park. That was later on though. Earlier, I can't remember the name of the wash, but it's the big wash that runs through Tucson, we used to play in it when it rained. That was a source of rain time or summertime entertainment.

It would be my brother, who is three years older than I am, and probably neighborhood kids who we associated with. In rainy times, this would have been in the summer during the monsoon. We were off school, so we were shirtless and shoeless and had a pair of Levi's on, and that's what we wore to go swimming. There wasn't any hesitation until I got older and saw what we were really swimming in. It was just muddy, sandy water. In the monsoons, it would run pretty rapidly, and then it would drop off pretty fast until the next rain.

It's a wonder somebody didn't get hurt. But we would float down the wash, and then when it got to the underpass, we'd get out. We wouldn't go under the underpass.

[So then would you walk back up and then do it again?]

Uh-huh. We didn't have a whole lot to do then. Water was something always wanted to play in, and so we always loved the rains. If you lived near the wash, well, of course, that was entertainment.

It could run up to three or four feet deep, and then it would back up. When it went under Wilson, I remember, sometimes there was

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too much water, and it would back-up the arroyo and provide a nice mudhole to swim in. So it was fun.

In the summertime, when it starts to flood, you would always head for the wash. That was our source of entertainment. As soon as it rained, you would head for the wash. I guess our parents really didn't know that we were doing that.

It would also sand you off because it was just muddy water. There was sand in it, going down the wash, and you'd get sandpapered a little bit, but that's about all. It was, looking back on it, our only source of water entertainment there in the summertime. Later on, we went to Himmel Park for swimming in the pool. Just in the summertime, we used washes when they were running. They could become very violent. They could pick you up and take you very fast if you weren't paying attention. But as far as I know, nobody ever got hurt.

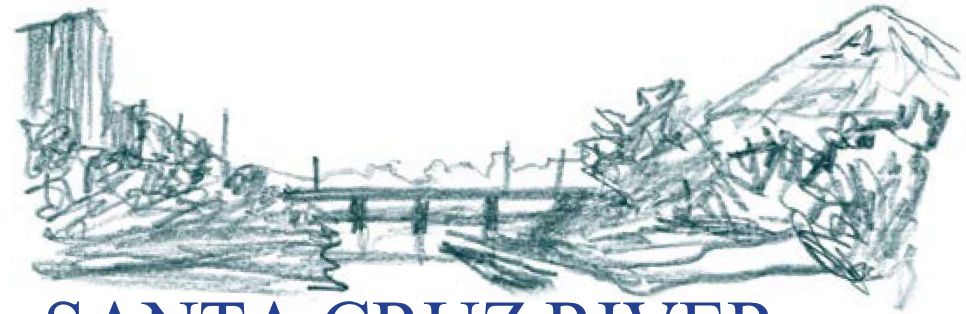
Anonymous
Between the 1930s and '40s

Arroyo Chico at North Wilson Avenue

You know, coming from the northeastern United States, you don't realize how dangerous it is to cross an arroyo in your car. And now there are all sorts of warnings. But every year there's somebody who doesn't listen. And, you know, it doesn't look like it's too deep maybe it's only a foot deep or two. But the water is also rafting rocks, trees, and all sorts of other stuff, and every year there's somebody that gets washed away in their car.

So I was telling you about how I lived in this house on North Wilson Avenue, and it has a wash. If you're driving down one of the cross streets, Copper, there's a dip, and it probably drops like five feet, six feet. Must be more than six feet because you can walk in the wash, and your head isn't as high as the wash. Anyway, somebody decided they were going to drive their car, they got sucked down with their car until it hit Glenn Street, the car got smashed to a stop, and they were at risk of drowning. One of my neighbors ran down the side of the bank and helped this person out. I wasn't there when this happened, but he told the story, and he said he remembered her saying, "Groceries! I can't leave my groceries!"

Gregg



SANTA CRUZ RIVER

San Rafael Valley, Santa Cruz River

I'm trying to think where this would have fed, but I would think it would have fed into the Santa Cruz further south. I was camping down in the San Rafael Valley and had to drive across a little tributary that was probably a two-foot drop from the dirt road into the riverbed. There was just a little bit of water. It was in summer, it hadn't been raining very hard, and I'm pretty sure it was flowing east to west, so it would have been something that would have flooded, gone into the Santa Cruz. I had a Toyota that had the spare tire underneath. It was like in a little rack underneath. So I'm camping with my dog, and I have to go across this. I got out, I looked at it and I thought, "I can make this bump." So, I drove across. I just pull up on the other bank and look down the river to see my spare tire floating down the river. I jumped out of the car, chased my tire, and got it back. It didn't make it as far as the Santa Cruz, but that was a summer camping trip that I still remember.

Berta

San Xavier del Bac Mission, Santa Cruz River

My wife was in charge of raising all the money for the conservation of San Xavier. When I married her in '95, I became a slave to her work at San Xavier. So mainly, I mean, I didn't pay much attention before that [to] the water flow at San Xavier because I usually would come in from the Mission Road side. In the last 25 years, several times I've seen it flowing at the crossing going in San Xavier from the highway. And then it would not be running at all further north.

John

In the last 25 years (1995 forward)

The Santa Cruz River south of Congress Street

It wasn't running very much, but they built a little lagoon just south of Congress, on the west side of the river, and then they had put little paddle boats where you could take your girlfriend out there and be romantic in the moonlight. The water was all fed by the Santa Cruz, but it was barely running. I don't remember ever seeing it running with a lot of water in it... I remember going down there with girlfriends, you would work your feet like a bicycle and your feet, your legs would power it, but a little paddle would take you all around.

John
Early 1950s

Santa Cruz River at Congress Street

In the monsoon times, the family would go down and watch the Santa Cruz when it was flooding. When there was a big storm, we would get in the car, as I remember, and the family would go down and watch the water in the Santa Cruz go on top of the Congress Street bridge across the road. It would be so high. I remember that a couple of times.

It was a big deal when we were kids, having a flood. The Santa Cruz flooded quite often in the summer when we had the storms. So that was really a pretty good source of entertainment. I can remember it crossing over the top of the Congress Street bridge. I guess it flooded on the A Mountain side of I-10. That was a lot of fun, especially in the summer when you didn't have a whole lot to do and go for a ride downtown to see the water in Santa Cruz.

Anonymous
Between the 1930s and '40s

Santa Cruz River at Congress Street

I'll never forget I was working downtown, and the Santa Cruz was running up to almost the top of the bridge there on Congress. You could go out on the bridge and see all the wood and everything floating down the river from the storm. I think that was the year that several of the bridges got washed out. There was no access really to the east side of town because the bridge on the Tanque Verde was washed out. At lunchtime, we were kind of wondering

what was going on, so we just walked over to Congress and walked off onto the bridge. The water was really rolling. I mean it was really high on the banks, and you could see all this stuff coming down, floating on top of the water. There were logs and branches and all sorts of stuff that were floating down there. We just watched it for a while to see what was going on.

Anonymous

Santa Cruz River on Riverview

The second house I lived in [in Tucson] was on the west bank of the Santa Cruz River on Riverview Drive, which is the very closest street to the river, and I lived in a little adobe house. It was built by my landlord in the '30s from an adobe pit in the backyard, and he would come and visit, I'm gonna say monthly. By that time, he was a very elderly man, but he had stories about when he lived there in the '30s when his children were little. The river was flowing then, and it was not marshy, but it was lush down there by the river. There were plants and those big reeds, the carrizo. None of that was there by the time I was there in 1978, but I heard his stories.

Berta

Santa Cruz River at Grant Road (formerly DeMoss-Petrie Road)

The only other story I have about the Santa Cruz is, I was going to work. I worked on the east side of the Santa Cruz. I went to work in the morning, and it looked like it was going to be raining; actually, there wasn't a storm that day. There was no bridge at the Santa Cruz River on Grant. And then it was called DeMoss-Petrie Road, but now it's Grant Road. And there's no bridge. So I drove home. And it looked like the water had gone way down. But I didn't realize that it washed out the dirt crossing there at the river, and I stuck my car into the bottom of that wash. And I couldn't get out. So I went and got a truck and tried to pull it out, and I pulled the bumper off my car, but eventually I got it out, and eventually, they put a Bailey bridge in. Then, of course, they put a new bridge in, but at that time there was no bridge there at Grant Road and the Santa Cruz.

Anonymous
Late 1940's or early 1950's



CAÑADA DEL ORO

Cañada del Oro near La Cholla and Overton Wash Crossings

I have been living near the Cañada del Oro Wash, where it crosses Overton and La Cholla Roads for 30 years. Road closures during the monsoons and winter rains were a frequent occurrence. If we wanted to go anywhere east or south, we couldn't get anywhere easily during the monsoon season because they kept closing both roads. My son was born in July 1990. I went into labor around dinnertime. Soon, there was a giant thunderstorm moving our way. My husband phoned the doctor on call, and he said, "Well, you can take some time before you come to the hospital since it's your first baby." My husband told him, "No, we're going to come into UMC because they're going to close the roads soon, and when they do that, it's going to be a long drive around them to get to the hospital." It was a good thing we didn't take the doctor's advice and left before the roads closed. I had a really fast labor, and I remember the doctor coming in and being soaking wet from the storm.

They finally built a bridge over the Cañada del Oro Wash at La Cholla Road. Before they built that bridge, there were always people trying to drive through there. For a long time, a red Fierro was stuck in the wash, and you could see part of it visible above the sand and dirt. They eventually put up a locking gate at Overton Road, where it crosses the wash to keep people from driving through it. Depending on road crew availability to clear debris at Overton Road, that gate can remain locked for a long time. This always made it hard for my kids who used that route to get to CDO High School.

Betsy
July 1990

Featured Storytellers

MARGOT

has been an advocate for our community and the desert since she got to Tucson in 1967. Margot has served on the Watershed Management Group Board of Directors as President and Vice President, and she embodies her love for watersheds and their importance in clean and adequate water supplies.

JOHN

is the founder of John Wesley Miller Companies, voted Tucson's Best Local Custom Builder in 2020. Building for over 50 years, he is renowned for energy conservation and green building practices in his builds. John has called Tucson home since 1948. John is immensely thankful for his business and his family.

BETSY

is a 5th generation Arizonan. Her great grandfather, Felipe J Villaescusa, owned a saddle shop and hardware store on Meyer Street, and his distinctive leatherwork is coveted by collectors today. She is a descendant of Leopoldo Carrillo, a merchant and landowner, and Carlos Velasco, a lawyer who owned El Fronterizo, a weekly Spanish newspaper that ran from 1878-1914, and one of the founders of the Alianza Hispano-Americana. Betsy is an outreach educator with AZ Project WET at the University of Arizona.

GREGG & BERTA

are married. GREGG is a climatologist and professor at the University of Arizona. Tucson has been home for him since 1992. BERTA got to Tucson in 1978 from Michigan, where, "if there's a bridge over a river, and you look down, there's water in it," which makes her very thankful for when there is water flowing in our creeks and rivers.

KATHY

is a climatologist and professor at the University of Arizona. She worked for the Arizona Department of Water Resources at the Tucson Active Management Area office for 23 years. She has called Tucson home since 1981. She has her own personal motivation for protecting and managing environmental assets: she is a birder.

Acknowledgements

The majority of the stories shared in this book were shared orally. Other than edits for clarity, they are direct transcriptions of the words spoken by the storyteller.

Our Memories of Flowing Rivers was organized by Community Engagement Intern Adrianna Nicolay under the direction of Lisa Shipek and the River Run Network Planning Team.

Graphic design and illustrations by Dennis Caldwell.

Statement on the audio files from this project

WMG recorded audio files when collecting oral histories from participants for Our Memories of Flowing Rivers project. The audio files were used to create a written transcript of the story shared. WMG will save the audio files solely for the purpose of keeping a record of the story in the storyteller's voice. We will not use the audio file for any other purpose, unless we are given permission from the storyteller to do so.

If you'd like to share your stories as part of WMG's Our Memories of Flowing Rivers project, please visit: **Watershedmg.org/Storytelling**.



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