

Pat\_Walsh\_Oct\_2012

This interview was conducted by Debo Powers.

Debo: My name is Debo Powers and today is October 30, 2012. I'm interviewing for the first time Pat Walsh. This interview is taking place at 11499 North Fork Road, Polebridge, Montana. This interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and it's part of the North Fork History project. So Pat tell us about your early background, where you were born, when you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Pat: Okay. I was born at Ft. Mead Maryland because World War II was still going on and my dad was in the army. I was born in an army hospital. Two months later the war was over and my dad was discharged and my parents drove from Maryland back to Columbia Falls, where he grew up in Columbia Falls and I don't remember any of that. But when we first got back here they didn't stay on the ranch where he had grown up because his brother was still living there, so they lived in several different places that they actually rented. My dad had managed to buy I believe two bulldozers and three dump trucks that all were surplus. I guess you can get those really pretty cheap in those days, and he went into the construction business.

Debo: So your family was from Columbia Falls.

Pat: Oh yeah.

Debo: How long had they been in Columbia Falls?

Pat: I can tell you this, my grandfather came here from... He was born in 1859 in Scranton, Pennsylvania; that's my dad's dad and he grew up working coalmines there. When he was I guess it was 1878 he came out to Deadwood, South Dakota and he worked freighting between the railhead and Nebraska, I guess it's Sidney, Nebraska, freighting, driving bull trains pulled by bulls up to the mines there, and the Indian wars were actually still kind of going on 1878.

Debo: Yes.

Pat: He did that for a while and then he went to Colorado. He worked in mines. We have early family pictures from Denver, from Leadville and Aspen, Colorado which were just mining communities then. He went over to Grand Junction and he actually met my grandmother and married her in Grand Junction and they went to Beaut. Well he was in Beaut in 1887. He had an [Assay] office. He knew how to survey which was something they did in the mines and he had an Assay office in Beaut. He apparently according to my dad tried to sell Marcus Daly, the owner of the Anaconda Company on the idea of the coalmines in the North Fork. He heard stories about coal banks being up here. Nobody had ever explored them; it's just trappers had talked about that, so he came up with two

other miners and I understand that he took the train as far as he could and then he walked the length of Flathead Lake and all the way up the North Fork. He stopped on the way at a cabin that was owned by a guy by the name of Steve Jarvis, and old homesteader and he stayed in that place and made good friends with him and he went up the North Fork looking for these coal banks. They were unsuccessful. They actually wound up in Canada I understand and almost starved, and they came back down and on a hill North of Columbia Falls they stopped because one of the miners got really sick and my grandfather killed some fool hens and made soup and I think they spent a couple of days there and nursed this guy back to health before they continued on back. It didn't work but my grandfather decided that he was going to stay. Oh by the way that hill to this day it's called Fool Hen Hill, so he's the one that named that hill.

Debo: Oh, that's why it has that name.

Pat: Yes.

Debo: Oh that's great. I never knew that.

Pat: That's how that name supposedly... Well that's family lore, so I don't know if you want to accept that or not.

Debo: No, that's good.

Pat: But at any rate he liked the Flathead Valley so much that he went back and brought his wife and two small children back to the Flathead and moved them in at Steve Jarvis' place.

Debo: Where was that exactly, the Jarvis place?

Pat: That's where my homestead is because he bought him out.

Debo: Okay.

Pat: That's where Walsh Road runs through the middle of his homestead which is a mile south of the Blue Moon right off of Highway 2.

Debo: Yeah.

Pat: But he bought him out. At any rate he moved his family up here and went back to Beaut and came back with six other miners, and this time he found a guide and they went up in October of 1887. His first trip up was in April of 1887. October of 1887 he and these other miners went back up, located these coal banks. Each of them filed a claim on the coal banks.

Debo: Where were those?

Pat: Well that's where Coal Creek. It's up on the hill. It's right above Lee Downs' place.

Debo: Okay.

Pat: And I think that's where a lot of the land came from that is in Home Ranch Bottoms. That was the Ladenberg place. Now at any rate...

Debo: That's why it's called Coal Creek probably.

Pat: Even today it goes across the coal seams and you can see the coal seams in the bottom if you go far enough up the creek. Lee Downs offered to take me up and show me the old original mines.

Debo: Did you ever go?

Pat: No, I never did.

Debo: So it was your grandfather that had the Jarvis place.

Pat: He bought it.

Debo: And that's on the park side?

Pat: No, that's in Columbia Falls.

Debo: Oh, in Columbia Falls. How did you end up with this property up here?

Pat: Well my grandfather was really familiar with the North Fork area and I think in 1901 they discovered oil, or they drilled for oil.

Debo: Up on Kintla Lake?

Pat: Up at Kintla Lake. I think Larry Wilson told you about that, and I suspect – I haven't found any documentation for this, I would still like to research this, but I suspect that my grandfather was somehow involved in the road going up there because he was doing that kind of work down in the valley. He was laying out irrigation ditches and surveying them, and I always wondered what his connection was because in 1906 when his son John turned 21 John came and homesteaded the South end of the Big Prairie. He was supposedly according to an old article I read in the Columbia Falls Newspaper at the time he was supposed to be the first homesteader on the North Fork.

Debo: The first one?

Pat: The first one, and I suspect that my grandfather if he was working on the oil wells up there may have had his eye on this, kind of directed John. John was

probably involved in helping him if he was working on there. And so he homesteaded that in 1906 and I guess they proved up on it and they took possession of it in 1909. In 1909 he married Harriet Smith and he had his cabin built because we have a picture from 1909 standing of him standing with Harriet in front of that cabin. That cabin sat on a bench overlooking the Big Prairie. He subsequently built some big log barns and everything and that was the Kintla Post Office. The little cabin was the Kintla because my Aunt Harriet was the post mistress there. In 1922 they built the big house that we still have up on the bench.

Debo: So when they first were there though it wasn't a national park?

Pat: No.

Debo: And then it became a national park?

Pat: In 1910, but by that time, by 1910 almost the whole east side was homesteaded. That was a stead...

Debo: The east side of the river?

Pat: Yeah, the east side of the river which is now in the park was just solid homesteads all the way up, and I can remember when I was a kid I guess I don't know, the first time I remember coming up there was probably about 1950, because we were in our 1950 Chrysler and I still remember that, and we only had that one year. I can remember driving up the Inside Road. We would go through Belton. It wasn't West Glacier then it was Belton, and we'd go through Belton and we'd drive that old Inside Road. Every time we would come to another car we had to back up for a quarter of a mile to a turnout and let them go by. It was just two tracks in the mud. I cannot believe he didn't get that car stuck.

Debo: But the Inside Road was actually better than the one on the outside?

Pat: Oh yeah, it was better than the Outside Road.

Debo: Even though it was just two tracks.

Pat: And the bad problem on the Outside Road, the worst problem was Fool Hen Hill. It doesn't go nice and straight over the river like it does now with a lot of fill and cuts. Then it went literally way up and came down the other side. That was a steep hill that everybody had to go over. It was a major barrier.

Debo: I didn't know that.

Pat: Oh yeah. I don't remember ever taking that outside road. Larry remembers it because they lived on the outside of the river.

- Debo: So when you came up in 1950 you were about how old?
- Pat: I would have been 5 years old.
- Debo: Oh 5 years old and you remember it.
- Pat: Hmm.
- Debo: So what kinds of things did you do when you were in the North Fork as a child?
- Pat: They put me to work.
- Debo: Oh they put you to work?
- Pat: I mean [00:12:22]. That nice big house didn't have a bathroom in it so they would send me down to there was a spring house down at the bottom. There are remnants that are still there and I carried the buckets back up the hill. Actually at 5 I probably didn't have to do that, but it happened every other time. That's not the worse part; I had to carry the chamber pots out to the outhouse. [Laughs]
- Debo: That was the worst part I'm sure.
- Pat: Well they built that big house. It's a 2,000-square foot log house and it was designed to be a lodge, a guest lodge. I don't know how many guests John ever had but he had a lot of ambition because he had a 4-hole outhouse.
- Debo: [Laughs] I've never seen a 4-holer.
- Pat: It's now my generator building. My aunt ended up selling that whole South end of the prairie, the whole homestead except that John in 1947 subdivided the area along the river that wasn't farmable, and there were a lot of cabins in there. They called that Haberville because he sold to all these railroaders that [lived in Haber], so it was called Haberville. There were a lot of cabins in there. I guess in '63 my aunt who was in her 90s was talked into selling that whole big prairie to the park for almost nothing. I'm sure my Uncle John who hated the park would have rolled over in his grave, but she was a naïve nice little old lady but she was very naïve and she sold it for almost nothing.
- Debo: Is that what happen with most of the homesteads that were over there?
- Pat: Yeah.
- Debo: They traded. Some of them traded for across the river didn't they?

- Pat: I don't know about any of that. I know a lot of them the people got too old to stay up there and so they would sell out to the park and then the park would go in and burn the house down and try to make it look like there had never been anything there. They would go down and live with their children or live in nursing homes or the veteran's home or something like that. It's really kind of sad.
- Debo: Now when you walk around on Big Prairie can you find some of those old homestead sites? Are they easy to find or are they really gone?
- Pat: There wouldn't be anything but dents in the ground where a lot of the old cabins had no foundations. Like John's original cabin did not have a foundation on it. It was there until the Red Bench Fire in 1988. I got distracted. My aunt sold the Big Prairie. She sold the piece of land the big house was sitting on and my dad got really upset and the park sold him back the house for just a minimal amount. He went up in the winter of '63 or '64 with a bunch of friends and they used a bulldozer and they skidded that house a mile across that prairie to where it is right now.
- Debo: Really?
- Pat: They drug it on the ice and the snow. He put skids underneath it. He had poured a new foundation where the house now is over near the river, poured a new foundation and they skidded that house across the prairie and then slid it over the top of the foundation and it just fit perfectly.
- Debo: Oh, what a job.
- Pat: It was, but he used the bulldozer to pull it across. The old foundation to the big house is still over there and I go over and look at it and from what I can see in that foundation I think he paid his help with whiskey because of the bottles I'd see in there.
- Debo: Oh that's funny.
- Pat: Yeah, but they moved it across. My dad would go up there and stay all the time. Now he did a lot of finish work. He was a very good finish carpenter. He did a lot of finish work in the downstairs. My project is to do the finish work upstairs. I mean it has indoor plumbing and has a generator and everything, so I still have a lot of hopes for that for my kids.
- Debo: Oh yeah.
- Pat: It's got a lot of bedrooms in it and I have a lot of hopes.
- Debo: When you were up here as a young person I know you worked a lot but you probably had some social life too. What was the social life in the North Fork?

- Pat: You know every time we came up, I was just up here with my parents, when my dad would have friends come and relatives and they would come up and they would stay with us, so I don't know that I did that much other than hike. I always liked to hike and I covered a lot of ground when I was a kid. I would hike over ground pass over to Watertown.
- Debo: So you were one of those young people that used to go to the square dances at the MacFarland ranch?
- Pat: I can remember being a little kid and my sister and I would be stuck in the loft during those. They would stick us in a loft. We'd go to square dances and I remember going to a square dance once up at the Kintla Ranch, Russ Olson's place and I can remember going up there and just being a little kid looking down watching all that.
- Debo: When you were up here when you were younger what were some of the people in the North Fork that made an impression on you or did you know too many of the other homesteaders?
- Pat: I did not know very many of them. The people on the other side that I knew I got to know pretty well was Roy Cooper, who was one of my dad's best friends and Lee Downs of course, and Tom Ladenberg. So I didn't have a lot of connection with those people because they didn't spend a lot of time up here then. The time I spent up here came much later.
- Debo: When did you start spending time up here?
- Pat: Well I moved back to the valley in '78 and I got a job on Big Mountain and I worked on Big Mountain for a year, and then I got on with the sheriff's office. In 1980 I was hired as a deputy sheriff and I stayed with them for... I worked at the sheriff's office for 32 years. The last 24 I was in the detectives division. I retired as a sergeant in detectives.
- Debo: I bet that was interesting.
- Pat: Well what's interesting is when my dad was sheriff from '47 to '63 he was the sheriff until the middle of my senior year in high school in '63 and he lived on the sheriff's property. In the middle of Main Street there's the old jail building. The jail building up until actually 1968 was also the sheriff's residence.
- Debo: He lived right there.
- Pat: We lived right in there. I was raised in the middle of Main Street in the jail building and my first trip in the detectives, my first assignment there was in 1986 and I shared an office with another detective. That office was the bedroom I grew up in. To this day it still has the same ceiling tiles that my mother put up here, so that was kind of a strange feeling.

- Debo: I bet it was.
- Pat: But the next year they finished the Justice Center and we moved in.
- Debo: So coming up here after the 70s when you came up here were you involved with the North Fork Improvement Association?
- Pat: I joined the North Fork Improvement Association way back when my dad was alive. This was when we first moved back in '78 and '79. I would go to meetings with him and I was a member. I didn't rejoin it again until just a few years ago when my wife and I started spending more time up here at the cabin.
- Debo: We're glad that you rejoined us.
- Pat: Well, I really remember in 1988 when the Red Bench Fire happened.
- Debo: Were you up here then?
- Pat: Oh yes. The sheriff's office provided security, still does provide security for the big fires and so I spent a lot of time up here and I can still remember the Red Bench Fire jumped. I was up here the night it started because we watched it. We were on a roadblock on the Red Meadow Road watching it come down the mountain.
- Debo: Scary.
- Pat: It jumped the river right by the MacFarlands and got all that dry grass. The whole area was full of [00:22:29], a lot of down full, so there was a huge amount of fuel on the ground, and in just a matter of minutes it went past our house. Fortunately the park had a crew up there and were soaking the residences as they could and they had put enough water on our cabin so the fire went right up to the cabin, burnt the grass right to the edge of the foundation and continued out across that prairie and you can still see today how far it went up on the other side and that was just a matter of minutes.
- Debo: It just blew through this whole area didn't it?
- Pat: Yeah. I was listening to the aircraft on the radio and I could hear them talking about it and it just blew across there. We didn't know for days whether the house was still there, so I ended up catching a ride on an army truck, I think they had a 5-ton truck they were hauling crews across the river up by Red Meadow, yeah.
- Debo: Because the bridge had burned.
- Pat: Yes, the bridge burned and so we went across and climbed the other bank. I got out and the fire crew continued on their way and I walked down the prairie and



there was the house still standing there with all this smoke and everything and it was in perfect shape. It didn't hurt anything.

Debo: That was a thrilling moment.

Pat: Oh boy, it was a relief.

Debo: Yeah.

Pat: Yeah.

Debo: So were you in Polebridge when it got close to Polebridge?

Pat: No. I was on a roadblock someplace else but I had a radio so I got to listen to everything that was going on. My dad was actually working on that fire because they hired him and his pick-up to move things around and so he was working on the fire at that time in '88.

Debo: So you probably did roadblocks during the...did you do it during the Wedge fire?

Pat: Oh yes. Well, between doing roadblocks but mostly just patrolling you know.

Debo: I remember they had the road closed off. You could only come up if you were a resident.

Pat: Well first we had the Moose fire at the South end in 2001 and that went to 70,000 acres, and then in 2003 we had Wedge Canyon in the North and the Robert fire in the South. The only reason it wasn't bigger was because 70,000 acres in between those two fires had already burned you know. I spent a lot of time...we worked almost around the clock. You couldn't get overtime for the days you worked. I worked 4 10s as a detective so every 3 days off I worked up here. And that fire I think it went for 60-something days. The Wedge Canyon fire was 60-something days long.

Debo: Yeah, it started in July I think.

Pat: I think it was July 17<sup>th</sup>, because I saw the first flume of smoke up there. I was driving in through the Polebridge Ranger Station, I saw that first flume of smoke and I knew because it was so dry that I knew it was going to happen.

Debo: It was a hot summer.

Pat: It was. The humidity when the Robert fire started was 5% if you can imagine. That's drier than the furniture in your house. When the humidity is 5% every little spark that hits starts another fire.

- Debo: I was on the Middle Fork on the Flathead River when that blew up.
- Pat: Oh you were?
- Debo: Boom! Like whoa!
- Pat: I can remember when the Robert fire we first got the call we were all down at the sheriff's office and we all started running code and it looked like an atom bomb was going off. And that at that point listening to the radio at first they said it's 1 acre. Well there was a huge flume of 1 acre then they said it's 4 acres, then they said it was 10 acres and by the time we got up to the Glacier rim it was across the road right in front of us about a quarter of a mile up. We were watching flames going across so we had to go down to the Glacier Ranch and start getting the people out because people were floating the river. They were coming in and that was a death trap because you have to drive back up toward that fire and those trees were burning and we were getting the people back up the hill and some of these people just wanted to sit around and we couldn't convince them how bad it was, because when they had first come in the fire wasn't there. We finally got them all out and there were still boats coming down, and there was one group of people in a raft that was coming down the river and the river was arching, or the fire was arching over the top of the river right in front of them. They were able to get stopped on a little island in the middle and a helicopter had to come in and get those people off there. They floated into that fire. I mean it was that scary, and at any rate...
- Debo: I just can't imagine coming down the river and seeing a big fire in front of you, you know.
- Pat: Oh yeah. We had paint burned off the side of a patrol car that a guy decided to drive up through the fire to get to the North end of it and it burnt the paint off the side of a patrol car.
- Debo: Do you have any more fire stories? Those are pretty exciting.
- Pat: No.
- Debo: Were you up here during some of the big floods?
- Pat: Well, my dad moved that house across the prairie, put it on a foundation in time for the '64 flood to come through and it washed through the house.
- Debo: It did wash the house?
- Pat: Oh, it was a couple of feet deep inside the house.
- Debo: Oh no, so they were thinking oh now this was a mistake.

- Pat: Oh yeah. We still have stains on our floor there from that flood and that was before my dad had done all the finish work inside, and so that water went through.
- Debo: How close are you to the river, your cabin?
- Pat: A couple of hundred feet.
- Debo: Yeah, not that far.
- Pat: Yeah. Maybe 200 feet. We have a road between us and the river however.
- Debo: So he was probably saying oh I shouldn't have moved that cabin this year, but I guess he had to.
- Pat: He had to because the park was going to burn it out. It's now on the national registry of historic places. The cabin was built in 1922 by Austin Wickert.
- Debo: Okay, I've heard of him.
- Pat: Well in 1964 I worked on a trail crew. It was after my freshman year in college and I worked on a trail crew on the Deniak Ranger Station. What we were doing was rebuilding bridges and we had to make them out of logs and cup out the abutments and our foreman who brought his own special handmade tools was Austin Wickert. He was 72 years old or something like that then, but he was actually my foreman.
- Debo: Oh, and you said 'you built our house.'
- Pat: Yes, because I knew Austin Wickert.
- Debo: That's great.
- Pat: We have kind of notes in a little logbook that my Aunt Harriet kept. She talked about Mr. Wickert came with the logs today, so that's when we know what year it was built.
- Debo: Do you get up here very often now?
- Pat: Oh I spend a lot of time in the summer up here.
- Debo: I've seen you on the river.
- Pat: Oh yes. I have kayaks. I love kayaks. Not that inflatable thing like you've got.
- Debo: Yes I know. You've got a real kayak.

- Pat: Oh yeah, and I just bought a really nice white water one this year which is better than the Costco ones I already have. Those are for my guests now.
- Debo: Yeah, I just have the inflatable. Do you have any good stories about encounters with animals?
- Pat: In 1968 I was home on leave and I can remember I spent about a week back at Kelly's Camp at the head of Lake McDonald, and I would walk out to the hotel. I would just walk all the way out to the hotel because I like to walk and it was a couple of miles around the road and I'd walk out to the hotel because they had girls there.
- Debo: Oh of course, yeah.
- Pat: I would walk out and then I would walk back and I remember one time I was walking out and I ran into a grizzly on the road. I just remember seeing this grizzly like about 30 feet from me ahead on the corner and I saw him pick one paw up and I did what you're not supposed to do; I turned around and I ran all the way into the ranger station. The ranger was there with his family. I went running into the ranger station and told him I had seen this bear. He grabbed his rifle and he went out and he couldn't find any evidence of the bear but he was concerned because his horses were just right up there too. Well this was about a week before the night of the grizzlies. I don't know if it was the same one or not but there had been a grizzly hanging around Kelly's Camp and they had had problems with that grizzly. That grizzly, my guess is it may have been since it was hanging around people it may have been the one up at Trout Lake that killed Michelle Koons. I actually remember seeing her at the hotel. She worked in the gift shop there, I remember that.
- Debo: That was a pretty horrible time I guess. Were you around during that up here?
- Pat: Yeah. And I can remember one other time that I came into my driveway at our North Fork house and there was a grizzly with its paws around a propane tank. All we could think is the propane has [morgaptines] in it that give it that rotten egg smell.
- Debo: Oh.
- Pat: And they like their food decomposed. I guess you could say it's pretty digested or something. If they kill something they'll go bury it and cover it up until it gets nice and rotten and juicy for them. And that was out thought. This grizzly literally had its arms around the propane tank.
- Debo: I never heard of that.
- Pat: You know. It didn't look like another bear, so I think it liked the smell.

Debo: What time of year was that, do you remember?

Pat: That was in the spring when we first started coming back up.

Debo: That's great. [Laughs] Well you've been up here for a long time; what kind of changes have you seen happen in the North Fork in the time you've been here?

Pat: Well during the 1970s the type of people living here changed and we had a lot of people that came up here during the Viet Nam War to kind of get away from the draft I think. [Laughs] And I think there were a lot of those people and that kind of changed the complexion because it wasn't... You know they almost started to outnumber the locals. They came in and they wanted to slam the door behind them and not have anybody else get in and I don't think the locals didn't seem to mind because a lot of the old timers when they had lived up here before it was not sparsely populated. There were a lot of people who did a lot of active social things and it had just kind of dwindled down. When the old-timers died off their kids all had to go someplace else. When I graduated from high school in 1963 there was nothing in the valley to keep anybody else. I will go, I will still see people that I grew up with, the ones that stayed and never left stocking shelves in stores and working for low wage jobs because that's what there was here. You worked in the mills or at the aluminum plant. That was one thing that was good wage jobs, but those jobs are all gone now anyway. And I think a lot of the people working in the mills ended up with nothing to show for it as their companies went out of business.

Debo: Right.

Pat: You had to leave.

Debo: You had to leave to go find work somewhere.

Pat: Yeah, to have any kind of a future. You can have a future here now, which is good. Now if I could get my kids to move back.

Debo: That would be your dream huh?

Pat: I have a daughter that's in college in New Mexico forever I think.

Debo: She's in college forever?

Pat: I think forever. She's a chemistry major and she graduates this next year and her fiancé is in the graduate program down there, but she's a chemistry major and he's an electrical engineering major and they can make a lot more money someplace else. My son is career navy.

Debo: He's all over the place.

- Pat: He's in the Gulf right now in an aircraft carrier and when he retires I would hope he would move back if his wife wants to move back you know with the kids.
- Debo: That would be great wouldn't it?
- Pat: Oh it would. We have to leave something behind.
- Debo: That's right. Great. Well can you think of anything else you want to add or any other stories or questions I missed?
- Pat: No. Right now I can't. Oh I can think of one thing, is when my dad first came back he had his construction business and you have to understand that after World War II when all the guys came back, they all came back at once and they literally took over all the political offices and most of the businesses and started new businesses. So that one generation literally was running everything. Well there was another sheriff at the time and there was an old-timer. I keep thinking that it might have been Ralph Thayer. My dad told me about it and I couldn't remember if it was Ralph Thayer or Ben Rover who was delivering the mail up to North Fork. This would have been 1946, in '45 or '46 there was a blizzard and he got trapped. He had his car up here; he got trapped in the North Fork. So he climbed the telephone pole and he apparently had a portable phone, tapped into it and called in for help.
- Debo: [Laughs]
- Pat: Okay. And then he went down and he built himself a [wikia] and he was an old-timer so he knew how to survive. But he called down for help and the sheriff wouldn't send anybody up for help.
- Debo: Because they were afraid they would get lost too.
- Pat: My dad knew all those old-timers in the North Fork and he decided he was going to do something about with his friends. They took one of his bulldozers and plowed the road open and got him out, literally they had the bulldozer and he plowed that road open with the bulldozer pulling their car behind them and they got all the way up here and they rescued him and got him out. He was talked into...all the other people involved and he was talked into running against that sheriff in the next election, so he ran for sheriff and was elected. He had already had some law enforcement because during the depression in 1939 he got a job with the Long Beach Police Department. He was actually a motorcycle officer in 1939 with Long Beach PD, and he worked there for a while before he decided he had to come back to Montana. Apparently they could make it up here. He was working as a wrangler for the park service and my mother was a Minneapolis school teacher who was working for I guess

Barrack 7, Barack 6 for the [00:41:11] that had these tent camps at [00:41:12] 50 Mountain Camp.

Debo: Oh.

Pat: She worked at 50 Mountain and my dad was a wrangler and he met her and I guess they started a romance.

Debo: That's great.

Pat: One night he hiked in on foot from Packer's Roost all the way to 50 Mountain Camp with a ring, gave her a ring, hiked all the way back out. And in 1940 he was in the National Guard. Well his unit was called up in 1940, well over a year before Pearl Harbor, so he was already in the army at Ft. Lewis when Pearl Harbor happened, so my parents got married and then he shipped out very early. They were one of the first units that were sent down to Australia.

Debo: So they had a lot of separation early in their relationship didn't they?

Pat: There were a lot of people that did. When he came back out he was shipped back to Maryland early and that's how I got born at the end of the war, because he had been in so long already. He got to come back to the United States.

Debo: You were an early baby-boomer.

Pat: Yeah. And here is something interesting. Because of what he went through rescuing the guy that was trapped up here, after he was first elected sheriff the first thing he did is got himself sent to the FBI National Academy. At that time law enforcement officers didn't have any training. They would give them a gun and a badge and say go do police stuff.

Debo: No training.

Pat: They wouldn't even give them a gun; you had to have your own and no training, none, and so he went to the FBI National Academy, which was the only academy anywhere. And he came back and when he was sheriff early on there were a couple of rescues and there was one rescue where he tried to save a drowning kid and almost drowned himself. And then there was a second one and they got together, a bunch of people that were involved these were both unsuccessful rescues where young boys drowned. They started the Flathead Rescue Association and then as part of it he started the sheriff's Posse. And the purpose of the sheriff's posse, you had to have a horse to belong, the purpose of the sheriff's posse was to provide transportation back into the back country for the rescue people and they would supply them back and forth. You had to have a horse and preferably a pack [stream] and that's how everybody... There weren't all the roads there are now and they would get back there with horses whenever somebody would get stuck in the back country.

So he started that rescue association. He lost his election in 1963. Ross Wilson came in as sheriff. One of his best friends ran against him.

Debo: Oh really?

Pat: Yes. Ross was one of his best friends.

Debo: Were they still friends after that?

Pat: Uh no. At any rate, Ross ran against him and beat him, so he dropped out of all the rescue work, and then there was a search on the North Fork for a drowning, and this was after Ross was in for 8 years and then he lost an election and there was a new sheriff in and there was somebody that was drowned. A lot of the old-timers and the Flathead Rescue Association were butting heads with the new people that came in when Ross came in and so these guys just kind of dropped out. Well there was a drowning; a young man drowned Pursinett drowned in the North Fork. He was in a log jam and at any rate a lot of the old-timers including other members of the Pursinett family got upset that the search was discontinued and so a lot of the old-timers got involved and they went in and they recovered him out of the log jam. They got together and they started the North Valley Rescue Association, so my dad was kind of the founder because he was NV1. He was kind of the founder of both organizations. And what's really kind of interesting is that Ross Wilson's son Larry is now the president of North Valley Rescue.

Debo: That's interesting.

Pat: It is kind of interesting.

Debo: Yeah.

Pat: I belong to North Valley too so I get involved in searches.

Debo: That's probably pretty exciting and hard work too. Were you involved with the rescue over here on the east side?

Pat: Oh yes. I had to wade the river at Nyack which is like mid-thigh and hike probably 5 miles up the trail, we were going up to lower Nyack cabin. About 3:30 in the afternoon they called and they said they have a find and they're okay and they're flying him out. And I said I'm sleeping in my own bed tonight. And so we headed back down and waded that river just before the sun went down and I started looking back and I said I couldn't have found that crossing in the dark.

Debo: Wow. Well that was a successful rescue.



- Pat: Yeah, that was, and I was involved in the Jackson Grasser search but they stuck me with the law enforcement people because that's my background, so we ended up going inventorying the car and talking to the parents and doing interviews and things like that. I would rather be a ground pounder.
- Debo: Yeah.
- Pat: I would much rather be out there, so I'm hoping that's what I can do more often.
- Debo: Well good, I hope you do too because you know this country really well. To end what is it that you love about the North Fork?
- Pat: Oh I love the scenery.
- Debo: It is great isn't it?
- Pat: Yes. I've lived in a lot of other places. I lived in Los Angeles for several years down in San Diego in the service, and then I lived in Kansas City. I worked for a company called Holiday Inn. Or Topeka [00:48:14] 75 Holiday Inns, I worked for them for several years and they transferred me all over the country. I lived in Kansas City and Columbia, Missouri.
- Debo: Nothing like here is it?
- Pat: No, it's just flat farmland and I'm a skier so I love, you know. I love living up here and I can ski and everything and I really like that.
- Debo: Yeah, and go down the river, kayak the river. I know you like that.
- Pat: I do. I like the kayak in the summer and I like the hike in the summer and I ski in the winter. I get a season pass every year. Actually I'm a volunteer ski instructor up there.
- Debo: You are?
- Pat: Yeah, with the Kalispell Ski Club, so we teach kids in the winter time.
- Debo: That's great.
- Pat: It's a very good way to get kids into skiing.
- Debo: Yeah. And they catch on so fast being young, right?
- Pat: Some of them do. [Laughs]
- Debo: You would think they're young, they could catch on really fast.

Pat: Yeah, and all my kids turned out to be really good skiers because we had them in a ski program from very early on, so it's like riding a bicycle for them; it's instinctive.

Debo: That's right. Okay. So unless you can think of anything else. All right, well on behalf of the North Fork History Project I would like to thank you for this interview.

Pat: You're welcome.

00:49:40

[End of recording]