Patrick Walsh Oral History Interview

October 30, 2012

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 is 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: I was born at Ft. Meade, 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. My parents drove from Maryland back to Columbia Falls, where he grew up. 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 rented. My dad had managed to buy, I believe, two bulldozers and three dump trucks that were war surplus. I guess you could get those really pretty cheap in those days, and he went into the construction business.

Debo: So your family was from Columbia Falls.

Pat: Yes.

Debo: How long had they been in Columbia Falls?

Pat: I can tell you this, my grandfather [Patrick Walsh] who first came here was born in 1859 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. That's my dad's dad. He grew up working in the coal mines there. I guess it was 1878 when he came out to Deadwood, South Dakota. He worked freighting between the railhead in Sidney, Nebraska, 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 there. We have early family pictures from Denver, from Leadville and Aspen, Colorado which were just mining communities then. He went over to Grand Junction, where he met my grandmother and married her in Grand Junction, and they went to Butte. Well, he was in Butte 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 Butte.

He apparently, according to my dad, tried to sell Marcus Daly, the owner of the Anaconda Company, on the idea of the coal mines in the North Fork. He'd 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. I understand that he took the train as far as he could and then 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, an 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. They

came back down, and on a hill north of Columbia Falls they stopped because one of the miners got really sick. My grandfather killed some fool hens [grouse] 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 [the coal idea] didn't work, but my grandfather decided that he was going to stay. Oh, by the way, that hill to this day is called Fool Hen Hill, so he's the one that named that hill.

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

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

Debo: No, that's good.

Pat: 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. 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: Yes.

Pat: He moved his family up here and went back to Butte and came back with six other miners. This time he found a guide, and they went up in October of 1887. His first trip up was in April of 1887, then in October of 1887 he and these other miners went back up and located the coal banks. Each of them filed a claim on the coal banks.

Debo: Where were those?

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

Debo: Okay.

Pat: I think that's where a lot of the land came from that is now Home Ranch Bottoms. That was the Ladenburg place.

Debo: That's why it's called Coal Creek, no doubt.

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 Downes 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. That's where our family home was in Columbia Falls.

Debo: How did you end up with the property here on the North Fork?

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. 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. According to an old article I read in the Columbia Falls newspaper of the time [*The Columbian*], 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 land and kind of directed John. John was probably involved in helping him, if he was working up there. 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 had his cabin built, because we have a picture from 1909 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. The little cabin was the Kintla post office, because my Aunt Harriet was the postmistress there. In 1922, they built the big house that we still have, up on the bench.

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

Pat: No.

Debo: And then it became a national park?

Pat: Yes, in 1910, but by that time almost the whole east side was homesteaded.

Debo: The east side of the river?

Pat: Yes, the east side of the river which is now in the Park was just solid homesteads all the way up. I can remember coming up for the first time when I was a kid. I guess it was probably about 1950, because we were in our 1950 Chrysler, and I still remember that, and we only had it one year. I can remember driving up the Inside Road. We would go through Belton. It wasn't West Glacier then; it was Belton. 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 yes, 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 didn'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 yes. I don't remember ever taking that outside road. Larry remembers it, because they lived on the other side of the river.

Debo: So, when you came up in 1950 you were about how old?

Pat: I would have been five years old.

Debo: What kinds of things did you do when you were in the North Fork as a child?

Pat: They put me to work. That nice big house didn't have a bathroom in it, so they would send me down to the spring house down at the bottom. There are remnants that are still there, and I carried the buckets back up the hill. Actually, at five I probably didn't have to do that, but it happened every other time. That's not the worst part; I had to carry the chamber pots 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 four-hole outhouse.

Debo: [Laughs] I've never seen a four-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 Havreville, because he sold to all these railroaders that lived in Havre. I guess in 1963 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, and she sold it for almost nothing.

Debo: Is that what happened with most of the homesteads that were over there?

Pat: Yes.

Debo: Some of them traded for land across the river, didn't they?

Pat: I don't know about any of that. I know with 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 at 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, because a lot of the old cabins had no foundations. Like John's original cabin did not have a foundation under 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 1963 or 1964 with a bunch of friends. They used a bulldozer and 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 is now over near the river, and they skidded that house across the prairie and then slid it over the top of the foundation and it just fit perfectly.

Debo: 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. From what I can see in that foundation, I think he paid his help with whiskey, because of the bottles I see in there.

Debo: That's funny.

Pat: Yeah, but they moved it across. My dad would go up there and stay all the time. He did a lot of finish work in the downstairs. He was a very good finish carpenter. My project is to do the finish work upstairs. It has indoor plumbing and has a generator and lots of bedrooms, so I still have a lot of hopes for that for my kids.

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. They would come up and stay with us, so I don't know that I did 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 Brown Pass to Waterton.

Debo: Were you one of the young people who used to go to the square dances at the McFarland ranch?

Pat: I can remember being a little kid, and my sister and I would be stuck in the loft during those. We'd go to square dances. I remember once going to a square dance once up at

Kintla Ranch, Ross Wilson's. I can remember just being a little kid looking down and watching all that.

Debo: When you were up here when you were younger who were some of the people in the North Fork that made an impression on you, or did you know many of the homesteaders?

Pat: I did not know very many of them. The people on the other side that I got to know pretty well were Roy Cooper, who was one of my dad's best friends, and Lee Downes, of course, and Tom Ladenburg. I didn't have a lot of connection with those people because I 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: I moved back to the valley in 1978, and I got a job on Big Mountain. 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 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 my dad was Sheriff from 1947 to 1963. He was the sheriff until the middle of my senior year in high school in 1963, and we lived on the Sheriff's property. In the middle of Main Street there's the old jail building. The jail building, up until 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 during my first assignment with the detectives in 1986 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 there, 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: After the 1970s 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 Dad was alive. That was when we first moved back in 1978 and 1979. 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 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, so I spent a lot of time up here. I can still remember how the Red Bench Fire jumped. I was up here the night it started, because we watched it. We were on a roadblock on Red Meadow Road watching it come down the mountain.

Debo: Scary.

Pat: It jumped the river right by the McFarlands and got all that dry grass. The whole area was full with a lot of downfall, so there was a huge amount of fuel on the ground. In just a matter of minutes it went past our house. Fortunately, the Park had a crew up there and they were soaking the residences they could, and they had put enough water on our cabin so the fire went right up to the cabin, burned the grass right to the edge of the foundation and continued out across that prairie. You can still see today how far it went up on the other side, and that was just in a matter of minutes.

Debo: It just blew through this whole area, didn't it?

Pat: Yes. 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. 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.

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. I walked down the prairie and there was the house still standing there, with all this smoke and everything. It was in perfect shape. It didn't hurt anything.

Debo: That was a thrilling moment.

Pat: Oh boy, it was a relief.

Debo: 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.

Debo: Did you work roadblocks during the Wedge Canyon Fire?

Pat: Yes, some roadblocks, but mostly just patrolling.

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

Pat: First we had the Moose Fire at the south end in 2001, and that went to 70,000 acres. Then in 2003 we had the Wedge Canyon Fire 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. I spent a lot of time—we worked almost around the clock. You couldn't

get overtime for the days you worked. I worked four 10s as a detective, so every three days off I worked up here. And the Wedge Canyon Fire went for 60-some days.

Debo: Yes, it started in July.

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

Debo: It was a hot summer.

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

Debo: I was on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River when that blew up.

Pat: Oh, you were?

Debo: Boom! Like whoa!

Pat: I can remember when we first got the call on the Robert Fire we were all down at the Sheriff's office. We all started running code, and it looked like an atom bomb was going off. At first they said, "It's one acre." It was a huge plume at one acre. Then they said, "It's four acres." Then they said it was 10 acres, and by the time we got up to 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 Glacier Rim and start getting the people out, because people were floating the river. They were coming in, and it was a death trap, because you had to drive back up toward that fire and those trees were burning. We were getting the people back up the hill, and some of those people just wanted to sit around. 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. There was one group of people in a raft that was coming down the river and 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 out. They would have floated into that fire. I mean, it was that scary.

Debo: I can't imagine coming down the river and seeing a big fire in front of you.

Pat: We had paint burned off the side of a patrol car when a guy decided to drive up through the fire to get to the north end of it.

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 and put it on a foundation in time for the 1964 flood to come through, and it washed through the house. It was a couple of feet deep inside the house.

Debo: So, they were thinking this was a mistake.

Pat: Yes. We still have stains on our floor from that flood. That was before my dad had done all the finish work inside.

Debo: How close are you to the river?

Pat: A couple of hundred feet.

Debo: Not that far.

Pat: Maybe 200 feet. We have a road between us and the river, however.

Debo: He was probably saying, "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 Register of Historic Places. The cabin was built in 1922 by Austin Weikert.

Debo: I've heard of him.

Pat: 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 Nyack Ranger Station. What we were doing was rebuilding bridges, and we had to make them out of logs and cup out the abutments. Our foreman, who brought his own special handmade tools, was Austin Weikert. He was 72 years old or something like that then, but he was actually my foreman.

Debo: And you said, "You built our house."

Pat: Yes, because I knew Austin Weikert.

Debo: That's great.

Pat: We have notes in a little logbook that my Aunt Harriet kept. She talked about "Mr. Weikert came with the logs today," so that's how we know what year it was built.

Debo: Do you get up here very often now?

Pat: I spend a lot of time in the summer up here.

Debo: I've seen you on the river.

Pat: Yes, we have kayaks. I love kayaks. Not that inflatable thing like you've got.

Debo: Yes I know. You've got a real kayak.

Pat: I just bought a really nice white water kayak this year, which is better than the Costco ones I already have. Those are for my guests now.

Debo: Yes, I just have the inflatable. Do you have any good stories about encounters with animals?

Pat: In 1968, I was home on leave. 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 because I like to walk and it was a couple of miles around the road. I'd walk up to the hotel because they had girls there.

Debo: Of course.

Pat: I would walk out, and then I would walk back. I remember one time I was walking out, and I ran into a grizzly on the road. I remember seeing this grizzly about 30 feet from me ahead on the corner. I saw him pick one paw up, and I did what you're not supposed to do. I turned around and 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 a bear. He grabbed his rifle and went out. He couldn't find any evidence of the bear, but he was concerned because his horses were right up there, too. 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. My guess is, since it was hanging around people, it may have been the one up at Trout Lake that killed Michelle Koons. I 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.

Pat: 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 mercaptans in it that give it that rotten egg smell. And they like their food decomposed. I guess you could say it's pre-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. That was our thought. This grizzly literally had its arms around the propane tank.

Debo: I never heard of that.

Pat: 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: During the 1970s the type of people living here changed. We had a lot of people who came up here during the Vietnam War to kind of get away from the draft, I think. [Laughs] There were a lot of people, and I think that kind of changed the complexion.

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. The locals didn't seem to mind, because a lot of the old-timers 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 here. I will still see people that I grew up with, the ones who stayed and never left, stocking shelves in stores and working for low wage jobs, because that's what was here. You worked in the mills or at the aluminum plant. Those were good wage jobs, but those jobs are all gone now. 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 to find work elsewhere, 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 next year. Her fiancé is in the graduate program 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 [Persian] Gulf right now on an aircraft carrier. When he retires I would hope he would move back, if his wife wants to move back 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. 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. I can think of one thing. 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. 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. There was another Sheriff at the time. There was an old-timer—I keep thinking it might have been Ralph Day. My dad told me about it, and I couldn't remember if it was Ralph Day or Ben Rover who was delivering the mail up the North Fork. This would have been 1946. In 1945 or 1946 there was a blizzard and he got trapped. He had his car up here; he got trapped in the North Fork. So he climbed a telephone pole, and apparently he had a portable phone. He tapped into it and called in

for help. Then he built himself a wikiup. 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 to help him.

Debo: Because they were afraid they would get stuck, too.

Pat: My dad knew all those old-timers in the North Fork, and he decided he was going to do something about it with his friends. They took one of his bulldozers and plowed the road open and got him out. Literally, they had the bulldozer and plowed that road open with the bulldozer pulling their car behind them. They got all the way up here and rescued him and got him out. All the other people involved talked Dad into running against that Sheriff in the next election, so he ran for Sheriff and was elected. He had already had some law enforcement experience, because during the Depression 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 the Bar X Six for the Noffsingers who had tent camps at 50 Mountain Camp [in the Park]. She worked at 50 Mountain, and my dad was a wrangler. He met her, and I guess they started a romance.

Debo: That's great.

Pat: One night he hiked on foot from Packer's Roost all the way to 50 Mountain Camp with a ring, gave her the ring, and hiked all the way back out. In 1940, he was in the National Guard. His unit was called up in 1940, well over a year before Pearl Harbor, so he was already in the Army at Ft. Lewis [near Tacoma, Washington] when Pearl Harbor happened. 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 who did. When he came back, he was shipped back to Maryland early, and that's how I got born before 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: Yes. 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 was get 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. So, he went to the FBI National Academy, which was the only academy anywhere. He came back, and when he was Sheriff early-on there were a couple of rescues. There was one rescue where he tried to save a drowning kid and almost drowned himself. Then there

was a second one, and a bunch of people that were involved in these got together. They 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. You had to have a horse to belong. The purpose of the Sheriff's Posse was to provide transportation 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 string. There weren't all the roads there are now, and they would get back there with horses whenever somebody got stuck in the back country. So, he started that rescue association. He lost the 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. Then there was a search on the North Fork for a drowning. This was after Ross had been in for eight years. 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 in 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, then a young man named Personett drowned in the North Fork [in 1970]. He was in a log jam. At any rate, a lot of the old-timers, including members of the Personett family, got upset that the search was discontinued. A lot of the old-timers got involved, and they went in and recovered him out of the log jam. They got together and started the North Valley Rescue Association. My dad was kind of the founder, because he was NV-1. 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 Search and Rescue [and is now NV-1].

Debo: That's interesting.

Pat: I belong to North Valley Search and Rescue, 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 five miles up the trail. We were going up to Lower Nyack cabin. About 3:30 in the afternoon they called and said they had a find, and that he was okay and they were flying him out. And I said, " I'm sleeping in my own bed tonight." So, we headed back down and waded that river just before the sun went down. I started looking back and said, "I couldn't have found that crossing in the dark."

Debo: Wow. Well, that was a successful rescue.

Pat: Yes, that was. And I was involved in the Jackson Glacier search, but they stuck me with the law enforcement people, because that's my background, so we ended up inventorying

the car and talking to the parents and doing interviews and things like that. I would rather be a ground pounder.

Debo: Yes.

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. 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 Topeka Inn Management that owns 75 Holiday Inns. I worked for them several years and they transferred me all over the country. I lived in Columbia, Missouri.

Debo: Nothing like here, is it?

Pat: No, it's just flat farmland, and I'm a skier, so I love living up here. I can ski and everything, and I really like that.

Debo: Yes, and kayak the river. I know you like that.

Pat: I do. I like to kayak in the summer, and I like to 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 with the Kalispell Ski Club. We teach kids in the winter time.

Debo: That's great.

Pat: It's a very good way to get kids into skiing.

Debo: They catch on so fast being young, right?

Pat: Some of them do. [Laughs] All my kids turned out to be really good skiers, because we had them in a ski program from very early on. It's like riding a bicycle for them; it's instinctive.

Debo: That's right. Well, on behalf of the North Fork History Project I would like to thank you for this interview.

Pat: You're welcome.

[End of recording]