CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

and

TUCKER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

NARRATOR: PAT ANTRIM

INTERVIEWER: Volker Janssen

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LOCATION: Silverado Canyon, CA

PROJECT: 2007 SANTIAGO FIRE

VJ: It is June 7th, 2008, and we are at Pat Antrim's house in Silverado Canyon to talk with him about the Santiago wildfire of October 2007 for the Tucker Wildlife Sanctuary. My name is Volker Janssen. I'm assistant professor at Cal State Fullerton. Pat, maybe we'll start talking first a little about your life prior to the canyon and maybe prior to your firefighting experiences. Where and when were you born?

PA: I was born in Newport Beach, but my life pretty much has been Silverado. My parents moved here when I was a year old, so I've been here for forty-seven of my forty-eight years.

VJ: So, you've lived here pretty much all your life.

PA: All but one year, yeah.

VJ: Wow. And what kind of childhood was that?

PA: It was great. It was kind of the Andy Mayberry[1] type of childhood. In the sixties and seventies it was an even more small town than it is now, more remote because development hadn't creeped out this far yet. It was the type of place that they stocked the creek up behind the forest service gate, and every Thursday we all went up there with our fishing poles after school. The type of place where you couldn't get—well, you could get into trouble, but everybody knew who you were, where you should be, where you shouldn't be, and if you're in the wrong place, typically somebody would pick you up, take you home, and make sure your parents knew where you were. It really was a neat—a different experience than today's kids. Anywhere you want to go hike, there's plenty of hiking, there's creeks to play in, there's fishing to do, there's

[1] Reference to "The Andy Griffith Show," an American sitcom televised by CBS from 10/3/1960 to 4/1/1968. Widower Sheriff Andy and his son Opie live with Andy's Aunt Bee in Mayberry NC, a town with virtually no crimes to solve.

bike riding, there's motorcycle riding, there's—it's kind of a unique small town in mega-Orange County growing up.

VJ: What about your parents? What did your father do that you could live out here?

PA: My father was a title escrow officer in Laguna Beach, so the commute from here to Laguna wasn't too far. And for a number of years, my mom was a stay-at-home mom until she got her real estate license, then she was a local real estate agent up here in the canyons. Obviously, just real local, so—

VJ: Were they nature people?

PA: No, they weren't. We moved out here primarily—when I was born I had underdeveloped lungs, and the doctors at Hoag Hospital said the moist climate wasn't going to be good for me, and they said either move to a higher altitude climate or move to the desert. And, fortunately, my parents didn't care for the desert very much, and they found this. It was close to where everything else that they did was, and it was high enough that it gave me a little bit drier climate instead of the moist sea air every day. And that's how they found it.

VJ: And did that help your lungs?

PA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I haven't had any problems. I had childhood asthma as a kid, but no deficits or anything restricting me from anything, and—

VJ: Well, it sounds like you had a real fun childhood. I mean, you were outdoors a lot, doing a lot of different things.

PA: Mm-hmm. We were. At summertime we typically spent our entire summers outside. A couple of good friends of mine, we'd camp at each other's houses every—a week at our house, a week at his house. Sleeping bags out in the backyards instead of staying indoors. Of course, after we supposedly would go to bed, we'd go out and terrorize the neighbors, water balloon people's houses and knock on people's doors. You know, the ding-dong-ditch type of stuff. Typical kids stuff, but—In this canyon, we didn't have television until 1972. Cable TV wasn't a thing then and antenna reception didn't work. Computers weren't too prevalent yet. So, you had radio and you had your own entertainment, so you went and played, and you were creative, and you found things to do, instead of—you know, everything's right at your fingertips today.

VJ: And you probably really got to know the natural environment here pretty well, right?

PA: Yeah. As a kid you knew all the little nooks and crannies, you knew all the little side canyons, you knew the wildlife that was here. You couldn't necessarily name everything, but you kind of knew a lot about what this was.

VJ: Any dangerous encounters with snakes or—

PA: No. Maybe rattlesnakes every so often, but nothing that you'd say, Oh, my gosh! Just normal day-to-day snake in the yard, and take care of it or move it or whatever. I've seen mountain lions, and we had a bobcat in our yard here a few days ago that walked by, but nothing of any consequence of fright, if you will. Just pretty basic—coyotes are around. But we're in their area, so we kind of expect to see those things.

VJ: Where did you go to school? That probably wasn't *that* close then.

PA: Elementary school, I went to Silverado School out on Santiago Canyon Road, and then junior high and high school I went down in Orange. Santiago Junior High School and El Modena High School were my high schools. And we were bussed from here down to school and back.

VJ: Were you sort of the exotic kids from the canyons in Orange then?

PA: We were definitely canyon kids. We were recognized as being—I don't want to say different, but different. We were the canyon kids.

VJ: How many of you were there on the bus?

PA: It was full. It was a full bus. I don't know the exact numbers, but there was--it was a bus that transported the elementary kids to that school and then a separate bus that did the junior high and high school. But it was—I don't know, a school bus is about forty people? Whatever it holds. It was full, for both the junior high and the high school.

VJ: There were a lot of kids in the canyon then?

PA: Oh, yeah. And there still is. There's still a lot of kids that grew up here.

VJ: Did you ever find a temptation to live somewhere out there? Going to school there you saw other kids growing up differently in a suburb. Orange was then a town that was growing pretty fast, right?

PA: Yeah, it was. No. I've never had a desire to leave here. Obviously, I have a choice now, and I don't have a desire to go someplace that is so, um, like each other. I mean, even in some of the old areas of Orange there's still—you have your one square little block, or one little cubicle of area you have. Here, you've got a whole—even though we have lots, I couldn't tell you how far up that hillside my lot line goes. To me, that hillside, all the way back in the forest, is mine. That's what I stare at every day. So my yard kind of goes on as far as my eyesight can see.

The atmosphere here is still the type of place that the neighbors know where your key is for your house, if you even lock your door. They take care of the place if you're gone, or if they see something amiss they go, Hmm, that's not right, and they'll go and actually figure out what's going on, instead of many places that just don't do that. You barely know who your next door neighbor is in a lot of communities. And here, that's never the case. Here, you pretty much still know everybody. You know what

everybody does, you know what their schedules are, you know when something's not right and you get involved, and you care about your neighbors.

VJ: Is there anything you feel you might be missing that communities in the suburbs or in more urban areas have that you don't have, or you feel that's probably some—a disadvantage you find living with, but nonetheless that would be a disadvantage?

PA: Convenience. Things here is a drive to anywhere. So the convenience. Down in Orange or in any other populated area, the store's right around the corner. Home Depot's right around the corner. Here, it's a planned event. If you're going to go do errands, you're going to spend a few hours running into town to do all your errands so you're not making five or six trips. It's a fifteen, twenty minute drive either way. So probably convenience is about the only thing. Even if you want to go out to dinner, it's still a decision to actually get in the car and go drive someplace for twenty minutes, half hour to go somewhere, versus right around the corner type of thing, so-- But that doesn't really seem like it's missing to me. Sometimes the convenience would be nice, but there's much more on the positive side of things than the negatives as far as being out in an area like this.

VJ: Were you dying to get licensed to drive when you were sixteen?

PA: Isn't everybody? (laughs) Aren't all sixteen-year-olds dying to get their driver's license? Um, yeah, I was. And I did. And my parents got me a car, and a lot of kids up here the same thing. They get a car when they're old enough so that they can get themselves around a little bit. In school it's a little bit challenging to participate in a lot of the after-school activities. The school bus came once to bring you home, and if you're not on the bus your parents have to pick you up, or it's a long walk. So, there were a lot of things in school that I didn't get to participate in because I would have had no way to get home.

VJ: Sports?

PA: Sports, yeah. Primarily that. And just all the different activity clubs that you have in high schools. Most of that stuff is after school hours, and because my parents didn't work that way. I mean, from Laguna Beach coming all the way out to Orange would have just been—my dad wasn't going to do that. Until I was old enough to have a car and drive myself I didn't get to do much of that. And then by that time, my interests were already starting to get into the fire service and I—so, rather than go down to the school activity things, I was in the ROP [Regional Occupation Program] program for fire science and doing things with the Orange City Fire Department at an early age, and tried to start getting myself planted for what I wanted to do in this world.

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VJ: So you already knew in high school that you wanted to be a firefighter?

PA: Mm-hmm, I did. I knew when I was, gosh, probably twelve, thirteen years old.

VJ: So you're living your boyhood dream.

PA: I really am, yeah.

VJ: Where did you get that dream from? Was that from experience with fire risk out here in the community, or did that come from somewhere else?

PA: It came from here. The—back then, the volunteer fire department, which is now part of the Orange County Fire Authority Reserve Program, when they had an incident, there was an air siren that would call the volunteers to the fire station, and you could hear that air siren throughout the canyon. And as a kid, you would hear the siren go off and run outside to see which way the fire truck went. And it was all of our neighbors who were the firefighters who would jump in their cars and run to the fire station, then come back, and that was just something that always just marveled me and just kind of, like, Wow, that's just really cool, to see the engine go by and have my next door neighbor on the back of it waving at me type of thing. I decided I want to do that. When I grow up I want to be one of them. So, yeah, I really am living my childhood dream.

VJ: You are sort of a community hero as a firefighter. So it's one of the appeals of the job? I'm sure there's much more to it.

PA: Yeah. People, I think, look at firefighters that way. I don't feel that, but I think that's how a lot of the population feels. But as one, I don't feel that personally. I feel that that's what we're supposed to do.

VJ: Training for firefighting, and already during your high school years, right? Were there parts of the job you thought, That's not what I anticipated? Any surprises?

PA: No, there weren't. Everything that I've been involved with and all the things I've learned have just all been more kind of like, Wow! instead of, Oh, I didn't think that would be like—Wow! that's really cool, that's really interesting, neat, that's exciting to know. There's just an overwhelming amount of knowledge you can gain and different avenues you can explore, from the medical aspect, to hazardous materials stuff, to wild land, to urban search and rescue to—I mean, just pick a field and almost somewhere there's that specialty in the fire service. I never really have found something that turned me away.

VJ: Did you immediately become active in firefighting here in the canyon, or did you also work elsewhere in Orange County? Did you have responsibilities in Orange, or elsewhere?

PA: Um—When I was fifteen, I was an Explorer Scout here in the canyon, through the Boy Scouts Explorer program with the fire department. When I was eighteen I got hired as a volunteer here. When I was finishing up my schooling at Santa Ana's Fire Technology Program at Santa Ana College, I got hired in 1980, when I was twenty, as a full-time firefighter. The City of Irvine was my first assignment as a full-time

firefighter, but I maintained my status here as a volunteer firefighter for eighteen years.

VJ: That means that in the beginning you started fighting fires that weren't wildfires.

PA: We did both. Because here, being a volunteer, I would respond to fires and to accidents and to calls here in the canyon when I wasn't on duty, and then at my career job in Irvine we would also respond as part of strike teams to wildfires throughout California, wherever they would send us to. So—so a little of both. I did both for quite a while.

VJ: What are the different challenges—and I'm sure you can talk about this for hours, how a wildfire works and what a structural fire—we'll be talking about the dangers of the wildfires in a minute, but what are the particular risks or dangers of structural fires, which I'm sure you had to face on occasion while on assignment in Irvine.

PA: The structural fire is really a fire that's already in a box. It's already, if you really think about it, really contained within a structure. The risks to us are that structure collapsing around us, and then what is inside that structure, what type of products, whether it be chemicals, cylinders, who knows. In homes, what people have in their houses, ammunition, just those type of—what's in the house itself, and then has the structure burned significantly that it's going to cause structure collapse, and obviously you don't want to be inside when it does collapse.

The biggest difference between structural fires and wildlife fires, the way I look at them, is every structural fire I've gone to, it really is already a contained fire. It's inside a structure. Our job is to keep it small and to keep it within that structure and not let it get to the one next door. Versus a wildlife fire, it's not in a box. It's raging on a hillside someplace and we're going to try to create a box by putting in fire lines or dozer lines or treating it with aircraft, or what have you, to make it—try to make it—to box it in and to try to confine it. Primarily, geography is the biggest difference, I think.

VJ: Fighting fires here in Santiago Canyon and Silverado Canyon probably also meant educating people about fire risks.

PA: Mm-hmm.

VJ: Did you find that people generally were in tune with the risks of living here?

PA: The majority, I think they are. I think the majority of people who live here understand the variety of risks that you have living in a canyon. Not only do we have the risk of the wildlife fires, we have risk of rock fall and mudslides, we have risk of flooding. There's a whole variety of risks there that are unique than living down in Orange or Mission Viejo. So—I think people are in tune to what those risks are. I don't think people are really surprised by—they don't have the deer in the headlights of, Oh, I didn't know that could happen up here.

But I think people are somewhat complacent to some of those risks. I think we have as a whole—in society we think it will never happen to *us*. It always happens to somebody but us. So I think we struggle with that a little bit, of actually accepting and acknowledging that we are the *us* that this stuff does happen to.

VJ: Would you say that people here live more in tune with nature?

PA: I think more aware of nature. Absolutely. I think people here are much more in touch with the weather conditions, the time of year that it is, those type of factors. And I think we pay much more attention to those things than maybe most people do. We're interested when it's going to be a two-inch rainstorm coming in. We're interested when it's going to be the Santa Ana winds. Um, maybe a little bit more than a—someone who doesn't live in a canyon community.

VJ: In your firefighting career in Silverado Canyon, what were the most dramatic emergencies to which you have found yourself responding to?

PA: Well, how do you mean dramatic?

VJ: What were, for you, some of the most memorable moments where you had to go out on emergency service here in the canyon? Because the canyon doesn't burn down all that frequently. It hasn't burned down this time, either. But nonetheless, I mean, there are remarkable emergencies that happen here, and that they may still be sticking with you.

PA: I think probably most of those are all people-related, because, you know, here, being a resident in the community and then being a volunteer in the community, most of the medical emergencies, other than traffic accidents, but many of the medical emergencies are your neighbors, that you're responding to one of your neighbor's house who—whatever happened, happened. So those stick out to me more than the house fires, the car fires, the brush fires. I remember all of them, but they weren't—they weren't truly impacts, I guess would be a word, versus the close friend who just had the heart attack, and you went and did CPR on someone who not only was either a fellow volunteer firefighter with you, or what have you, but it was your neighbor, your friend, your Explorer Scout leader, whatever the case may be. So, I think for me, most of those I think are the people calls of all the different friends, and almost family, if you will, that you go to their house and hope for the best and do the best you can, and sometimes it doesn't always turn out real well.

VJ: So you actually do a lot of those calls that actually are medical emergencies?

PA: Uh-huh, yeah. The volunteers up here respond to any 9-1-1 service for EMS [Emergency Medical Services], fire, their basic life support status. The paramedic unit for here comes out of the city of Villa Park, so it's about, you know, fifteen, twenty minutes away. Until the last few years when they moved the career engine out to the mouth of the canyon, that engine was located out by where the toll road and Santiago Canyon merge. But even then, it wasn't a paramedic unit, so the paramedics were still quite a ways away. So the initial responders were volunteers, with CPR

[Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation] training and AED [Automated External Defibrillator] training, first aid training. Now, everyone's required to be an EMT [Emergency Medical Technician], but back in those days they, they weren't. It wasn't prevalent for firefighters to be EMTs. You were either basic first aid or you were a paramedic type of qualification. So, so—over the years, the volunteer program—now we call it reserves—their medical training is up to EMT status. But—they're the first responders. They're the first ones on scene and initiate the first type of treatment.

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VJ: You probably also had to respond to calls that were, you know, accidents particular to the canyon. I'm thinking about empty mine shafts, mountain bikers, wildlife encounter, that sort of thing. Can you tell us a little bit about those kind of accidents that you had to deal with?

PA: Most of those are—were up in the forest, with the exception of a few local ones, like Shadybrook Store two houses down here from mine where the young gal was killed by the rock that crashed through the structure and she wasn't able to get out. The other—I guess nature related or—would be up in the Cleveland National Forest. One was two brothers went into the Blue Light Mine a few years back and—and tried to dive into the water, came up on the other side through the shaft, and of course there's not quality oxygen and air in there and they weren't able to get back out. So we had a recovery effort to go and try to locate them and find them.

A lot of—less today than back in the seventies and eighties, for whatever reason I don't know, but it used to be very frequently. Almost every weekend we'd have car crashes up on Santiago Peak, where cars would go over the side, six, seven hundred feet down, and it could take six, seven hours to extricate somebody and airlift them out, and those type of things.

Now today's calls are much more mountain bike related: the broken collar bone, the broken leg from somebody who crashes on the trail up on the forest somewhere.

VJ: Wildlife encounters? Are those a problem?

PA: Very few. Yeah, very few. Over at Whiting Ranch Park they had the cyclist that was killed by a mountain lion a few years back, and then the other lady that came across and was attacked, then mauled. But very few actual animal—a few snakebites here and there, but there are very few wildlife encounters to where someone has been really injured by some type of a, a critter.

VJ: The accident that happened two houses down from here, do these boulders come down frequently? Or is that a freak occurrence?

PA: Unfortunately, it happens pretty frequently. This one particular hillside, that's the third event where a rock cropping, one particular rock cropping has had boulders the size of automobiles break free and come tumbling down the road. The first time it happened, the boulders went between the structures and didn't strike anything. The

second time, it hit the house next door to my house and the store and the house next to that. Fortunately, nobody was injured in that rock fall. And then the last one, the same rock cropping, a couple big boulders came tumbling down and, unfortunately, like I say, one of them went through the market and killed the daughter, who was upstairs working on her homework.

VJ: You probably knew the person, too.

PA: Yeah.

VJ: Were you there as an emergency responder?

PA: No. We were home at the time, and we heard the rumbling and the crashing and the crushing, and we didn't know where or what it was so we grabbed our clothes—it was evening time, so we were in kind of our jammies already, so we grabbed stuff and ran outside because we didn't know where the hill was coming down at. And looked down canyon and could see all the dust and the rock rolling down the middle of the road and knew that, okay, it didn't hit our house, it hit two down.

So I was off duty, but I kind of went back to duty, if you will. I went over and—because of the rains, we had relocated one of the fire vehicles from the volunteer fire station into our driveway here. Um, the fire station was also destroyed back in 1969 by a mudslide, and they built the fire station right next door to where that hillside is. Under real extreme weather conditions and risk of mudslides, they'll relocate the fire engines in case something comes down again, so—I had a patrol vehicle parked in my driveway, so I was able to hop in it and call our command center and let them know what had happened and request resources and—So I kind of unofficially went back to work until everybody else got here and told me, Great, we got it. Thank you very much. And I kind of went back to being a civilian again.

VJ: But that must be emotionally tough at times to do, to deal with victims of these accidents and have them be such close personal friends.

PA: Yeah, it is. It is. You really need to detach yourself. You need to realize what your role is, be able to engage and insert yourself into what your job is. And, then, after the fact be able to leave that and to disengage from it and put that behind you. Yeah, it can be tough. There's a lot of talking about it, to kind of get it all out and to deal with it and to be part of the community as far as—like that event, the anguish in the community, but also be part of that, but also be part of the rescue effort. So—it's kind of a unique mix. Yeah.

VJ: Uh huh, and you mentioned the flood of 1969, which was really quite dramatic, the whole January of '69 had sort of a steady flow of rain, and ultimately, I think it was early February, you had a, a couple of big boulders come down here. And Silverado Canyon was sort of shut off from the outside world for quite a few days and you remembered that as a teenager.

PA: A nine-year-old kid.

VJ: Nine-year-old kid. Do you remember anything from that?

PA: Oh, absolutely. That was my first helicopter ride.

VJ: Tell me about that, because I think that is, that is a really remarkable moment in these canyons' history.

PA: I lived about a mile up canyon from the house I currently live in. We—the house I lived in there, grew up in, was on the creek, and, when the creek started to overflow, that whole neighborhood self-evacuated to a house that was built up on the hillside. So there was probably six or seven families that were living in this one house until we could be extricated by helicopter. By that time, the roads had washed out. There was no way to get out of the canyons, there was no way to drive into the canyons, so we were stranded there for—I don't remember how many days, but several days. We, uh, combined all of our canned food from everybody's houses. We kind of pooled everything together to keep ourselves with enough food for everybody. Parents would go down to the creek every day and bring buckets of water back up and boil the water so we'd have clean water to have. And then eventually, once the skies cleared a little bit, the military came in with helicopters and started evacuating us by helicopter.

It was, it was kind of interesting for me as a kid. It was kind of—there was a certain scary part to it, but there was also kind of a part that was kind of cool. Because for us it was, everything was—we were camping almost, you know. We were all—slumber party type of thing with all our buddies. We didn't have to go to school. We'd sit and watch the creek rise and see propane tanks going down the creek, looked like little submarines, and we thought that was cool to watch. And a couple of houses we saw that were destroyed by the floods that would collapse wall by wall, kind of like little card houses kind of falling down. We thought it was cool. It was like, Wow! That's really neat. So—it was kind of scary, but there was almost kind of a—it was almost, as a young kid, it was kind of cool thing to actually watch.

VJ: I guess you can sort of look at the spectacle of nature and the power and watch it maybe with a certain detachment you know—when you're a child.

PA: Well, especially when you don't really understand it, when you don't really understand what the forces are and what the destruction is. Our house that I grew up in ended up with about four to five feet of mud in it, and we lost a bunch of our possessions and—So after the fact, it was like, Oh boy, all the stuff I used to have, I don't have anymore. But during the time, I had no idea. I never thought about the loss and about having to rebuild and the financial aspect and the hardships that came because of it. At the time going through it, to me, it was like, Wow! This is kind of neat.

VJ: Yeah, but I think you're right. The community must have taken a long time to clean up after that.

PA: It took a number of years. Yeah, it took quite a while to recover, to rebuild, to even get the roads back in, get a water system back in, get the electrical lines back in. After we evacuated, we relocated with some friends in Orange, and I don't remember how long we were there but long enough to have to enroll in another school. I went to school for a couple of months probably at a school in Orange because we were gone for that long. So it took a long time to get the canyons back to where you could drive home and get back to your house.

[0:30:24]

VJ: You wouldn't happen to know a family by the name of Quick?

PA: I don't. No, the name's not familiar to me.

VJ: Because I remember reading a letter from a Mrs. Quick to Ronald Reagan at the time, who was governor, thanking him for the inmates and crews that came in and rescued her and her family, and the inmates carrying the children through the water to the other side of the creek.

PA: Uh-huh

VJ: Well, you were saved by helicopter, so I guess you didn't encounter the inmate crews.

PA: Right. No, but we saw them. They were—we could see them in the area. But, yeah, we were lucky that the helicopter was able to land on a bit of a road ledge and hover while we were able to walk up and climb up on board. Yeah. But that doesn't surprise me. There's a number of stories. A lady by the name of Judy Myers, who was pregnant at the time, she was rescued and had to be brought across the creek and airlifted out while in labor. So there's a number of those type of stories of people being rescued and brought through pretty dangerous areas to get to safety.

VJ: And it probably brought the community closer to the extent that it survived, right?

PA: I'm sure it did. I don't remember any of that, but I—it seems like many disasters do that. The Santiago fire has brought this community closer again. And every time something significant happens, it brings a community closer together. The rock fall that killed Caitlin brought the community close together again. So I'm sure it did, but as a kid I don't remember those type of things. I wasn't involved in those activities or those type of –

VJ: Now, when it comes to fires, there must have been a number of close calls for the canyon, even before the Santiago fire. (pause) You must have had frequent occasions where you worried that this canyon might burn.

PA: It's always a worry, even when there's not a fire, that this canyon might burn. Most [of] the fires historically, with the exception of the Green River fire back in 1947 that came from Riverside County side out by the 91 Freeway, Green River, burned up to the back side of Ladd Canyon, most of the fires have burned up and out of the

Silverado Canyon area. The Indian fire back in the early eighties burned off the Indian Truck Trail from Riverside, burned up to Santiago Peak, but it took a turn towards the south, down towards Coto de Caza.

So most of our fires that have really threatened the canyon have been fires that have started in the canyon, but they historically have burned up and out of the canyon. The Santiago fire was the first fire that I'm aware of that burned from the coastal side, if you will, back up into the forest. That's an unusual fire pattern for this area.

VJ: That's really the first time?

PA: The first time in—when I've looked at all the fire history maps in various projects I've worked on in my career, that's the first overlay that I can recall that burned up into the canyons versus within the canyon itself and then up and out.

VJ: And last year's season you probably were really anticipating some concern in the fire season. We've talked to people in Modjeska and they all talk about the many events that fire authorities sort of introduced to prepare people for the fire season. And Silverado probably had the same thing happen?

PA: Yeah, the same. Yeah. We had the community town hall meetings. The Fire Safe Council—participated in their outreach to educate, and to have the annual Clean Sweep and Chipper Days and encourage people to create defensible space around their structures and to have a plan. Had the vendors in for the fire gel, to try to market those things to the community. So, yeah, same type of events that Modjeska had, this canyon had also.

VJ: Explain that fire gel to me.

PA: It's a product—there's a couple of primary vendors. One's called Barricade and the other one's called Thermo Gel. The inventor of it—I'm not quite sure how they invented it, but the product is a very close resemblance to the same chemicals they use to make baby diapers. It's applied with water, and rather than a foam that doesn't hold its retention and doesn't stay well on vertical surfaces, this is a real thick, slippery, sticky product that you can actually coat a surface with—and it will stick and stay there. And it maintains and holds the water within the little bubbles so it creates a barrier.

The concept is, once you pre-treat those areas, they'll take a substantial amount of fire impingement before whatever it's coated on actually can start to burn. It's something newer to the fire service as far as use. Historically, we've used firefighting foam, but that just doesn't last too well. It works well if we have fifteen, twenty minutes in front of a fire, and lay it down, and then the fire comes. It's effective that way, but the fire gel, you're able to treat your house, evacuate yourself, and it will maintain its moisture for up to about twelve hours. It can be rehydrated. If it starts to dry out, you can come back and mist it and rehydrate it. It seems to be a pretty decent product. There's quite a few examples throughout California where people have applied that to their property and their actual home has survived.

There's a homeowners kit that's available, that comes in gallon jugs with a little eductor so you can apply it yourself. There's kits that are available to the fire service that they can utilize it. And there's big tanker trucks that the company has that they can come out as a vendor and apply it to areas. It seems to be pretty neat stuff.

VJ: Now may be a good time to start turning to the actual fire of October 2007, and maybe the best way to do this is to start with where you were when you first heard the news, or maybe the beginning of the day. The Santa Ana winds were blowing pretty strong, so I'm sure you and your colleagues were on high alert.

PA: I'm sure they were. I was actually on vacation in Oregon. My wife and I were just south of Crater Lake on vacation. We had our laptop with us that we would use to just check on whatever. And we turned the laptop on and logged in to the news and saw that, oh, there's a fire in Orange County. So we kind of looked at it and paid attention to what it said, and they were like—where it's burning, there was another fire, called the Santiago fire, several years ago that burned a very similar footprint to what the initial phase of this fire burned. I told Danielle, my wife, I said, "Well, it's going to do exactly what it did last time. It's going to burn to Lake Forest, going to burn over to Portola Hills and down towards Irvine, and it's going to go out in a couple days.

So we went about our business, did our thing, and later on came and turned it back on and saw, oh, it jumped Santiago Canyon. That's not good. We loaded up and seventeen hours later we were back here in Orange County. That's how my initiation to the Santiago fire was.

VJ: And then you reported ready for duty?

PA: Well, the next day. We got in probably about midnight-ish.

VJ: Was that on the Monday? No, probably Tuesday.

PA: I think it was probably Tuesday by now. The days kind of have fallen apart for me. But we got to the 261 and Santiago Canyon and the road was closed. So we tried to tell the officer that we were just coming back from vacation and needed to get home to evacuate our house and do this and that. He said, "It's already evacuated. Nobody's going in. You can't get there. So turn around and go back somewhere else." So we pulled the trailer down to my sister's house in Orange Park Acres and spent the rest of the night there.

I stopped at the command post on the way to my sister's and spoke with our operations chief to see what was going on, and at that time he told me they were losing structures in Modjeska and that things weren't looking too good. So I told him, I said, "Well, as soon as I get set up I'll try to get back to work as soon as I can."

So we set up the trailer and spent the rest of the night at my sister's. I left my wife there and the next day and came back to work. I was able to get up into the canyon

with my fire gear. They let me through the roadblocks, and able to finish evacuating things. Obviously, we couldn't evacuate because we weren't here for—

[0:40:00]

VJ: Oh, you were able to then get to your house?

PA: Yeah. Once I returned back to work they let me through the roadblock. That was my first priority was to come and take care of the family stuff first and got out the things that we needed to get to survive for who knows how long. I applied our Barricade gel kit to the house before I left. We had bought one of those homeowners kits. And then I went back to work.

VJ: The canyon at that time must have been eerily abandoned, and yet I know that there were some people that were still here.

PA: One would think it would have been eerily abandoned, but there was a lot of people who didn't evacuate. I'm going to guess there was probably forty to sixty people who did not evacuate, and they were very mobile. They were driving all over the canyon. The canyon was heavily populated by sheriffs trying to evacuate everybody for the last call to make sure everybody was out, but it wasn't as deserted as one would think it would have been. Yeah.

VJ: Did you have everything prepared in the house for evacuation?

PA: We do.

VJ: Did you know exactly what to pick?

PA: We do. We have a—and I'm one of those, I kind of figure I better do what I preach, and if I preach preparedness and that you have to have a plan, I better have my own plan. So we do. We have—posted in my office is a set of instructions. For evacuation do A, B, C, D, E, go get this, turn off this, box these things up. Our important file cabinets have orange stickers on it saying "take this" so you don't have to even think about it. In the shed I have a bunch of boxes that are labeled evacuation boxes with all the—they're all empty, so all we need to do is follow the list and look for the things that say "take this," throw it in a box, load it in the car, and away you go. So we have that plan.

My wife practiced that about—maybe about a year prior to that on another fire that we had in the canyon that was a smaller fire. But when she heard it, she boxed everything up, put it in the car, and self-evacuated. The fire got put out quickly, so they didn't initiate an entire evacuation of the canyons, so I got to put everything away when I got home because she was kind of upset that she did it all. But it worked. The important thing to me was that the plan actually worked, that she was able to load stuff—the important things up and get out of the house within ten or fifteen minutes.

So I just followed that same plan. I just came in and grabbed the piece of paper and got the boxes and boxed everything up as we identified, and headed back down the road.

VJ: And you, too, probably want to make sure that everything's prepared for firefighters that might come by your house in case of a fire here so that they can work around your place, right?

PA: I pretty much maintain it that way. I try to keep my property in a condition that if out-of-area firefighters come by that they'll look at it and go, "Oh, we can do something with this home." Even my shed where I have the Barricade fire gel, I have a label that says if I didn't have a chance to apply it, if someone has knowledge of what the product is, they would be able to go, "Oh, this guy's got Barricade. Let's use it." I didn't really take any extra steps when I evacuated this time around to make sure that I did all of the preparation stuff myself before I left.

VJ: You do welding?

PA: Um—little bits here and there. Not anything –

VJ: So you don't have a gas bomb in your garage?

PA: I do have an acetylene tank in the garage, yeah.

VJ: Is that a concern for you when it comes to fire? Did you keep it in the garage?

PA: I did, yeah. I just left it there. I mean, it's a concern, but if you look probably in most people's garages, with all the different things that they have, it's probably not any more dangerous than—well, it definitely isn't any more dangerous than the propane tank that sits about five feet away from the garage. A propane tank, under fire conditions, if the vent fails, that's where the term BLEVE, the boiling of liquid evaporated explosion, that has historically—some tremendous fires have killed many people from propane tanks exploding. So, everybody has one of those.

So the acetylene tank isn't really any more of a hazard than the propane tank that sits outside more exposed. You'd have to actually have the house fully engulfed before the acetylene would be a real concern or an issue.

VJ: Okay. So you packed your things and you went back out and then went to work.

PA: Then went to work. Yes. I went back to duty. I was contacted to see if I was available to relieve a strike team that was already assigned to the fire. And a strike team is five engine companies with a supervisor. So, I said I was.

VJ: So you would be the supervisor.

PA: I would be the supervisor, uh-huh. So I went and got a vehicle, came to the rendezvous point to meet the other strike team leader who was transitioning out. At

about that time, another what we call a branch director showed up and said, "No. You're not going to be that. You're going to be the Silverado structure protection group supervisor, so reassign someone to take the strike team and you have another job already." So I never even got to be the strike team leader. I got bumped up immediately to be the person in charge of the structure protection effort for Silverado.

VJ: I guess that makes sense given that you have so much local knowledge, right?

PA: Yeah. There were two reasons. One was because I do have the local knowledge, and the other reason, we have a fire plan, the Silverado Fire Plan, that was developed, as well as a Modjeska Fire Plan, and I was involved in the writing of both of those. So, it made sense to put someone in charge of an area that is intimately familiar with what the plan calls for in resource allocation, in tactics, and those type of things, as well as pretty much know the street names of every street in the canyon and truly where the hazards are and the intimate knowledge of the area. So it did make sense, yeah.

VJ: Was then the next step putting in place the fire plan and following the plan?

PA: It was. The next step was to figure out where the fire was burning, what the fire conditions were, what the expectations of the fire were going to be. Was it really going to get to Silverado? If so, when? How much time did we have before it got here? How much time did we have to prepare structures ahead of the fire? If it got into Silverado, where in the canyon was it going to get? The canyon itself is about six miles in length, so which part of the canyon was going to be threatened first? And then trying to get enough resources and the right type of resources to prepare structures and to do things ahead of the fire so that if it did burn down into the canyon we're ready to try to protect people's homes.

VJ: What did you do then? You moved right in and you knew where to go?

PA: There were already some resources that were being assigned in the area, so we gathered all those up down by the Community Church and made certain we had a good briefing for everybody. We had quite a few folks who were out of the area, that had never been to Silverado, never heard of Silverado, didn't know the history of the canyon, didn't know the hazards in the canyon.

Many outside firefighters would feel very uncomfortable in Silverado Canyon assigned to firefighting because it is a one-way in, one-way out canyon, a very steep, narrow canyon, extreme brush conditions, the amount of growth, extreme fire conditions, many combustible homes. All the factors that scream, Watch out!, and scream, Danger!, are in this canyon. So for someone from the outside coming in that doesn't know the specifics of the canyon, this would be one of those areas that many people would turn away the assignment. They would say we're not going to go there, it's too dangerous for us to be there.

So having a detailed briefing of the area that they're in, letting the firefighters know where the safety areas were, what the conditions were, and things that we could do to provide for safety first, then got them to buy in that they were actually going to take

ownership of protecting structures and actually wanted to be involved in doing it. So that was the first step, was to make certain everybody kind of knew what they were going to get involved in.

The next step was, after we figured out where the fire was going to bump into first—which we identified Wildcat Canyon and the mine track area, which is at the far end of the canyon, those were the two primary locations where the fire would make its first approach into the canyon—then we assigned resources and started preparing the structures in those areas, removing vegetation from the structures, creating the defensible space that people historically haven't done on their own.

VJ: That's the complacency you mentioned earlier.

PA: Well, partly complacency but partly their own risk management, if you will. People know that there's a risk of a wildfire, and they know they should clear their brush, but, more importantly, they know that every winter it is going to rain. They know that for certain. The fire may happen, the rain is gonna happen. They weigh the odds of, If I take all the brush off of my hillside, what's chances of a boulder and a mud flow coming and destroying my house?, versus, If I leave all the brush there, what's the chance of a brush fire this year? So they kind of gamble. They kind of say you know what? I know it's going to rain so I'm not clearing all that brush. So we went in and we cleared all the brush that they should have cleared.

[0:50:10]

VJ: I spoke with Chay Petersen, who lives up in Wildcat Canyon and had exactly that scenario. She said, "We clear brush to some extent, because after that we expose ourselves to erosion." And I guess that's exactly what you're describing here.

PA: Right. That's exactly it, yeah.

VJ: When you talk about assigning resources to Wildcat Canyon, I was thinking, we drove up there and you cannot bring a fire truck up Wildcat Canyon Road.

PA: You can bring the right fire truck up Wildcat Canyon Road.

VJ: Yes? You can?

PA: You can. And that's part of it, getting the right resource to fit up there. Our wildland engines are smaller. They're designed for those tight areas. So we were able to get five or six engines up in the Wildcat Canyon area. Now, the regular engines that you see down in the city, they don't fit. There's no way you can get a fire truck up there.

VJ: They just about fit on the main road here.

PA: Barely, yeah. Yes, they barely do. But the wildland engines, they're designed for more remote, small, tight areas and we were able to get several up in that, up into Wildcat.

VJ: Did you have to do any actual firefighting there?

PA: No.

VJ: Or was this mostly for clearing brush and clearing the space?

PA: Yeah. We were very fortunate. The fire never came into Silverado Canyon to the part or point that we had to actually engage in active firefighting around the structures. The fire stayed up on the ridge tops and was contained on the ridge tops by the helicopter and aircraft support and by the hand crews going direct, or actually engaging the fire up at the higher elevations.

VJ: Where did they come from?

PA: Well, they came from all over the country. They came from—[phone ringing] gosh, you name it. They came from all over the place. Forest service Hot Shots crews from—from, Geesh, everywhere.

VJ: From prison camps also?

PA: Some from inmate camps. L.A. County had some inmate crews here. Cal Fire had inmate crews here. And, like I say, the forest service had many of their Hot Shots Crews here.

VJ: I guess they hiked in from somewhere?

PA: They parked their trucks down here in the bottom of the canyons and they hiked up the ridge tops. And they typically will spend, oh, twelve to fifteen hours on the fire line, and then they hike back out and go back to fire camp.

VJ: And then the second place where you wanted resources was towards the end of the canyon, right?

PA: Yeah, the main focus area was the end of the canyon. We had engines located throughout the canyon as precautionary—for visibility and to kind of monitor conditions, and to prepare around those structures also just in the event that the fire did come into an area that we didn't expect it to. But we had–pretty much the two areas of main focus was towards the end of the canyon and then the Wildcat area. Yeah.

(Pause)

VJ: So tell me about how firefighting worked out there at the end of the canyon.

PA: Well, we never actually fought fire. Fortunately, the fire never got that far. All our efforts were in preparation for. We created a defensible space around structures up there. In the time from start to finish we removed probably I think twenty-two to twenty-five tons of vegetation. With the fire gel we pre-treated sixty-four homes. We brought in other specialized engines that are called CAF units, which is a

compressed air foam unit. The foam that comes out is like a shaving cream consistency. It also sticks to a vertical surface pretty well. With the range of it, you can pre-treat fifty, sixty feet out ahead, so we can pre-treat a lot of area up on the hillside before the fire could burn down.

We had a plan developed for a firing operation in the event the fire did actually get into the canyon, to drive the fire back up to the ridge top to keep it away from the homes, but we never used that because the fire never got that far.

VJ: But you did spray out this white foam, right?

PA: We did, yeah.

VJ: Because Chay Petersen remembers that it looked –

PA: Looked like snow.

VJ: – like a nice winter landscape.

PA: It did. Yeah, it looked like snow. We sprayed that partially for training. A lot of folks had never seen that before. Those units are—although they've been in the fire service a number of years, the application to wildland fire fighting is probably only within the last five to eight years. There are still a lot of firefighters who have never seen one of those units. So daily we would do training with it and show folks what the advantages of it were, especially for the folks who were from out of the area and were nervous about being here. That was part of their briefing, if you will, of here's all the things that we're doing, and can do, to provide for a safe work environment for us to be up in this area.

So, we used—Yeah, it looked like it had snowed almost daily up at the end of the canyon. And the guys were busy every single day. Every day, even though they would have their off shift, the next day coming in with a fresh attitude towards it, they would recognize or see more that they could do to even make the situation better than it was the day before.

VJ: So, you were busy throughout that time with preparation, but the flames actually never got close enough.

PA: Correct. I think the flames in Pine Canyon, I think, without actually doing any mapping of it, were probably, oh, a half mile, three-quarters of a mile away. Probably about a fifteen, twenty-minute hike back up into Pine Canyon is the closest as the fire ever got. Which was good. I mean—the best of the conditions for us is to never have to test all of the preparation that we did.

VJ: And that really was then the end of the Santiago fire operation for you?

PA: Yeah. That total time was about, I think, thirteen, fourteen days of waiting to see if the fire came into Silverado that day or not. So it was—it took quite a while for it to

either hang up on the hillside, or for the fire crews to go up to it and actually put the fire out, which is what they ended up doing.

Originally, the control plan was to do a major firing operation using Silverado Canyon Road as the fire control line and to fire out all of the slopes between a street called Oak Lane all the way to the mine track area, which is about, oh, two and a half, three miles. We weren't real comfortable with that plan.

VJ: It sounds like a big area to burn against.

PA: It's a huge area to burn, and it would have denuded a substantial amount of the canyon walls for the future flooding and rock fall and all those other issues. Even because of the narrowness of the canyons, there's a high potential for the fire that was ignited as a backfire to spot across to the other side of the canyon and to have a whole new fire take off on us. It was not an operation that we were real pleased with moving forward, which, after we addressed our concerns and said, You know what, we need to do this differently. Fortunately, the incident commander saw the wisdom in that and directed the crews to again to go direct, which is right on the fire's edge and to put the fire out. That delayed things quite a bit. If we had done the firing operation, the fire would have probably been finished and the evacuations order would have been lifted probably a good eight or nine days earlier than they were.

VJ: Or it would have gotten a lot worse, right?

PA: Or it could have gotten a lot worse, yeah. Well, if the firing operation was successful, if it went according to plan and it didn't jump the lines and everything, went exactly like it was planned to go, it would have sped things up. But because of the tactic that we argued for and that they actually took, that delayed things quite a while. It required the crews to hike to the ridge tops every single day, and with hand tools construct fire line for that same distance. Helicopter support tried to keep the flames low enough so that the crews could get in next to the fire and actually extinguish it. That took quite an effort.

VJ: So there's almost a military-like cooperation between air support and ground troops, so to speak?

PA: It really is orchestrated very much like a military operation. Absolutely. With all the different type of equipment that we utilize—the aircraft, the fixed wing aircraft, the helicopters, the hand crews, the heavy equipment, the bulldozers—it really is very much orchestrated like a combat, with all those different sections working together.

VJ: The hand crews that do the grunt work at the frontline, what do they literally do there? I mean, do they just pat out the fire? What kind of tools do they have up there?

PA: One of their best tools is chainsaws, where they cut the vegetation. The other tools are shovels, a tool called the McCloud, which is on one end like a heavy rake and on the other end a sharp blade for scraping. Another tool they use is a brush hook, which

is a sharp cutting tool. It replaces the chainsaw if the saw breaks. Another tool is called a Pulaski, which is a combination of an axe on one end and a hoe on the other end.

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And their mission is to create a fire control line, which is an area of clear mineral soil without any vegetation, any root structure, anything within that soil at all. So you can imagine a path of anywhere—the rule of thumb is one and a half times the height of the vegetation, so you can imagine a path of six to ten feet in width. For however long the fire perimeter is, they're clearing any of the vegetation down to bare mineral soil to be certain that the fire can't extend into the new unburned vegetation.

VJ: And that fire line is out there now and will probably serve as protection if something was to happen again this season, right?

PA: That fire line is out there now. Eventually, things will reseed and will start to grow back, but that will be several years. So, yeah, all the dozer lines that were put in in the Santiago fire, all the hand lines that were put in, if for some reason we had another fire in the same area this year, those would be usable for us in tactical decisions on where to put other apparatus.

Now, with the exception of the fire that was actually in the National Forest, not much has grown back in that area, but most of the other burn area of the Santiago fire has had a heavy grass growth this year and a tremendous mustard grass, or mustard weed this year. Most of that area is primed to burn again, in a much different type of fire as far as fire speed and fire behavior, but a lot of the Santiago fire burn area—it's susceptible to have another fire this year already.

VJ: Of a different kind of fuel, though, right?

PA: Different kind of fuel.

VJ: They call it flash fuel?

PA: Flash fuel, uh-huh, versus the fifteen, twenty, thirty year chaparral. The grasses—if it were to have another fire, it would burn much quicker but with much less heat involved with it. So it would be a much cooler fire, a much faster fire, but it could still burn again. Already.

VJ: Now, lifting the evacuation and your wife coming back, it must have been a good day to see the community come back?

PA: It was a good day. Yeah. Several days prior to that we had initiated an occupant liaison program because it was so long that people were out of their homes. We were escorting groups of folks back to their homes to get things that they needed to have, that they just couldn't do without anymore. So we were starting to see people filter in, being escorted to get things.

But the actual day of lifting the evacuation, it was pretty intense. There was a lot of horn honking, a lot of yelling, and almost like New Year's Eve type of celebration. There was quite a few happy folks to come home and find they still had a house and to actually get back into their house and start cleaning up and get life back to normal. Yeah, that was a pretty good day.

VJ: A lot of shoulder patting for you, I'm sure?

PA: Yeah, some. I was still pretty busy doing things, so I was kind of in and out of here. But, yeah, a little bit. I got plenty of hugs and plenty of handshakes. So that was nice, it was good.

VJ: I was just reminded of Chay Petersen's description of her staying in the canyon, defying evacuation orders, and sort of being part of this almost underground community that's not supposed to be seen—

PA: Right.

VJ: —during evacuation. Did you ever sort of rely on some support or help from some of these evacuation resistors?

PA: You know, we did. Primarily—it's interesting, the actual evacuation center was down at El Modena High School. Well, many of the residents chose to live in Camp Silverado, which is at the Albertson's parking lot, which was not one of the established evacuation centers. Information being sent to different areas and by different people was causing quite a bit of problems. Misinformation was causing quite a bit of problems.

There was one situation early on when I was here where the engine companies, because they're so large, and during our shift changes we had to take the engines out of the canyon and send them down the canyon first before we could send engines back up into the canyon. There are just not enough places to turn everybody around and to park everybody. Well, within minutes of the engines leaving the canyon, the word had gotten out to the Camp Silverado that we were abandoning Silverado Canyon and we weren't going to defend it. And that was anything but the case.

So we ended up using folks like Chay, who didn't leave, to try to have them spread the correct information, that if you're going to be up here and if you're going to tell people things, at least know what you're talking about and know that you're sending out factual accurate information. So through them we were able to get information back down to the folks that, No, we're not leaving the canyon. In fact, what we're doing is, those guys have been here for twenty-four hours, and they've been up twenty-four hours, and now they're going into camp to get fed and get some sleep and we have new crews coming out for the next twenty-four hours. So we were able to fix a lot of that miscommunication by using some of the folks who refused to leave.

VJ: On the one hand, it's odd that they would even think that—especially under your watch since you were in charge of the structures in Silverado—that under your watch

Silverado would be abandoned, given that you are a son of the canyon, really. But on the other hand, I guess for a lot of the canyon residents the Orange County Fire Authority is sort of a foreign body. Is that a right assessment?

PA: Well, the fire authority is grouped into county government. Historically, the canyon communities have always been skeptical of and want limited involvement with any county government levels, and trying to have government hold us to code requirements and to standards that work down in Orange, Santa Ana, Mission Viejo, wherever, they don't work up here a lot of those times. So there's a reluctance to be excited about the county in any aspect: the sheriff's department, the fire authority, the building department. Pick a county government and it pretty much isn't a popular group up here in the canyon areas.

And I think the fire authority fits into that just like everybody else, that we as a fire authority are trying to enforce codes as best we can, within reason, but it is enforcing codes, the clearance codes, the defensible space codes, the new building requirements for the construction techniques. Now someone, if they want to rebuild their deck up in the canyon community, they pull the permits, it has to be out of non-combustible material. So that's a bigger cost, it's a different process. So I think to some level we are looked at as—I'm not saying the enemy, but we're kind of not understanding the true culture of the canyons, if you will.

VJ: You really have a unique position then because you are so deeply connected to the canyon.

PA: Yeah.

VJ: And at the same time, you are also with the county, right?

PA: Right. I'm right in the middle. Yeah, it is very unique to see and understand both sides, but then try to bring a sense of reason, for lack of better words, to really what the issue is. Bring the logic in and bring the reason into it and try to come up with, Hey, here's really what we're trying to do. We're not trying to tear everybody's house down and make somebody build all brand new concrete buildings, but we're trying to make it to where if there is a fire in the area that firefighters will come here, they'll feel comfortable being here, and there's a good chance that you'll have a house after the fire burns through there. And there's things we can do to make that better, and there's things that are impossible for us to do.

But there's always resistance to change and to do something different, and there's always some type of reluctance to believe government in these type of communities.

VJ: And you probably have a little bit of a job in diplomacy and sort of being an ambassador to both parties, maybe making the county understand the canyon and the canyon understand the county.

PA: That's pretty accurate. The fire authority frequently engages me with, Hey, help us, explain this to us. Where are they coming from? What can we do on our side so that

they'll understand what we're really trying to get at? And how can we present our side? Because we don't know, we're not accepted. We come up to the Town Hall meetings and half the time they're almost chased out of the canyons because they'll say something that—the community will say, You don't know us. And unless you know us, you can't speak to us, type of thing. Community meetings up here are pretty entertaining at times. There's a lot of passion in them, and there's a lot of debate and a lot of vocal folks who aren't shy with their opinions of things.

So, yeah, the fire authority—commonly I'll get called on to bounce things off of. Hey, what do you think about this? Is this going to work? And sometimes the answer is, Yes and sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's like, You know, that's just not realistic. There's just no way that's going to happen.

[0:70:03]

VJ: Do some in the canyon community ever treat you like a little bit of a traitor to their—to the clique?

PA: I've never felt that. I was expecting after the Santiago fire to have some very upset people with me. Their homes looked much different after the fire than they did before the fire—

VJ: Because of the—

PA: Because of the amount of things that we did. I was fully prepared to have some pretty irate folks, you know, You cut down the tree that I planted when my daughter was born. How dare you do that. Or, You've exposed us now to the mudslide because you cut fifty feet up the hillside. And I never received any of those comments. I was really surprised. I've never really felt any of that negativism, if you will, or like, He turned into one of them. I've never experienced that.

VJ: But there were probably also people who had misgivings with the decision to not do the controlled burn, but instead take your time and actually maintain a pretty long duration for the evacuation. Do you think next time there's a fire, people will be less likely to evacuate?

PA: I think there's a chance of that, yeah. I think just by the fact that a number of people didn't evacuate. I've heard numerous comments, "Had I known that, I wouldn't have left either. Had I known they weren't going to force me to leave, I would have stayed. I would have stayed and continued working on my cabinets in my shop," or whatever it is that they may be doing.

So, yeah, I would think that if this happens again, the evacuation's going to be much more difficult. In addition to the fire, now with this last winter of rains, we have also had several mandatory evacuations because of potential for the mud flows. People have become complacent over those also, because until a couple of weeks ago nothing has happened.

Yeah, I think next time it's going to be a harder sell to tell people, "You need to evacuate." Unless they actually can *see* the flames and feel the imminent threat, I think folks are going to stick around a little bit more than they did this first time around.

VJ: And fire season is on already, right?

PA: Fire season pretty much in California is ongoing.

VJ: Has this always been the case? Or do you think that over the time that you've lived here things have gotten worse?

PA: I think things have gotten worse. Fire season typically opened in May and typically closed around November. And then we had the winter season. California, now we have Santa Ana winds in December and January. And we don't anymore open and close fire season. Fire season is open pretty much year-round now, because the weather conditions are that much different. I can remember back in elementary school, when we first went back to school you get your school pictures taken, and I always had the big old red chapped lip because of the Santa Ana winds in September. We get very few Santa Ana winds in September anymore. They're always November, December, January, even up into February now.

So things have changed. The climate, for some reason, has changed; the burning conditions have changed to where now fire season is a year-round event. You can have a fire in January that is just as catastrophic as a fire that burns in July or August.

VJ: In your opinion, have the developments on the northern and southern end of Santiago Canyon, the further encroachment of suburbia if you will, has that changed the fire situation at all? (pause) The firefighting situation?

PA: Not really. It's changed a little bit the type of firefighting. Wildfires used to be just that—wildfires. They were out in the wilderness area with no threat to public or to humans or to developments. Not only here in Orange County but almost nationwide, wildfires are now being called wildland urban interface fires, because there *is* so much development that it's required the fire service to change the tactics and change the approach to how they fight the fires, but it really hasn't changed the fire, if you will.

The historical fire corridors are still historical fire corridors. The Sierra fire that burnt from Sierra Peak down into Anaheim Hills, that was a historical corridor. The Santa Ana winds fires burned in that direction. The 241 fire that started up on Windy Ridge and the 241 that burnt into Orange Park Acres and Anaheim Hills, that's another historic fire corridor. That pattern that fire burned, that's how it always burns. It required us to change our tactics and our resources and focus much more on structural protection than actual engaging the fire and doing firefighting. But the fire still burns pretty much the same way.

VJ: In the future can you ever see yourself getting tired of this job of teaching community members to be wary and be aware and not fall into complacency, and that you'd maybe one day give up this kind of job and just do something else and not have this heavy responsibility in being caught between the county job and the canyon history?

PA: Yeah, about three years from now is when that will happen.

VJ: You think? Really?

PA: Yeah, really. In about three years I'll be fifty-one years old, I'll have had my thirty years in the fire service, which qualifies me for my pension, and hopefully in three years I'll still be young and healthy enough to go do something else in this world. So my—our plan is in about three years to retire and find something else to do and explore something different, a different career path maybe, different—who knows what? But to go experience something that we've never experienced yet.

VJ: So you might even move away from here?

PA: Mm-hmm, yeah. A good chance that we'll relocate. Yeah.

VJ: Is that a little scary to you, to leave this place? I mean, you've never lived anywhere else, right?

PA: Yes and no. As time marches on and, as it continues, the planned development for this area is really going to change the whole flavor and the whole atmosphere of the community. As the city of Orange continues to march out past Irvine Lake, within five to ten years, depending on what the economy does, all the area around Irvine Lake and pretty much everything, almost up to Silverado Canyon, is slated for development, which is just going to change the entire atmosphere. The city of Lake Forest has already annexed out almost to Modjeska Canyon. There's developments identified all in Live Oak Canyon, Trabuco Canyon, hundreds and hundreds of homes are going to be built through Live Oak Canyon Road.

So the next ten years, this isn't going to be the same Andy Mayberry community that it was when I grew up. Although I still love living here, as time keeps going, it kind of is losing its appeal to me, and I want to find back what I had in the sixties, seventies. I want to find a community in an area that has that same environment, same flavor, same things that I remember growing up. And that's just not going to be here at some point.

VJ: Do your neighbors know about this, or is this—

PA: That I'm leaving?

VJ: Yeah.

PA: Some do. Not everybody knows, but some know that I plan on retiring in about three years or so and that we'll probably relocate.

VJ: But they're still talking to you.

PA: Yeah, they're still talking to me. Yeah, they are. Well, many of them have the same plans. My neighbors across the street, she just retired from the school district a couple of weeks ago, her husband's going to retire probably within a year or so, and they're moving to Illinois, back to where they grew up. Yeah, there's a lot of folks that are transitional, if you will, of people who I grew up with here and who were the long-time residents that kind of got to the same point that I did of going, "You know what, this has just changed too much," and they've found communities in Oregon and Washington and northern California, all areas that have kind of recreated the environment that they had when they lived here.

VJ: It prompts me to ask what has changed noticeably within the canyon for you, in terms of community life over the last couple of years, that makes you feel this is not quite the place I grew up in?

PA: Well, the community I grew up in, there was still a couple of restaurants in the canyon, now there's only one. There was two stores, now there's one. There was two gas stations, now there's none. That whole true identity of the community is—I won't say falling apart, but it's different. Now it really does kind of take these catastrophic events to really bring the community together. Whereas, in the past, the community was together all the time. Now it really is—the activities that we had back then, they're a struggle to get with today's life. With everybody's activities and business demands and economic demands, and just what everybody does, it's tougher to have that slower pace, if you will.

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Now, I spoke earlier about, you know, everybody? Well, now you know everybody in your immediate neighborhood, but there's a lot of people in the canyon who I don't know. I have no clue who they are and no clue where they live. Back in the late seventies, you pretty much knew almost everybody. You could know that that's John's house, that's Jane's house, that's whoever's. Now, it's—for me anyway, it's much more limited than that.

VJ: So to some extent, the canyon also has become a little bit more of a bedroom community, in place of a small town with its own center.

PA: Very much so. Yeah, very much so. It is definitely a bedroom commuter community, where people drive to everything because there's nothing—there's the one little café here now. Whereas before, you could drive right down the street to the restaurant and the bar and have dinner and have your Friday night out. You didn't have to go all the way down to the flatlands, if you will. So, yeah, that's changing the whole atmosphere of the community a little bit.

VJ: So canyon communities are also a part of the change in Southern California, to some extent. Not entirely isolated from it.

PA: Oh, yeah. We're not exempt from it, unfortunately.

VJ: Pat, I've asked all the questions I have for you, and you've told me a great deal and this was a very rich and interesting interview. If you have anything you want to tell me that I didn't really ask about, now might be a good time for you to bring that up.

PA: Boy, I have no idea what it would be. We seem to have covered quite a variety of things, and I don't know if there's anything that stands out that's like, oh, you forgot to ask about –

VJ: Okay. Well, in that case, that concludes our conversation with Pat Antrim here in the Silverado Canyon. Today is June 7th, 2008. My name is Volker Janssen.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

INDEX