

Transcript of Interview between Mrs. Penny Pitou and Arthur Weeks IV

Date: 3/10/14

Location: Penny Pitou Travel

A: My Name is Arthur Weeks, I am interviewing Mrs. Penny Pitou and today is the 10th of March, 2014.

A: So actually, I looked at your biography on Wikipedia when I first got your name and it said that you were originally from New York not New Hampshire

P: I was born in Bayside. I hate to admit it but I was born in Bayside, Long Island, New York but my family/parents when they were honeymooning had come through Laconia and had stayed at the White Owl Cabins [and] fell in love with the Lakes Region. When I was 3, my brother was 2, they said, “Let’s chuck all this stuff here on Long Island, here in New York, and let’s move north.” So they came up north and built a little house and bought 128 acres of land. Well they bought the land first then built the house and my father decided he wanted to be a farmer from New York. So he asked a lot of questions from the local farmers, bought some cows. We named all our animals so of course we couldn’t kill them so that’s a real detriment when you’re a farmer when you can’t kill anything. We did kill the chickens, but the pigs and the cows just hung around forever. It was a wonderful life it was a wonderful way to grow up, but when I was around 7, my parents realized that they couldn’t make a living farming and so we moved to Gilford. And that was the best move for me, ever, because we moved to Potter Hill Road where I still live—different house, but I still live there. Our next door neighbor, Gary Allen, became my coach, my mentor, drove me to a lot of ski races. He was terrific and he was also one of the first people that I went hiking with in the White Mountains. I can remember climbing Mt. Lafayette when I was pretty young and I had a white cotton turtleneck on, and I sweat like crazy going up and at the top it was cold and I thought I was going to freeze to death. It was like being in a freezer with this wet cotton turtleneck wrapped around me. After that, for years I brought a second shirt with me that I could change into and now with these new fabrics, you can sweat like crazy and be at the top and wind blows a little bit and boom, you’re dry. He was terrific and when we went to Maine we climbed Mt. Katahdin and we camped out and Sy Simons, who was a friend of his, made blueberry pancakes for breakfast and we climbed Katahdin as young kids. So I fell in love with the mountains. Of course, I fell in love with them when I was skiing on them too. For me the mountains are my inspiration. When things aren’t going well/pretty crummy in my life I go out into the mountains. I go everyday anyway with the dogs, and we hike for an hour and a half—we go up a mountain around here. As often as I can then in the summer I drive up north and go into the Whites. I think I’ve celebrated every birthday since I was 15/16 on atop of a mountain in the White Mountains. One time—and I can’t remember if it was a birthday or just because I wanted to hiking that day—I went with my German Shepherd Tessa to climb Isolation—I don’t know if you know Isolation but it’s very far—

A: Is it up, is it past the notch?

P: No it’s before the notch but it’s a very long haul. It’s called Isolation for a reason it’s isolated. It’s one of the 4k footers so you’ve got to get it in although I’ve never, ever tried to get all 48 four-thousanders. What I do is I sniff the air in the morning and say “Oops—it’s a Moosilauke Day” or “Oops—it’s a Lafayette Day.” Some of the mountains, I think I’ve climbed Waumbek

or Cabot—but not the other and they're really up north, which you probably know. I went up Isolation with my dog—in shorts and it started to snow. It got very cold and there's a point where you reach the ridge and you turn right or left and I turned right—which was wrong—and I came back and it's getting colder and colder and I turned left and got to the top of Isolation. The only thing I had to eat was a half of cantaloupe and I sat there with the snow coming down in my shorts and my poor dog, trying to eat a frozen cantaloupe which wasn't a lot of fun. I haven't been on Isolation since. After a while, my kids know that the best birthday present they can give me is to suggest going up a mountain then we go up together. Now of course, instead of me leading the pack they lead the pack and I follow behind. My grandkids are very strong; they really run up the mountains. I don't do that anymore, I'm not sure if I did it in the first place. My grandkids are in really good shape. I love the mountains. There's a mountain called Paugus, it's not a 4k footer but it's a mean little mountain I just love it. I go over a oh god, what's the name of that mountain? It's got beautiful rock formations...I go over a little mountain first and cross a brook—which is always hairy to cross—then we go up the backside of Paugus and nobody's ever on the mountain. Ever. It's about two and a half hours up, a lot of sweating on the way. Just being on the top with my dogs and looking at the view is just extraordinary. I feel so happy and that'll be one of my first mountains this spring. Well the first mountain will be Israel Mountain because it will have less snow on it. I do it the long way I go up it and down the backside. It's about seven or eight miles which isn't very far. It's an easy hike, it's not hard. If I take my older dog, I can't do much more with him. With the young one, my new rescue dog, I have to do a lot of big mountains with him to wear him out. Lafayette is one of my favorites but I enjoy hiking up Greenleaf. I hate Greenleaf trail but I like to go up Greenleaf then come down Skookumchuk. Go to North Peak, away from the crowds, then climb down Skookumchuk. It's a five mile trail down. It's not difficult so you can look at the views and enjoy the beautiful peaceful woods. There's not a mountain up there that I don't love, and I have a senior pass now so I can tape it to my window and not have to worry about getting a pass every year. For a while that was kind of a drag. The problem is that they left Laconia, you don't have to bypass Laconia to get up to Campton—maybe you know that. I don't have to worry about that at my age, I don't have worry about anything just if I can get back to the car.

A: Being in the mountains, what was your first day of skiing like? What drew you to the sport of skiing?

P: Well, I grew up on the farm as I told you, there wasn't much to do but skate or ski. My father made me a pair of skis out of I think barrel staves and he put a leather tow strap and candy jar rubbers to keep my galoshes—they weren't ski boots—to keep the galoshes underneath the strap and they sent me off down this little hill in the back yard. I spent most of the time on my face but I thought “My God, this is fun!” and I loved it. Then we moved to Gilford and 15 town fathers formed the Gilford Outing Club and they had a little rope tow. All of us could really turn left because we'd go straight down the hill and to the left to the little rope tow. Then eventually we went to a different area, we had a longer rope tow but it was still sort of a drag literally and figuratively as a kid going through the ruts with your mittens on. I learned to run slalom there. Gary Allen set gates with little birch saplings, make them pointy at one end then stick them into the ground. Now of course, they have screwdrivers to screw in the poles. It's amazing, the changes over the years. Then eventually, when you were old enough you graduated to skiing at Gunstock which was once Belknap Recreation Area. Then, if you continued racing, as I did, and

started winning races you had to go to different ski areas. I raced at Wildcat before they had lifts that was before 1956, and we used to have to climb up Wildcat. We'd sidestep up that whole mountain, get up, turn around, and have our training run. There were no gates, just trees on each side of the trail. You had to stay on the trail, couldn't go through the trees. Then we'd pack it up again, and then the radios would crackle and pop and they'd get them to the starting gate and say "3, 2, 1" and off you went. We also raced on the Servant Trail on Mount Washington. I don't know if you've been on Washington but it's halfway up and called the Howard Johnson's burned down which was just a hut with some food. So we'd climb up there, pack it out with our skis and down we'd go.

A: Through reading your biography on Wikipedia, one thing I found interesting was that you snuck onto the boy's ski team—

P: Well I didn't have to sneak. I played with these kids, skied and jumped with them since I moved to Gilford when I was seven years old. Then I was close to 13/14, and nobody said no girls could race, so I don't said "I don't see any other girls I'll just pretend I'm a boy," and put my hair under my ski hat. I asked the boys to call me Tommy and off we went. We raced in a lot of races, I jumped in a lot of meets and I won most of the jumping competitions, and I was really good in downhill since I couldn't turn very well. One day, three quarters of the way through the season—by the way, I was the second man on the team—we were racing at New Hampton school and I caught an edge and fell flat on my face right in front of the gatekeeper and my hat fell off. My hair fell out, and the gatekeeper looked down at me and said, "Oh my God, it's a girl." So two weeks later, the principal of the Laconia High School called me in and said I was off the team because I had been discovered as a girl. That was twenty years before Title IX. The showers in the girls' bathroom at Laconia High School never worked. We still went out and played field hockey and stuff—we got sweaty--but we didn't take showers. The boys' showers worked just fine but not the girls' showers. The girls just had intramural sports, field hockey and a little basketball, but that was it for girls sports. When I came back from the Olympics in 1956, I said to the track coach—because I still had that spring at school—I said to the track coach "show me how to throw the discus and put the shot because I'm prett strong and would like to compete in the summer Olympics" and he said "girls don't do that." And I said "I know there are women that compete in them and he said, "Not here. Girls don't put the shot and throw the discus here." That was the end of me being in the summer Olympics—

A: Before it even began

P: Yup

A: You said that you got kicked off the team. Was there any positive reaction to you being on the ski team?

P: Well the boys thought it was fine because we were winning. We were doing really well. I think the reason we were kicked off the—of course, they discovered I was a girl—but I think what happened was when I had been discovered as a girl some of the parents called the principal and said "there's no chaperone on the bus. We don't want our kids riding with her. There's no chaperone." And I'm thinking to myself, "why do I need a chaperone? I've skied with these kids

every day and every weekend after school and now I have to have a chaperone to be on the bus with them?”

A: That seems a little absurd.

P: Well it wasn't very long after that—I was about 14 then—I was 21 or 22, the next door neighbor came up the hill crying and she was a really good athlete. All the kids in Gilford, it didn't make a difference whether you were a boy or a girl you played baseball, football, played all the sports and you played together. There weren't many kids back in those days, of course there are now. There are hundreds of them down there it's amazing. She was crying—Amy never cried, she was tough as nails—and I said, “What's the matter Amy?” She said, “I went down to play baseball and they told me I couldn't play cuz I'm a girl.” Well, that got it going all over again. I said, “come with me,” and down we went to the baseball field. There were five baseball diamonds. I went up to the first one and I said to the guy there, “This is Amy Richardson she wants to play ball” and he said, “she can't she's a girl.” I said, “She can throw and catch better than any boy out there on that field” and he said, “It doesn't make any difference. She's a girl.” I said, “You know what? I'll start a girls' baseball team.” He said, “Ahh. First of all, they can't throw and catch. Secondly, they'll never show up.” Well, 65 little girls showed up. He was right, they couldn't throw and they couldn't catch because nobody had thrown the ball to them. They came with their mothers and fathers as coaches. It didn't take long before we had a girls' baseball league in Gilford—hard ball, not softball. It eventually turned into softball, but I started it and I don't even like baseball. I just couldn't stand it. It was not fair. That, I guess, was before Title IX too. Title IX came in 1977?

A: Just about, yes

P: And this was the early sixties. Poor Amy, she didn't get Title IX either. I never knew it was so unfair until Title IX appeared and I saw that girls had all the equipment, they had teams. Even in the middle school, the girls have a girls' ski team--which my granddaughter was on but it was too much to be on the ski team and the race program so she gave that up—but even in the middle school, for God's sakes. It was fabulous. It is fabulous. I'm sure some of the men don't like it because a lot of the money goes to fielding girls teams but *c'est la vie*.

A: Since they've had boys and girls ski teams, has any Laconia or Gilford school try to contact you, being a former resident, has anyone tried to contact you to coach those teams?

P: They did. Somewhere in the seventies they asked me to coach the girls' ski team. I said yes. I went to all the races and I waxed their skis at the start. I had some very good skis but I also had skiers who said, “Don't wax my skis. I don't want to go too fast” and I said, “but that's the object of this.” So that didn't last too long. I think I did it one year or two years I can't remember. I've spoken to the team a couple of times, but if you don't have something that's up to date or if there's nothing that touches them, kids don't care about history. I found that they were pretty bored. I haven't been asked since.

A: Have you used the same skis?

P: No. I'm always trying different skis. When my brother was in the ski business I skied in whatever ski he was representing—that was easy. I didn't have a choice, I just decided that I would ski on whatever [he was representing]. I figured that was being loyal. When he stopped repping skis and got out of the ski business, I skied on whatever I wanted. Now I got a pair of K2s which are very nice, little short skis. I guess the answer to that [question] is that I'm still looking for the perfect ski. I loved the Rossignol Bandits but then they stopped making them. Soon as people like a pair of skis, they change them—like cars.

A: When you ski in Europe do you ski in the German Alps, the Swiss Alps or the French Alps?

P: I ski in four countries. I ski in Italy, Austria, Switzerland and France. I'm going to give you a brochure. Next Year I'm going to be in France. I used to ski 5-7 weeks a winter, now I do two. That seems to be enough but I do two hiking trips in the summer. That keeps me busy. Now I hire guides. I used to be out front. For 20-22 years I took the faster skiers. I had a few other American skiers that came with me and would ski with the other skiers, the other groups. We try to fit them in according to their ability. You don't want to have a hotshot with someone snow plowing. I ski in all four countries. Right now Switzerland is really expensive. Austria is the cheapest. Italy is next, then France, then Switzerland.

A: The cost, is that due to the exchange rate with the Euro?

P: The Euro and the Swiss Franc. In the old days, I had four currencies: I had the Austrian Schilling, the Italian Lira, Swiss Franc—which is still around, and the French Franc. I had to have a little wallet with four currencies and I always had some German Deutsche Marks because we'd fly into Munich and I didn't want to use a different currency with a crappy exchange rate. The exchange rate makes a big difference. You have to be sort of clairvoyant. I plan these trips for next winter. I've already priced these trips for the first two weeks of February of next winter and I've already figured out what I think the dollar will be doing. I hope I'm right, but no currency trader is any smarter than I am; they don't know either. So far I've been really good. Once the Euro went to 1.60 that nearly killed me, the Swiss Franc is really strong compared to the dollar. It's not even on par, it's awful. Things can change, I can price it at one thing and the dollar changes—it seems the better our economy is the worse the dollar is. It just seems our dollar is weaker when our economy is doing well. They like to invest in dollars when we're not doing so hot for some reason. It's stupid. You think that when our economy's strong our dollar should be stronger. That plays a big role. I don't deal in dollars, I deal in foreign currency.

A: What are the differences you see between a regular mountain resort for skiing in Europe and say, going up to Waterville Valley for a few runs on a weekend?

P: There's such a big difference. Europe is vast. The areas are huge. The three valleys Les Trois Valleees—and I'm going to Courcheval, the first valley, going there next winter—are bigger than all the ski areas in Utah and Colorado combined and you could throw New England in there too, and still have some left over. It's vast, it's 350 miles of groomed trails and slopes, four valleys. You can spend a week in each valley, it's so big. Of course you have all the possibilities. I was in Val Gardena in the Dolomites this past winter. They have 420+ lifts, all interconnected.

A: You say 420+?

P: Mhmm. All interconnected. You can start in Ortisei and wind up almost in Cortina, a bus ride of two hours. When you're skiing, people ride so many lifts that they have no idea where they are. That's why you really need guides. We can go as far as Amenterola then take a lift up to the top and ski down the backside and there are these horses with long ropes with big knots every two feet. You grab a hold of one of the knots and they smack the horses and off you go down the valley, holding on and hoping to hell that you don't fall because they'll run right over you, the people behind you. It is an experience that we don't have here. I love to ski in Vail; I'm going there next week, the 19th, maybe the week after next. I have a lot of skiing, there's a lot of skiing there, but it doesn't match the breadth and depth of skiing in Europe. It's just unbelievable. Nothing's like it—well Whistler/Blackcomb are something like it. I like it there because if you get bored with Blackcomb you can go to Whistler. With Europe you have the ambience of being in a foreign country, eating wonderful food. In Italy we had seven courses every night. I didn't want seven courses I wanted four but they said, "Penny, the reason everyone comes to our hotel is for the wonderful food and we're not going to serve four courses, we're going to serve seven." So they did, but it went very quickly. It was well done. I sell my trips with two meals: breakfast and dinner. In the West, nobody does that. You buy breakfast and you buy dinner which can be a bit of a drag if it's a busy time of the year because you have to go early in order to get a table somewhere, and if you're with a group it doesn't work at all. They don't have space for 20 people, and I go with 40. Dinner ends around seven and we have an area where sit and everybody gets to move around and meet everyone. A lot of social contacts are made on these trips. People make friends and when they find out which trips their friends are going on, other people sign up. Those two weeks will be sold out by the first week of June which should be great.

A: What were your first Olympics like? It was 1956

P: It was very exciting. I was a senior in high school. I made the team when I was 16. I was 17 when we flew to Europe on a Super-C Constellation, something like 17 hours to London. For me, landing in Europe, it felt like I came home. I loved the smell, I loved the food, never was homesick in Europe. Never. I don't know what that was all about; it might be a throwback from one of my ancestors. I loved it. I was very strong and I worked very hard, but I wasn't a great skier. I learned to ski after I made the team, I think. I raced in all three events—which was a big deal, because they only allowed four members of each team/nation to race in each of the events, and I was chosen as one of the four. There were seven on each team. I raced in all three events and would've done quite well in the downhill but I crashed and fell flat on my face just before the finish and slid through the finish line on my face—well on my stomach actually. I was told I had the fourth-fastest time when I did that. At a very-young seventeen, that was really good and I stayed on in Europe for another two months. We didn't have teams; we had a team that every two years would say "you're on the world championship team" or "you've made the Olympic team." We'd arrive in November and in February when the races were over they'd say, "You can go home with us or you can stay for the next nine months" and I always stayed. I figured the only way to beat them was to live over there, to race against them, to see what they ate and how they lived, how they trained, I watched everything they did. I copied them and then I beat them.

A: At both Olympics, were the interactions between the other athletes cordial?

P: Yes, very. The athletes were terrific. We're all in the same boat. It was great. I had had three years of French in school—actually I was in my fourth year of French at school—so I was fluent. I [interacted with] the French team, immediately found a French boyfriend—who didn't speak a word of French, which was terrific—and my French got better and better. The same thing happened in the 1960 Olympics. It was a very “small” Olympics in that I'm sure there wasn't as many reporters and officials and we were all in one place, all the athletes stayed in the Olympic village. So we got to meet the cross-country skiers, bobsledders, we all ate in the same dining room. That was really great. I don't think they do that anymore. The alpine skiers are far away from the skaters and the cross-country skiers. You don't get to meet anybody except the other alpine skiers. We met everybody; we met hockey players, I watched the hockey team win in 1960. Of course everybody forgets that they won in '60—they all say that the first time was 1980, which drives me crazy. That part was very nice. Both those Olympics were small, but you have to keep in mind that we were amateurs in those days. We were poor. If your family wasn't of money, it was really tough. I made the team on Northland seconds. I never saw a decal on my skis until I made the team. They cost 27 dollars. That's all I had, one pair of skis for all the events. When I made the team Northland gave me a new pair of downhill skis and a pair of slalom skis. Up until that point, 25 cents an hour takes a lot of money, a lot of babysitting, a lot of changing diapers to buy yourself a pair of skis. During the time I raced, if we won the races my friend Betsy Snite and I were invited to the next race and they'd pay our transportation costs from the border of the country to the race and pay for the hotel room and breakfast and dinner and maybe give us 5 dollars a day for lunch. Everything was pretty much taken care of and then they'd ship us back to the border of the country. They'd pay to that point and the next country would pick up the expenses—it's only if we were winning, mind you. That's how we survived. Betsy had more money than I did, her family did, but she lived the same way I did. We traveled third class on the train which was wooden benches, pretty uncomfortable.

A: What was it like in your first Olympics coming back from the Olympic village to your senior year in high school?

P: They picked me up in Boston and '93 was done but not totally. I had been in the airplane for hours and hours and hours. My parents picked me up in Boston and said, “We're stopping in Concord because you're going to speak to the legislature.” I said, “What?” I had been over there speaking French and German. So on the way home in 1956 in late March we stopped and I spoke off-the-cuff to the legislature. All 400 people were there. Amazing. They actually recorded it. I sound a little bit like an idiot because I was jet-lagged. They had banquets. When I came home in 1959 after the world championships, I had been in Europe for almost a year and a half. We had a “Penny Pitou Day” which was quite a celebration. I remember riding through Main Street in a convertible and it was the same day Milo Pike was trying to pave Main Street and he was really unhappy. Eventually we were married so he must have forgiven me.

A: Now I see you have two dogs here, the St. Bernard's in the picture, obviously you're a big dog person. Have you owned a lot of dogs over the years?

P: I can't tell you how many in fact I'd keep my grandkids hiking when they were younger if I told them very sad dead dog stories. Every single one of my dogs I can keep track of the day they born, the day they died. I've had 5 Briards, 2 Great Danes, 4 St. Bernard's, a boxer, a rescue and a mutt. Oh—I had a beagle, I've had lots of dogs. We had Irish setters when we were back on the farm, and when we got to Gilford I had my first dog for me and he was a named Seth. Seth went to school with me, came to the beach with me, Seth and I were buddies for sure. I bring the dogs to work and they learn very quickly that they have to be quiet and lie on their blankets. We've already been up the mountain once so they're not antsy as you can see. I had just taken them for a little walk. We go out by the Irwin motors and walk along the river, to make it like another forty minutes or so—easy walk. I like dogs, they're wonderful companions. I need to have them in the mountains, have a buddy to go with me. I've hiked with two Briards and two St. Bernard's and German Shepherds before—four of them. All off-lead and they minded me; amazing, but they did. [Points to lab] He's too old to go up the mountains anymore but the little one, the rescue; he's going to be great this summer.

A: So when you find rescue dogs, do you find them from a specific shelter?

P: I've only had one and that was because I was losing my Briard. Briards are French sheep dogs and I knew I was losing her; she was dying of kidney disease. I said to the gal who helped clean the house from time to time, "I got to have a dog, I can't live without a dog." She said, "Why don't you get a rescue dog? Get a dog that's not a puppy. Get a puppy in the spring you can't take the dog on the big mountains and you got to give them a few months to get their feet under them, their bones and their ligaments to mature." So I thought that was a good idea and she found Spencer [other dog in office] at Joyful Rescues out in Cuba, New York which is near Buffalo. I said, "That's too far to go" and she said, "My mother and I will drive out and get him." So she did. She brought him home and he is something else. He's got a little Italian Greyhound in him and he just goes like the wind so he's going to be really good in the mountains. I'm excited about that. Very quick, very agile and he can go for miles and miles. I hope he gets tired because I'll be tired after fifteen miles for sure.

A: What's it like having a St. Bernard in the mountains?

P: That was not so good. I did the best I could with the Saint. My St. Bernard Muffin was only five and I never traveled with water. When I took the kids hiking I never travel with water. We'd go from hut to hut and they'd have a little tin cup around their waist and when we came to brooks, they drank; when we didn't come to brooks, they didn't. I didn't think you should bring water, now I know you should. I never brought water for the dogs either. I think it was a hot day and I think it was too hot for her. She managed, she got up and down the mountain—it was only Smarts Mountain in Lyme—when we got home something happened. I don't know if it affected his kidneys; the doctor never could figure out what was wrong. He passed away a couple of months later. That was the last mountain we went up. That's what did him in. The St. Bernard's and even the Briards—I have a picture of them here—were only 70 or 80 pounds. The Briards you have to be careful with because they're so hairy. [Points to picture] That's Chloe, she just died.

A: Ok, I've seen this breed in a few movies.

P: There they are when they were younger. That's on the top of a mountain—no, that's walking here in Laconia.

A: So that's—

P: Yup, that's Brutus when he was a little younger and a little thinner. I realize now that I can't overdo it with the dogs and I have to be careful because otherwise I won't have them for as long as I want them. I'm trying to be a better dog-mommy.

A: Do you find hiking to be a good change of pace from skiing from time to time?

P: You know people always ask me what I like better: hiking or skiing. I guess what I always say is "Whatever I'm not doing I like better." I like hiking, I get more exercise. Of course, because I like to go all day long when people sign up I'm not sure if they want to hike as much, so I have to be careful that I don't do as much. I want them to like what they're doing and not have to take days off because they're sore. I love to ski too. It's not *just* skiing or *just* hiking for me; I'm concerned about the group and everybody being happy. When you have 40 people and 5 guides, you have to make sure that each guide is doing what you hope they're going to be doing. I hire the same ones; I know that they're pretty much terrific. I still have to go because people want to a little faster, some want to go slower, some want to stop a lot, some not as often and they don't say anything to the guides. So when I'm with them they'll say "I wish we didn't stop as often" and I'll say "Let's not stop so much why don't you tell them." They can't do it but I do. When I do it, things are better. What do I like better? I can't wait to go hiking, although I am going skiing tomorrow whether I like it or not. It's supposed to be nice tomorrow and very warm. I would just like to be warm again.

A: There's supposed to be a big snow storm from Wednesday night to Thursday morning

P: That's what they say. Here we go again. It's supposed to get cold again

A: I think so, yes.

P: Well that will be nice. Either that or it's going to be slop. Well that's good. Like I said, I'm going to Vail and they get a lot of snow but I hope it snows before I get there.

A: What are some of the differences you've found between skiing in the White Mountains and skiing in the Rockies? I know one of the differences people say is that there's not a lot of ice out west compared to skiing in the White Mountains. Have you found any differences besides altitude?

P: Sure, the altitude in the West can be a killer. Vail is at 8200 ft—that's where it starts—and it goes up to 11,000. Taos is even worse it starts at 9,000 and goes up—I don't think they have much vertical might be 11,000 maybe 10,500. I stay with a friend in Edwards which is 7,800 and I don't get sick but if I stay in Vail, coming from sea level going to 8,200 I wind up with sort of that gnawing headache for a day or so. You climb up stairs and you get a little breathless. I was

out hiking last fall and the first two days were really tough but then you acclimatize. The altitude is tough, but the snow is not icy. I have skied on ice at Vail although they would say never. I would say generally the snow in the West is softer and less icy. We seem to have more snow and more water in the snow. It can be nice and fluffy but they roll it and it's hard packed and they pack it again and again so it gets down to this glisten form. You see your face in it. That's what they race on. The snow is impregnated with water; it's ice. You can't even stand on it. If you try to ski a World Cup Run after the race is done, it's impossible; you go sideways faster than you go front ways. You have to have crampons to stand on it. It's unbelievable what they race on. On the other hand, you look at some of the courses that we used to race on and there are still bumps, moguls, water bars. Back in the late 50s early 60s they barely groomed it. Unbelievable. [points to my water bottle]. How many of those do you drink a day?

A: I try to get about four in.

P: Good for you, do you try to do that on purpose?

A: Part purpose, part I've found that it's a lot healthier. I like it over soda, it saves money and with the blandness of water I usually get the flavor shots to put in the water beforehand.

P: That's good. Good for you that you do that. I don't drink enough water. I never get thirsty. When we were training, if you got thirsty that meant that you sweat a lot, which meant you weren't in good shape, so nobody drank.

A: So it was the "water is for the weak" mentality when training then?

P: Yea. We just didn't drink. I don't know. No one did. No one carried water when they were hiking. You should see the guys over there, they still don't carry water. They'll carry a small bottle and it warms up because it's plastic but I can't believe they don't drink as much as we're told to in America.

A: That's what you see out in Europe, the no one carrying water?

P: You don't see a lot of them, no. I think they're drinking more than they used to, but you don't see people with those huge suckers on their backs, the Camelbaks. The locals you don't see doing that. There might be Americans with Camelbaks. I know it's healthy to drink water. Now that I see you drinking water I will drink.

A: Have you done any of the Volksmarches in Germany/Austria/Switzerland?

P: No.

A: It's where towns will host either a 10k or a 20k.

P: Nope, I've never raced in those. You know when I stopped ski racing, I became a tennis player. I became a state champion in tennis. I don't play tennis anymore unfortunately, but you really have to play that a lot in order to hit the ball consecutively. I did race in the Return of the

Champions in Vail, maybe 10 years or so ago. I don't run gates and my technique is so different from the way kids ski now, and I don't want to look like a fool. I don't compete in the mountains I mean I'm 75 which I could use as an excuse to not race.

A: [points to picture] So is that the picture—above the one on the lower left—is that a picture of you and your husband in the mountains?

P: No that was a client, Ben Jesser and we were in Verbier and I just decided we looked kind of cute together so I sat in his lap.

A: [points to different picture] I mean the one above it.

P: That's Eric Thioliere and he's been my guide for years and years. Actually I have a thing called the Medaille de Fidelite from the bureau in Chamonix I had worked with the bureau for 20 years. He'll be doing the Tour de Mont Blanc, he's guiding the Tour de Mont Blanc for this summer and that's actually the Tour de Mont Blanc that we're on. I've done it five or six times, the last time I did it was five or six years ago. [points to photo] Ahh, there I am with the Medaille de Fidelite with Eric.

A: Is that a medal handed out by—

P: Well no, it's a medal handed out by the Bureau de Guide, the Guide's association in Chamonix. It was the first time that it had ever been given out and it was given to a woman and an American. It was a big deal. He's a guide. He's the guide that I've gone to Chamonix with a few times with ski groups. [points to another photo] These are some of the agents that used to work with me on familiarization trips. Every 20th or 30th anniversary I take everyone hiking or skiing in Europe. I don't have as many employees so I can't take everybody and leave them high and dry here. I can't close the office for a week or two.

A: The big mountain behind the group picture—

P: The Matterhorn. This is the Matterhorn over here, this is the Mont Blanc. 92? That was a long time ago. That's Mont Blanc, that's Kilimanjaro. The top of Kilimanjaro is a huge football field it's very flat. Here is the Matterhorn. This is the hut you stay in overnight before you climb it, and then you walk over here then start up. You work that ridge to the top. When I take that route I always hike up to the hut and then we walk over to the Matterhorn so we can hug the Matterhorn. That's us on top of the Matterhorn right there, Tony Spiess was the guide. It was a long time ago too.

A: So you hug the ridgeline?

P: It's sort of a hug. You can't hug the Himalayas, can't get that close it's all snow. In fact, there's a rope that hangs down and that gets you over the hitch and keep on trucking. Part way up there's another hut, you can go in there in the case of bad weather or if you want to turn back. It's very exposed a very technical hike. You still have to be very cautious. You're on a rope with a guide but he doesn't have a rope around anything. He doesn't use any protective devices as you

free climb. When the clouds part you can see it's like a 4,000 ft drop on either side. Pretty Scary. More than a little scary—very scary. And that's Aconcagua right here. I did not make this that's 2207 and my friends made it so they had to send a picture—well they didn't have to, but they did. This is Austria but these are the Dolomites and that's just beautiful hiking. It's all lovely and I'm very lucky to be able to do this and it's only because of my skiing that I became familiar with these mountains and comfortable taking people there to hike or ski.

A: So have you done—I know one popular hike and ski run is Tuckerman's Ravine. Have you done Tuckerman's?

P: I did Hillman's Highway which is to the left of the actual drop off on Tuckerman's. I've never gone over the head wall; I've hiked up over it, and I was up at Picnic Rock a couple of years ago with my son and everything was real soft and sloppy and it was starting to break through. There was a great big waterfall right in the middle, it was like a big crevasse right in the middle and it was very shortly thereafter that a guy was up there hiking with his son and he slipped and went right into that crevasse and they didn't find him for months. They hoped that he banged his head badly enough so that when he went in he was already gone or unconscious. Pretty sad. So no, I've not gone over the head wall but I have skied up there. I'd rather hike, and hike without carrying the skis over my shoulder—and the boots. In the old days when we hiked with leather boots it was a different story. They don't hike in their plastic boots anyways, they carry them. No one's crazy enough to hike two hours in those plastic clunkers.

A: I heard you mention the Himalayas. Is that where the Matterhorn is located?

P: No, the Matterhorn is in Europe. The Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Western Europe. The highest mountain in Europe is in Georgia and that's 18,000. The Mont Blanc is maybe 15,500 maybe 15,700. It's really hard to get to this mountain in Georgia which was part of Russia so not many people climb that mountain. It's very dangerous to even get there. The Himalaya I've taken a lot of people—not a lot of people--three groups and we've hiked to Kala Patthar and we've done some other hikes in Nepal. I don't want to go to any third world countries; I've had it with that. I want to make sure anything I put in my mouth is clean and safe.

A: Would you ever do the Himalayas if given the chance?

P: No. I mean if I had a group call me and say “would you do a trip to the Himalaya?” I might consider it but no, I'd rather take them to the Alps. It's the same experience, and they don't go home sick—or with a bullet in their heads. You don't know what's going to happen in these countries.

A: I know the Himalayas has K2 and obviously Everest.

P: It's miserable being at altitude. The base camp of Everest is 17,500 and you go up to 27,000/29,000. It's crazy. When you get to altitude like that you're brain cells are dying, they're not regenerating—that's it.

A: Did you ever go to the Zugspitze?

P: Oh yea, Zugspitze. I had a group in Lermoos which is the Austrian side of the Zugspitze and it's a wonderful valley, a gorgeous valley. Zugspitze—I trained there actually when I was younger, but now there's so little snow I don't think they ski up there anymore. All the glaciers are receding. We were up there and there was a little snow but not very much. I was there in the summer time and there was enough snow to train and now it's gone, which is sad.

A: So if you could pick—I know you have plenty of favorites in the White Mountains—but if you could pick a favorite mountain, what would be your favorite mountain to ski at and your favorite mountain to hike?

P: Every mountain has its pluses. I like Paugus because nobody's there and it's mean, it has some steep pitches but because nobody's around you feel like you're in another world. The mountain I think of and hike the most is Moosilauke. They've had some washouts so going up the Asquam Ridge Trail the bottom part of it is closed now. I like Moosilauke and I like Lafayette, Lincoln and Haystack but I guess the answer to that would be Moosilauke.

A: For Hiking?

P: And for skiing, I love Cannon because everybody knows everybody. The same people have been working there for the past forty years and when the snow is good, it can be fun to ski in the powder there. Loon has a lot more skiing than it used to, in the winter months it faces in a direction which makes it shady most of the day. I like to ski in the sun. My grandkids ski at Waterville. I like Waterville, Tom Corcoran—who was on the team with me—one of the original owners of Waterville. It's in the sun, and I like that but it can be very cold too. Wildcat I don't ski very much because it's so far away and that can be cold as well. Attitash—I wish they had a lift that went all the way to the top and not the fast one that goes 2/3 way up and you have to ski down to a lift that takes you all the way up, but I do like Attitash. What's left? Bretton Woods is a little mild. The two closest ones for me are Cannon—Cannon, Loon and Waterville, depends on the day.

A: Being a downhill skier, do you prefer wide open runs to glades, for example?

P: I like the glades as long as there are no rocks to ruin the skis. I think it's fun to ski in glades. I like to make turns in the glades. If I have the right skis on, I like it wide open because I like to make big g.s. turns. The trouble is, if you want to have skis to make cute little turns and bumps, those cute little skis are not very good at high speeds. I'm not sure how that works if you can push a button and you get another 10 inches/10 centimeters on your skis, that'd be neat. I guess I like to ski in soft bumps a lot, which is surprising since at my age my knees should be shot. My left is shot but it doesn't hurt when I ski, it only hurts when I hike. I don't know if you know Waterville Valley but there's this trail called Periphery. If you look down it's all the over to your left but if you make one turn to the left or one turn to the right, you can sort of bank up all the way down and I love that. I like sluiceways, valleys so I can go up and down all the way down like a kid would. I like that very much.

A: So how did you feel about the snowboard when it was first introduced?

P: All of my kids skied on snowboards for a while. I was terrified that they might give up skis and ski on snowboards. You know the snowboarders scare me when they're behind me, for sure because on one side, they can't see so they have their back to you. So if they decide with their back to you that they're going to shoot across the trail...with skiers you can judge what they're going to do, with snowboarders you can't. They have every right to be on the hill and I think for a while snowboarders kept skiing alive. They try not to scare people because they know they don't have a good reputation. I sometimes get a little ticked off when I see them scrape off the last little bit of snow right down to the ice. There are some areas in Europe that have more snowboarders than skiers so I try to stay away from those areas because it's too scary. The horror stories are many with snowboarders running into people.

A: I know especially with Massachusetts vacation week it gets really crowded with skiers and snowboarders.

P: My granddaughter wants to be an orthopedist, wants to work with broken bones. I think that's because she sees people crashing all the time, or get crashed into. The problem with our trails is that a lot of the trails are narrow, or not huge. You know it's not a wide expanse like it is in Europe which is detrimental if you have a whiteout—that's lousy. If you don't have whiteout, and can see anything, the trails are wide enough so you can stay away from the snowboarders or they stay away from you.