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Pat Jablonsky
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Interview conducted by Vincent Santucci
Transcribed by Unknown
Edited by Molly Williams

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NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
P.O. Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

Transcript

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Vince Santucci: I appreciate that. In general, a couple of things about the interview. Assume I know nothing. When you respond, try to provide as much detail as you can, as best as you can recall.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay.

Vince Santucci: We're undertaking this oral history interview with several individuals. We're trying to capture some of the historical work done for paleontology at Carlsbad Caverns as part of the paleontological resource inventory that we're undertaking.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay.

Vince Santucci: I'll probably start very, very general in terms of who you are and your background. Then, I'll proceed then chronologically as best we can. I'll provide an opportunity at the end if I haven't covered anything that you think's important. Give you an opportunity to share anything that we hadn't discussed prior to that.

Pat Jablonsky: Sure.

Vince Santucci: I just want to do a quick introduction here. Today is Friday, January 3, 2020. This is an oral history interview for the National Park Service Paleontology Program. I'm speaking with Pat Jablonski who was involved in some really important paleontological work at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Where are you today, Pat?

Pat Jablonsky: I live in Delta, Colorado which is south of Grand Junction on your way to the San Juans.

Vince Santucci: Excellent. We're doing this interview over the telephone. My name is Vince Santucci. I'm the Senior Paleontologist for the National Park Service. I'm interviewing from my home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Thanks so much, Pat. Really appreciate your help.

Pat Jablonsky: Well, thank you for calling.

Vince Santucci: Sure. The first question I want to ask you is a very basic general question. When and where were you born? Where did you go to school?

Pat Jablonsky: My goodness. I was born in Atascadero, California. Don't tell anybody because I claim that I'm a native Texan because we only lived in California for six weeks before my dad was kicked out of the Army and sent back to Texas.

Vince Santucci: Very good. Your schooling?

Pat Jablonsky: I have a number of degrees. I have a Bachelor of Teaching in elementary school. I also have ... I say a number of degrees. I have several majors. One in earth sciences, one in anthropology, and another in geography. I have a major in music as well.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Very good. Good cross-section and background for you.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. Well, I was going to school, and then I married. Then, my husband was killed in Vietnam.

Vince Santucci: Oh, sorry.

Pat Jablonsky: Then, I basically had to start all over again because, at that point, I had a 21-month-old baby.

Vince Santucci: Really sorry to hear that. I was unaware of that.

Pat Jablonsky: It's okay. Vietnam.

Vince Santucci: Yes. Do you recall any early interest in fossils that you had?

Pat Jablonsky: Absolutely. My dad was the Deputy Superintendent of a large public school in Texas. Although it was in music, he's always had a fascination for the fossils that you would find around the town where he grew up which was Iraan, Texas. It's both upper and lower Cretaceous fossils in the area. From a very early age, that was a serious interest of his. He was one of the co-founders of a museum in the Freeport Lake Jackson complex in Texas. That was our weekend activities, was to go and get permission, of course, to hunt invertebrate fossils. He was a Research Associate at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. He was a Research Associate for the University of Texas at Austin. He had permits where other people would just illegally enter somebody's ranch and collect fossils. He could collect for research purposes, and it stuck on me from a very early age.

Vince Santucci: Great. Your education in earth sciences and in anthropology, where did you gain that education?

Pat Jablonsky: Sam Houston State University and Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. Sam Houston is in Huntsville, Texas and the other school was the alma mater of LBJ, was in San Marcos.

Vince Santucci: Was the first institution the earth science degree?

Pat Jablonsky: That was my elementary education teaching.

Vince Santucci: I see. Very good. How did you wind up at Carlsbad Caverns?

Pat Jablonsky: I met a gentleman who, one of his activities was to go caving. Pretty soon he said something about, "Oh, would you like to go into a cave?" I said, "Of course." That was the beginning of instant love for serious caving. I had done what you would call weekend caving for a lot of years before that, but never anything serious. So that's how I got started. Then I found out

that there was a grotto in Denver. Bill and I – that was to be my future husband. I went to the grotto meeting and I just went, "Wow. This is it." They had a weekend coming up where they were going down to Carlsbad in about 1983 or '84. I went and that was just the beginning of a mad, passionate love.

Although, I will have to admit I was in Carlsbad when I was five, and I was in Carlsbad when I was 10. At age 10, my parents just said, "Go do whatever you want to do." I went up to the front of the line and nagged and badgered the lead ranger for the whole two and a half hours. We got to the Jumping Off Spot at what is now called the Bottomless Pit, and looking into Lower Cave. I said, "Who gets to go there?" He said, "Well, only scientists and people who explore caves." I looked up at him and said, "Well, I'm going to go there one day." It took me until I was 40 to achieve that, but I did.

Vince Santucci: Congratulations.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah.

Vince Santucci: Yeah. We benefited from that for sure. Thank you.

Pat Jablonsky: It was a great experience.

Vince Santucci: Your introduction to cave paleontology, did it come before Carlsbad or did it occur—

Pat Jablonsky: No. It did not. I was the Collections Manager at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science for almost 10 years, both in mineralogy and in paleontology. That was really my serious introduction to vertebrate paleontology. Gosh, we had these giant rooms with huge field-jacketed dinosaurs laying around everywhere. At some point, back in about 1985 or '86, I guess, they decided that they were going to have a serious department of earth sciences. Because I had been the Collections Manager for the geology department, they just said, "Would you like to move over to the complete earth sciences department?" Where I would be Collections Manager for both areas, and I said, "Of course." That was the beginning of my introduction to vertebrate paleontology.

Vince Santucci: During your time at the Denver Museum, I'm sure you had an opportunity to work with quite a few of the paleontologists. Who were some of the names of paleontologists that you were able to work with?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, you may know one of them, Dr. Kirk Johnson, who's now at the Smithsonian.

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: I know Kirk rather well. The other one was Dr. Ken Carpenter, who's at Price, Utah. It's one of the university museums there. The third person would have been Dr. Richard Stucky. He was to become the head of that department. He was from Carnegie. I've made some others, too, There's Bryan Small, who was one of the preparators at the Denver Museum. He made a type discovery of a fossil at Petrified Forest a number of years ago. Then, I don't know if

you know this, but I found a specimen at the Petrified Forest National Park. It's also a type specimen as well.

Vince Santucci: Can you tell me more about that?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, that's getting a little sidetracked. My husband eventually got on with the National Park Service, and when I was ready to retire from being a museum Director in New Mexico, I was kind of what you would call "a camp follower". He would get a job as some part and I would go along and I had enough background in various things that I would land a job. While we're at Petrified Forest National Park, our schedules were so different. He worked Monday through Friday, and I worked, generally speaking, Wednesdays through whatever. We never had weekends off together.

Because of that, I was bored. I went to Bill Parker, and I said, "Look, I have some basic background in vertebrate paleontology having been at the Denver Museum. Is there anything that I can do?" He said, "Sure." One of my volunteer projects was that I would take a GPS, and if I happened to see some bones or teeth or anything else of interest to them, I would just plot it and then give that to a master, my day out in the park. Also, another job that I had as a volunteer was to monitor archaeological sites which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Then, one day they had some government archaeologists coming in. They didn't have anybody on staff that could go and kind of monitor their activities. I was asked to do that. Long story short, I gave them instructions on how to get to the cave and said, "I'll let you go on up on your own. I'll stay down here at the bottom. Be aware that the cave, last week when I was up there, had several rattlesnakes. Watch your step. One of the ladies was kind of dragging her feet and I just happened to look down as she started up the trail and noticed an orbit of a fossil, just kind of protruding out of the ground. I yelled at her, "No." She thought she had stepped on a rattlesnake.

While they were up doing their project and inventory at this cave little shelter, I took some brushes and began to brush away some of the dirt and clay and a little bit of matrix and realized that I actually did have a portion of a skull of some critter. I kind of built a coffer dam around it and covered it back up and put a slab of rock ... built a pen around it so to speak. Then, went straight back to Bill and said, "Look, I need to show you this." I had taken some pictures and it was of interest to him. That's how it came about that I discovered a – how do you say it, pseudopalatus. It's P-S-E-U-D-O-P-A-L-A-T-U-S.

Vince Santucci: Pseudopalatus?

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. Yeah. For some reason, that was leaving my brain.

Vince Santucci: You discovered a phytosaur?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Very good. Well, I'm going to look that one up.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah, that was about – I don't know the year, but we'll say around – I'm having to think about this, about 2002, 2001, 2002.

Vince Santucci: Okay. The period of time that you worked for the Denver Museum, what was that timeframe?

Pat Jablonsky: Somewhere around 1983 through 1994.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: It just literally under 10 years. It might have been 1984 to 1994, but approximately.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Your husband's full name who worked for the National Park Service?

Pat Jablonsky: William E. Yett, Y-E-T-T. He was maintenance.

Vince Santucci: Okay. What parks did both of you work at?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, mine's rather limited. He has a longer list. Okay. Mine is Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore—

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: —where I took care of museum collections and took care of horrible conservation issues. I mean, major, major – it was awful. Then, from there I went to Petrified Forest National Park where I worked as a VUA, visual use assistant. Then, from there we went to Devils Tower National Monument. The first summer I was learning how to do FMSS, which I'm sure you know what that is.

Vince Santucci: Yes, uh-huh.

Pat Jablonsky: The second summer though, I applied for an interpretive job there at Devils Tower and was turned down. In the meantime, I put in an application at Jewel Cave. I was a lead interpretive ranger at Jewel Cave one summer. Then, the next four years, I stayed at Devils Tower.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Great. Then, how did you come to begin work at Carlsbad?

Pat Jablonsky: My first introduction at Carlsbad was that I noticed that there was a lack of scientific study or it appeared that there was a lack of scientific study. That the people that I was associating with were mostly into caving. Although I love caving, I'm not a gonzo caver. I'm not one of these that can go down to Mexico and drop a thousand feet into a cave and swim around in murky waters and stuff like that. Because I'm short, I guess, and because of my background in invertebrate fossils, I began to look at what was going on below me. My first introduction at Carlsbad Caverns – are you ready for this?

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: You're going to laugh. My first introduction was one of the cave specialists at Carlsbad Caverns named John Ross. John had discovered that there was an environmental

problem occurring in the cave. After 50 years of visitation by staff and visitors, that there was an accumulation of lint, L-I-N-T, occurring. I was there for a week of cave restoration where they were taking out a portion of what's called the Texas Trail. I have a tendency to voice my opinion, sometimes rather loudly. I couldn't figure out why it was that we were taking out this dirt trail and wheelbarrowing it to another portion of the cave and dumping it. It just really bothered me.

On the third day, John Ross had heard about this complaining lady and he came up to me and he said, "Here. I want you to come with me." I said, "Oh boy, I'm going to be kicked out of the cave." He took me out to a portion of the cave, at the center of the cave, in the Big Room and bent over the retaining wall and he came back up with this klop of stuff in his hand. He said, "Do you know what this is?" I said, "No. Whatever it is, it's really nasty." He said, "Well, it's a combination of things." It turned out that it was lint. He had estimated that there would be hundreds of pounds of lint in the cave after that many years of visitation. He said, "I need someone to take on a project for me and that will include figuring out what is the composition. How does it get into the cave? How can we eliminate that problem from this cave?" You're talking to the person who said, "Sure. Better than moving dirt from part of the cave to another."

Now, just a long story short, in 1988 I had my first, what I call, a volunteer lint camp. It's still going on, although I officially retired in 2014 from being the coordinator. There's a group of us, we're kind of family. We still go down once a year and pick lint out of the cave. Okay. Between 1988 and September 2019 we had picked or gathered 540 pounds of lint out of Carlsbad Caverns.

Vince Santucci: Wow.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. Of course then – I'll try to keep this short. One of the cave resource people at Wind Cave National Park which, we were going up there regularly to do exploration, became interested in it. He helped us get a federal grant to study remediation of lint in a cave environment. We're still doing it. I don't know of any National Park Service cave that does not have some type of lint abatement program in place because of our research.

Vince Santucci: Very good. I'm sure you interacted with Ron Kerbo—

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: —during your time. Okay. Transitioning into the paleontology at Carlsbad, how did you get involved with the paleontology?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, that was the same type of thing. I was seeing that there was things going on and no one was really paying a lot of attention. I guess, one of my projects was – they had discovered Lechuguilla Cave. I will confess that several people on the exploration group knew better, but kind of pushed some bones out of the way so that they could continue with exploration. A short distance into the cave there were some bones that were laying by the side of the trail and they put out some ribbon. They basically asked people not to step on them. They had a couple of paleontologists from the University of New Mexico. They kind of looked at them and said, "Oh, it's probably a cow or something like that. Maybe something more exotic, but we're not sure."

I had an opportunity to go into the cave and do some exploration. We went past them and I took a brush and kind of brushed the dirt away because they were located in what's called a secondary stream passage. Just from eyeballing them, I went, "Well, I don't think this is a cow." I went back to the Park Service and asked permission and wrote up a request for a permit. I excavated a sloth from Lechuguilla.

Vince Santucci: That was in the '90s? Early 1990s?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes. Let's see if I can find the date on that.

Vince Santucci: There's a sloth recovery report that you put together in 1994.

Pat Jablonsky: The date of the expedition where we actually went in and recovered was July 1993.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Who did you work with on that project?

Pat Jablonsky: I brought together my own team. I didn't have anybody from down there that was interested. I pulled people from the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. A couple of caving friends that I felt that I could trust to do it correctly and not spill the beans, so to speak.

Vince Santucci: Okay. That collection of the sloth remains, where is that today?

Pat Jablonsky: I am not 100% sure. When I collected them, I took them back to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. We went in the prep lab and I prepped them. Then, at some point, they just got put into the collections. Nobody was interested in them. Then, I found out that Mr. McDonald of the National Park Service—

Vince Santucci: Yeah.

Pat Jablonsky: —what's his first name, I forgot.

Vince Santucci: Greg McDonald.

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, yes, of course – was interested. I told the Denver Museum, "You know these are really National Park Service, so they need to go back to the Park Service." I took them back down to Carlsbad. Then, he captured them. After that, I don't know where they are.

Vince Santucci: Okay. I can reach out to Greg and find out.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay. Sure. Well, I hope he's doing well.

Vince Santucci: In terms of that excavation and recovery, was it one individual, do you recall?

Pat Jablonsky: Say that part again?

Vince Santucci: Oh, I'm sorry. The sloth recovery, were the bones associated with only one individual of sloth?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: How complete was it? How much of the speci—

Pat Jablonsky: Well, there was two humerus, distal end. There were two tibias, two femurs. There was a couple of flat bones that were not really identifiable. Then, on the last day, which is always usual, we were following the materials downstream, so to speak, and I came upon a portion of the maxilla in which I had five teeth all upper.

Vince Santucci: Nice.

Pat Jablonsky: Then, small piece of the brain case. Some other rib fragments. No vertebral column, though, at all. I thought that was kind of interesting.

Vince Santucci: Is it possible that there's a por—

Pat Jablonsky: More of it there?

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: No.

Vince Santucci: No. Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: We did a very thorough check. I also brought on somebody that was into invertebrates or bird materials on that expedition. We collected a lot of various – we just sifted through all the secondary stream passage and found everything from bird to rodent to bat, and even some mollusk.

Vince Santucci: All of that is in your 1994 report?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Perfect. Was that ever published on – do you know, did Greg publish on the sloth or any of that other material published on?

Pat Jablonsky: I'm not aware of that being done.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Does that portion of the cave have a name? Some sort of place name or reference?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, it does, and you're going to ask me that. At one time, I actually had the – was just past the Liberty Bell Room and the Pearl Room if you're going – oh no, let me start that again. Okay. I did that wrong. The natural entrance and you do a couple of minor drops. Then, you come to the secondary stream passage. It's very obvious that it was – water flowed through

there. It's before you get to the Pearl Room or the Liberty Bell. I do not have anymore the survey numbers.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Does that location have a place name that was assigned to it?

Pat Jablonsky: I don't know.

Vince Santucci: I can look at your report and see if there was a place name assigned to it.

Pat Jablonsky: Not that I'm seeing.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: I'm looking at the paperwork that I presented. Okay. The excavation site is near survey station A3.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: That's very precise.

Vince Santucci: Okay. There's a reference to something called Mud Room. That's in your memo. I can ask Rod Horrocks that question.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay. I'm looking. Yeah, I don't see that.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: I know we also recovered some charco—

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: —from that area as well. I don't see anything about a Mud Room.

Vince Santucci: Okay. All right. Well, very good. Was that the first project that you were involved in at Carlsbad? The first paleontology project?

Pat Jablonsky: I think so. My second was – I did a skeletal study of bats in Lechuguilla Cave.

Vince Santucci: Yes. Yeah, very-

Pat Jablonsky: This is pretty thorough.

Vince Santucci: Very interested in hearing about that.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay. Then, my third thing that I did was I dated the guano in the Big Room.

Vince Santucci: Okay. That was around 2001?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Do you want to start with the bat study?

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah.

Vince Santucci: Okay. The timeframe for that work?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, it started in 1990. We didn't finish until about 2004. That's because at some point these became rather political with Lechuguilla. An outsider had taken it upon himself that he was the person that was responsible for anything that went on at Lechuguilla. Someone else in the Park Service was not happy with that. Some data was stolen, and Mr. Kerbo just said, "That's it. Nobody's going in the cave." The project for inventorying the skeletal bat materials in the cave got put on hold for quite a while because of the closing of the cave.

Vince Santucci: Okay. You applied for and received a permit to do that work.

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, I did.

Vince Santucci: Did you have phases to that project that you worked on or what were the objectives of that project?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, see it's interesting that Lechuguilla is just kind of like an open pit. Way back in historical times, they mined guano temporarily out of the entrance area. At some point, it's in the recorded information about dropping the pit just to say you've been in Lechuguilla. People would come out and say, "You know when we were in the bottom of the drop, we could hear air rushing in or out of holes in the floor." This went on for years and years and years.

It wasn't until about 1986 that they began digging. I think they actually started in about '83 digging. Gruesome would come up for a weekend and they would dig. They kept trying to follow the air. Find where this air was coming from. Finally, they broke through to virgin passage in about 1986. If you go into the cave, you would see bat remains. How did they get in there? In one portion of the cave called Sugarlands, I was in there doing some survey work and discovered a wall that was nothing but a mass of claw marks from bats. I had recognized them from Wind Cave National Park. I knew what I was looking at was bat scratches on these walls in the Sugarlands area.

In this area, I noticed a number of bats skeletal material, and went, "This is interesting. We need to be inventorying all of these bats that are in Lechuguilla Cave. I presented my proposal to the Park Service and received a grant to – I mean, not a grant but a permit to continue with the project. I organized people that I felt could do a good job and not have a huge impact on the cave and could follow instructions.

Bill Yett and I developed a kit where a layperson could actually take this kit that had bat skulls in it that were made out of plastic that we – I'm getting muddled here. I got actual skeleton skull materials, upper, lower jaw, etc. Made sure that my identification was absolutely accurate, and we had someone who was able to take them and make accurate casts of them. We took the seven most common that were found in the Carlsbad National Park and in this kit was all kinds of instructions and keys and how to ID your fossil or your skull material. I formed these teams and

we went in over the next couple of years and identified over 125 different skeletal remains of bats.

Vince Santucci: Very good. I see the National Park Service reports you created for that project. Did you ever publish that formally?

Pat Jablonsky: No.

Vince Santucci: No. Be a good project for your to work on.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. It was a long and tedious project. I never published. I considered it several times and I was discouraged by some people. I just didn't pursue it. In the meantime, in my own private life I had taken on a position of a Director of a museum in New Mexico. It was just too overwhelming.

Vince Santucci: Sure. Would you be able to summarize what you felt were the most significant findings from the bat study that you were involved in?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes. There were no Brazilian free-tails. Now, you know, here at Carlsbad Caverns, less than three miles away that has multiple, probably close to 750,000 Brazilian free-tails. Almost everything we found were things like ciliolabrum, velifers, volans, yumanensis, frescus, townsendii, etc. We thought that was kind of interesting.

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: Then, how did the bats get in there when there was no natural entrance?

Vince Santucci: Is that still a mystery?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes. My theory is that there are entrances and depending on where the bat perches in the daytime, maybe they found a little crack and followed the crack cause the wind was blowing in. They got inside and then couldn't figure out how to get back out. Lechuguilla now is at 150 surveyed miles. It's still just a man-made entrance. No other entrances have been found. It has been thought that maybe it was connected to a cave on BLM land called Big Manhole. I was in on that project as well where I identified all of the skeletal materials that came out of the digs there and did an inventory for the BLM as well. They never made the connection there.

Vince Santucci: Just some miscellaneous questions. We'll save the guano study for last.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay.

Vince Santucci: Do you know anything about or do you recall anything about a ringtail specimen?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, yes, yes. I wasn't in on that. That was in a portion of the cave near the Dilithium Pool. It's a beautiful specimen, and the same thing. How did it end up so deep into the

cave? I think it's just one of those things where the cave has multiple entrances, but we are not aware of where they are because they're so small.

Vince Santucci: It sounds like you actually saw that specimen?

Pat Jablonsky: No, I did not personally see it. I saw lots of pictures of it. I know it's location because my daughter is the person who named the Pool that it was laying in.

Vince Santucci: Oh, the Dilithium Pool?

Pat Jablonsky: Uh-huh.

Vince Santucci: How did she—

Pat Jablonsky: Dilithium Crystal Pool.

Vince Santucci: How did she come to name that?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, a lot of the names in Lechuguilla were based on a movie or one of those Star Trek movies or whatever.

Vince Santucci: There was a reference, and I don't know if you ever heard it. Someone had referenced a specimen as Kerbo's Dog. Was it-

Pat Jablonsky: No.

Vince Santucci: Do you know about that?

Pat Jablonsky: I do not.

Vince Santucci: Okay, because we were thinking that that may have been the ringtail specimen. They just jokingly refer to it as Kerbo's dog, even though it wasn't a dog.

Pat Jablonsky: No, I had not heard about that one.

Vince Santucci: The specimen was never collected. It's still in the cave?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, it's pretty well cemented in place.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Excellent. Any other thoughts about other specimens from Lechuguilla of interest?

Pat Jablonsky: I'm not aware that there are any others. You realize I have not been actively doing anything in Lechuguilla since about 1997.

Vince Santucci: Okay. All right. Then, that leaves us with the guano study. Is that the third and final study that you were involved in?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Can you share a little bit about that study?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, if you're in the Big Room, there's an interpretive sign that talks about the guano in the Big Room. It kind of mentions that they think it's 10,000 to 12,000 years old. Somebody questioned me about, "Well, how do they know how old it is? I mean, can you date guano?" I said, "Oh yes, of course." I went to the Park Service and I said, "Where can I find information on the dating of any guano in Carlsbad Caverns?" We started looking and discovered that there is no scientific reference to the dating of the guano in Carlsbad Caverns. Here we go again. I applied for a permit to actually go into the cave and collect guano from various places. Also, collected some skeletal materials as well for dating purposes. The big one was how old is the guano in the Big Room.

Vince Santucci: What is the answer to that question?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, you know how you have to do that kind of thing. You have to send off your specimens to three different labs to have a radiocarbon dating analysis done. Basically came back, after I – what is my exact date? 44,000 something.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. It's about 44,680 plus or minus. I used three different labs for analysis. Then, we just kind of took an average.

Vince Santucci: The fossil material that you found in the guano mostly microvertebrates, bats and rodents.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah, it's bats.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: Bats mostly. I only collected the bats. Just to safeguard my research and to also provide the Park Service with some additional information, I collected guano out of the bat cave. Then, like I said, I collected some skeletal materials from a couple of places. The dating on the skeletal material was ineffective because there was too much calcite present. Guano, I collected a number of places there in the bat cave. It came back rather recent in age. One of the samples that I turned in I took from fresh guano. Within the year that I was collecting. It came back, "Well, that's pretty young. It was maybe July." I did that deliberately for myself and for the Park Service so that they could see that the information I was providing for them was as accurate as possible.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Great. The few bat remains that were collected during the guano study, were they put into the park collection or were they repositied somewhere else?

Pat Jablonsky: In the bat study at Lechuguilla, all of the—let's go back to that one—all of the bats that were collected were either returned to the cave to their exact location or they are in the Cavern museum collection.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: The ones that were collected in the guano were destroyed.

Vince Santucci: Okay. For sampling?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay. For analysis.

Pat Jablonsky: I didn't collect a bunch. I just collected just enough for that analysis.

Vince Santucci: For the age dating?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, age dating.

Vince Santucci: Okay. When you say that the specimens were either returned to the cave or put into the park collection, is that an either or, or both?

Pat Jablonsky: It's both.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. The final report, it shows you which ones are actually in the park collections or those that were actually returned to Lechuguilla.

Vince Santucci: Okay. All right. Were there any type specimens that were discovered during that research?

Pat Jablonsky: No.

Vince Santucci: No. Okay. Any other thoughts in terms of your work at Carlsbad or Lechuguilla?

Pat Jablonsky: I just loved it. What can I say? I mean, what an honor to be allowed to do some really great work.

Vince Santucci: Oh, absolutely.

Pat Jablonsky: I loved every moment of it. I mean, I made a point of not letting politics get in my way, so to speak. I just saw that things weren't being done and they needed to be done, and I did them.

Vince Santucci: It's much appreciated. I'm glad we had a chance to chat and discuss and capture this history. I had a couple of other loose end questions.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay.

Vince Santucci: You worked on the sloth recovery and that was the specimen from Lechuguilla. That was the specimen that you said that the people that were documenting early on pushed those

bones aside. Had you ever heard that there was a sloth specimen that came from the main Carlsbad Caverns?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: What do you know about that?

Pat Jablonsky: I really don't know much about it because when I tried to get permission to see it in the collections, I've never seen it.

Vince Santucci: Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: It was from also the – I think they call it in Carlsbad, I think it was from an area that's called the secondary stream passage as well which is kind of interesting.

Vince Santucci: Yeah. There's a report by Carol Hill and Dave Gillette. They indicate that it came from the lower Devil's Den area. Does that sound right?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, it is.

Vince Santucci: Okay. I guess it was collected or discovered in March 1948.

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, a long time ago. Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Perfect. Is there anything that you think is worth sharing that we haven't covered?

Pat Jablonsky: No, not really. In connection with the studies I did at Lechuguilla, I did do a pollen analysis at the entrance of Lechuguilla Cave.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Can you tell us a little bit about that study?

Pat Jablonsky: Well, I messed up. I'm having a senior moment here is why in the world I felt that was important. I just thought it was interesting that what was in the guano – three pollen samples were examined from Lechuguilla Cave to identify prehistoric vegetation in the vicinity of the cave. How did all these bats get into the cave? We thought well maybe if we did a pollen analysis, it might tell us something about a previous opening into the cave. That's all I can remember.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Very good.

Pat Jablonsky: The interesting thing is that we did find that a couple of the pollens were of vegetation not from that area but rather from the eastern United States. You know what we decided on that? It was on the boots of the people that were doing the digging in the cave.

Vince Santucci: Oh, boy.

Pat Jablonsky: Because most of the cavers, not all, but a good percentage of them, were from the East Coast.

Vince Santucci: Well, that's interesting.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. We did, too.

Vince Santucci: Contaminating the fossil record.

Pat Jablonsky: Yes. Yes. First, we were doing that. I mean, when you go – if you and I discover a cave that's never been opened to the outside atmosphere and you step into it, you immediately have altered that environment.

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: In a detrimental way, even.

Vince Santucci: Right. One last question. What was it like being around Carlsbad during the early days of the discovery of Lechuguilla?

Pat Jablonsky: Traumatic.

Vince Santucci: Was it?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes. Like I said before, you had an outside National Park Service person who became the dictator. That individual wanted to – well, he didn't want to, he actually told the Park Service person that he was an idiot and "I'm running the project." The outsider.

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: I was in several of those meetings and it was difficult to sit there and hold my tongue.

Vince Santucci: Very interesting. That was the time that Ron Kerbo was at Carlsbad?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: Okay. Did you ever meet, let's see, Lloyd Logan?

Pat Jablonsky: Oh, yes. I know Lloyd.

Vince Santucci: Do you?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: I'm going to interview Lloyd probably next week in terms of his work at Muskox Cave.

Pat Jablonsky: Very good.

Vince Santucci: Were you ever in Muskox?

Pat Jablonsky: No. No. Yep. I always wanted to go, but my job as the Director of the museum in Carlsbad was a 60 to 80 hour week job. Just to get off time to do some of the things I did was difficult.

Vince Santucci: Oh, sure. I could imagine. That was, at the time, prior to the National Cave and Karst Research Institute setting up their headquarters—

Pat Jablonsky: Yes.

Vince Santucci: —in Carlsbad.

Pat Jablonsky: Correct. That's the vision of Ron Kerbo.

Vince Santucci: Right. Do you keep in touch with the museum at all?

Pat Jablonsky: The Park Service Museum or the City Museum?

Vince Santucci: The City Museum.

Pat Jablonsky: Periodically. I'm one of these people that I go in and I do a project and I do it to the best of my ability, and then I walk away. It's like selling your house. You get it all ready for the buyer, and then you think it's perfect. Then, the buyer comes in and rips it all apart because they didn't like it.

Vince Santucci: Sure. That City Museum, they didn't have any collections from Carlsbad, did they?

Pat Jablonsky: Yes, they did.

Vince Santucci: Oh, they did. Any—

Pat Jablonsky: It was almost all formations that people would collect out of the cave and then feel guilty and then turn it in to the City Museum.

Vince Santucci: Were there any fossils at all?

Pat Jablonsky: No.

Vince Santucci: No. Okay.

Pat Jablonsky: No. I had human remains. I can't tell you how many human remains I had that got brought into the cave. They were not from Carlsbad Caverns National Park that we are aware of.

Vince Santucci: Okay. I guess to close, what are you doing now that you're retired other than taking care of your daughter's dog?

Pat Jablonsky: I play flute in the Valley Symphony Orchestra. I had laid that flute down in about 1964 and I didn't pick it up until about 10 years ago, 2010. I'm loving every moment of that.

Then, Bill and I both do Meals on Wheels for persons that are confined to their homes. Also, volunteer for – are you familiar with Hospice organizations in all the different states?

Vince Santucci: Yes.

Pat Jablonsky: We volunteer for that in various capacities.

Vince Santucci: You remain dedicated to service and that's very laudable.

Pat Jablonsky: Exactly. Yeah. Then, we've enjoyed traveling. We've been to Alaska three times. Once driving all the way to Fairbanks and a little bit above Fairbanks. Then, twice on the Alaska Marine Highway Ferry which, if you've never done it, you have to do it. It's so cool. It's not a cruise ship.

Vince Santucci: Very good. Well, it's nice to talk to you now, again, after 20 some years since we last spoke. I really want to thank you for your time. This was very, very useful. I'm going to work with the Park to develop a transcript. If you wouldn't mind, we'll be happy to send you a copy of it. If you find that we misspelled anything or misquoted you in any way, we'd sure appreciate any feedback.

Pat Jablonsky: Oh, I'd be honored.

Vince Santucci: We'll make sure you get a copy of this interview as well.

Pat Jablonsky: Cool. Well, thank you. Thanks a lot. Come down to Carlsbad and join our lint picking group.

Vince Santucci: Sounds good. Well, thanks again—

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah. I even worked with NASA on the Apollo and the space shuttle research on lint abatement in the shuttle and the capsules both.

Vince Santucci: Wow, that's interesting.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah.

Vince Santucci: Well, Happy New Year to you. Once again, thanks for your time.

Pat Jablonsky: Congratulations. I'm so proud that you are the head of something so significant.

Vince Santucci: Well, thank you. I really appreciate it. I think I've got the best job in the world.

Pat Jablonsky: Yeah, I think you do. It's wonderful.

Vince Santucci: Thanks, Pat.

Pat Jablonsky: Okay. Take care.

Vince Santucci: Bye-bye.

Pat Jablonsky: Bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]