

PAT MC CAMMON TRANSCRIPTION

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Damian Macey Interviewer

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, June/July 2016

D: This is Damian Macey interviewing Pat McCammon for the Marshall Library oral histories project. Pat will you give us some background on yourself, where you were born and where you went to school.

P: Well, I was born in Marshall, Illinois, my parents were Charles and Agnes Trefz, and I had three brothers and a sister, I was born on the "tail end" by about nine years. I was spoiled, not with things, but with love. So I was fortunate. We lived at 505 Ash St.

D: Where did you go to school?

P: I went to North side school and I believe my class was the first to be at the new junior high building and then went to Marshall High School.

D: Is there anything in particular like fond memories you can share?

P: Yes, it was very interesting, especially when you think about today, that the bathrooms in the north and south school were in the basements. The first floor was the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th grade classrooms and the second floor was 5th through 8th grade. And way up in the top was the music room. So I'm not sure how they handled handicapped accessibility, but in the time that I was there, I don't remember anyone being handicapped and not being able to use the stairs.

D: I remember those levels and even the teachers that were there. In your childhood you must have had some interesting neighbors. Can you recall changes since your childhood?

P: Well, actually, let me see, three houses are still there besides the one that I was born in. Miriam Cole, whose father was Fenton Cole, lived across the street, I believe she had a couple of brothers. At the corner of 6th and Ash, the Carroll's lived there. He was an official with Illini F.S. He and his wife and daughter lived there. Then right next to us on the corner was people by the name on Schofield. The Cole house was replaced, rebuilt, several years ago now. There is a new house on the west side. So basically, that was pretty much it.

D: Did you have a family pet then or did you have a family pet?

P: We had a dog, most families had a pet, we were a dog family, not a cat family.

D: What were your hobbies?

P: Well, as a child, I took piano lessons from Nina Hogue for many years, also I loved to roller skate. One of my fond memories was going to the north side school and there was a side sidewalk that went all the way around the school. I used to skate up there and just go round and round the school. I had to

watch, though, because on the south side, there was one step that came out from the building and you had to be careful.

D: I do remember that. You have lived away from Marshall, and are married, you might tell us a little about your marriage and then when you moved away from Marshall. And then you moved back.

P: I am married to Joe McCammon, we were high school friends, we dated a few times. He went into the Air Force after high school and he served three years until October 1958. When he came home he ran into one of my brothers and asked him if I was still available. He asked me out and we went out every night for three weeks straight. My kids and grandkids laugh at that. We were married pretty quick after that in July 1959.

D: And you had a couple of children.

P: Yes, we have a son, David, he was born in 1962, then Connie was born in 1965. When we got married, we moved to Ohio and we both worked at the Ohio Oil Company in Findley, Ohio. Joe had decided...when he first came home... he thought he wanted to go to Eastern, he went the first quarter. Since he had already been in the service, and was a little more mature, he decided that wasn't for him. So back in the 50's a woman couldn't transfer in her job, so even though I had worked for that company, I had to be re-interviewed to be hire again on Ohio for the Ohio Oil Co. Females at that time just couldn't transfer jobs. Well, after about a year of us both working there, he came home one day, and said he had made a decision that he wanted to go back to school again. So he/we did that and he did graduate and started a long career for him and the two of us worked together after I was a stay-at-home mom. I was very fortunate to be able to do that.

One of the jobs that he had was working for Ford Motor Credit, and he did publication lists and unfortunately times got a little tough with the union his job ended. They said he could go to another department but that was not his "love" so he decided to leave. (inaudible)also had a newspaper in another division, he was interviewed for that job, and got it so we went to Ypsilanti, Michigan. So he edited that newspaper. Then one day he went to work and he saw a list of jobs and his had a red line through it !

D: I remember as a child there was a magazine called "Ford Products".

P: Yes

D: Was he involved with that?

P: No, he was not, we always enjoy it, but that, as many things did, that went by the wayside eventually. And that was too bad because it always had a lot of interesting stories.

D: So what brought you back from Michigan to the Midwest and finally back to Marshall?

P: Well, actually we left Michigan, we went back to Indianapolis which is where he had been and we lived there. What's a couple different places... most often with jobs in publications. Which is usually

the first to take a hit, when times get bad publication jobs take a hit. For a long long time he had said that his ultimate dream would be to come back to his home town and have a weekly newspaper. We talked a lot about that, and bringing the kids up in a city, unlike the way we were brought up. So we went down to Crawford County and he worked for a daily paper down there and also did a lot of photography work.

We worked together with photography for weddings, I don't know how many weddings we did, a lot. Lots of sports pictures. I went back to work at the Ohio Oil Company which was by then, Marathon. I worked in the (?) department and also the legal department. That was a new experience, I enjoyed that a lot. He was a very nice man. Very bright, very good to the people that worked for him. Then we had a partnership with a gentleman that lived out of town. We actually started the Crawford Press which kind of rankled the local newspaper, well in the meantime Joe said, let's go up to Marshall, that's where I really want to be, as far as doing what I like to do. We discovered first of all that we had to have a print shop, and believe it or not, I ran the press. We came to Marshall and realized that there was no modern print shop. So we came up and located where Blankenship Drug Store had been. So we began our newspaper there in 1986.

And then discovered that ....the other paper that was currently printing was located in Casey. And unfortunately for Marshall, there was usually more Casey news than Marshall. And so we kinds of saw a spot there and started the Marshall Choice in 1988. Allot of people laughed and said "you will never make it". A local businessman whose business is on Main Street in Marshall came down to see us and the first thing he said was "I hope you have your own customers, don't expect mine to support you". So that was disappointing that a successful business man would say that.

D: You obviously proved him wrong.

P: Yes we did. At that time Marshall was kind of in a pivotal place. We had several empty buildings, people used route 40 to bypass and then Route 70 came through and Walmart came in and it seemed that people has just kinda given up on downtown Marshall. So we tried to promote the positive side of Marshall.

D: We have got people with varied backgrounds in Marshall and you wrote some stories about these people.

P: Our theory was that everyone has a story. We were told by a man in town that the paper couldn't keep going by these stories but Joe looking at him and told him that he felt "everyone has a story to tell". It was very rewarding to do these stories on our local people. Sometimes when he had done a story on someone, they would give Joe a little gift. It was just fun a rewarding. We have several things around the house that brings back memories of stories he had done.

D: Did you finally decide to retire and sell the business?

P: Well it was so interesting.... this man kept calling us on the phone and we thought he was a broker who was wanting to sell our business for us. Well, we weren't interested in that but he kept calling

and calling. Then one evening he called us at home and said he wanted to buy our business ...Joe just kind of laughed. You know, when you have a small business in a small town some broker in "Timbuctoo" thinks he can sell it for a million dollars. But he told us he was serious and he talked for a long time and Joe finally told him to put it in writing and send it to us. Well, he did that. But we weren't really ready to retire. But we talked to our accountant about it and he said that we really should think seriously about it. He said when you are ready there may not be a buyer interested in it. So we checked him out and we finally did come to an agreement. The day we signed the papers, I thought "I don't think I can do this...I don't think I can sign this". And the man who was handling the sale said " we understand...you like this business" but we went ahead and signed the papers but it was very difficult.

D: So you didn't have anything to do and then a project called Main Street came along and we could do a whole section on that.

P: That's for sure.

D: And then there was a place called Harlan Hall. We'll just hit a few highlights on those two projects.

P: There is kind of an interesting story on that...after we sold the newspaper I actually took a job selling used cars and mobile homes for a few months. It was an interesting time and I learned a lot about people. Then I worked at a bank as a receptionist for a while but that was not my thing. Then after that I volunteered at a program called Main Street. We got that up and running and I had the distinct pleasure of being the first director. It was a wonderful experience. Marshall began looking better and being better and got the street scape going because of it.

D: I think that time was a turning point in the appearance and interest and feelings of people being more positive about Marshall.

P: That's right. Damian, and you know we had a great team. And they were people that believed like we did that Marshall had a lot of great attributes but it just hadn't been brought to the forefront. Architecture, for example, is just wonderful and we have several people that began fixing up their buildings and we have an awning grant program and it was just a good move for our town. I just really enjoyed working with a lot of fun people like yourself.

D: And that's one thing, it is a national program it's not something that just developed here in Marshall. It was part of a national program. Many states have these groups and they see very optimistic outcomes. And Marshall has been approved for a second stage of improvements. Marshall has really been improved by the Main Street group.

Then you got involved in a little project called Harlan Hall.

P: Ha Ha Yep... While I was still involved with Main Street. Historic preservation is a big part of the Main Street Program. I would like to say that Illinois projects was probably one of the best in the nation, I would honestly say. There were very good leaders to help communities know how to proceed with their improvements. And then there was Harlan Hall which before was called the Moose Building, it

was owned by the Moose organization and they had let it deteriorate because of lack of membership and other problems.

So they wanted to sell it and Main Street wanted to buy it and preserve it. It had been a livery stable on the first floor and an opera house on the second floor. Sounds like an odd combination but it great and a part of our history going back to about 1862. So, we convinced the mayor at that time that it would be a good thing. So he agreed that Marshall would buy it and we agree to work really hard on it. We had lots of people working on it and we were able to save the historic building.

D: You can really look at Harlan Hall and think of that as part of your legacy. So you can be very proud you worked on that.

P: Well, it took a lot of people volunteering to get that big job done. You know, I told people that I don't have the ability to do that work, but with people volunteering in lots of ways to help and it all got done. I was just proud to be a part of it.

D: I would like to go back and ask this questions, "Would you say that there was a significant event in your life or invention that has changed your life?"

P: Well, perhaps coming back to Marshall. (inaudible)

D: Well, thanks again, Pat for your time. I think you have given some background that some people didn't know.

P: I appreciate being a part of the oral histories.