

ALTA

Andy Walker

Joey Prokop:

Andy you have been able to grow up at Alta. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Andy:

Sure, it's interesting...the history behind that because Ted and Wilma Johnson ran the Watson Shelter for Alta Ski Lifts. In the early '60's my father at that time was patrolling at Park City because they were offering free skiing to families of patrollers and there were four of us boys and a girl so dad took them up on that. He'd patrolled Alta though before that in the '50's so he knew a lot of people at Alta and had a pretty good friendship base. Anyway Alta decided in (I think it was '64) that they were no longer interested in managing the Watson and instead they were going to just give it as an independent business to someone or sell it as an independent business and my father heard about that and went up and talked to Chick. I remember him coming home and I was probably 9 years old and he assembled the whole family and said "Okay guys we have an opportunity to do this really scary thing. We're going to run the restaurant mid mountain at Alta and I need the help from everybody here to make it work". He's talking to a tribe of little kids and we're all going "YEAH DO IT"! We probably weren't the model employees, we were more like the model skiers or at least that was our intent. So they decided to get it and our first year up there was the '64/'65 ski season and you're right it was a phenomenal place to go to work and to live and to be a part of that culture. It was just an amazing step for the whole family. So yeah it was way fun growing up there.

Joey Prokop:

In that respect talk a little bit about, you know there's the aspect of running the business but there's the aspect of the fact that you're right on the mountain and how that's a very important aspect of your life, your brothers life and your whole family.

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Andy:

Interestingly we went up every Friday afternoon, in fact we all had special permission from our schools to get out early on Fridays so that we could get up in time to catch the last chair and you know we'd dash home and drive up and head to Watson up the chairlift and then we'd live there for the weekend, come down late Sunday night and be back in school for the week. We did that all the years that we were in school except for one when we actually moved to Alta which I'll tell you about a little bit later.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a bit about that you wish you were up at Alta.

Andy:

Oh absolutely and when we actually lived up there a lot of those times we were actually up at Alta because we got snowed in so often. But what I was going to mention back before was as you know the uphill capacity didn't used to be near as grand as it is now. There was the single Collins chairlift which was slow and a single and there was the Wildcat lift which was slow – a double. California in its entirety seems like they all used to ski at Alta. The lower lot would get 40 busses. All Californians, I mean the weekends would just load up with people and the lines were 30, 40, 50, even an hour long and our deal going in with our folks was when it got really crowded in the restaurant we came in to bus. So that's when the ski hill empties out when everybody goes in for lunch. So we got to ski with the crowd and bus trays with the crowd and come back out when the crowd went back out. So we would push that quite a bit, you know we'd ski by the front at about 11:30 in the morning and there'd be 100 or 120 pairs of ski's out in the racks and it's like "No I don't think they need us yet. Push off, let's do one more". Pretty soon we'd get to the bottom and we'd be in the back of some monstrous lift line and Joe Wildcat would come out and go "You Walker boys get

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up here, your folks are looking for you!” And on the chair we’d go and we’d be in big trouble and we’d have to go up and bus for two or three hours and we’d get to go out and ski again at about two o’clock. But I think we all really didn’t like that part very much. I mean yeah it was okay because the pay off was neat but man we had to do everything with the crowd back in those days.

Joey Prokop:

Talk about the crowds in those days and maybe contrast how it is now on the mountain.

Andy:

The greatest thing that ever happened at Alta was the new Collins chairlift. It completely changed the amount of skiing you can get. I mean all of the years I grew up at Alta, on crowded weekend days you could get 8 or 9 or 10 runs in a day and that’s about all you could get. And that was skiing from 9:15 in the morning to 4:30 and that’s the best you could do. Now I get up at 9:30 or 10:00, I ski until noon and I come home because I’m completely worn out and I’ve ski’d more than I used to ski in a whole weekend back in the old days. In fact the crowds back in the old days (and when I say the old days I’m talking ‘60’s and ‘70’s) started getting so bad because the popularity of skiing just skyrocketed for a number of years and there wasn’t all the other ski hills around Utah like there are now. Snowbasin wasn’t developed the way it is now. Deer Valley wasn’t, Park City was nowhere near the size nor was the Canyons; so there’s a lot more room for a lot more people now. But back then there wasn’t that much room for all those people so you just stood in lines all day. Ever since they put that new Collins chairlift in you were accessing 2,000 or 2,100 feet of wonderful Alta skiing at its best in 8 minutes a ride. So in two hours you can ski a whole weekend’s worth of skiing. It’s wonderful now, I love it! A very big difference.

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Joey Prokop:

What's kind of interesting now too is...the capacity is one thing but then the ski equipment too. I mean things get ski'd by average people that in the old days took some serious skill to do. I guess maybe you might want to talk a little bit about how the terrain is getting ski'd a little bit more in terms of...did it used to be a big deal for the Baldy Chutes to be open?

Andy:

It used to not only be a big deal but when they opened at the end of the first day that they were opened there were eight tracks down it. Now people ask how to get to the Baldy Chutes and I say "well when it opens you'll see because there's a line that looks like ants that goes all the way from the top of Sugarloaf to the top of the Chutes". Everyone and their brother ski's it now and absolutely it does have a lot to do with equipment. Equipment...technical improvements in ski equipment has raised everybody's level of expertise a notch or two which is actually pretty neat in some ways and not as neat in other ways. In ways the people are trouncing into all kinds of areas they never went to before because like you said it took more skill and it took more strength to ski an old straight pair of Head Standards bombing up through Eagle's Nest and Eddie's High Nowhere and stuff...there was a lot more effort on the skier's part to drive those ski's through a turn and control your speed on those real steep pitches and now with the advent of shaped skis and really wide skis I find that breaking is almost automatic now. I just put the slightest bit of effort into my edge and "whhhewww" I slow down really quickly. Also with the side-cut's the way they are nowadays the turning takes significantly less effort on your legs than it used to. Which does another thing; it makes it so you can last longer. You can last for (I don't know) 20 to 30,000 vertical in a day where on old straight skis you just had to drive so much more with your body you either had to be a super athlete or you had to quit and go eat a lot of chili.

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Joey Prokop:

Which worked out great for your family. You showed me that picture of the deck at Watsons. What was it like partying out on the deck at Watsons?

Andy:

Oh, it was so much fun! And you know it has the perfect western exposure for springtime. The sun just blasts against the old west wall of Watson at the point where if you leaned up against it you'd burn your back you know? But it's definitely a party city deck and in fact it was my first construction job. Back when I finished high school in '73 my dad saw to it that I got hired on with the crew that built that sundeck back then. So I grunted my way through being a laborer for the summer building that deck. So I have a lot of personal love for that deck because I helped build it and it was my launch into the world of carpentry. But that deck has provided more fun, springtime entertainment than you can even imagine. It's just a real party central in fact after RT and Kay Hill bought the Watson, they actually cut a big hole in the side of it and turned it into a little beer bar and you could get french fries and whatever they served from there. But it has always been a major party center. A couple of other things along those lines, in the winter we always kept it open all winter long but we would get (as you well know) two, three and four foot storms and if you're an employee at Watson the first order of business after the storm abated was to shovel that deck. That's when you wished the deck wasn't quite so big. We usually wish it was giant but not when you're out shoveling it. It was a monstrous project but it helped keep you in good shape.

Joey Prokop:

You said that when you first came up there there was only the Collins chair which was a single, Wildcat which was a double and Germ was in there?

Andy:

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Yeah, Germ was a very old double chairlift that had a very large wooden ramp that a little control stand sat in the middle of. It was probably 12 feet wide by 8 feet deep and Don Cluff (who used to run the Germania chairlift) that was his place where he'd hang out for the whole day. He'd come up to Watson at 8:30 in the morning and drink a couple of cups of coffee and go back down to work. I don't know if you ski'd there back then but you used to get on the Germania lift and it basically went the way that the second part of the Collins does now, a little bit farther to the right, you know the old lift line. But there was a big net that extended out over the cat track that took you around to the high meadow. So if a skier screwed up in his entry he'd fall into that net and I saw it happen two or three times. Yeah, Germania was a very different ski lift in those days.

Joey Prokop:

Over the years I imagine you've got a couple of soft spots in your heart for favorite runs. Tell me your desert island run, you know the conditions are right, the snow is right, the light is right; tell me where you're going to go.

Andy:

You know in our youth for some reason there were two runs at Alta. There was Collins Face and Lower Rustler and that's just where we lived. We never had the patience to wait in that Germania lift line after waiting in that Wildcat lift line, so we'd get up to the top and ski down Meadow. You never even ski'd High Collins in those days; it was like that was backcountry. No one traversed it over; we didn't even know you could get into Waterfall from the Meadow back in those days. No one ever cut that trail back then. So it was Collins and Low Rustler and we ski'd them so often we kind of built the bumps there ourselves and we just loved them and that was our home turf run. But when conditions got really good powder wise, of course anything off the high traverse was good but again you'd have to wait in the Germania lift line to do that, I think that (I shouldn't even say this but the secret is so out of the bag now that it doesn't even matter) but

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Chartreuse which is just to the north of Extrovert off of Sugarloaf – unbelievable powder skiing. That Yellow Trail, anything on the backside.

Joey Prokop:

What's kind of interesting about Alta now...do you think that it's kept true to its roots? I mean you've seen the changes over the years. Do you agree that the Collins chair is a good thing as far as opening the terrain but do you think that the resort has stayed...I mean it's a lift servicing company to get people on the mountain, it's about skiing, do you think that it's true to that mission?

Andy:

Absolutely. I mean I don't see any breach of that mission whatsoever. Alta Ski Lifts has talked about some ideas where maybe they'll get into lodging instead of just running the lifts. Because, you know, I guess wherever there's money to be made they'd like to be a part of it and I'm sure that excluding snowboarding which most of us that are skiers really appreciate that they still do that but it's got to be an economic hardship on the resort. So, you know, I guess they look at other avenues to make some money. They did terminate both of the leases at both Watson and Alpenglow (which is now Alf's) and now they run those concessions themselves and both of them have ski tuning shops and ski equipment shops. So they've gone into a little bit more revenue gathering in that department but I don't see any discos and I don't see...there's not a new lodge up there right? There's Peruvian and Goldminers and Alta and Rustler and Snow Pine which I think is now not even Snow Pine anymore. But that's all the lodging that's ever been up there and it might be all the lodging there ever is up there. I don't see them doing anything on the hill except improving the skiing. Like last year they put in a bunch of new snow making equipment that goes clear to the top now of Germania and Collins and they upgraded it to some really high-tech pretty cool stuff that's all remote control. They've invested a fortune in snow cat's and snow cat drivers who are people who've been around the resort forever and take unbelievable pride in what they do and it shows in their work. So their

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mission seems to be to just provide incredible skiing. And I don't know if you've ever tried to involve yourself in the night life at Alta, but the night life at Alta basically is – you go to the Goldminers bar and drink until 5:00 and go home because the place is emptying out by then. People are having dinner and going to bed so they can get up and ski. I mean there just isn't much of a night life up there. However on that note, back when we had Watson there was a bit of a night life up there. My father would be significantly wealthier now had there not been but we'd wait for him to finish counting his money and ski down with all his money in his backpack and we'd run upstairs and grab the light switch on the sundeck and blink it up and down a few times and people would pour out of the trees up in Aggie's and down they'd come and we'd start pouring pitchers of beer and eating food and just getting wasted. I'm sure that was the biggest night life at Alta was Watson. And then people would just pass out on the floor and stay all night and in the morning (we had that old lift phone system – so Watson's was one long and one short), so “bling bling” and you'd pick up the phone and it would be Joe Wildcat down at the bottom of Wildcat going “Neff's here”. We called that the ‘Watson Early Morning’, because he'd get all these drunken people up and go “you're out of here”.

Joey Prokop:

Who were the characters up there? Talk about Joe Yakamura, isn't he cousins with Buck Sasaki who is there as the lift operator? And the Fred Speyer days all the way through the Onno days. There's a lot of characters up there, who are some of your favorite characters that you've known over the years?

Andy:

Well Joe of course is way up on the list. You know he's about as dry a guy as you could ever meet (although he'd extend you with a smile) but when you could get him to laugh you couldn't get him to stop. And just an almost all business kind of a guy, but everybody loved Joe Wildcat. He was just a fixture at the bottom of Wildcat. It was like if you got rid of Joe you'd have to tear down

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Wildcat, you know that's what it seemed like and those were fun fun old days. Les Fuller who used to be the foreman on the Sugarloaf chairlift, he was a fun and funny guy and used to play tricks on us. One time we were getting on the lift when they were sweeping all the new snow off of the chairs as they came around the bull wheel and those chairs had a little layer of foam on them and the chair could actually lift up and I remember one time we were getting on and here comes this chair and Les says "hey you guys have a great ride" and he pulls the chair up and we're sitting on steel for the next twelve minutes. Cold steel! I mean I loved that kind of sense of humor, it's pretty funny and at Alta sometimes it's so business like that it's fun to see a practical joker come along you know? And there are some personalities up there that have endured for a long long time. Wendell, you know everybody knows who Wendell is and it's like you almost can't go up there and not see Wendell who is one of the original 'Three-Pinners' hauling down the hill having a grand old time. He's still around here somewhere. He'll be at the reunion. Don Cluff was a fun old guy, an electrician by trade before he was a lift operator and he helped me out with some electrical stuff back in the day. I'm sure I'm forgetting some of the really fun old lifties. You know it's funny because a guy get's on the lift crew up there and he just stays like until he dies. You know it's not a place that you leave, you just get on there and you stay forever.

Joey Prokop:

That's why we always call Supreme 'Wayne's World'. I remember being up there and it's just Alta or nothing. Why do you think that is?

Andy:

There is almost an addictive nature to Alta. There's just something about it's grandness at the top of the scale and it's funny because I've flown for a living for 30 years and I've flown all over the world and there's many times when I'll end up in conversation with skiers in different places in the world and I mention Alta and it's like "where?" And it's funny if you mention Snowbird or Park City and it's "oh

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yeah yeah, by Denver right?”. But Alta just doesn’t do a lot of marketing but among the *real* skiers in the world, everybody knows Alta. There’s something about...it’s almost like being part of a really exclusive club that is addictive about skiing up there. It’s just such a magical mountain! It’s got really wonderful pitches, it’s got very little traversing between pitches which really does make an exceptional skiers mountain. There’s parts of it that are good and intermediate so that a guy doesn’t have to feel intimidated if he’s not an expert skier and there’s as much expert terrain as you could ever possibly ski and never get bored with. Even beginner stuff over on the side we don’t go to.

Joey Prokop:

That’s always been a joke between friends and me about the groomed stuff. Would my pass work over there? Like if I go there would they let me ride the lift?

Andy:

[Laughter] Because isn’t that a different resort?

Joey Prokop:

That’s West Heber. My wife is like “let’s go”, I’m like “go where” and she’s like “a three hour tour”.

Andy:

Supreme. But when the skiing is really really good....

Joey Prokop:

It’s great!

Andy:

Oh my God, there’s a run off there that I have no idea what it’s name is, we just call it ‘Tower Ten’ because it starts right at tower ten and it’s got to be at the very

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top 30 feet and has got to be an almost 70 degree pitch. You know you don't fall down, you fall off. But you *don't* fall because it's hazardous. But it's a steep pitch and it's just one of those things that makes Alta Alta, you know it's a long steep steep pitch; really fun.

Joey Prokop:

As I'm looking on the wall behind you there are pictures of you doing the gellande jump, let's talk a little bit about that. Was that from the 50th or 60th Anniversary?

Andy:

That picture's the 50th Anniversary which was '89 and I believe they're going to do it again on the 75th Anniversary, at least that's what they told me back in the 50th which is only six years away. So I'll still be really really young; I won't even be 60. So I'm jumping at it.

Joey Prokop:

Tell me a little bit about that jump and the approach, the take off and what it's like. It seems like you're really high in the air.

Andy:

It's just one of the greatest things that was ever built and I don't know where gellande really started, I just know that my first exposure to it was at Alta. When they first built that big old jump back in the mid '60's (I think it was) it was monstrous and it's got a long end run that starts right at the bottom of Corkscrew and you can hike clear up into the trees during practice and just fly as far as you want, you know and they really control the start position during the competition and they have all kinds of rules now. You can't even push with your poles or skate or anything because they're trying to control so that no one out jumps the hill but those rules have gotten a lot more strict in modern times. Back in the old days you just kind of did whatever you wanted to do. But they built that jump

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back in the old days so that its takeoff was a good 20 plus degree uphill pitch and then right from the top pitch all the way to the ground where it hollowed out was about 22 feet. So if you stood on the edge of the lip and looked down it was like *big!* It's like more than two stories up in the air and then there was a knoll that came up and went over and from the edge of that lip to the edge of the knoll was maybe 65 feet or something like that. There were guys in the history of the contest that had some sort of an accident on the way up the ramp and flew off the thing sideways and just impacted that knoll and never got past the knoll you know, that's dangerous. You didn't want that to happen. But if you had a good jump on that thing and unfortunately it's done in the spring and that's neat because it draws the crowd and it's fun and it's sunny but that transition, you'd just come flying down the end run and you'd hit that transition at the bottom and in the afternoon it would get all slushy, you'd lose about 20 knots of speed and you'd go 80 feet and it's like "geesh". And one year my little brother Matt had been jumping that and that's all we did once they built the gellande was run after run after run. The only reason we were even skiing was just to get to the end run. We'd been jumping it all day and we're getting a ton of air, we're getting like 150, 160 feet just having these amazing jumps and we stayed up at Watson that night (because that's what we always did) and early in the morning we all got up and we're skiing down "let's go hit the gellande" and of course it's ice. My little brother starts from the same spot he was starting at yesterday and he says he got to that transition and thought "I'm going way too fast!" And he almost out jumped the hill. He landed down in the transition probably 200, 210 feet and just splattered and left a trail of blood and it was pretty bad. He told me recently that he remembers when that was because he remembers giving the scab to his girlfriend. A real token of love!

Joey Prokop:

Where is she now?

Andy:

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I don't know, he might of lost track of her.

Joey Prokop:

You did a nice description of that but at sometime it probably got (never routine) but you're very comfortable and confident doing it. Talk about maybe the first time you looked down at hit.

Andy:

We didn't even...I mean the first time I looked at it I couldn't even imagine going off of it and I'd spent my childhood in the air. We had jump after jump after jump all the way down that mountain. All we did was jump and we saw that jump; of course across from it there's the little gellande right? And that had a much smaller lip and it was 30 feet to the knoll and it was just a lot tamer deal and that's where everybody started as a kid and then you'd look at that big gellande and go "man that's a scary looking thing!" It just looked intimidating. It was *massive!* I think it's a modern marvel how they even built the darn thing but there was a lot of snow cat work involved and a lot of really good drivers that made that thing happen. But I can't even imagine the first guy you know, looking down that thing "okay I'll give her a test". But the first time all of us did it, yeah we were nervous because it was such a big scary looking thing but in every case I can think of after your first jump we're all standing at the bottom with adrenaline just coursing through our veins going "let's go do it again only way higher!" Really, I mean every time you jumped that was what you said "I'm going to get more air next time!" and it's the funnest sensation in the world that I can even remember – really to fly off of that lip at 40 or 45 miles an hour. You're hauling and a true gellande jump is where you just spring off the end of the lip and you're standing almost like you're standing on a sidewalk with your ski's absolutely parallel to the slipstream, so here's the ground and here's your ski's and then you start dropping down and as you crest the knoll you lift your legs into a gellande position. It's kind of like retracting the landing gear and your ski's fall.

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[Interruption]

Andy:

Having grown up there, in essence it was like my playground all the years of my youth and probably everybody has some sort of a fond memory (that didn't grow up in a ghetto) of where they grew up and it was such a unique place to grow up. It's funny because when I reflect back on my childhood I think at least as much about the summers as I do about the winters up there. I particularly loved the summers. When we would actually move up to Watson for at least a couple of months and do all of the work that needed to be done to get it ready for the next season; my dad used to be so meticulous about keeping it in such primo shape. But those were wonderful days because when you didn't have to work, when you didn't have to shovel garbage and run to the dump and paint and scrape and dig trenches – all the stuff that we did up in the summer up there, it was like just a real Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn kind of a way to live. I'd grab my fishing pole at the crack of dawn and just walk down the mountain and fish that stream all day long. When the sun started going down I'd walk back up the mountain and be home and I'd never see another soul all day. That's how crowded the canyon was back in those days. Or maybe I'd be with a brother or two and that would be the extent of your social life that day. So there was something about being alone or nearly alone on that monstrous mountain and those incredible wildflowers for a summer at a time that was very endearing to me. My first romance happened the summer between 8th and 9th grade with Annette Morton who was...she's still working up there now and at the same time my brother's going with her cousin Kim Morton so we spent the whole summer wandering around Albion Basin together holding hands and going to Chicks house and listening to Blood Sweat and Tears and it was a really really romantic summer and it's a time of my life I could never forget.

Joey Prokop:

You were saying about how there *is* a real family atmosphere up there.

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Andy:

Yeah, there definitely is. Everybody knew everybody because it was a small enough cadre of people. You know it was probably a couple of hundred people that comprised the lift crew and the patrol and the instructor corps and restaurant people and you *really* got to be close with everybody. You knew everybody on a first name basis. Watson was a particularly good place because everyone stopped in for coffee and donuts and just to socialize you know. So everybody was on a first name basis. The people that worked at the other lodges, your social life, when you lived up there in the winters, your social life consisted of turning on the light on the sundeck and having the trees spill out but when that didn't happen you'd head down the mountain sometimes if you were bored and go party with the deep powder house crew. Sarah Madsen at the Alta Central and you'd just get crazy and do a lot of really fun stuff and there was a lot of drinking involved and then you'd hike back up the mountain at 2 o'clock in the morning. You'd be real sober by the time you got back to Watson. I mean it's a closeness because you're all kind of in the same trench you know what I mean? You're all in the same tiny geographic area, members of the same little bitty club and everybody is so inspired by that mountain and what it is, how beautiful it is. It's a really grand mountain, the only other mountain I can think of that strikes that kind of vision of grandeur into my heart is Telluride. As you drive into Telluride and you see those big cliffs and the giganticness of the mountain. There's something about such a massive amount of granite and fur trees that's just amazing. And everyone seems to be part of that club, everyone seems to be part of that amazed consciousness that we all share. It's a really cool thing.

Joey Prokop:

I think one thing that I'm getting from talking to you is that you really don't ever take things for granted. You can't be ho-hum about looking at the views or looking at skiing a good run. Talk a little bit about how it just doesn't get old.

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Andy:

No it doesn't get old in fact my little brother and I were just skiing the other day and we mentioned that at the end of the day its so funny the way we get to the bottom of a run time after time after time and say "that's the best run I've ever had!" And it's like 'how can that be?'. But it seems like it is. Every run seems to be like the best run you've ever had and you've just found this little bitty new line that you've never quite seen before way over on Westward Ho. You took it a little extra far down the spine that time and you found this notch you never knew existed and it's like "oh my God look at this! Have you guys ever seen this before?" Nooks and crannies that just pop up and plus it looks so different in various levels of snow. If there's five feet of snow on the ground verses 20 feet of snow on the ground, the whole personality of the mountain changes. The pitches shallow slightly when it gets real deep, the trees go away, the bushes go away, the rocks go away. So it's got a hundred personalities over the course of the winters as the snow depth changes and there is something about it that you can never get tired of. I'm sure probably a surfer feels the same way out in the ocean when the same looking wave comes by but it was the ride of his life once again. I feel that same thing every single time I go to the top of High Rustler. That's kind of my home; you know when you push home that's where I go. I find myself at the top of High Rustler, the first run of the morning almost every time I go skiing and I'm almost always alone and I stand up there and look at Superior and Hell Gate and the whole of Alta is sitting right down there below me and I'm just so awe inspired by what a view it is and the immensity of (I don't know) I mean it gets right into your soul and then you've got to ski it! Which is just spectacular. Every single time.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about Chick.

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I spent a little time in Chick Morton's office. He was the Principal and we were kids and we did stuff that got us in trouble. Chick is a neat old guy, no question about it. A real character with a million stories, I mean he started at Alta in about 1900. He was there forever. But by the time I knew Chick I was probably 9 or 10 years old, he was running the resort when we got there. He was a nice enough guy but if you did something stupid you ended up in his office. One of the stupid things we did one day was...there was a ton of new snow on the ground and we're on the Wildcat chairlift and you get up over the old mine dump and it's like "let's jump!" So me and a brother jump off the lift which starts bouncing and of course they know what we've done and pretty soon we're in front of Chick and he's telling us how we could've killed everyone on the lift if the cable would've jumped the wheels and you're grounded from skiing for a weekend which is like the most horrible thing that could ever happen. So, yeah I spent a little time in the office with Chick as a kid. On the other hand he was an avid fly fisherman and he lived up there pretty much year round in that green house up on the side of (whatever it's called). Patsy Marley and he took myself and a brother or two and up we went over the other side down into American Fork and gosh I wish I could remember the name of the lake. But he just sat there and fished and he told us stories all the way up and all the way back. Really a delightful man! I think he was such a good leader for Alta to have because he was pretty set in his ways and I think that describes what Alta needs to be.

Joey Prokop:

[Inaudible]

Andy:

You used a good adjective there. There's a timelessness, there does seem to be a timelessness. But all the time when I'm up there I look around and go "home sweet home". Really what's changed...the pitches are the same like we talked about they changed a little bit with the depth of the snow but the pitches are all there, the wildflowers are still the same, the trees are still where they all used to

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be. They moved a lift or two and added a lift or two but those big grand cliffs that you see on skiers left as you're riding up Sugarloaf...Sugarloaf Peak and all those cliffs down into Secret Lake, they've never changed and they never will I hope.

Joey Prokop:

Talk a little bit about Devils Castle, do you ski up there very much?

Andy:

Well not very much because it's a three hour tour and I've paid for a lift pass and by George...to tell you the truth on that note the uphill capacity has gotten so grand that if I just ski'd challenging run after challenging run alone and no lift lines which is typically what the deal is, I'd just run out of strength after two hours and go home. So I've found myself in the last couple of years getting much more adventurous and I do hike off all over the place now. There's rarely a day that I don't ski Eddie's High Nowhere. There's rarely a day that I don't hike to the High Notch to jump into Yellow Trail and those are things I didn't used to do because I considered it kind of a waist of time. Unless the powder was just incredible I wasn't interested in hiking. But I do a lot of that now and when nothing else is left and Devil's Castle is opened up it is really a wonderful expedition. Again half the fun to me is the hike up and just looking at the world around me going "wow this so spectacular". It never ever loses the ability to awe me clear to my soul. I'm moved so deeply just looking at it and being part of that energy that...yeah Devil's Castle is really cool. It's got some really neat fall lines that you're probably aware of that just go on and on and on and after about 30 turns you just run out of leg and you've got to stop but there's still a bunch of mountain below you. So yeah, really a neat pitch. That's part of the hugeness of Alta. People don't even realize it's there, a lot of people don't, and it's like a whole other facet of the diamond.

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Joey Prokop:

I love that, it's a nice analogy. Can you tell us about maybe friends you've known over the years and people that you hope to see that are coming and just a little bit about how it's nice...like touching base with a lot of old friends that you don't get to see often.

Andy:

Right, it's sometimes decades. We actually...my brother Tom and I started talking about doing an Alta reunion back in the '90's but because I moved away for almost 30 years, Tom's been gone that long and we just kind of spread out to the four corners of the earth but you never lose that attraction or that connection that we have with Alta and with our home base. So we started talking about doing a reunion clear back in the '90's and bringing back all these people that we grew up with and haven't seen in a very long time but like so many dreams of that nature, just nothing ever really moved forward. Nobody took the bull by the horns and made it happen. In 2002, April 24th we lost our little sister which was a real tragic surprise. We had no idea that we were about to lose her, it was some undiagnosed weak valve in her heart that just quit working one night and that was the end of her. Well when that happened, I think during the course of the funeral and the spreading of her ashes the following August my brother Tom and I got real serious about the reunion idea and said "you know what? People *are* dying". We'd lost Chick by then and Hans Brogle and Binx Sandahl and Jim Shane and so many of the old guard was dying and we got thinking "you know what? We better do one of these before everyone dies" . And so we did put it together and we did the first one of these in the summer of 2003 and probably a little bit over 200 people showed up the first night, the Friday night of that party and it was a phenomenal thing because some people you didn't even recognize, they looked so different after 30 years. There were a number of people there I hadn't seen for 30 years and it was so much fun and it was like the wink of an eye had passed between the last time we saw them and we were all 30 years younger and this time. It's almost like the conversation just carried on from

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where it had dropped off 30 years ago. Everyone was just as close as they were back then (if not closer) through all that time and memory and whatnot. It was a phenomenal thing to put together, it was very well attended. There was a hundred groups of people that broke into a hundred different little groups and everyone kind of switched around and it was just a tremendous amount of fun. So there was an outpouring of emotion during that that kind of came to me in the form of 'we've got to do one of these at least every few years'. So this is now 5 years later and we decided to do it during the winter this time. So we've chosen the last weekend of the full time season – April 12th and 13th and you're going to be there and I'm sure you're going to get some fun interviews and stuff. But again the acceptance level of all those people up there that feel the same kind of love for Alta that I think you and I do are just so excited to join and share that love and that feeling with all those other people. Because somehow it exaggerates it and it feels even bigger and even more wonderful when you can put all those people together.

Joey Prokop:

The goal for this piece is to try to catch some of that magic. I don't know if I'll be successful but I'll give it a shot. Is there something I haven't touched on?

Andy:

Oh a fun story or two, if you've got a minute. One of my favorite memories is...there's a character up there named Jeff Anderson. You probably know him, he owns the Rustler Lodge at this point and what a ski racer he was back in the day! He was two or three years older than me and he was one of those guys that whenever he was in a race if he finished he won. But he rarely finished because he'd go so fast that he'd just blow out of the course and explode and that would be the end of Jeff for that race. But if he stood, he was on the medal podium at the end of the race. He had a personality that was so fast and hard and furious and he took me under his wing for some reason when I was about 12 so he would've been about 15^{ish} and he was going to teach me to be the gutsiest guy

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on the mountain. He used to do stuff that scared the crap out of me like making me do one turn down Bear Paw and Volkswagen sized bumps with no uphill turning and he'd threaten me with my life and bend a ski pole around my neck if he saw one...anyway I just loved skiing with him because it made my adrenalin flow so bad. So we got together 10 or 12 years later and just found him out skiing one day and he said "let's go tuck some stuff" and he had a camera crew actually from Rustler that was following him around. So we went up and we tucked Yellow Trial in front of a camera. I don't know where that bit of footage is but it's hidden somewhere and that was fun and we both got our adrenalin pumping. Then he said "let's go tuck the Baldy Chutes!" and I'm like 'yeah right' and he said "part of it anyway". So we went up to the top of the Baldy Chutes and we ski'd down and it's like 'from how far up do we really dare to do this'? And my dad's standing at the bottom of Ballroom yelling "don't do anything stupid!" And it's like 'right - that's why we're here'. We got down to what I thought was about two-thirds of the way down and you know it's fore shortened from up there. You're actually higher than you think you are and I said "okay I'll go first" because I didn't want to follow Jeff because I knew he was going to do something really insane. So I just dropped into a vertical track and I stood up and you know just your body and the slip stream slows you down 20 miles an hour so I came out of the bottom of that thing at 70 miles an hour. Just fast enough to just be real real fast and it took the thousand feet from the bottom of that thing to the bottom of Ballroom to even get stopped - throwing a rooster tail 100 feet in the air. But I got stopped down by my dad and he was like terrified and all white and its like "you lived" and its like "yeah, let's watch Jeff". And I yelled to him, I says "Jeff you're way higher than you think you are, you're like halfway up!" He doesn't hear me. He doesn't care if he does hear me and he jumps into a vertical line and *tucks it* and he comes out of the bottom at least 85 miles an hour. I mean just the fastest person on ski's I've ever seen in my life and he sees that he's not going to be able to get stopped by the bottom of Ballroom and so he veers a little bit left and he runs into a bunch of small moguls. Thank God they were small, but his legs looked like sewing machine needles as he's absorbing stuff and he's

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trying to stand up but if he stands up too fast he's going to get knocked on his back and he can't get control where he can start putting in an edge because he's bouncing through these moguls and he finally gets to the bottom of those and we're starting to cut over to where we can see what the outcome is going to be and he finally starts getting turning sideways and the snow's just flying. We lost sight of him through the snow plume that had to be 50 or 60 feet high. It was so high! And you just couldn't even see him and then it started settling down and we ski'd over and there he was standing about an inch shy of the trees at the bottom of upper Main Street and that's where he finally got stopped. He was so shook up, which I'd never ever in my life seen Jeff Anderson shook up about anything. He was so shook up, we invited him to the Watson for a beer and he says "no, I think I'm just going to go home". He ski'd the cat track down. Went home and probably drank a lot that night. That was a fun memory! And just one other story I wanted to quickly tell you. Are you aware of the Germania Hut? So it used to be up on that ridgeline where the top of the Baldy Express is now and it was an old Quonset hut that I think Harold Goodrow and Jim Shane and a bunch of people from the olden days built for hikers and for skiers. It didn't have a heater or anything, it was just an old Quonset hut and we used to go up there as kids and spend the night. Not very often because it was a pretty miserable experience you know, you had to wait about two years between stays to forget how horribly miserable it was to wake up with absolutely frozen ski boots and try to go skiing the next morning. But we ended up buying a little heater from Sears and we went up and put this heater in and it *totally* changed the atmosphere of the Germania Hut. Then we brought paint up and totally hippie-sized the place. I mean we put every bright color of paint imaginable on there and a heater and some hippie type kid moved up there and I'm sure that the lodge owners were like "that's a customer that we could have if you guys wouldn't have done that". They eventually ended up tearing it down because of what we did to it probably. I mean it would be down by now anyway but we used to have some huge parties up there once we got that heater installed. That was a pretty amazing place to have a party. The very very top of the mountain and one night some guys that

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we thought were going to show up for the party never showed up and the lift closed, so about two hours later you hear this noise outside and its these guys and they'd hiked all the way up with like three cases of beer in backpacks "we found it!" Blizzard raging outside! We had some dedicated beer drinking friends back in those days who will all be at the reunion by the way.

Joey Prokop:

What's really funny about that hut is that we did an interview with Alexis Kellner. Those huts actually...you know J. Laughlin...did you know J. Laughlin?

Andy:

Well you know the Albion Hut is still there.

Joey Prokop:

The one over at **Nunis** Flat I guess was the name of that up at the top of Supreme.

Andy:

Yeah that's still there. It's completely decrepit.

Joey Prokop:

We used to hang out there a little bit.

Andy:

But we could pull the roof off and make another garage with it. One more story I wanted to tell you was my buddy Dave Madsen who's been up there forever you know, first as just a skier, like the greatest skier on the mountain and then as a patrolman and then as a cat driver. He called me up about two or three years ago right after it switched over to daylight savings time. He says "hey you've got to come up and do some cat skiing with us because we've groomed the

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mountain all evening and it's just broad daylight and there's no one on the mountain and you probably want to do this". So I grabbed my ski's and headed up there one afternoon at about 4 or 4:30 and met them up at the cat shack up there by Albion. We did the briefing and he and I go jump down in this cat that costs maybe even more than that camera. It's just a fascinating thing to sit with Dave and watch him groom Corkscrew. We groomed Corkscrew for awhile and I'm so fascinated with this really sophisticated cat that I'm not even thinking about skiing until a little bit later when he said "hey do you want to go to the top and do some runs?" I said "sure". So he radio's this guy Leo whose doing the top part of the mountain, Leo picks me up and up we go to the top and they dumped me off right at the very pass where you either go down the Sugarloaf side or ski off the Germ side and I was into really fast skiing and I knew where the corridor was and I knew there wasn't a soul on the mountain. So I just did it probably in 45 seconds down to Watson and the Watson crew is standing out front watching and Leo picks me up...we did that three times and these guys at Watson invited me in for beer so I went in and started telling them old Watson stories. This is the old Watson before they burned it down a few years ago, but we sat and told all these great stories and then Dave shows up and it's after dark now and he says "you want to go up and go back over the top?" and I said "sure". So they take me up and they dumped me at the very top and it's absolutely pitch black. There's no moon and the stars are unbelievably bright and I'm standing at that top headed down looking at Keyhole and Dave says "I'll just have the light on" so he turned the spotlight on his cat so it was illuminating all of the whole Keyhole face and stuff and he says "just head on down and then go over to Amen because they've run at least three swaths there so you can ski groomed corduroy down that and then we'll see you at the bottom" and he said "by the way, I did this with my son a couple of months ago – Park" and he said "when he got down to the transition at the bottom of that thing he was doing about 50 miles an hour and I turned off the spotlight". He says "I'm going to try to resist that urge with you!" Which he did. But still you know when you wander around that corner into the Keyhole it just totally went from day to night and I was thinking 'well I know

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this mountain backwards and forwards' and I realized you know what? You really use your eyes to navigate and I got into that Keyhole and sure enough I go off the cat track and the lower part of it but I got back up and defied death one more time and found my way down the cat track at the high part of Sugarloaf. I found my way down that all alone on (how many acres is Alta? 22 million, I don't know it's big) but skiing down and just looking at stars and cliffs and snow and utter silence. The most silent silence you've ever heard in your life and just the sound of me breathing and the sound of this really soft snow under my feet and I remember going down.....