

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: Growing up in an artistic household, Patrick S. Gordon took his first painting lessons from his mother, Janelle Gordon, a locally recognized still-life painter. He began his formal studies under the tutelage of the widely regarded watercolorist, Glenn Godsey, at the University of Tulsa. Patrick received his BFA from the University of Tulsa in 1974, where he also completed extensive graduate work in watercolor.

Born in 1953 in Claremore, Oklahoma, Patrick gained national attention with a series of solo exhibitions beginning in 1982 at the Fischbach Gallery in New York City and Joseph Gierke Fine Art in his then-adopted hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Since then, he has continually exhibited at numerous prominent galleries around the country, been featured in notable museum shows and competitions, and his works can be found in important private, corporate, and museum collections throughout the United States. Print editions of Patrick's work are widely popular with collectors throughout the world.

Listen to Pat talk about his early fascination with flowers, what it was that changed his life, and Mrs. Lennox on the oral history website and podcast VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 7:16 New York TV

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling. Today's date is September 16th, 2020. Pat, would you state your full name please?

Pat Gordon (PG): Patrick Scott Gordon.

JE: And your date of birth?

PG: October 24th, 1953.

JE: That makes your present age?

PG: Younger than you. (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing)

PG: 66.

JE: But you don't have to say how much younger, do you?

PG: (Laughing)

JE: Okay. Patrick Gordon.

PG: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: We ended up knowing you as "P.S. Gordon." Why the "P.S. Gordon" and why not "Pat Gordon?"

PG: Well, there were so many gender issues as I was growing up. "Was 'Pat' a girl or a boy?" I just got aggravated by it, and my dad went by "J.E." Gordon — Jack E. Gordon — he was an attorney in Rogers County in Claremore.

So, I noticed that he went by initials professionally. And I thought "Okay, I'll do that. That makes sense." Well, I did that for maybe — I don't know — 25 years? And one day I was in New York. I was staying at The Plaza. It was a life that I really hadn't expected. But, I was in New York working with my publishers.

And my painting dealer from Fischbach called and she said, "Get up. Turn on the television. Turn on Regis Philbin, because you're getting ready to be on Regis Philbin."

I said, "What?"

And he said, "They're going to show your work today on Regis Philbin. Get up!"

So I got up; I'm in my Plaza Hotel bathrobe. I'm drinking the best coffee in the world. And here is Regis Philbin on National Television. He said, "We're going to talk about art today."

And he had this dealer from down on Broadway who was a print dealer and he said, "Most people can't afford to buy original works, so they buy prints. It's one way for people to build an original collection. And we're going to show you artists that we believe have some staying power and we think these are the people you should consider buying if you're looking for prints."

And so with that, the camera pans to a velvet-covered — just, every tried-and-true kind of trick in the world, rectangle on camera. They pull that off, it's my print. The audience goes "Ahh," (gasping in awe) and they go to commercial.

I am feeling out of the world. I just — my ego is soaring. [Unintelligible] ... New York I'm so excited.

They say, "Come right back after commercial, we'll talk about this artist P.S. Gordon."

So they come back and they talk about the print and what a handsome print it is and what a talented artist I am and Regis looks at this dealer who I did not know and said, "I wonder what the P.S. stands for."

And the man said, "Pamela Sue."

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: And at that point, my phone starts ringing in the room and my dealer is screaming — screaming — over the phone, "They can't do that to you! They cannot do that to you!"

So he called NBC back and was screaming at them; and they didn't recover any time for us. But after that, I decided: "If I ever move to New York, I'm changing my name." And I moved to New York 20 years later and

changed my name. I didn't change it; I just went by what my real, Christian name is: Patrick.

JE: Yes.

PG: I didn't need that done because it is a sad state of affairs in the art business, but women get the short end of the stick.

JE: Women do?

PG: Mhmm (in agreement).

JE: Why is that?

PG: It's better now this decade than it was the previous decades. Well, the same thing every other — men were in control of the market and men liked dealing with men, and a lot of artists are male.

JE: Even a female's work didn't ... rise to the top?

PG: Didn't matter.

JE: It didn't matter?

PG: That's why a lot of women in the art world go by initials.

JE: Huh.

PG: They won't use their name.

JE: Wow.

PG: Isn't that amazing?

JE: Yes, it is.

PG: I thought it was incredible. I never saw it personally until then.

JE: Yeah. Where are we recording this interview?

PG: In my studio in midtown Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: Okay. This is a house and certainly it must be a historic house. A little bit about this history of this house.

PG: This house was built in 1940, surprisingly. It looks a little bit older. It was built for an oilman named Cates. It's one of the few French houses in the city. There are a few but there aren't very many, but architecturally it's French. I have always lived no further than 10 blocks from this spot in all the time in houses that I've lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I just like this neighborhood.

JE: Are you the third, fourth owner of this house?

PG: I was the fourth, I think. I was the fourth. I had a friend who lived here 45 years ago. He bought it. Charles Faudree bought it. It was his first house in Tulsa. The entry hall is still decorated exactly the way Charles left it 38 years ago. When I bought it, Charles called me and said, "I'm jealous. I wish I had that house back."

And I said, "Well, you've owned 20 houses in town. You've had your choice. This was not yours; this one's mine."

JE: I should say we have Charles' interview on VoicesOfOklahoma.com, so those who are listening may want to listen to his interview; and we are sitting in the living room of this house.

PG: Well, it was originally the living room.

JE: ... and it's now?

PG: My studio.

JE: Your studio. Matter of fact, I'm looking at your work — where you paint and all that kind of thing.

Chapter 3 – 12:13
It Was a Pencil

John Erling (JE): And I'm going to talk about this because — I ask about the COVID experience. I'm looking at your painting, which you haven't completed yet, I guess.

Pat Gordon (PG): Mm-mmm (in agreement).

JE: And the man has a red scarf on, a red hat or bandana — or a red scarf...

PG: It's a red mask.

JE: It's covering his head too.

PG: It came up from his neck, like a turtleneck, that he uses as his COVID mask. But he pulled it up and put his glasses on, and I went: "Perfect."

JE: Yeah.

PG: We were having dinner outside.

JE: You saw —

PG: We were having ... Oh! Yeah, yeah! This is my friend Greg Calumberger.

JE: Oh, you saw him do that?

PG: Oh, he did it during dinner!

JE: (Laughing).

PG: And I said, "Stop right there." I got my camera from my telephone and took pictures.

JE: Okay.

PG: Because we were eating outside with masks on with my best friends in the world.

JE: Yeah. Right.

PG: All of us 5, 6 feet apart.

JE: And so that captured your imagination and now you've...

PG: Well...

JE: ... painted that.

PG: Well it dominates our life at this point.

JE: Yes. And how has it affected you, this COVID experience?

PG: Well, it's interesting how it affects me because, when it started, I remember seeing an article on television that said one of the few professions that won't be affected by the COVID are artists. And I thought, "Well, what a bizarre thing to say." And then I kind of thought about it and I thought, "I'm used to being at home every day. I've had studios, but for probably the last 35 years, I've painted at home."

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

PG: And I'm used to being at home. I'm just not used to seeing my neighbors at home. I look out and I think, "Well why aren't they at work?"

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: Well, there not at work because their work's not working.

JE: But has the COVID pandemic affected sales?

PG: Mm-mmm. (In the negative, alluding to sales not being affected). Now, I find that the oddest part of it. I've had a fantastic year.

JE: Really? Maybe people will have been set aside to be more thoughtful and think about these things?

PG: I think people are stuck in their house. I think they're looking and thinking: "I need something that I can appreciate — that can make my life richer if I'm going to be inside."

JE: Yeah.

PG: I've always being inside.

JE: (Chuckling).

PG: It's just the truth of it.

JE: Where were you born?

PG: I was born in Claremore, Oklahoma.

JE: Your mother's name?

PG: Janelle Stallings-Gordon.

JE: What kind of a person was she? Describe her personality.

PG: My mother was funny, smart, clever. She was an attractive woman. She wanted 10 kids, she got 4. I said, "4 is enough, don't you think?" I was the last. She was an artist. She was a housewife and she painted.

JE: So then you started getting art lessons at a very young age.

PG: It's hard to explain, but the first time I got a pencil put in my hand, I just felt like I knew what to do with it. I could write, I could script — write — long before my age was supposed to. I just knew what a pencil was.

JE: You think that was 3 or 4 years old? Maybe?

PG: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I've got a drawing in my living room, from what I was 5, of our dog. She was a collie. And it looks just like her. I mean, it's just uncanny. I even look at it and I think, "Whew."

JE: 5 years old.

PG: Mhmm (In agreement). 5, 6.

JE: Yeah.

PG: Because she died when I was 6; that's why I can even time it. My mother actually saved the drawing. I have a couple of them — from the early years.

JE: So you recall, then, your mother being real supportive of that?

PG: Well, my mother just made her studio available to me. I could go in and draw and paint anytime I wanted to. When I found out that I could do it, I did a lot.

JE: Can you imagine how — what joy you brought to her?

PG: I did. I did. Because we could talk about art.

JE: Yeah. Yeah.

PG: My dad was a lawyer.

JE: And what's his name?

PG: Jack E. Gordon, Sr.

JE: And what was he like as a lawyer and all? As a family man.

PG: Well, let me explain it to you this way: He was a captain in WWII in Germany. He came home, he had 4 boys, and he thought it was a small platoon.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: It was, uh ... Interesting.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: It was interesting.

JE: Did you, uh...

PG: We ate square meals. We ate with all hands — one hand in your lap, two feet on the floor, and speak when spoken to.

JE: Did you have to make your bed in hospital corners and...?

PG: Well, kinda, yeah.

JE: Yeah. Right, right. Did you have roll call in the morning?

PG: Well, my dad went to work at 4AM every morning. 4 in the morning.

JE: To a law firm?

PG: To a law firm. In Claremore. And he'd get all of his dictation done before 6 o'clock and then he'd go have breakfast. He'd come back and go to work. He'd work until 4 and he'd quit. He quit everyday at 4 o'clock and went fishing.

JE: So did you become a fisherman too?

PG: Oh, I hated it.

JE: Did he try to make you a fisherman?

PG: Yes. And I have a drawing from when I was 8, and I would sit in the front of the boat and draw and my brothers — my 3 brothers — would sit in the boat and fish; but I sat in the front where there was this little place where I could draw.

JE: Yeah. That's funny.

PG: My father must have been horrified.

JE: But he didn't indicate that?

PG: No, no — supported me through everything.

JE: Yeah.

PG: ... But I'm sure he was still horrified (Laughing).

JE: Your brothers' names? Who are they?

PG: My brothers' names. My oldest brother is Jack Gordon, Jr — Jack E. Gordon, Jr — he is a prominent criminal attorney in northeast Oklahoma. He is also now working — he is retired — and is working in the defender's office in Tulsa; and he's kinda teaching these new, young kids how to go to court.

Then there's my brother, Mike, who's an Uber driver; and he lives in Broken Arrow. He has two kids. Two grandkids.

My brother Todd is in Boston. He's been in Boston for the last 40 years. He teaches at the New England Conservatory in the preparatory school. And he is a musician — trained concert pianist — and tenor. Operatic tenor.

JE: Wow. Two artists in the same family.

PG: The last two.

JE: Isn't that something?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). And my mother played the church organ, so music and art was just part of our lives.

JE: Yeah. Your father didn't have an artistic bent?

PG: Well, you know, weirdly enough, I can say that in my childhood I remember my father teaching me how to do the alphabet during church

— that looked like it had been blown up with a bicycle pump. So he was clever (but he didn't paint or draw), but he showed me how to do that and I remember it to this day — that it was influential on me

JE: How else was he influential on you?

PG: Well, when I was 16, he took me to court and he had the rights of majority bestowed upon me. "Rights of Majority" meant, at 16, I was legally 21. And the reason he did it is because he had worked very hard and he had a trust fund for his kids' education — that's all it was for, for education.

But he got tired of dealing with all us, so he took me to court and had the rights bestowed on me so I could take care of the bank, I was legally old enough, and my brothers had to come to me if they wanted a car, a trip, tuition — they hated me.

JE: Well, he saw something in you that you didn't.

PG: Well, I had a reasonable sense of ...

JE: Common sense.

PG: Common sense. And I had had a checking account since I was 9 years old. (Chuckling).

In Claremore, that was funny.

JE: Yeah? So then he taught you the business side of life.

PG: Mh-mmm (In agreement).

JE: And, in your world of art, and in your business, you're the businessman.

PG: I am.

JE: Are you ... are you the... I don't know if I need to know, but, are you the accountant? Do you ... You have an accountant, probably, right? I have an accountant. I have an accountant. Oh, my god! (Chuckling). No. I'm good at making money. And I'm good at spending money.

JE: And your accountant lets you know when to stop spending.

PG: Oh, no. I know. I know immediately.

JE: So, anyway, it's interesting to know that you're interested in business and art.

PG: Well...

JE: That doesn't always happen.

PG: This is my business.

JE: Yeah, but somebody else could say, "I don't want anything to do with that. I just want to paint."

PG: I had my first show and sold my first painting when I was 12 years old. My dad — as a side business ... it was on the side, because he liked to build — he built a little strip shopping center in Claremore and there was an office on the end of it. Really pretty office: white carpet, very nice. Before he rented it, I said, "Can I have that for a place to do a show? I want to have an exhibit."

And he said, "Yeah."

And so I had it for two weeks. This center — this little strip shopping center — was right across the street from the second Wal-Mart in America.

Anyway, I had this show of drawings, and paintings, and stuff kinda glued on the walls, basically. You know, taped up on the walls. I sold my first painting for 60 dollars.

JE: Wow.

PG: 1964.

JE: And you couldn't believe it, I suppose.

PG: Yeah, I believed it.

JE: You knew?

PG: Well, no, I didn't know, but I hoped! So I thought 60 dollars for this painting of a clown seemed like a reasonable amount, I mean ...

JE: And how did you come up with 60 dollars?

PG: I don't have a clue.

JE: Alright. So, then, you say, "Oh! This is what I want to do in life."

PG: Well, the second she said, "I'll take this one," and wrote me a check, I went, "Huh. Well, I can do this. I can sell this. I can sell anything that I make."

JE: So then in that moment?

PG: I knew right then.

JE: It projected you.

PG: But I knew it long before then.

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement)

PG: I didn't have any interest in anything else.

Chapter 4 – 5:45

Flower Shop

John Erling (JE): Your grandparents.

Pat Gordon (PG): My grandparents. Interesting. On the Gordon side of the family, I had my grandfather who I never met; died in 1938, right after he'd

built his office building in the JC Penny store in downtown Claremore. He died. He was 6'6", weighed 400 lbs; I've seen pictures — couple, just one or two. And he was a doctor; one of the first doctors in this part of Indian territory.

JE: What was his name?

PG: His name was Minor William Gordon. Which there's still another doctor. My cousin is Dr. Minor William Gordon, but I think that was it: Minor William. He died in '38 and he was married to Pearl Irene Elliot who was his nurse. I used to know people who said that they met delivering babies on a buckboard.

JE: Would you tell folks what a buckboard is?

PG: Well, it's a horse-drawn carriage — not a carriage — it's a horse-drawn cart big enough to put a person on the back of it in case they needed to bring him back in.

JE: And he delivered babies on it.

PG: And he delivered babies on it.

JE: On the way, I suppose, somewhere, and then that child came. Right? Your grandmother — was she artistic? Did she show some flair?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). She had flair.

JE: As he just took a drink of his Diet Coke.

PG: (Chuckling).

JE: Alright. Tell us about the flair.

PG: She had flair. The story she tells is that she was the last private-duty nurse for Enrico Caruso in New York. Because she came from New York to Claremore, Oklahoma to marry my grandfather. She tried to be on the

stage, apparently, in New York. She was 6-foot at death. When she died, she was almost 6-feet tall. I mean, just ...

JE: Wow.

PG: She was a tall woman, and a strong woman. So I can't imagine that she would have ever thought "stage," but... Anyway, she was a nurse. She wasn't that grandmotherly type that you think are so wonderful. She was not nice. She was not a very pleasant woman.

JE: And you remember her.

PG: Oh, yeah! Sure I do.

JE: Was she interested in flowers?

PG: No. But my other grandmother — there's the trick. My other grandmother was a florist. She had a flower shop downtown. She worked in Tulsa for 30 years at Burnett's Flowers over on 11th and she worked in Claremore, and she was a florist and I was down there in the flower shop. I can remember at 3, 4 ... opening that refrigerator to just smell it.

And to today, when I go to Tony Gardners', when I go in there, my grandmother could be standing next to me. It's just so powerful, the sense of smell — historically. Your memories are related to smell. And I just go in there and it's like, "Where is she?" (Chuckling).

JE: Did that set your interest in flowers right there?

PG: Oh, of course it did! I kinda rose out of my neighbor across the street when I was 6, out of an old woman. I said, "I want that rose." Did you not know how worried my father was? (Laughing).

JE: So then did you paint a flower at a very early age?

PG: No. No. I didn't paint them ... really, til ... seriously until college.

JE: Before we move on, though, we have to talk about your father and the 1921 Race Massacre.

PG: My dad was an interesting man. He told us, my brothers and I, years ago, that when the Race Riot occurred that my grandfather — the doctor — drove him to Tulsa. Drove he and my uncle.

So, 1921. My father was born in 1917; so he would have been 4. And my uncle was 6. And my father said he remembered them driving through and seeing heaps of bodies on a flatcar.

And I said, “Why would he take you as a 4-year-old child to see it?”

And he said he never really understood and he never really ever talked about it again. But he drove him over here. And that had to be — you know ... 1921 had to be not a nice drive from Claremore to Tulsa — 30 miles out on Highway 66, I guess.

JE: Right. Boy. He wanted you to ...

PG: He wanted them to see what had happened.

JE: And we’re going to assume that he projected — this is going to be remembered forever, so...

PG: Well, he wanted me to know it. I can remember when he told us about it. And he said he never understood why he did it; because, really, it’s something a child should have never seen.

JE: So your father did talk to you about the ‘21 Race Massacre.

PG: Oh, yeah!

JE: Because so many families didn’t talk about it.

PG: Oh, no, no, no. He talked about it.

Chapter 5 – 11:56
Sixty-five Credit Hours

John Erling (JE): The first school you attended?

Pat Gordon (PG): Claremont Grade School.

JE: Alright. And are you drawing under the desks there, or what are you doing?

PG: I was drawing a lot. I was doing lots of things and, fortunately, the teachers would look at me and say, “No, no, no. The clown’s nose is red.”

And I’d say, “No, it’s not.”

And they’d say, “Oh, yes it is.”

And I’d say, “Oh, no it’s not.” And I would do it as I wanted to. Well, you know, it was Claremore, Oklahoma. They only had ... you couldn’t have two thumbtacks to hang your drawings up; they only had one and mine was always the last because it wasn’t very good in comparison to the others.

And my mother would come into the homeroom thing and she’d say, “Oh, it’s beautiful.” She’d just — whatever — “It’s beautiful.”

“Well, great. I think it is, too.”

And then the teacher would take her aside and say, “I’m sending this little girl home with him to teach him to color.” (Laughing)

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: So Polly was sent home to be my coloring tutor. I didn’t like that.

JE: No. But we would have thought ...

PG: Recalcitrant.

JE: ... since we see your work, that you would have been the best artist in the room.

PG: I was! Well, as far as I was concerned, I was. But the rest of them didn't think so.

JE: (Laughing). And who cared at that point, right?

PG: Yeah.

JE: Right. And so then, you're on into grade school, junior high school ...

PG: Well, then I started being useful. I could draw anything that anybody needed drawn. "Oh, I need a dog..." or a puppy or a cartoon.

"Okay. I can do that."

So once you became useful to other people who had no creative drive — ability — then you become more popular because you can do what they need done.

JE: Right.

PG: That taught me something.

JE: Yes?

PG: You wanna make people happy.

JE: Yeah.

PG: I wanna improve the quality of their life. That is, exactly, what I'm doing now. That is my whole purpose in life.

JE: Charles Banks Wilson was born in Springdale, Arkansas and grew up in Miami; and he, of course, is our very famous Oklahoma painter and painted those murals on the ceiling in the ...

PG: ... I watched ...

JE: ... of the capitol. Did you ever meet him?

PG: Uh-huh (in agreement). Long time ago when he was painting J.M. Davis' portrait of the Davis Gun Museum in Claremore. He came to paint his portrait for the museum, I would think.

JE: Right.

PG: And so I was somewhere ... 10, 12, 14, 10, I would think. Early — 10, 11. I watched him for a little while and the Mason Hotel was fantastic. It was just unbelievable. It's a shame that it's gone today.

JE: Did he talk to you? Did you just watch him? Or did you ...

PG: I just watched him.

JE: Yeah. In his interview on Voices of Oklahoma, he was about your age when Will Rodgers allowed him to draw him when Will Rodgers invited him to come up on stage as Will Rodgers was performing.

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). I would have too if they'd have asked me.

JE: Right. So here you're pretty young and into high school then? You're pretty popular because you can draw and all that?

PG: Yeah. I did the inside of the high school yearbook.

JE: And that high school was?

PG: Claremore High School.

JE: Right. By the way, there was the federal judge Stephanie Seymour who graduated from that same school.

PG: Did she really? I didn't know that. I know Stephanie.

JE: Yeah.

PG: She's from Claremore?

JE: Yes.

PG: Lord, how did I not know that?

JE: You need to mention that to her.

PG: Well, I will next time I see her.

JE: Right. So, high school was good experience for you?

PG: Oh. Was it a good experience? I liked it just enough to get out of it.

JE: Right. Were you a student? Would you consider yourself a really good student?

PG: Yeah. I was smart. This isn't like our president. "I have a good brain!" (Laughing). I have a good brain and a good vocabulary. Yeah, I mean, you know. It's Claremore, Oklahoma. I am a gay man in Claremore, Oklahoma which was so rural growing up. 5,000 people. I could walk — at age 4, I could walk from my parents' house to my dad's office through downtown. No one thought a thing about it. It was that — Hooterville. Mayberry.

JE: Right. Good times, weren't they?

PG: You know, well, it was interesting. I wouldn't change any of it.

JE: Okay. You're a gay man. When did you begin to have ...

PG: Well, I didn't know that then. It took me years to figure it out because there weren't a lot of examples. I didn't quite understand what this was in my head.

JE: How young were you when you began to question?

PG: Well, I probably always questioned it in my life. But I didn't understand it in terms of what it applied to in my life.

JE: Until?

PG: 30? Late 20s?

JE: Did you date? Did you have girlfriends?

PG: Oh, yeah! I married my high school sweetheart. I dated Cath Gordon until I was 15. And I just celebrated my 50th Christmas present with her. I just gave her something for Christmas 50 years later. We're still friends. We have 4 grandchildren together.

JE: But you're divorced.

PG: Oh, yeah. I've been divorced a long time.

JE: Was the cause of the divorce because you were gay?

PG: No. Cause for the divorce was because I didn't have a good marriage.

JE: Okay. So then when you married her, were you thinking ...

PG: Oh, I wasn't thinking anything about it other than "This is my high school sweetheart and she's the one I should marry." And I married her.

JE: Right.

PG: I was young. 20.

JE: But you had attraction for men, too?

PG: Well, I didn't really have ... I wasn't having relations at that point. I was married. (Laughing). It was just a confusing part of ... a quadrant of my brain.

JE: Yeah. And you certainly didn't have anybody to talk to about this.

PG: Well, there wasn't anybody really to talk to about this, so ...

JE: When I came in here, you were talking about diabetes. How long ... I mean, when did you start realizing ... or when were you diagnosed as having ...

PG: I was diagnosed with being Type I diabetes when I was 29. I was 6'1 and weighed 130lbs. and couldn't figure out why in the world I was so thin, but that was why. I was kind of like Mary Tyler Moore-sized, except taller. I knew something was wrong. Anyway, they diagnosed it and I think I've managed it pretty well.

JE: But it's a tough, tough disease.

PG: Well, it's a tough disease but there are tougher.

JE: You graduate? In what year?

PG: Yeah, I graduated in — now this gets confusing. I graduated in '71 from high school. But Claremore had a limited education and I was really interested in more, so I started going to college out at the junior college as a special student. Then they didn't have AP courses. I just went out and enrolled as a special student at the junior college, which at that point was Oklahoma Military Academy.

I started taking classes out there when I was in the 7th grade. And they had a fantastic, fantastic teacher named John ... it starts with a 'W'. I can even see it. I started out there and this guy really was good. He was a good teacher; and he treated me older than I was. He recognized that I had ability, again, then after the pencil, the brush came. Whew! "This is like magic. What the hell?" You know.

JE: Did he introduce you to that?

PG: No, I'd been painting for a long time but he did things with me artistically, educationally that challenged the way I looked at painting. A junior college in Claremore, Oklahoma? How could I have been so lucky?

JE: Yup.

PG: Well, I enjoyed that so much and my Dad always said to me, “You have to work, Pat, as soon as you turn 12 or 13, you’ve got to have a part-time job somewhere — in the summer, in particular.”

Bailing hay is what my brothers did. Mm-mmm (in strong disagreement)! No way. I wouldn’t do it. He said, “... unless you go to school.”

I said, “School!” (Chuckling)

So I signed up out at the military academy to take painting. Well, but the time I got through high school, I had 65 college hours. I was 17 years old, because I was the youngest in my class. Everybody was older than me. My birthday was October 24th — just under the cutoff line. I was young, I had 65 hours of credit. As the years went on, I took history, political science, English. I took all my basic college courses because Claremore High School was not challenging me in the places I needed to be challenged. So I started taking other courses out there. “If I can take that one, I can take that!”

Well, by the time I graduated high school, I had 65 credit hours when I went to college, they accepted 45 of them.

JE: Wow.

PG: So I started off college as a second-semester sophomore.

JE: At what ...?

PG: At 17.

JE: In what school?

PG: At OU, where my high school sweetheart and I went to go to college. And then she didn’t like it and said, “Well, I’m going to go to TU.”

And I said, “Oh, I’ll follow you,” so I went to TU.

JE: How long did you stay at OU?

PG: One year. That was all it took.

JE: That put you into your junior year then?

PG: Yeah.

JE: So then you come to TU.

PG: And I finished college in two years.

JE: And you would have been?

PG: 20.

JE: 20 years old. Wow.

PG: And I got married. My parents said, “You can’t get married until you’re a senior in college or at least 20 years old — 21!”

And I said, “Well, I’m a senior in college and I’m 20.”

And they said, “Okay.”

And it was to the same girl I’d been dating for 5 years and it just seemed like the proper thing to do.

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

Chapter 6 – 10:35

Rejected at One Hundred

John Erling (JE): Alright. When you were at TU, what kind of artwork were you...?

Pat Gordon (PG): I met Glenn Godsey. That was what it took. I met Glenn Godsey who was the painting teacher at TU. And I studied under Glenn for the rest of ... at that point all I had was painting courses to take. So I just painted for 2 years and graduated college and I went into graduate school.

JE: So that was a fortuitous thing, to meet Glenn.

PG: Oh, my god he calmed me down. He made me calm. He didn't teach; he let you evolve.

JE: "Slow down," no?

PG: Well, and he would talk to me and then he just understood me and he understood ... and I started painting flowers then. That's when I really ... At OU, I had to paint abstracts; that's all they would teach. (Laughing)

JE: And you didn't enjoy doing that?

PG: Oh, I had thought it was interesting but I'd say, "Oh, god the best part of that painting just went down the drain..." You know? I mean, it wasn't who I was. I could make it. It's not that hard.

JE: So here's a second professor. The one at the military academy...

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement)

JE: And now Glenn, shaping your life.

PG: And he did.

JE: So you had a degree in what when you graduated?

PG: Graphic design.

JE: Graphic design?

PG: (Laughing)

JE: Why? How's that?

PG: Well, because my dad insisted I knew how to make a living.

JE: Something of ...

PG: Because he was worried that I'd be starving to death in a coldwater flat in New York.

JE: Mh-hmm. And so what year did you graduate?

PG: 1974.

JE: And you were doing watercolor?

PG: Only watercolor.

JE: Only watercolor.

PG: No oil painting. I had already been an oil painter. Watercolor ... Glenn Godsey taught the only watercolor course that I knew of at college level that received credit, and I wanted to paint in watercolor.

JE: For the rest of your life.

PG: Well, I thought it was ... yeah!

JE: Okay. Then where does the oil come in?

PG: Well oil comes in at a later period, but I still do watercolor. There's watercolor over there. I started oil painting seriously after college, probably in the early 90s.

JE: Okay. What led to that?

PG: I wanted to do something bigger. Watercolor has a certain limitation in scale because of the materials, not because of the ideas. The largest

watercolor I ever did was 60" x 80" and it's on two sheets of paper. They don't make watercolor paper that big, so I would have to take big sheets of paper. Well, I wanted to do bigger paintings and there was no bigger paper.

JE: You enjoy both, though?

PG: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JE: One over the other?

PG: Oh, no.

JE: No.

PG: No.

JE: So when you graduate from TU, then you say, "Alright. I'm setting up shop and I'm going to be an artist now for the rest of my life."

PG: Yeah. I couldn't just stand there. I'd have starved to death most of the time. We were hungry. There were summers that we'd only eat lettuce and tuna fish. We didn't have that much money.

JE: So you were trying to survive as an artist?

PG: I didn't finish my Masters. Three hours short. Who cares? I wanted to paint.

JE: Your Masters was in what?

PG: Painting.

JE: Okay; of course.

PG: (Laughing) Under Glenn Godsey at TU.

JE: Alright. Right. And so, then you said, "Well, I'm starving here. What should I do?"

PG: So I taught.

JE: Okay. And you taught what?

PG: I taught painting, drawing at Philbrook, which I had been teaching. I got my first job. The first person I met in Tulsa, Oklahoma when I came back here from TU in '72 ... first person I ever met in Tulsa was Marcia Manhart.

JE: Hmm...

PG: I was going through her neighborhood, knocking on doors, to find a garage apartment. And I met her. She didn't have a garage apartment, but she was running the art school at Philbrook. I said, "Well, I'm going to go to TU and be a painting major." It was my first job. I never had a job before until Philbrook. (Laughing)

JE: No.

PG: So I started teaching there. I would have been '74.

JE: And any other place?

PG: Oh, yeah. At TJC, Claremore Junior College... I wouldn't work any ...

JE: Tulsa. Tulsa Junior College.

PG: Tulsa Junior College, Claremore Junior College.

JE: Oh, both! Both places.

PG: Uh-huh.

JE: Oh, I'm sorry.

PG: I wouldn't teach any place full time because I was terrified of becoming addicted to a paycheck. I didn't want to be a teacher. I was a good teacher. I taught Joe Lando, I taught hundred and hundreds of students, many of

which are still painting today. But they also all started painting like me. I hated that. Go make your own image; don't take from me. That's my experience. You go make whatever yours is; great. Go do it.

JE: Did any of them go on painting like you and made money on it?

PG: Yeah! Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I had several good students.

JE: So then how long do you have to work to support your painting?

PG: I only worked part-time. Oh, my god. I stopped well in from college on. From 1974 on, I made my living from painting.

JE: Oh, so that was after...

PG: After I graduated.

JE: But ... Tulsa Junior College and Philbrook, then there was a time when you didn't need that income.

PG: Yeah, I quit when Emily ... I have one child, daughter: Emily Gordon. Her mother was pregnant and I said, "Oh, well, I better tell ya I quit down at TJC today." (Chuckling)

She didn't work. It was just me.

JE: And so? It worked out. You started selling?

PG: Well, the way I started selling ... People would come and they'd look and they wouldn't buy. And I thought, "These are nice paintings." And they were only \$100. And they wouldn't buy 'em. And I thought, "Why? These are 22" x 30" watercolors."

JE: Of flowers?

PG: Of flowers. Of still-life. And nobody would buy 'em. And I thought, "Oh, well, this is awful."

JE: Where were they displayed?

PG: Well, one time I did a show at what used to be called Lou Boils. You remember Lou Boils out on 41st and Yale? They had windows down in the bottom of the mall and I would put my paintings up in there and I did sell one to Darrell Royal, the coach from that space.

JE: Texas coach?

PG: Texas coach Darrell Royal bought one; he and his wife bought a painting I had out there. (Laughing) That was funny; I'd forgotten that.

JE: So, you have ...

PG: So I just had 'em and somebody would say, "Oh, I, here..." I taught for the Arts and Humanities Council and I worked with the Junior League teaching, doing arts projects in the public school systems.

And then after you would get through with that teaching assignment then all the Junior League girls would go over and have bloody marys at somebody's house and so I got to meet all the Junior Leaguers from teaching.

And slowly but surely one would say, "I'd like to come see your paintings and see what you make," and blah-blah-blah. And they'd come in and they'd see 10 or 12 paintings and it'd be \$100 and they'd say, "No, thank you."

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: I'd say, "Okay, great." And then one day I thought, "You know, I am so tired of being turned down at \$100." So, with the next woman who came in, I thought, "You know, I'm just gonna jack the price on these." Because the reality was I'd be much happier being rejected at \$500 than I would be to be rejected at \$100.

JE: Perfect.

PG: So the next woman who walked in, Marcia Manhart brought her in. She said, "I think you oughta look at his paintings." And this woman said, "How much is THIS one," looking down her nose at me. And I said, "Ma'am, that painting is FIVE-hundred dollars."

She said, "I'll take it."

JE: Wow.

PG: And I looked at her and said, "Okay. It's yours." And afterwards I thought, "Huh... I get it. Too cheap means something's wrong." And from that point on, I raised my prices.

JE: You knew how to price things, didn't you?

PG: But it took me ... I just couldn't stand being turned down for these beautiful paintings at \$100.

JE: There's interesting psychology in that, isn't there?

PG: Fascinating.

JE: "Oh, the price! This must be worth something!"

PG: Yep. And I tell many students — many people who come to me for art advice — I look at 'em and I say: "You could be priced too cheap." And then there are those who shouldn't be priced as high as they are, but that's not my business.

JE: But you're lucky you decided to go high; somebody else might have said, "Well, I'll ..."

PG: " ... I'll quit."

JE: No. "I'll cut my price to \$75."

PG: (Flabbergasted exhaling) If they're not taking at \$100, I'd just as soon them not taking at \$500.

JE: Right.

PG: And interestingly enough, that painting came back to me. The woman who bought it died and her mother, who she and I sat on the board of the Philbrook together, had the painting delivered to me and said, "I think Judy would want you to have this back."

JE: Hmm...

PG: And I think it's interesting that it came back to me because it really was the first time that the eureka-light went on since I was 12, "I really can do this."

JE: Yeah. And it really was your painting.

PG: And it was.

JE: When you paint and sell, it still is your painting.

PG: Oh, always.

JE: In your emotions and in your mind, right.

Chapter 7 – 11:07 Changed My Life

John Erling (JE): When you paint, you try to distract your brain from painting: You listen to music, podcasts, television.

Pat Gordon (PG): Watch TV.

JE: Is that what you do? So ...

PG: Political television.

JE: ... so that the painting, flows become automatic. You know, like you see piano players just let it flow.

PG: I just ... I just sit in front of it and it comes out of me onto there.

JE: Okay. Like when you watch a piano player particularly play by ear, it just flows. So this is just flowing for you while you may be watching television and fully comprehend what they're saying on breaking news.

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

JE: And here it's flowing onto the board.

PG: I have nothing to do with it. I am the instrument.

JE: And for those of us who sit on the sidelines, we sit in wonderment.

PG: Well, sometimes it surprises me. Don't think it doesn't. I mean, I come back and I go, "Huh... surprising."

JE: In New York — was it about in 1982? You had a solo exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery?

PG: Was it '82? I have no idea.

JE: In watercolor.

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

JE: So that's your first foray into New York.

PG: No, second.

JE: Your first?

PG: My first one was right after I graduated college.

JE: Oh.

PG: I had my first show in New York when I was 20 at Graham & Sons Gallery, which was 1974. I went to New York. I decided after ... Well, what happened really at the graduate school is that I had taken everything they had to offer and I'd taken all the art history and that's all I needed was one more course in art history. And they said: "We'll have something in the Fall."

So I said, "Okay, I'll be back in the Fall." Fuck that. I'm-a never goin' back.

Once I got out, I realized, "Oh! Painting's much more fun than school."

JE: Yup.

PG: Then I decided, maybe towards a year... I had 10 or 12 paintings and I loaded them in a portfolio, I went to New York, and I walked from gallery to gallery with portfolio of paintings. "Hi! I'm Pat Gordon from Tulsa, Oklahoma! I made these and I'm looking for a place to show 'em!"

JE: (Laughing)

PG: Well, I did this for almost two weeks and they just would, like, send me onto the next place. One, it's a watercolor; next, it's flowers. What the hell?

So they... I walked into this gallery and this guy — and I said, you know, "Hi, I'm P.S. Gordon and I'm here, blah-blah-blah, and I want to show you these paintings."

He looked at me and said, "These are really fine paintings."

I said, "Thank you. I think they are." And he offered me a show. Unheard of. This was the oldest gallery in New York City.

JE: And the name of it?

PG: Graham & Sons, which was up on Madison & 72nd. And, you know, most of the art galleries were down on 57th, but they were an old gallery, and they had been up there, and they had a 20th century section. They sold mostly old art, but they had a 20th century gallery, so, I did my first show — didn't

make any money. I borrowed \$5,000 from the bank to live for a year because that's what it cost me to live that year.

JE: So you could be there?

PG: No, so I didn't have to teach as much to paint a show. I had to come back after they said, "We'll do a show of your work." It wasn't all this work, I had to make new work. And we did the first show and didn't sell a painting. Not one.

JE: Wow.

PG: And I was just, like, devastated. And like I said, I had to borrow \$5,000 to pay for the frames and the shipping and the money for us to live because my wife didn't work. She just cooked and fed me.

JE: And then the two of you are in New York?

PG: No. We were living in Tulsa. I never moved to New York until much later.

JE: Right, right. Okay. So then you're here producing more work for the show.

PG: And I do the show and it doesn't sell and I think, "Oh, shit... I can't deal with this." And so I kinda tucked my tail between my legs and I came on back to Tulsa, Oklahoma with all these paintings I couldn't sell for, at that time, we were trying for \$1000 a piece. It's all they were.

JE: How did you handle that?

PG: Well, it was depressing, but I thought I'd never do another show. I came back to Tulsa and just continued to work here and would sell occasionally. I still taught.

Years went on by and in '76, maybe, Aladar Marberger, owner of Fischbach Gallery, was brought to Philbrook for a lecture and they called me and said, "Would you take this guy around town and show him Tulsa? We think that you could like him and he would like you."

And I said, "Okay, great; I'd be happy to."

So I picked Aladar up at his hotel ... No, no, no. I said, "Have him come to my studio." At that point, I had a studio downtown — 3rd and Cheyenne — in the Midco building. And Emily was at school and I would drop her off at school and then I would drive downtown just like everybody else and go to work.

And I painted 8 hours a day. I'd pick her up from school, take her home... Well, Aladar came to my studio and I had just finished a show and a couple of the paintings were still in my studio. And he came in and I said, "Come in, sit down; I'll be with you in a minute." I wasn't anything but rude to this man, because I had been to New York and I failed miserably. You know, I thought, "I don't need to do this again. But I'll be nice to him because he's here." And, like, you know, those southerly...

JE: ... Niceties.

PG: Niceties that we provide in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "I'll be nice." And so I said, "I'll be right with you; let me finish up here."

He said, "Are these paintings yours?"

And I said, "Yeah." And then I drove him around town and I took him out to ORU, which he loved. He loved those big, praying hands. I drove him to Gilcrease and I just drove him all around town. And it happened to be it was in January, but I had a red Miata and it was, like, 70 degrees for some reason. So we had the top down. He thought this was the greatest place to live he'd ever been.

Well, as I was dropping him off at the event at Philbrook, he said, "I really liked your paintings, I wish you would send me some slides..." — is what we used to send out — and he said "I'd like my partners to see them."

I kind of blew him off; I said, "Oh, yeah, okay. Fine." Let him go into the lecture; I never saw him again. Well, I did send them some slides. My ego couldn't resist it. But I never heard anything from him.

JE: And this is Fischbach Gallery in New York?

PG: In New York.

JE: Right.

PG: And I didn't hear anything back from them. And then one day he called, about a month afterwards, "We've decided we want to give you a show."

JE: Hmm.

PG: And I very handily said, "Okay."

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: Just so nonplussed by the thing. Just trying to be so calm. I said, "Okay."

He said, "Here's the date. Get to work."

And I got to work and it was a sellout and it changed by life.

JE: Wow.

PG: Changed my life.

JE: Can you imagine — no. I'm trying to imagine how nervous you were.

PG: I hate openings. I've threatened to not go to every one of them I've ever had. Because I don't like that part of it.

JE: Why?

PG: Well, it's a ... You know, it's kind of like ... It'd be like showing pictures of yourself in your underwear. It's so private, but you learn that that's just what it is. You feel vulnerable when they go up. I don't care how good you are. There's that sinking spell: "What if you spent the last year of your life in a room by yourself working and your judgment was off." Or... you know, it's a scary feeling.

JE: And then to stand there and go...

PG: "I can't believe I've done these!" (Laughing)

JE: And to watch the people react.

PG: Well ...

JE: 'Eh?

PG: I don't have many bad reactions. Mine are not terribly social paintings in the respect that I'm trying to get at you, except for you my political paintings — completely different story.

JE: But it sold out.

PG: Yeah.

JE: In how ... in weeks?

PG: Oh, it took the length of the show to sell it. It wasn't that ... Shows are odd things. Here, they're a social event, in New York they're a social events. Sales rarely occur on a first night, opening night. They like to sell ahead of time. They like to open a show and like you see it's sold out.

JE: And see the "sold" sign on it.

PG: Red dots on everything. That's what you pray for.

JE: Why do they like to do that?

PG: Because it makes people want them more.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: It's all psychological. "I love that painting; I want that one!"

"You can't have it; it's sold."

JE: (Laughing) But since they're in that mood of wanting to buy...

PG: "Then I'll get another one!" Yeah.

JE: Right.

PG: Oh, it's incredible.

JE: (Laughing) Oh, my. I'm experiencing with you the thrill that had to reside with you.

PG: Oh, it was astounding. "From Claremore, Oklahoma?" That's what I kept thinking.

JE: But, particularly, since you had failed in New York.

PG: Well, it was 7 years... There were 7 years.... There was enough time between to where I was like, "Well..."

Chapter 8 – 7:13

Artists are Given Insight

John Erling (JE): You have tablescapes, right, we call 'em?.

Pat Gordon (PG): Mm-hmm (in agreement).

JE: You've changed your backdrops? Did you? To your flowers?

PG: Well, painting ... As you change, paintings change. Internally, I've changed: thought-wise, thought process, what I'm trying to accomplish, what I think is more important now than then.

Painting is a fluid thing. People would like for it not to be. Dealers would love for you to never change your style: start with this, stay with that. They don't want to have to work hard, I'm tellin' ya. They don't want to have to follow you and make their clients follow you. They want you to do the same thing. That first show? They wanted to those same things.

That doesn't work.

JE: Are there many different Pat Gordons in you?

PG: Yeah.

JE: When you look back on your early work, how do you see it? Are you proud of it? Do you say, "Oh, my..."

PG: I don't ever see anything other than just "Why did you let that out?" Because I know that this stuff comes back to bite you, so every piece that goes out has to be good.

JE: Your watercolors would feature flying pennies, firecracker underwater, plastic Godzilla...

PG: It's interesting what I find to paint. It's an odd combination of curiosities and beautiful, fine objects and their relationship to each other in the painting. It's always ... They're not painted just for the object. They're painted for their implication or the relationship it might have to another object in the painting.

JE: So was there a time when you painted for the public, or did you paint for you?

PG: I don't paint for the public. I always paint for me.

JE: Your instinct.

PG: I can't depend on them. My god... The public is the most mind-changing experience. I can't paint for them because thoughts are changing all the time. They have to come to me.

JE: But aren't there trends — buying trends?

PG: I don't know. I don't look at that.

JE: ... Where everybody's buying such and such?

PG: “Well, everybody's buying abstracts at this point.” Well, you know, I don't make abstracts in that same sense. I think that there is a cultural change which has occurred that I think now is partially beginning to wonder how much COVID has had to do with it. I see that there are trends — not that I'm very impressed with — but as culture changes, so does the artist and so does the artists' work. At the moment, I'm painting this. This is what I normally might paint.

JE: You're pointing at flowers.

PG: I'm pointing at a still-life on the mantle. But I think the acknowledgement ... I believe that artists are given this gift because we have insight different than most people. I think I was given a great gift for portraying concept, theory, meaning — albeit rather skewed because it's coming out of my head, but I think these are the paintings that are going to hold up, that will have social curiosity that's going to have a certain staying power. And intuition about the subject I paint — the subjects that I'm painting — they are all symbols for other things. It's not just about beauty; it's not just about the shape of the object. It's about the content of the object. It has value in itself. Make sense?

JE: Yeah. I'm thinking you have obviously put a lot more thought into it than somebody who walks in and says, “I'll buy that.” They can't even begin to think all the thoughts that you just said.

PG: No. They don't have to. I do.

JE: But they do get an appreciation for what they see, but not as deep as you would have for having done it.

PG: Well, that's because I made it.

JE: They should know what you just said about their painting.

PG: Well, their paintings are important to me.

JE: Yeah. Do you paint to sell because you just have to?

PG: No! Oh, because I HAVE to? Well, it's the only way I can make a living.

JE: Yeah.

PG: I don't want to teach.

JE: No. No you don't.

PG: I quit 41 years ago. 42 years ago.

JE: But that's instinct: You have to paint.

PG: Oh, I have to paint. Literally, physically, I have to paint.

JE: Right. So when you finish a painting...

PG: I start another one.

JE: You don't back off for a day or two?

PG: Pffft! No. Hell, what am I going to do? I can't get that day back.

JE: So you set that one down and ...

PG: I put that canvas down and I put a new one up.

JE: And you start again. But, okay, but then you're already generating an idea.

PG: Already, this painting's already led to the next painting.

JE: While you're thinking about that painting, you're thinking about the next one.

PG: ... the next one.

JE: Already. Yeah. Do you ever get ... I'm going to call it a 'drought'.

PG: A block?

JE: A drought, a block, yes.

PG: Not very often. I've had a couple.

JE: Did they last awhile?

PG: Mm-mmm (in the negative). Mm-mmm (in the negative). I gotta make a living. I had a kid in med school. I had to work ... (Chuckling)

JE: Yeah. So do you keep hours?

PG: Every day.

JE: So what ...?

PG: I start at 9:30 every morning, 10 o'clock at the latest; and I paint until 11 o'clock at night and I quit at 11. I stop to eat.

JE: You mean you've been painting nearly 12 hours?

PG: Every day.

JE: Say 10 hours for sure.

PG: 10 for sure.

JE: You're painting ... Don't you start painting for a few hours and then say, "Boy, I gotta go run an errand. I gotta get out of here."

PG: I don't care. I don't wanna get out of here.

JE: You don't... (Chuckling)

PG: I do well inside.

JE: You don't wanna get away and come back with ...

PG: I'm having the most fun I can.

JE: And sometimes we back off our work and say, "Well, I'm going to come back with it with a different perspective," and you don't have to do that.

PG: No. I don't have two paintings normally, or three paintings, going at once.

JE: No.

PG: I have one painting at a time.

JE: Yeah.

PG: I thought this was done. It wasn't done. So I'm now into this one and I keep coming back to this little watercolor beside you.

JE: And that's a portrait.

Chapter 9 – 5:55

Portraits

Pat Gordon (PG): Mm-hmm (in the affirmative).

John Erling (JE): Alright. We haven't talked about that.

PG: We haven't.

JE: Thanks for bringing it up.

PG: Sure.

JE: When did that begin in your life?

PG: Portraits? When I was in the 7th grade, I got \$5 a piece to do the cheerleader's drawing of her boyfriend of the week.

JE: (Chuckling) Well wasn't that fun?

PG: Well, sure, it was fun. I was making 5 bucks and she had something she wanted — a portrait of Bobby. I had a girl not long ago that came up to me and I hadn't seen her in a hundred years and she said, "You know, I feel so stupid. I threw all those drawings away."

And I say, "Big mistake. Really. Big mistake."

But I was kiddin' with her. But I started then. I did a portrait of my girlfriend in the 8th grade — Debbie Oakley — and she still has it hanging in her house.

JE: Right.

PG: Which I think is funny.

JE: Okay, so that's in 7th grade.

PG: So I've done a lot of portraits. I like portraits. Portraits is not for everybody. Making a portrait, you have so many things to take into consideration: the purpose of the painting, the subject, where it's going to hang, and what's its intent.

I've done many portraits of kids, portraits of bank presidents... They're good bread-and-butter. Right now, I've got one, two pending. Three. Three portraits pending. One's in Philadelphia, two are here that are kind of what I call "corporate" paintings. They're going to institutions.

JE: You make a lot of money on them, don't ya?

PG: Yeah. There aren't many who can do it.

JE: It's really something when you paint an image of someone that you capture the spirit of the person. Am I right?

PG: Well, you've got to try. Some will come in here. I had a guy I used to call "dead eyes." Oh, my god. I mean, he'd just look at me and it was like he wasn't in the room. It was hard. And you run into those things and you think, "What am I going to do?" Because I think we're painters of the humble truth, basically. It's not always easy.

JE: "Painters of the humble truth..."

PG: Well, that used to be a show they used to do at Philbrook and I said, "This is the best line that's ever been said about still-life painting." And they called them "painters of the humble truth." And it was a show on American still-life painting. But it really is — the "humble" part of it I always loved. The "humble" truth. Because, sometimes, I'd pick up stuff that I don't ... intuitively, I don't know.

I had one client. I didn't know he was an alcoholic. I had no — I didn't know him. But I did know that every time I saw him, he had a glass in his hand. And when I did his portrait — and I work from photographs — he was sitting there with a glass in his hand!

Well, years later, he quit drinking. And what got him to a meeting everyday from that point on? It was seeing that portrait of him with a glass. I had no idea.

JE: Yeah.

PG: So, the interesting thing that I find about my work is that it can affect somebody that I'm not intimately related to, but can have a profound effect in their life. All I did was paint it.

JE: Yup. Your first big commission for a portrait. Can you remember that?

PG: I did a portrait in Dallas of two boys. By the time I got it done, I was in fetal position on the sofa of the art dealer's house because they were talking so much money for these two portraits that it upset me. I said, "I can't paint that."

JE: This was the most you'd ever been paid. How much was it?

PG: \$37,000. For two paintings.

JE: And it scared the living daylights out of you.

PG: Made me sick. Made me SICK. My dealer and this art consultant were talking over me. They were on the telephone and on loudspeaker and I'm just on the sofa, and then I'm laying on the sofa, and then I'm like, "I don't want to talk about this. Because I thought there's so much riding on this, you know? Everybody wanted their money, and if I didn't perform... It was scary.

JE: How long did it take you to do that?

PG: Once I thought about how much money was mine, I thought, "Hmm.."

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: It just hadn't happened.

JE: So, talk to me about pricing. How do you come up with a price?

PG: Well, price now is by the — literally by the square foot.

JE: Really?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). It's priced by size.

JE: It's not by the aesthetic value of it?

PG: Mm-mmm (in the negative).

JE: Really?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). It's business.

JE: By the square foot?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). I don't add it that way, but a 4 x 5 is a certain price.

JE: It's not by what's on the canvas.

PG: Mm-mmm (in the negative). By the size.

JE: Is that just you? Is that just everybody?

PG: Pretty much everybody.

JE: Pretty much everybody. Because, that takes into account materials, hours put in...

PG: You can't take in that stuff.

JE: That's just ...

PG: That's just ...

JE: We're not talking about carpet here now; we're talking about ... (Laughing)

PG: Well, it's not much different than carpet. It's on the wall.

Chapter 10 – 11:10 You're Positive

John Erling (JE): So we need to talk about your move to New York.

Pat Gordon (PG): Yeah.

JE: What year was that?

PG: I couldn't tell ya.

JE: 2003.

PG: Okay. Three.

JE: Right. And why?

PG: Why. There are personal reasons. There was ... My dream as a 5-year-old was to live in the west village to where ... Do you remember Maynard G. Krebs?

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement). Yes.

PG: On Dobie Gillis?

JE: Yes.

PG: I wanted to be Maynard G. Krebs.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: I wanted to live in the village, I wanted to wear boatneck shirts made out of terrycloth, just like Maynard G. Krebs. That was my dream: to be in New York. Since then, I had severed my relationship with Fischbach, which was later. We remarried later. Emily was in college in medical school. I always wanted to live in New York. And I loved every minute I was there, except for those days I was trying to get a 5' x 7' canvas down the street. Those days I hated. It was a hard place to live if you didn't have a lot of money. And at that time, I did. I don't now, but I did then.

JE: Where did you live?

PG: I lived in the most fantastic 2,500 square-foot loft you ever saw. It was fantastic. I lived on 34th street to begin with, right by the ... a block from Javits Convention Center, in what used to be in some kind of warehousing

space. And I was there for 4 or 5 years and then the city condemned the building.

JE: They were clearing the way for ...

PG: For the 7th street subway. So they took my building; so I had to move. So then I had to move and I moved to 39th street, which was just a great street to be on because that was the same street that the 39th street flea market — which was every Saturday and Sunday — was.

And, of course, you know, I'm a painter of objects. It was like the best thing that could happen to me is that I spent two days at the flea market every week.

JE: Inspiration for a long time.

PG: And then I'd go upstairs and I'd paint it.

JE: So how does an Okie...?

PG: Well, I'd been going to New York three or four times a year before I ...

JE: You had friends?

PG: I had friends.

JE: Okay.

PG: I had a business. And everybody is there to make a living. Everybody there is there to make their mark in their business. It is the ultimate in location and lifestyle: how you manage it, how you live it. I had to work everyday at painting. So did I get out and run around like when I would have been 20? No, no. I was almost 50 when I moved. 49, I think.

JE: Okay then. Are they buying your work?

PG: Yeah. We sold a lot of stuff.

JE: But just before you moved to New York, you learned you were HIV-positive.

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). Not just before. I had rented an apartment in New York — not the one I had when I moved to New York, but I rented another one on 63rd street, right off of Central Park.

And then I got the news. And I had put my house on the market. I had someone who was going to live there and take care of the pets before I moved them to New York.

JE: Oh, here?

PG: This was not here; this was on 19th Street.

JE: Yeah.

PG: I had a bigger house. It was just an enormous house. I had my bags unpacked, sitting in the front hall. A woman from Tulsa Cares — which I served on the board — called and said, “I really have to talk to you before you leave.”

I said, “Okay.”

And I had been in a relationship and the relationship had ended; and I just wanted to be clear that no problems — we’re going on.

So I didn’t even think about it. I mean, I unconditionally swabbed my ... had ‘em swap the inside of my mouth and I wasn’t worried. Why would I be worried? I was perfectly fine.

So she comes into the house and we sit in the living room and I said, “What’s up? I’ve got a flight leaving in an hour.”

She said, “You’re positive.”

“That ... No, you can’t be right.”

She was right. I was positive. Well, I didn’t move to New York that day. I

went upstairs, went to bed, shut all the blinds, canceled everything and remained in bed for three months. Nobody thought I was here. Everybody thought I had moved to New York.

JE: Hmm...

PG: I had food brought into me. I didn't leave the house, didn't go anywhere. I couldn't figure it out. It was just mind-boggling. Anyway, once I pulled myself together ... (Laughing) ... It took me while. I got a doctor in New York; I had the best doctor in New York that money could buy. He was the first doctor who saw Patient 0 at the hospital when he was in his residency. He saw the first AIDS patient. This guy was an amazing doctor.

And once I had him and he said, "You're gonna be fine; I promise. If you die of anything, you'll probably die of diabetes. You're not going to die of AIDS."

Well, I had buried 25 people I knew. AIDS, for a lot of us, was like World War II. We lost so many; we buried so many nice, good people. I wasn't one of 'em. I'm lucky.

JE: You wonder why?

PG: No. No. I know why.

JE: Why?

PG: I'm supposed to make these paintings.

JE: Yeah. Magic Johnson — was it about that time?

PG: No; he was earlier than me. He was earlier than me.

JE: You must have been taken by his story, though?

PG: Yeah, well, it was ... It gave you confidence that life would be okay. It's just gonna be a different life.

JE: Yeah. Thinking about depression... Somebody could be listening to this. It was so dark, wasn't it? It's so dark.

PG: I couldn't ... I had the windows shut, the blind shut ... I just ... couldn't function.

JE: For three months. And then what started bringing you out of it?

PG: Well, I just finally thought, "You're not dead now. Get up." Finally I got up and I thought, "I'm going back to New York." I sold my house and left.

JE: Right. And a lot of people in Tulsa didn't know you were going through this.

PG: No. Nobody knew. I didn't tell anybody. The funny part was I ran into a woman who I loved dearly who was a well-known woman in this city. And she was so glad to see me and she said, "I want you and Charles... " — Faudree — "... to come for dinner. You set the guest list."

I said, "Okay."

So I gave her a list and there were 10 people. I didn't know why she was doing it. And we get to this fancy dinner. And she's at one end, and I'm at the far end of the table and she gets a bottle of champagne and she has it opened, and they're pouring it, and we're drinking, and Charles looks up at her and says, "Well, why are we having this party? This celebration?"

And she said, "To welcome Pat back to Tulsa!"

She thought I had left and I was just "back." And Charles is looking at me because Charles was one of the men who was bringing me food.

JE: Oh...

PG: And he looked at me and said, "Are you gonna tell 'em?"

I said, "Uh-huh." (In the negative).

It was so funny; she thought I was in New York.

JE: Yeah.

PG: Anyway, I finally pulled myself back together and got a good therapist.

JE: Did Charles help you though, too? I mean, he brought you food but he must have been uplifting in his comments to you.

PG: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, Charles could also be rather harsh. I think he said to me, "How stupid are you?" The first remark out of his mouth.

I thought, "Well, apparently I am."

Anyway, it was ... It was a dark, dark period. But I still painted through it.

JE: Oh! You were painting?

PG: I was painting in a dark room. (Chuckling)

JE: And you can look back on those paintings and "See myself; I was depressed when I did those."

PG: They are wrapped up in plastic in the basement.

JE: Really? You never tried to sell them?

PG: Mm-mmm (in the negative).

JE: They were not sellable? Or sale-able?

PG: Mm-mmm (in the negative). I just painted them. I didn't intend for them to be for sale.

JE: But how do you know they could not be sold today?

PG: Oh, I would not ... No. They're dark.

JE: Oh.

PG: They're really dark.

JE: They're not P.S. Gordon.

PG: Yeah.

JE: They're not Pat Gordon.

PG: Well, yeah. They're me. They're just ... it's the dark side.

JE: But for somebody who knows your work, and knows you, would look at it and say, "Well, that's not Pat."

PG: Maybe.

JE: Yeah.

PG: Although, they're so well painted that they would. (Chuckling)

JE: (Laughing)

PG: They'd just go, "What's he paintin'?" Yeah, they were dark.

JE: You know, you talk about "they're so well painted," and they are. But, you must have self-doubt.

PG: About painting?

JE: Yeah?

PG: Mm-mmm (in the negative).

JE: Never. You feel really confident?

PG: Yeah.

JE: “I’m doing great work.”

PG: It’s not that... I don’t say it as “great work.” I’m doing the work I’m supposed to.

Chapter 11 – 5:35

Mrs. Lennox

John Erling (JE): In the late ‘90s, you did “Mrs. Lennox and The Gift of Falling Snow.” Tell us about that.

Pat Gordon (PG): Well, I created these paintings in the ‘90s, a series of men in ball gowns. I think part of it was just my... What I was seeing at AIDS fundraisers — there were a lot of AIDS fundraisers then — and we didn’t have the support from the local public, so we had to work our own group of society to fund it, to pay for it, to make the money.

Charles and I were lucky because we included our clients and got them involved and, you know, we now have the Charles Faudree Tulsa Cares building. We have a fantastic agency which takes care of people with HIV AIDS and Hepatitis-C.

And I saw some things that I had never seen before. And I was so fascinated by it — the fact that I never seen it — that I wanted to paint it. And that’s when the series of Mrs. Lennox came about.

“A drag queen.” I think that’s the wrong statement for it. He’s not a drag queen. He’s a performance artist. There’s a vast difference. I’ve seen a lot of drag queens. There’s a vast difference I think in terms of performance. I saw it at a party and I just couldn’t take my eyes off of this bald man that had on a pearl tiara. I just couldn’t take my eyes off of him because it was such a strange contradiction of subjects. And I didn’t really know him very well, and I walked up to him and I said, “I think I have to paint you in this outfit. Would you pose for photographs?”

And he was very flattered and he said, “Yes.”

Well, I had since then done 4 or 5 of Ken in different outfits and his performance character — well, I call him “Mrs. Lennox.” And that’s because I thought Ken in drag looked just like Annie Lennox. So I was convinced that he probably looked like who was the lead singer in the Eurythmics. And I was pretty sure she was quite theatrical. And I was just this was probably what her mother looked like. So that’s how it became known as the “Mrs. Lennox” paintings. It’s Annie Lennox’s mother. (Chuckling)

JE: Where does “The Gift of Falling Snow” ...

PG: Well, that came much later. That came much later. That came after, really, after I moved to New York. In fact, the first painting I did in New York was about “The Gift of Falling Snow,” which was just currently in a show at Philbrook.

JE: And the Mrs. Lennox painting sold?

PG: Well, one. One. But it wasn’t of Mrs. Lennox. Oh, the Mrs. Lennox painting sold — to straight people! Nobody gay bought one of these drag queen paintings. The mayor of Tulsa bought one — Kathy Taylor, the former mayor — they all went to collections. I have three left.

In New York, I went to a documentary. There were things you could see in New York that you couldn’t see in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I went to see this documentary on AIDS and I was just so overwhelmed by it. And I came back and I had found that the illusion, or the portrayal ... I was trying to figure out a way to paint about this with symbolism.

I didn’t want people to know how scared I was. A lot of it was about fear. I have a disease that has no cure. If I stop taking my pill, I’m dead in six months maybe. Maybe less than that. Well, I already had diabetes. I’m like, “Hell, I got another one I have to deal with. Please, please.”

You know, when I grew up, my Dad didn’t believe anyone needed to go to the doctor even though his brother was a doctor. So we never were allowed to go to the doctor. So we’d cure everything with Vicks and an aspirin.

JE: Yes. (Chuckling)

PG: Well, I still do. But now all of the sudden I have things that're happening that will kill me. Just simple as that. That's why in the Corona's heyday, I stay in almost all the time, 'cause I've got too many targets on my back.

JE: Yeah. You've got two big targets that are bigger than... Well, they both could take your life. All of 'em.

PG: All of 'em! Hell, I'm not gunna flunk this pandemic. I'm not flunking this one, so help me God.

Chapter 12 – 6:50

Tulsa Cares

John Erling (JE): I think you knew of a 20-year-old boy who went to the hospital and maybe he thought he only had pneumonia — that true?

Pat Gordon (PG): And he died. Less than a week. From Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: From pneumonia?

PG: Well, it was pneumonia. AIDS-related. It was AIDS-related pneumonia. I was shocked that this could still happen in Tulsa, OK. It shouldn't have happened to him. Our health and treatment for it is so much better. People shouldn't die from this, but the medication is \$3,800/mo for one pill.

JE: Really?

PG: 38.

JE: You pay that?

PG: Yeah. Oh, I don't pay that. The federal government pays that.

JE: Right. But this boy had not been tested.

PG: That's what I was told, that he had not been tested.

JE: That was kind of his onus, isn't it? He should have been tested.

PG: He should have been tested.

JE: Right. Tulsa Cares, which you support, are they involved in all of this kind of thing? In testing?

PG: Yes. Tulsa Cares is a nonprofit organization that originally worked singly for HIV/AIDS education and support. Now, it's a social agency that really is working with between 700 and 900 people in northeast Oklahoma — all who are affected with, and are related to, AIDS or HIV. We have a housing market; we have a food market, pantry; we have a clothing pantry for people because, oftentimes, it's somebody of a lower economic standing.

JE: Mh-hmm (in agreement).

PG: And there isn't a lot of help for these people. So we help them.

JE: The Tulsa community is very accepting of the LGBT...

PG: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. The Tulsa ... You know, I see so much political television on now, but Tulsa is a very welcoming, loving, committed city. It's one of the reasons I do like living here is because we do care about each other — most of the time. And the city and the public has been very good, I think, to the LGBTQ community.

JE: Have you felt a prejudice toward you because of your...

PG: Let me tell ya: I've always felt from here or there somebody who was disapproving of being gay. People don't like it if you're different. But it's the difference that they love about you. It's a conflicting kind of story. I haven't ever had a lot of problems, but occasionally somebody will yell out of a car

window — I'm sitting, walking into dinner and they wanna scream — let them. Hell is that about?

JE: They're yelling at you? They know you? They know who you are?

PG: I don't know.

JE: Yeah.

PG: I don't know, but I just think it's rednecks. You know?

JE: And I guess most gays face that.

PG: Oh, sure. We all do.

JE: Wherever they are.

PG: If you're different of any kind. Everybody faces it.

JE: If you had a chance to have any famous painting in the world, what would it be?

PG: It would probably be a Matisse. I love Matisse's paintings. I think he was one of the great painters. And I think I'd like maybe a big, red Cy Twombly, which is just a matter of circles. He just makes big circles. And I saw a show of his, and it was all in red, and I just went, "Wow. I wish I had one of these."

JE: Did any of these famous paintings ... Who influenced you the most?

PG: Well, I know you're gonna laugh at this. I think I had a profound influence from Gloria Vanderbilt because she was popular in the '70s. She just died at 92 or 93. I loved her drawings. They were very Matisse-like. They were very ... she was a contemporary Matisse. And I, as a young teenager, I was very attracted to this paintings.

JE: Anderson Cooper...

PG: Anderson Cooper's mother.

JE: On CNN, yeah. She had a big influence on you.

PG: She was very influential in the '70s. You remember Gloria Vanderbilt jeans?

JE: Yes.

PG: They were a special jean, you know? Well, she was painting at that time. Well, she painted until she died. She had a lifestyle with Wyatt Cooper that was so interesting. She had an interesting life. There's something about those paintings — they were simple. They were Matisse-like.

JE: Yeah. Do you realize — I know you do — I'm going to call it, "You were born with artist privilege." You were born with a talent, a calling, if you will. And maybe you thought that everybody was born with something that they wanted to do. I don't know if you thought that or not. This talent, this calling; and you probably thought, "Well, this is what I wanna do. Certainly that person knows what they want to do." And you find out in life that's not the case.

PG: Oh, I don't understand how they could be so lost. I don't know how people could be so lost. Because they didn't have anything.

JE: It's the few who are born with this interest and the talent to go with it. There's a small percentage of mankind that are born that way. And look at what you are.

PG: Well, I just haven't varied very much from right to left. I'm just, "Go down the center, and paint."

Chapter 13 – 6:13 Political Paintings

John Erling (JE): You paint political paintings as well, don't you?

Pat Gordon (PG): Mm-hmm (in agreement).

JE: You make statements. Through your paintings. Do they sell?

PG: I have people — yeah — who have asked, who come and look. You know, I just had a political... You saw that show at Philbrook?

JE: Yes.

PG: You saw the painting I had in there of the Barbie doll with the yellow wig?

JE: Yeah.

PG: (Chuckling) At the bottom of it, it's called "Fat Nixon."

JE: Yeah.

PG: Because I keep thinking, "Trump's gonna leave just like Nixon did: on a plane on the south lawn because he's gone one step too far." Well, he's not gone yet; but there might be another painting coming, too. (Chuckling)

JE: And here we sit on this day, 48 days until the election, November 3rd, 2020. And it's obviously a huge election.

PG: It is in my book.

JE: What advice do you have to potential artists that are starving artists — few succeed...

PG: Let me tell you something about starving. I still starve on occasion.

JE: You do?

PG: Yeah, sure. It's one of the ... You know, it's not like I just sat down and made tons of money and just lived on it from that. I spent it. It's meant to spread around. It was never my intention to be a millionaire. Ever. It just never occurred to me. I have learned in my life that money comes to me as I need it. I never had a full time job in my life. I had 4 part-time jobs. I worked more than anybody I knew, because I was still putting in 40 hours

of painting a week.

I teach in the morning from 9 in the morning 'til 10 at night. I come home at 10 at night to 4 in the morning.

JE: Wow.

PG: Well, I was young.

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

PG: I could do that then.

JE: Right.

PG: Now I have to do it in the daytime. After 11 o'clock? My mother used to say, "Nothing ever good happens after midnight."

JE: Right.

PG: Well, I've gotten up at the next morning, if I painted 'til 1 or 2 in the morning, I'd get up the next day and see what all I'd done.

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement, chuckling).

PG: I was just like, "What did you do that for?"

JE: So I suppose it's like writers will say, "If you have to write..." If you have to paint, then maybe consider it your life's calling. But you have to be careful to decide whether this is just a hobby or is this really something that I should follow up on?

PG: I always say it's the most fun I can have without laughing.

JE: (Chuckling)

PG: Honestly. It's fun.

JE: Yeah.

PG: I just make a living out of it.

JE: And you can do this until you're 85 years old.

PG: Well, you know, that's an interesting point. I have assumed my entire life that I would do this — literally — I'll get on a chair and I'll die at this eisel is what I'm hoping for. And I hope it's a quick drop-dead-and-you're-gone. But we'll see.

It never occurred to me that my hands would hurt.

JE: Mmm.

PG: My thumbs would hurt. My — right here...

JE: They do now?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

JE: It's arthritis?

PG: Mm-hmm (in agreement). And probably overuse.

JE: Mm-hmm.

PG: My hands... Like, this is where my hand's comfortable.

JE: Yeah.

PG: Well, that's a grip tension, so ... (Chuckling) I have so many hand things that I try and wear to protect my hands, and my eyesight's good. And for a diabetic? That's the leading cause of blindness in America. So there's a reason to pay attention to having diabetes. I didn't wanna be blind. How good is a blind painter?

JE: So you'll paint as long as you're ...

PG: As long as I'm able.

JE: As long as those hands hold up.

PG: And if they don't hold up... God, take me on home, because there ain't nothing else I wanna do.

JE: Do you fear death?

PG: No. What's there to fear? I think it's like going to sleep in one room and waking up in another.

JE: Mm-hmm (in agreement).

PG: And I hope I have a good paint supply up there.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: Wherever. Or down there.

JE: So you plan to go "up there?" (Chuckling)

PG: Well, I really hope I'm reinvented and cast into some little body — newly born baby — somewhere. I'd like that idea much better.

JE: Did your family have a faith? A church?

PG: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I grew up going to the First Christian Church Disciples of Christ, which was kind of like the Methodist Church in Claremore.

JE: So that was a weekly occasion and ...

PG: Oh, yeah. My dad was an elder; my mother played the church organ.

JE: Okay.

PG: We lived across the street from the church. We were there all the time.

JE: Yup.

PG: Now I'm a good Unitarian. I've been at the Unitarian Church since 1972.

JE: Well, I have enjoyed talking to you.

PG: Thank you. Thanks.

JE: It was fun. And to be in your studio, where such great work comes out, it was an honor to be here. So I thank you, and many people will be fascinated by your painting and by your thoughts on your painting. That's very good.

PG: I also like to talk.

JE: Yeah, yeah. That's true.

PG: My parents used to offer me a nickel for every 5 minutes I'd be quiet.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: Let me tell ya: I didn't make a penny.

JE: (Laughing)

PG: My mother would say, "Here's a nickel." (Laughing)

JE: (Laughing) So, thank you.

PG: You're welcome. Thank you.

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