

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 276-004**

**Interviewee: Mary Pengelly**

**Interviewer: Wendy Hall**

**Date of Interview: January 21, 1992**

**Project: UM Wildlife Biology Program Oral History Collection**

Wendy Hall: My first question is, where did Les grow up?

Mary Pengelly: In Negaunee, Michigan. He was born March 3, 1918 to William and Mary Pengilly. The Pengelly came when he went to college and somebody changed the name on his transcripts. Eventually, he had it officially changed. He was born and raised as William L...Lesley Pengilly.

WH: What did the "W" stand for?

MP: William.

WH: William. Okay.

MP: William Lesley.

WH: You grew up in that same area also?

MP: Yes. I was born and raised in Marquette, Michigan, which is about 13 miles from the Negaunee where he lived.

WH: What was it like...to grow up there in the area you both did?

MP: The areas were very different. Marquette was the county seat. It was on Lake Superior. It was a shipping area for the mines. It had a college. Negaunee was a mining town. It was a copper mine mainly. The mines had a large say in what went on in the town. Provided the main tax base. They affected peoples' lives.

WH: What did his parents do?

MP: His father was a miner and died when Les was two years old probably. Les says he died June 26, 1920. He was 26 years old at the time. His mother had stayed at home. She was taken out of school in sixth grade to take care of her mother. Later she had to take care of her...I think she had both her father and mother. Off and on, she had other people that she was taking care of—her brother's children. After Les's father died, his mother remarried a couple of years later to Joseph Rickard. He was a widower with one daughter, Meryl Rickard. I'm sorry. Meryl Rickard.

WH: What kind of activities was he involved in, that you know of, when he was growing up?

MP: I think he was probably active in sports. I know he was a Boy Scout. He mentioned going to Boy Scout camp. I know he was an inveterate reader. He talked about reading at home. His mother would turn out the lights or take the light plugs out. She caught him trying to read under the blankets with birthday candles because he wasn't to be denied. (laughs) He was called into school at some point with the number of books he checked out at the library in a quarter. Because what was he doing with them? Well, he read them! He said he read three books a day: one in the morning probably, some book, one in the afternoon, and then one at night. I don't know how big they were, but he read constantly.

WH: Have you mentioned that he would read a book during class or something about that?

MP: I think he probably had it in behind whatever book he was supposed to be reading—geography book or whatever—from what I can understand.

WH: Do you have any idea what got him interested into wildlife biology?

MP: I don't know whether he had just taken...he had taken zoology in college. Apparently, it was interesting, taking botany when he first went to college and ended up in the course. The teacher told him to just sit down and stay: you're taking zoology. He only had only had one botany course. He didn't have too many of them.

Wildlife biology...I'm not sure because he went into that. Of course, he was teaching courses in high school after he finished college. When he went into the navy and he came back, he said he wasn't going back to that. He was going to school. I think he went down to take...he was interested in forestry. That was it! When he went to the University of Michigan to see about taking forestry, the dean looked at his transcripts and said, "You don't want to do that. You have to take too many different graduate credits. Take wildlife management because your zoology background blends in very well and would be a good background for it." I think that's where he started with the wildlife management.

WH: What role, if any, do you think his parents played in influencing him to study at home?

MP: I don't think they had any influence on the wildlife biology program because he was away from home long before he went into that. I think his mother encouraged him to study and everything in school. His step-father did not. In fact, I think he was hindrance if anything.

WH: Where did he obtain the undergrad degree again, did you say?

MP: It is now Northern Michigan University. I think it was Northern Michigan College or Education or Northern State Teachers' College at the time that he went there. He graduated

under most...I think it was officially Northern Michigan College of Education, actually. We always called it Teachers' College.

WH: Where did he get his graduate degree at?

MP: The University of Michigan, he received his Masters of Wildlife Management, I think it was. His PhD is from Utah State University. Somewhere are the dates. (rifles through papers)

WH: Go ahead. It's fine.

MP: I guess I need his papers. He received his bachelor degree in 19...in 1939. His master's degree...I want to say 1949. It would have been 1948, I guess. Yes, he received his PhD in 1961.

WH: Why did he go on after his undergrad degree to get higher degrees?

MP: I think he was not interested in teaching high school and grade school children anymore. I don't know if he was interested in other types of work or whether he wanted to teach at a higher level.

He went in the navy in the spring of 1944 and came out at the end of the war in...the fall of 1945 and decided to go graduate school then. He went down to the University of Michigan. He went to school under, not the GI Bill, but the VA because he had been injured in the war. The Veteran's Administration was going to give him his money for school. They insisted on testing him. When they gave him the test, they said...After the dean had persuaded him to take wildlife management, they said that no he couldn't take that because it involved field work by yourself in the woods. He should take psychology because he needed to work with people. That was his psychological profile.

He didn't want to take psychology, so he didn't go to school. He took a job with the Veterans Counseling Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He counseled veterans for one year. He decided to go to school next year, but he had to take psychology for one quarter, clinical psychology. He did not like it. They finally allowed him to go into the wildlife courses.

WH: Was there anyone who influenced him when obtaining these degrees that you know of?

MP: I suppose he was influenced by his teachers. I know that Warren Chase was his major professor. He was the dean of the wildlife department. I don't know how it went at University at that time, whether it was separate department or not. He was in the wildlife department or whatever it was. I'm not sure otherwise who else.

WH: What was his main emphasis when he was obtaining each of his degrees?

MP: Undergraduate school was basically sciences. His major was zoology. I think he must have had a minor in math. He took other science courses, too. Since it was a teacher's college, we were all required to take general courses. We had to take comp and rep (?), history, American history, Michigan history, and education courses, of course; then, for two quarters of practice teaching in addition to psychology. I think he took ethics and philosophy and a lot of other courses.

WH: What was his main emphasis then in the graduate degree?

MP: At the University of Michigan, after the brief the spell with the psychology department, it was wildlife management. He took some forestry work...but basically. I think some of that he had taken earlier when he...He started going down, taking some summer school courses.

(Break in audio)

WH: You were talking about when he was going to summer school.

MP: According to the records here, I remember now, he went to summer school in the summer of 1940. That was one year after he had graduated. Apparently he took zoology and botany, systematic botany, that summer. The summer of 1942, after we were married, he went to summer school. It was what they called a fresh air camp. It was sociology, and he was in to psychology. I think basically his reasoning for that was that...I don't remember whether they paid him or not, but, at least, didn't have to pay for it. So, he could afford to do it. I think maybe they paid him because they were handling delinquents. He was studying that. I don't know whether he was interested in it at the time. I think it was mostly (unintelligible). It was something he could afford to do.

WH: What was his interest in when he was getting his post-graduate degree?

MP: Afterwards as I said, I believe they required him to take psychology. He started taking wildlife management and he seems to have had forest surveying, land management...

WH: Were those the courses...

MP: Wildlife management.

WH: Were those the courses he took when he was getting his doctorate then? Or were there different ones for that?

MP: The doctorate was some of the same type of courses, but his course study says advanced wildlife problems, range management, animal ecology, animal nutrition, nutritional diseases, range forage plants, wildlife problems, advanced nutrition of animals, principles of genetics, zoology, and then thesis work.

WH: Okay. Do you know of any difficulties that he had to overcome while being a student?

MP: Mostly financial at all points, both in undergraduate school and of course all through graduate school. Except for the one summer he was married, he quit graduate school and basically had children. He didn't go the summer we were married.

WH: How did he pay for his education then?

MP: In undergraduate, he lived at home so that he wasn't having to pay for board and rooms. His parents did provide that help. His mother gave him a 20-dollar gold piece, which he cashed to pay his first quarter's tuition at Northern when he went. He did have a job as a lab assistant in the Zoology department, which he had for I think two years. Because of problems with the professor, ethical problems basically, he refused to do it anymore. I'm not sure how he managed it junior year for money, whether he had some other type of work. During the summers, I think he worked with...where his step-father worked, which was the TB hospital (?). His step-father was the plant manager. He hired him to do errands and that type of thing during the summer. I suppose he made money there—

(break in audio)

—enough to save it to help his tuition.

WH: What about when he was in graduate school (unintelligible)?

MP: in graduate school at the University of Michigan, he ended up counseling in the psychology department. (laughs) They kept him on even though he was in forestry. He was paid so much an hour. So he received that. Then of course, he was receiving the VA allotment, which I think was 90 dollars a month.

WH: What about when he was at his...

MP: At his PhD, he did have a teaching assistantship, I think it was or would have been. I know he taught courses, but he actually taught them. He wasn't just assisting a professor. He was actually doing the teaching and taught a couple of courses along with a full graduate load.

WH: Why did he go on to get higher degrees?

MP: I think with the masters and his YNDA and other work besides high school teaching...When he went for PhD, he was a biologist for the Idaho Fish and Game at that time. I think if he figured that he wanted to get in to advance himself, he was going to have to have a PhD to do it, to go on. Again, I suppose he was looking for a better job to support his family. We had three children by that time.

WH: When did you meet him?

MP: First day he came to school in 1938. When he came to Northern in the fall of 1938. It was the first day of school. I was in a class with him the first quarter. We were friends all through college. We started to go together in the spring of my senior year, which was 19...what did I say 19...?I'm sorry. It would have been the fall of 1935 when we met. I'm into the graduation. It was the fall of 1935 when he came to school, not 1938. In the spring of 1938, the spring quarter, we did start to go together. He finished college in '39. I was teaching. We would get together and do things—date.

WH: Didn't you say that your sister...

MP: Yes. He dated my sister during the first quarter that he was there. He used to be at the house occasionally with her. Actually, her senior year, sometimes I went out with him and sometimes with his friend, depending on who was with who. There was different girls. (laughs) But we were together a lot that last year, my last year. I finished college 1937-38.

WH: How did you end up going out with him?

MP: (laughs) My boyfriend, I guess you call it, at the time had to play a basketball game the night of Junior Prom. He was president of the junior class and thought I should be allowed go. So he asked Les to take me to the prom. (laughs)

WH: When...

MP: That was his freshman year, my sophomore year.

WH: When were your married?

MP: June 21, 1941 in Marquette, Michigan.

WH: What were your interests, or what have been your interests?

MP: I took home ec [home economics] in college because my older brother and sister convinced me that was what you needed to take to have a job during the Depression. So, I did take that. I had been interested in history and languages. But, I had always been interested in sewing and cooking, so it seemed to go in. I liked hiking and swimming, particularly. I was into Girls Scouts from the time I was ten years old until, well I guess, sophomore in college practically. I look back as a counselor at a camp. We did a lot of hiking and some skiing—what you call cross country now. They didn't have lifts and things like that.

WH: What role did you play in Les' career, do you think?

MP: (laughs) I don't know. Probably, I was the hindrance because of children! (laughs)

I always encouraged him to go when he wanted to. I didn't say, "No you can't do it." I was always well along when he wanted to go someplace else or start when he finished...When he received his masters at Michigan, he took a Civil Service exam and did very well on it. I think he got a 99 then hit a ten point bonus. He had 109 score. He was top on the list for I don't know how many jobs he was offered at the time. He decided he wanted to go west. None of the jobs were in the West. So, he turned them all down.

We were all set to head west, though he didn't have a job. We bought a trailer and we were going to go to California. Then he was offered a job, a one year job, replacing a teacher on sabbatical at the University of Idaho. He taught there for one year. The next year, he was hired by Idaho Fish and Game to do...I think it was to research a problem that they wanted done—a problem on whitetail deer in the first few years. The last year, he became the head biologist for the whole north end of Idaho.

WH: What dates were those then?

MP: What did I say he finished in 19...?

WH: '38.

MP: No. He finished in college in 1939. He taught Wildlife at the University Idaho in 1948 and '49. So, it would have been the spring of...or the fall of 1949 when he went to the Idaho Fish and Game Department. Yes, 1949 to 1954. First wildlife field research and then he was big game biologist. He was in military service in 1944—spring of 1944 to 1945.

WH: What role has your family played in his career?

MP: (laughs) Probably just the incentive to drive in more money as much as anything. I don't know. Even when he was in Idaho as a biologist, whenever he could, he took the children with him if he could on the field. There were times he had to go to a ranch to work with some of those people. If he did that, he would take the girls with him. When we were Idaho...I mean Montana. As the children grew old enough, most of them went hunting with him—one of the girls and both boys did. I should say, one other girl went a few times, but she didn't want to hunt so then she gave up.

WH: How many children do you have?

MP: Six.

WH: What are their names?



MP: Mary Lou is the oldest. She is a pharmacist for the National Institute of Health. Ann is the second, and she is married and lives outside of Atlanta, Georgia and has a seven...did they say seven year old or six year old son? Oh boy! (laughs) He is seven I think. He is going to be seven. He's six. He's going to be seven in May. She is a botanist. She and her husband both have PhDs in Botany from the University of Montana.

David is the older boy. He did his undergraduate work in biology. He started to do plant pathology and then switched to water resource management and managed the local Water Rights Bureau in Montana in Missoula for a while. Then he went law school and is now lawyer with a firm here in Missoula.

Lorie has worked with many things, Vista [Volunteers in Service to America]. Then taught school—junior high age mostly—in Idaho for five or six years, maybe seven. Spent a year in Europe and taught English in Prague, Czechoslovakia for a while. Then came home and is now a graduate in the History Department here in Montana.

Mark is a temporary employee with the Forest Service. He is temporarily unemployed for the winter. He works at the 9 Mile ranger station during the summer. Kim is a graduate student and she was just married in November. She finished with her masters in social work in June. Her husband is finishing his masters in forest hydrology. She has most of her work in hydrology too but couldn't finish it.

WH: Okay, I think I am going to flip tape before the next question.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

WH: Would you say that any of your children have followed in Les' footsteps?

MP: Not really. None of them are in wildlife. David and Ann both took biology in college, which is combination of botany and (unintelligible) that they had in college when they were in Minnesota. Of course, she had a masters in biology at Smith College and then a doctorate in botany, but not wildlife.

WH: Where were Les' parents originally from?

MP: Negaunee. I think his father might have come from Ishpeming, Michigan, which was three miles away. I'm not sure. I need to think about that. Someplace, I have that information. I can't give it to you off hand.

WH: What colleges or universities did Les work at before coming to the University of Montana?

MP: In Michigan of course, he was teaching high school. He taught at the University of Idaho the one year.

WH: When was that?

MP: That would have been 1948-49. Then he worked as a biologist for the Idaho Fish and Game Department before he came to Montana. That was the only college he taught at at that point.

WH: When did you arrive to the University of Montana?

MP: In November 1954. I remember. I think he started work on December 1, 1954.

WH: How or what department reported him to the University?

MP: He was in the wildlife program, but it was the public service division apparently that, as near as I can figure out, that he was hired in. The program was to be handled by a cooperative agreement between the Montana Fish and Game, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the University of Montana. Montana Fish and Game probably put up most of the funds and the University provided office space, and I think clerical help if you needed any of that type of thing.

I'm not sure what the other combination was, maybe management or something. Because Dr. J. W. Sebry (?), who taught botany here, was instrumental in bringing Les here—also Guy Brandborg, who was supervisor of the Bitterroot Forest at the time. They were the two that had set the program up. Dr. Sebry had gone around lecturing to sportsmen's groups. They felt it was an important venture that they wanted to continue, but he didn't have the time or energy to do it any longer. He was going on his own time.

WH: What parts of the country did he work...had he worked in?

MP: Before?

WH: During his whole career.

MP: After he finished college, he taught school in Powers, Michigan, then in Petoskey, Michigan, and Negaunee, Michigan, before he went into the service. Then, of course, he went to the University after service. He spent a year at the University of Idaho, then five years with the Idaho Fish and Game Department doing a research as a big game biologist, and came to Montana with this cooperative agreement. I think it was 1963, he was hired as a permanent member of the faculty with 25 percent of his time and salary to be paid from the school of education because he was teaching conservation education for them, in addition to wildlife courses.

WH: Had you mentioned before that he also worked up in Alaska?

MP: He took a leave of absence in the winter of 1968 and 1969. He went to Alaska and taught for a man there, who was on sabbatical to go to school. He was up there that one year. He went up in August and came back in May in Fairbanks. University of Alaska.

WH: I can't remember if I asked you, where did he do his PhD work?

MP: The Utah State University at Logan, Utah.

WH: Okay. You mentioned once before that he took some graduate or excuse me, some post-graduate classes or he finished some of those classes with the University of Montana.

MP: No, he took one year at Utah State University. After he went back to work, he had been upset by some of the things at Utah, but a lot of it was with his job. He didn't feel like he could take the time to go back. He just gave up the idea of going on to finish his PhD. After he came to Montana, Dick Chamber (?) basically convinced him that he needed to go on.

He made arrangements with Utah State that he could take some of the classes he had to have here at this University. I think he took some classes from Phil Wright. I had forgotten the other classes that he had to take. Utah gave him credit for those. So this was before.

Actually, when he did his comprehensive exam, Utah sent the exam to Montana. Someone in the administration, administer group, administered a written exam to him and sent it back to Utah to be corrected. He didn't have to go down. Again, that was a financial matter. They were doing that to help him.

WH: What did he do his thesis work on, when he was getting his graduate degree? What was his research? Do you remember? What species...?

MP: I am trying to think now because he was working on the whitetail deer and in effective logging in fires. I can't remember if it was just on whitetail deer or on the elk. I would have to look that up. I'm sure they have the thesis here. I can find it or I know Wes Malcom (?) would know.

WH: Where was that when he did that? Was that in Michigan?

MP: No, he was doing research in the forests around Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

WH: Okay.

MP: That's where he was working.

WH: When he did his post-doctorate research?

MP: He didn't do...post-doctorate, he was just going back from here and checking some of the work that had been done because they wanted to know how things changed. He went back to check the areas because he had done measurements on the growth...

WH: In Idaho? The same study?

MP: In Idaho, back on the same study.

WH: Okay.

MP: That was after he was over here.

WH: Were there any other agencies besides the ones you have mentioned that he has worked for?

MP: No, I think just the Idaho Fish and Game, and he has been teaching, otherwise basically.

WH: Okay.

MP: Except for the...as I said, his work when he first came. The first nine years was basically going around the state and talking to sportsmen's groups is what he was doing. They would line him up. In the meantime, the high schools, rotary clubs, and all the other groups were asking to talk too. Because they were trying to become...have sportsmen become acquainted with wildlife problems and of management, wildlife management, so that they weren't shouting about things they didn't know anything about.

WH: What professional or private organizations did Les belong to?

MP: Mainly the Wildlife Society was his main emphasis. He joined that as a student. When he was at Michigan, he joined the Wildlife Society. In fact, I think that is how he found out about the job in Idaho that he had met Paul Dolphy (?) there at the meeting and found out. He was acquainted with him then (?). Later on, he became an officer. He was vice president and president, and I think past president for the Wildlife Society. He was vice president in 1977 and '78 and president '78-'79.

He was a member of the Montana Fish and Game Commission from 1973 to 1977. He was appointed to the Montana Environmental Quality Council in 1980 until 1984. He belonged to most of the wildlife type organizations, but I don't think took part in the National Wildlife Federation or Montana Wildlife Federation, Wilderness Society and Montana Wilderness Society, and Montana Wildlife...Chapter of the Wildlife Society. He was more active in the Wildlife Society. That answered two questions.

WH: Yes, I think so. I think that is all the ones I thought we would go through. Let me check here. Were there any parts of the world that he had worked or was it just the United States?

MP: Except the only place he had worked otherwise was in the Navy. He was on a shipboard. He was on a destroyer and spent time down in the Panama Bay and Cuba. They went down there...He spent three weeks in the hospital there so (laughs) he didn't see too much of it otherwise.

WH: I think...

MP: He was in the Atlantic on destroyer duty in the Navy.

WH: I think that's all of the questions for you.

(Break in audio)

I wanted to make a correction on one of my questions that I mis-asked. Where did he do his master's work at?

MP: At the George Reserve in Michigan, right outside of Ann Arbor. I can't remember exactly where it was. I know it was on whitetail deer. I don't remember the specific problem.

WH: Okay, his PhD work was done...?

MP: Coeur d'Alene National Forest and the dissertation was factors influencing production of whitetail deer on the Coeur d'Alene National Forest, Idaho.

WH: All right, thank you. Sorry about that.

[End of Interview]