

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #54
“From ‘J.P. Patches’ to elusive gorillas, this Edmonds pair
has seen plenty”
Sno-Isle Libraries, April 6, 2020



Speaker 1:	00:00	In this episode, our hosts Jim Hills and Kurt Batdorf interview a couple with a connection to J.P. Patches and a near brush with death within the Mount St. Helens volcano crater. Stay tuned for a conversation with Sharon Howard and Mike Rosen, award winning documentary filmmakers from Edmonds, Washington. Coming up next on Check It Out.
Speaker 1:	00:29	Welcome to Season 3 Episode 54 of Check It Out, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds.
Speaker 2:	00:37	The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
Jim Hills:	00:46	Hi, and welcome to Check It Out Podcast with Sno-Isle Libraries. I am Jim Hills, and-
Kurt Batdorf:	00:51	I am Kurt Batdorf.
Jim Hills:	00:53	I'm very excited to have Mike Rosen and Sharon Howard here with us today for this episode. Sharon Howard got her start with KIRO TV in 1977 as a floor director for newscasts in the live J.P. Patches Show. I am so excited to delve into that piece there. We might have to explain that to our listeners, but we'll get to that. You spent eight years at KIRO before going to KLMO, where you produced a show called Front Runners. I also recall that. I was a big watcher of Front Runners, a series about profiles of high achievers.
Jim Hills:	01:27	Mike Rosen started working at local TV stations in high school, and in his home state of Wisconsin, moved to the Northwest in the late '70s, started in the news at KIRO also, eventually heading up the documentary unit. You got married in 1985, and in 1990 did a show together called Vanishing Giants, visiting Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania to film rhinos, elephants, and mountain gorillas. I'm really looking forward to hearing more about that.

(Continued)

Jim Hills: 01:56 Mike served as a managing principal for PRR, don't ask what it stands for, and is nationally recognized communications firm together with Mike and Sharon, these two are visionary communicators, visionary filmmakers, have captured 28 regional Emmy awards, a national Peabody, and done a number of wildlife films featuring craters from all over the world. Welcome Mike Rosen and Sharon Howard.

Sharon Howard: 02:24 Thank you.

Mike Rosen: 02:24 Thanks for having us.

Jim Hills: 02:25 Glad to have you here. I can't help but I know you've done a lot of work with wildlife and maybe J.P. falls into wildlife.

Sharon Howard: 02:33 It certainly does.

Jim Hills: 02:34 Before we start talking about J.P. for many of our listeners, you might have to explain who J.P. Patches is.

Sharon Howard: 02:41 J.P. Patches was a clown.

Jim Hills: 02:43 Literally?

Sharon Howard: 02:44 Literally, trust me.

Mike Rosen: 02:45 But what a clown.

Sharon Howard: 02:47 What a clown. His name was Chris Wedes, and I think the show was the longest running children's show in the country.

Mike Rosen: 02:56 Yeah, one of them.

Sharon Howard: 02:57 Yeah. And especially a local show. I mean maybe Captain Kangaroo, and those were longer. I'm not sure. But he was a marvelous man, and I can remember watching him when I was 16 years old with my brother who was 12 years younger. And then I got married, had kids, and I watched him as I nursed baby number two. He entertained child number one, and then I got to work on the program for three years. Unbelievable, he was a big part of my life for a long time.

Jim Hills: 03:29 And the show, J.P. Patches show was live, right?

Sharon Howard: 03:31 Yes it was.

Jim Hills: 03:33 What's it doing a live as a floor actor?

Sharon Howard: 03:36 Well, everybody thinks that we had a script, and it was planned, but our plans were to meet in the cafeteria 15 minutes before the show.

Jim Hills: 03:45 That's incredible.

Sharon Howard: 03:45 And we just played it by ear. Somebody would say, let's do a Star Wars thing. I need a R2-D2. So, as a floor director, I have to think, "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" Well, I go and get the shop vac. I mean, that's the kind of thinking it was.

Jim Hills: 04:04 I have to share that my father-in-law still is C for clown, and knew Chris and J.P. And it's funny, just a couple of days ago, there're kids in my wife's family, and they were complaining only one of them ever got called out on the icu2-TV, and the other two felt terribly terribly left out. Could you explain what the icu2-TV was?

Sharon Howard: 04:30 Well, this is the way that J.P. talked about birthdays. It was a magic thing, and he could see the kids through it.

Mike Rosen: 04:38 Yeah, I remember. I watch J.P. As a kid growing up here. I remember the icu2-TV.

Sharon Howard: 04:44 Obviously, parents would send in their kids birthdays, and their names, and J.P. would look into the TV and say happy birthday.

Jim Hills: 04:54 Besides J.P. patches Front Runners, I mean, it was kind of a golden era of local content?

Sharon Howard: 05:00 Was it ever? My partner and I used to say, "You know this is the best in television that we're going through right now. When we get in our rocking chairs, we're going to realize that." And then we would always say, "No, we realize it now." Because it was, we were not told what to do. We did any story we wanted, complete freedom.

Jim Hills: 05:21 And in the intro, we talked about Front Runners as being about high achievers. And that was kind of the guiding light. But having obviously local high achiever. I grew up here. I've been here for all but one of my years, I won't say how many of those there are.

Mike Rosen: 05:42 Enough.

Jim Hills: 05:42 Enough. And I really, I thought it was interesting about local high achievers in that there was an era where in the Puget

Sound region, we felt a little ignored, and that there was an opportunity to shine a light on ourselves. With Amazon or Microsoft and all the others here, I don't think we, the need to shine a light on ourselves is quite the same. But when Front Runners was around, it really was a big deal, wasn't it?

Sharon Howard: 06:15 It was a big deal. Had very high ratings, and it was great to work that nine years with Steve Pool.

Jim Hills: 06:22 Oh, yeah.

Sharon Howard: 06:22 He was great to work with, and the crew was great. My partner Ken Morrison and I, we had opposite interests. He loved to go to Hollywood and do all of the star stories, and I would rather be out. He said it was his nightmare to be on a canoe going down a river, but that's what I wanted to do outdoors with the craters, and with nature. So, we complemented each other.

Jim Hills: 06:45 And Mike, you're a transplant from Wisconsin but an early transplant, right?

Mike Rosen: 06:50 Yeah. Home in June, July and winter.

Jim Hills: 06:55 But also worked KIRO. Is that where you guys met?

Mike Rosen: 06:57 It is. I was a news shooter. I started as a news shooter in news, and saw her on the first day, and it took a very long time to get to yes.

Kurt Batdorf: 07:14 Do you remember what the first assignment was you worked on together? Or did you ever work on assignments together?

Mike Rosen: 07:19 The only things we actually did together at KIRO I think were some of the promos.

Sharon Howard: 07:25 Yeah, that's true.

Mike Rosen: 07:25 Some of the commercials.

Kurt Batdorf: 07:26 Okay.

Mike Rosen: 07:27 Because she was more on the programming side, and I was in the documentary or news side. It didn't keep us away from each other. That was not a deal breaker.

Jim Hills: 07:40 Did you start on the documentary side when you came to KIRO?

- Mike Rosen: 07:44 No, back in Wisconsin, I got a job as you had mentioned when I was a junior in high school working at a TV station there, and they taught me the studio cameras, it was black and white film back in the day. Now you have a sense of my age. And actually it was black and white, we helped take him to color, but they taught me how to film that kind of stuff. And I did industrials and commercials, and then I got the job at KIRO as a news photographer. I was one of the first probably in the country to shoot video. There were two stations on the west coast that had video cameras on this side of the Mississippi in fact, and KIRO was one of them, and we only had three, and that's what I started with. I did news, and then they started a documentary unit, and gave me the lead on that.
- Jim Hills: 08:28 What an amazing arc of your career in terms of storytelling and the technology that was available to you. I mean, coming from, in high school, and then when you said you were a shooter, I thought it was an interesting phrase for a videographer. Oh no, not a videographer, transitioned to videography.
- Mike Rosen: 08:49 And sadly, my timing tended to just be off. It's like every time a new technology came, it was always still heavy when I had it.
- Jim Hills: 08:58 Yeah, I can relate to that. Or just mastering a technology, and just have something else come in just to take its place when you got the hang of it. Well, I was wondering about your experience doing documentary work, and local TV, and whether or not that was the beginning of what you're doing now, or what you have been doing?
- Mike Rosen: 09:18 Yeah very much so. The kinds of docs that I did at KIRO were, nature and wildlife things happen when we joined forces, actually when she allowed me to work with her. But mine were social issues. So, I did things on drinking and driving, learning not to burn. I did a lot of Herb Wise Bon consumer reports specials. And whatever the general manager would spend his weekend thinking about is usually what my... So, once I did an hour on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which he oddly had not crafted to fit into a 47 minute show with commercials.
- Jim Hills: 10:04 How did you start to transition to wildlife work?
- Sharon Howard: 10:11 [crosstalk 00:10:11]. Well, Mike was working at PRR when I was working at Como, and I convinced my boss, Dick Warsinske, who was a wonderful wonderful man that if he let Mike be my photographer, he would only have to pay for one hotel room. So, it affected the budget money. I think you were making what, 200 bucks a day, or a hundred bucks a day, or if that?

Mike Rosen: 10:36 Oh yeah.

Sharon Howard: 10:38 Yeah.

Mike Rosen: 10:38 That's kind.

Sharon Howard: 10:39 But we got to go all over the world together, and it was the experiences. We both had full time jobs, but at first, we did these documentaries on our own time. So, we'd be there at 2 o'clock in the morning editing, doing whatever, in addition to my job at Front Runners, and his PRR.

Jim Hills: 10:58 Did that just come out of your own personal drive, or your... Where did the work come from?

Sharon Howard: 11:02 Yes. Passion.

Jim Hills: 11:04 Looking passion, and looking for an outlet for afterwards, or did you think about that first?

Sharon Howard: 11:11 I think it was just a way I loved Front Runners, but after a while doing it, I needed another creative outlet. And it took me three years to convince Mr. Warsinske that I should be able to do that.

Jim Hills: 11:27 I'm interested, we touched on the technology change, and Mike, I seen a picture of you in hip waders, and one leg of the tripod is in a, I think a stream, and that does look like a heavy camera on top of that. Can we talk about some of the challenges of how a wildlife documentary looks so easy, but how do you get that cool shot?

Mike Rosen: 11:56 Yeah you're right. We were shooting a show called Natural Connections which was helping people understand that all things in nature are connected, and what we do has an impact on them. And we were talking about, in this case it was the salmon run, the largest salmon run happens every seven years up in Canada. And those video cameras don't like water. And we had gotten an underwater, it was like a bag, an underwater container for it so we could shoot underwater, and it had a leak in it. We brought it up from L.A. and it had a leak in it, and so the camera went down. And so, I was calling... Unfortunately, I don't know why the Adams River had a cell signal, but I was talking to an engineer in L.A. asking him how do I get this thing back up again, and when we were in Africa, similarly that was back when the tube cameras existed.

Mike Rosen: 12:44 That was even before the camera, you could put the tape in the camera. So, there was a guy, our sound guy who also had to carry the video recorder, and also the microphone to record the things, and that was when the cameras had tube, and if you pointed them anything bright too long, they would burn into it, like your television at home, what if you left that back in the day, TVs would do that. That of course happened to us while we were in Africa. We were able to fix it. But yeah, the technology does become a bit of a challenge, to shoot wildlife, you're supposed to not be too-

Jim Hills: 13:18 [inaudible 00:13:18].

Mike Rosen: 13:18 True too obvious, yeah. And hide away, and we never had the time to go somewhere and sit for three months and wait for that one shot. So, we had to be luckier.

Jim Hills: 13:30 Yeah, he had to go pursue that.

Sharon Howard: 13:32 Yes.

Jim Hills: 13:35 Would you mind walking us through some of the more memorable projects that you've created for yourself, and then you're talking about Africa. I think I've heard that Mike you had a gorilla sit in your lap for a while, talking about salmon runs, and guarding the equipment from the water. Can you walk us through some of those?

Sharon Howard: 13:59 Well, my first real wildlife encounter that I can remember is in 1990, and we were in Amboseli National Park in Kenya, and we were watching the T family come into camp. Cynthia Moss and Joyce Pool who are renowned elephant researchers had a camp, and Cynthia had done this book on 13 years in the life of the T family.

Jim Hills: 14:32 Now, just to clarify, the T family is the-

Sharon Howard: 14:35 Is the elephant family. They're all named T. Theresa, Tulip, Truman, et cetera. So, the matriarch of the group was tuskless, she had no tusks, which happens heredity wise once in a while. And we were sitting on the ground in camp watching the elephants eat their way through camp, and tuskless comes up, and she turns right, and she comes over to me, and she blows her arm, I mean my arm with her nose, she just blows air on it, and touches my arm, and walks off. And Joyce was sitting about 15 feet from me, and she'd been there for 15 years researching

them, and she turned around and said, "You're a lucky woman."
And she was crying.

Jim Hills: 15:21 So, that obviously does not happen very often?

Sharon Howard: 15:22 No.

Mike Rosen: 15:23 It had never happened to Joyce, and this matriarch walked right past Joyce to get to Sharon.

Sharon Howard: 15:33 I've always thought she knew we were there to tell her story.

Jim Hills: 15:36 Nice. When you talk about telling her story, I think when you're talking to people, you can ask them their story. How do you infer a story when you're doing wildlife? How do you see that story?

Sharon Howard: 15:52 Through interviews. It takes a long time to find the right, especially if you're dealing with scientists, to find the right scientists who speaks through his heart. And there's nothing more strong than having somebody who is smart with the head to talk through the heart, and when you find those guys, the emotion that they can project on the screen is unbelievable. So, you do your research, and then you seek those people out.

Jim Hills: 16:24 And pairing that with the scenes you're getting out of nature-

Sharon Howard: 16:28 Correct.

Jim Hills: 16:29 And putting those together?

Sharon Howard: 16:30 And then having a very good editor.

Jim Hills: 16:35 Our audience can't see, but you are pointing over here, Mike.

Sharon Howard: 16:38 Yes.

Jim Hills: 16:41 I'm interested in understanding. You said you couldn't wait around three months for the moment, you had to go find the moments, but still you must end up with miles of, hours of.

Mike Rosen: 16:53 Yeah, hours and hours and hours. We really have been charmed, in our travels would run into National Geographic, or IMAX a lot. And like when we were shooting bears up in Alaska, it-

Jim Hills: 17:07 Taking pictures of bears, not shooting bears.

Mike Rosen: 17:09 Yeah, sorry. Sorry about that.

Sharon Howard: 17:12 Photographing bears.

Mike Rosen: 17:13 Yeah, technicality. At one point, there are 30 bears, grizzlies in our site. They come literally within five feet of you. There's never been an incident there. And IMAX had been there right before us. Literally, the float plane drops you off and leaves. So, anything you need, food, water, your equipment, how to charge your equipment, you've got to have it with you because they drop you off and they leave. And IMAX had been there, and they don't give anybody special permission. So, you have to hike like two miles with all your equipment to get to where the bears are. And IMAX, they would have a helicopter fly in fresh food for them everyday.

Sharon Howard: 17:55 We're eating beans, canned beans.

Mike Rosen: 17:58 Rained every day they were there. So, in that case, we got lucky, and it has been like that, like the gorillas experience you referenced before. In Rwanda, we camped at what was Dian Fossey's camp at Carousel which is at 10,000 feet. Again, you have to carry everything with you because there's nothing up there. And it took 30 guys to haul our food, our water, our generators, our gas on their heads, barefoot, and we get up there, and then you got to go up from there. You're starting at 10,000 feet, the gorillas up for there, and your feet never touch the ground.

Mike Rosen: 18:39 It's just grown, and it's literally the guide is macheting the way through for you to get there. Your feet never touch the ground. And at one point, we looked at each other because you can see the gorillas, and you could smell the gorillas, and we decided at one point we going to have to call the show Butts of Nature, because that's all we were getting. At one point, we just rested on the hill, you're just sort of squatting on the side of the hill, and a silverback gorilla breaks through the brush, walks right up to me, climbs on my lap, puts his head in the lens, and sits there for four and a half minutes.

Jim Hills: 19:13 Oh my God.

Mike Rosen: 19:14 And all the things they tell you, never make eye contact, don't get within 15 feet, certainly don't touch them. And he's sitting on top of me. And of course, when you look at your producer who is also your spouse, first words out of her mouth should be, "Are you okay?" But they weren't, they were, "Are you rolling?"

Sharon Howard: 19:31 I've never heard the end of that honestly.

Mike Rosen: 19:34 Oh, there's more.

Jim Hills: 19:37 I mean, at that close range, that's much closer than you would normally work shooting wildlife. So, what kind of footage did you end up with-

Sharon Howard: 19:45 Incredible.

Jim Hills: 19:45 ... A 400 pound gorilla in your lap?

Mike Rosen: 19:49 You see him coming straight at you, and then it's sort of a natural white to black. And then he does turn around and walk away. So, we didn't use the whole four and a half minutes of him there, but Sharon very cleverly wrote to it. And we also had to be careful about you trying not to draw too much attention to you as filmmakers, but you do see my knees in the shot trying to figure out where do I go.

Jim Hills: 20:13 Sure, yeah. I thought your knees in your shot [00:20:17]. Sharon, how did you write the words to go with that footage?

Sharon Howard: 20:28 Well, when the gorilla comes towards him, and we've seen him enough, I cut away, Dian Fossey had taken a picture of him when she was trying to take notes, and he was a youngster. He was very mischievous, and he would come over and steal her pen and paper. And so, I was able to go away to that, and talk about that, and then come back. That gorilla's name was Pablo. Pablo just took us to black. He just took us to black, because he was black, and he was so close, and so, that was a natural cutting point.

Kurt Batdorf: 21:01 Well, but you also wrote, "This is Pablo. This is Pablo's chest."

Sharon Howard: 21:05 Yeah. And this was voiced by Dan Lewis, and he did a great job with the script.

Jim Hills: 21:12 A longtime news anchor from-

Sharon Howard: 21:14 Yes. Since become a very good friend.

Jim Hills: 21:18 That's great. So, speaking of writing that piece, how do you write a script for something that can't be scripted? Maybe can be scripted. I don't know, I assume it can't be.

Sharon Howard: 21:35 Well, the producer's job is to find out or identify the subject, and then to identify the people that are interviewed. And I've always seen myself as the person who just write something between two sound bites that I want to get across. So, I ask questions that will make the people say what I want to say, or what information I'm trying to get out. Because coming from them instead of my words is much stronger to me.

Mike Rosen: 22:09 You also have a bit of a selfish motive in that style.

Sharon Howard: 22:11 Yes, I hate to write.

Jim Hills: 22:15 There you go.

Sharon Howard: 22:17 And it is a visual medium. I mean, it's the pictures, and I did pride myself in always writing to the pictures, and a lot of writers don't in television. They just write what they want, they leave it to the poor editors to have to cover it.

Mike Rosen: 22:30 Make this match.

Sharon Howard: 22:32 Right. I would always look at all my B roll, and I would write to the pictures.

Jim Hills: 22:41 Sounds like you're open to the moment. But the logistics of getting to Rwanda, and 30 people carrying your stuff up to Dian Fossey's camp, I mean, you've got to have an idea in mind of what you're going to go after. You have an idea, and then you do all of this work, and you're not sure you're going to get it?

Sharon Howard: 23:07 Sometimes. You get back and you look at your footage, and sometimes if you're working with a photographer, and you think you've communicated, and it's not working. And he didn't get what you wanted, then you have to rewrite. But with Mike, and I'm not saying that just because he was my spouse, but...

Kurt Batdorf: 23:23 Was?

Jim Hills: 23:25 We believe they still are married.

Sharon Howard: 23:28 Is my spouse.

Mike Rosen: 23:31 She has to remind me it's a day by day agreement.

Sharon Howard: 23:35 It's been what, 35 years?

Mike Rosen: 23:36 Right.

Sharon Howard: 23:36 I lost my train of thought.

Jim Hills: 23:41 Oh, where were we?

Sharon Howard: 23:42 Yeah, where were we? Oh, I've always gotten more than I set out to get. So, I have to rewrite it anyway because I've got better stuff than I thought it was going to have. But I just generally have in mind the point I want to make, and it's always for the craters, it's always for saving the environment. A lot of people call our programs documentaries, but I never really have because to me a documentary looks at both sides. And I don't spend very much time looking at why the Earth should be destroyed, or why this animal should be killed.

Jim Hills: 24:14 It's really a chronicling of the reality, right?

Sharon Howard: 24:17 Correct.

Jim Hills: 24:18 Can you share some of the titles, some of the work, and where that has appeared?

Sharon Howard: 24:25 Mike's got a better, because he took care of all those syndication stuff.

Mike Rosen: 24:32 Natural connections, Lolita, which is about whales, killer whales, Return of The Eagle. I'm trying to think of-

Sharon Howard: 24:45 River of Bears.

Mike Rosen: 24:46 River of Bears, and the parks. And those five-

Sharon Howard: 24:50 The parks show was called Islands of Nature.

Mike Rosen: 24:54 And those five got packaged together under a brand called Earth Agenda. So, they ran here originally, and then they got syndicated, like Oprah gets syndicated. So, sometimes it was CBS, sometimes NBC, sometimes ABC. So, those ran all over the country, and I think 92% of the country. And then Natural Connections, which was our first independent one, that also ran here first. But it was on Discovery Canada. It's been in six or seven different countries, it's in a couple thousand schools and libraries. And that one ran, PBS ran it as the launch to their Earth Week. So, they ran it in primetime as a launch to an Earth Week series.

Sharon Howard: 25:39 And then we did Wolf.

Jim Hills: 25:41 [crosstalk 00:25:41]. I was going to ask about that because I saw the wolf piece too. Can you describe that one?

Sharon Howard: 25:54 It's about wolfs.

Mike Rosen: 25:54 So says the writer.

Sharon Howard: 25:54 We mostly shot it in Yellowstone. Some of the footage came from Nova Scotia, and we interviewed people like Jim Brandenburg who is a wolf photographer, famous wolf photographer. He's had like five National Geographic covers, wolf biologist in Yellowstone, several wolf biologists. And we went to-

Mike Rosen: 26:18 Utah.

Sharon Howard: 26:18 Was it Utah? Yeah. No, Wyoming.

Mike Rosen: 26:23 Oh, you're right.

Sharon Howard: 26:24 Yeah, Wyoming. To interview the soldier wolf family, and they are native Americans who the wolf is very very important to them. So, we just looked at different aspects of the wolf and throughout history, and what he means, and that it shouldn't be destroyed. He's always been thought of as this horrible creature, and like one person said-

Mike Rosen: 26:48 Not to say anything bad about books.

Sharon Howard: 26:49 No. When you think of it, everything from Little Red Riding Hood to whatever, but we didn't just try to destroy or control the wolf, we annihilated him from this country. And that's just interesting. We don't want that to happen again.

Jim Hills: 27:10 No, we don't. On that note, we'll take a quick break, and we'll be right back with Mike Rosen and Sharon Howard.

Speaker 7: 27:18 Is there a pre-schooler running around in your life? Then check out the Sno-Isle Libraries countdown to kindergarten list of 100 essential picture books. Find this book list, and many more online at Sno-Isle Libraries.

Speaker 1: 27:34 We love hearing from our listeners and subscribers, especially if you enjoyed a guest or have a suggestion for a future topic. Drop us a line at Check It Out podcast at sno-isle.org. Again, that's Check It Out podcast at sno-isle.org, and let us know what

you're thinking. Don't be surprised if we read your comment, or answer your question on our future podcast episode.

- Jim Hills: 28:08 And we are back with Mike Rosen and Sharon Howard. I'm so excited. We left a great story there at the end, and I know you've got others. In the break, you were telling us about an episode in Tanzania. Could you share that one?
- Mike Rosen: 28:23 We were in Ngorongoro crater in Tanzania, which is, it's just the self-contained, all the animals you would want to see are in this crater. And it was very rare to be allowed to camp there. I don't think they even allow it at all any anymore. We had to carry everything, getting have to carry everything you need including our generators, and our gas, and all that to charge our batteries. So, in the morning we woke up, and our generator was gone, our batteries were gone, the Chargers were gone, and we're the only ones in this crater, except for the Maasai. And what are the Maasai going to do with this?
- Mike Rosen: 28:58 We started walking around, and we saw one of the charges with battery on it, and the cord dangling off. And then we found another one, and then another one, and kept going. And there was our generator that had been eaten pretty much everywhere a hand touches. The hyenas had grabbed it, and hauled it away, and we were given very strict orders to bring back everything we took. So yeah, they're going to really believe that a hyena eat our generator, but that is what happened.
- Kurt Batdorf: 29:26 Interesting and fascinating.
- Jim Hills: 29:28 That is a great excuse. Your version of the dog ate my home work. A hyena eat my generator.
- Sharon Howard: 29:33 And the metal. I mean, the steel around the generator was punctured, and dented in, the teeth were so strong.
- Jim Hills: 29:41 They were hungry.
- Sharon Howard: 29:44 I think it was our scent on the leather.
- Jim Hills: 29:46 If that doesn't give you a respect for what's out there, that would do it. But not all of your experiences have been in Africa. There was something closer to home, maybe called St. Helens, I think I heard?
- Mike Rosen: 30:03 When I was a videographer for a shooter for KIRO TV, for a lot of the time I got the great gig of being able to fly in the

helicopter, shoot out of the helicopter, and we were following St. Helens up to the point where it erupted, and I was in the air on May 18th as well filming that. And then after the May 18th eruption, there were dome building eruptions. So, there were about six or eight of those. So, we would go down and see how is the dome doing. And in one of those cases, we were in the helicopter flying directly over the center of the dome, and had left the crater, literally just gotten out of the crater, and it erupted. So, 30 seconds earlier, we would have been gone.

Sharon Howard: 30:48 Toast.

Jim Hills: 30:48 And what kind of eruption was that?

Mike Rosen: 30:50 I could give you a picture. They were very lives, there wasn't as much of the substance in it. But if you looked at it, it was as high and as wide, and much wider because it wasn't as much earth in it. They were very very large, and we had just outfitted the helicopter with an antenna so it could go live, but had never done it before. We thought, let's give it a try. We were able to go live from Mount St. Helens, eruption before that plume barely got over the top of the crater. That was one of the first scares I saw, because she was in the control room inside.

Sharon Howard: 31:30 We weren't married then, were we?

Jim Hills: 31:31 1980.

Sharon Howard: 31:37 There's the guy I love.

Mike Rosen: 31:40 At one point I felt that I probably had the record for shooting more volcano eruptions than anybody because I'd gone to all of the Mount St. Helens ones. Yeah, I broke their record in a month.

Jim Hills: 31:54 Well, you also had experience not doing documentaries, [inaudible 00:31:59], you also were doing PRR?

Mike Rosen: 32:01 Correct.

Jim Hills: 32:01 Which I think you'd told me earlier it actually doesn't stand for anything?

Mike Rosen: 32:04 It doesn't.

Kurt Batdorf: 32:05 Seems like it should.

Mike Rosen: 32:06 It's really embarrassing for a very expensive marketer to say those words. We were an integrated marketing firm, which by itself says we could do better with our branding. Our mission statement was, "Do Good, have fun, make money." And we primarily worked in health care, the environment, and transportation. We did things for, there's probably seven things in your house that we had something to do with you don't know about. If you have a front load washing machine, a low flow toilet, if you recycle, shower head, if you pay a toll. All of that is us just in the region here.

Mike Rosen: 32:40 But we worked for like the Environmental Protection Agency, Energy Star, we help people understand about Energy Star. We did the fuel economy label that's on all the new cars in the country. We helped the CDC train medical examiners on what to do if they come across a body contaminated with radiation because they were worried about dirty bombs. But we couldn't say dirty bomb. We worked with Starbucks, and Nike, and Philip Sonic care, and a lot of government agencies, and very consistent with the work we do. Is trying to help, people can make good decisions if they have good information.

Jim Hills: 33:13 How do you carve out as a business, how do you carve out that niche?

Mike Rosen: 33:17 Quite successfully. We were a hundred people in seven states. And the strategy was to balance between government and private sector, CDCED, ECA, and the Fortune 500 companies. Have a lot of companies clients so we aren't too beholden on anybody. Diversity by geography. We offered several services, market research, public involvement, public relations, everything that goes into advertising, that goes into marketing, and then the graphics including video work, or old fashioned paper stuff. We offered a cross-section of services as well. Having the diversity across all those things protected us against all sorts of economic challenges that other people suffered from.

Jim Hills: 34:03 How long were you with PRR?

Mike Rosen: 34:07 26. I'm going to say 26 or 27 years.

Jim Hills: 34:12 You were managing principal?

Mike Rosen: 34:14 I was.

Jim Hills: 34:15 I mean, you had started as a shooter in high school, but your managing principal of a far flung PRR agency?

Mike Rosen: 34:26 At the time when I joined them, they were six people, and a sole proprietorship, and they offered only like two, they offered market research and public involvement primarily for transportation, and pretty much 90% of the business was with one client. And I liked the way that the owner at the time thought, she liked that I had this other experience, and a marketing approach to things. So, we decided to give it a shot, and then she turned it over to me and said, "Why don't you manage this?" And then we grew it up to the 100 people, then eventually bought her, and turned it into half of the company is employee owned, and then I had six partners, and then I was managing principal. I had always thought it would be cool if we could evolve the company into an entirely employee owned business.

Jim Hills: 35:14 What kind of projects are you working on these days? What feeds your creative drive?

Sharon Howard: 35:20 We're selfishly, excuse me, selfishly traveling for ourselves.

Kurt Batdorf: 35:25 And documenting it along the way?

Sharon Howard: 35:27 With our still cameras. It's always about the shot, even though we're both retired.

Kurt Batdorf: 35:35 Still about the shot.

Jim Hills: 35:37 Do you think of yourself as retired, or do you always think-

Sharon Howard: 35:40 I hate that word, don't we all?

Jim Hills: 35:43 Yeah. Looking for a story, always seeing a story?

Sharon Howard: 35:46 That's true. I guess I never would have thought about it quite like that, but it's like that.

Mike Rosen: 35:53 She doesn't have an off button.

Sharon Howard: 35:56 It's always been Mike's dream when he retired to spend two months in another country every year, and so we started last year, well, the day he retired, the next day we left for Galapagos for three weeks, but then we started to plan our every year two month trip, and so we spent January, February last year in Cape Town.

Jim Hills: 36:17 Wow. What was that like compared to here?

Sharon Howard: 36:20 Oh my God, it was wonderful. It's a beautiful city. It's a gorgeous city. The people are friendly. We had a great time. But it was always about craters. We did two safaris. We had seals, a great huge island of seals. They were 40 minutes from our house, and we had to the south, a whole colony of penguins that we would go visit all the time, and spend the day with. It was great.

Jim Hills: 36:46 And then this year we're going to go to Namibia, Botswana, and Madagascar.

Sharon Howard: 36:52 Looking craters.

Jim Hills: 36:53 Do you have anybody to carry your stuff around, or they're all in the backpack?

Sharon Howard: 36:59 Nop.

Kurt Batdorf: 37:01 It's a lot smaller these days, right.

Sharon Howard: 37:03 True.

Mike Rosen: 37:03 We always used it when we were doing the dice because all that stuff is heavy. We would always try to find the youngest person with the strongest back. One of the grips that we used more than once was Peggy Luce who was the second American woman to solo climb Everest. She could carry anything.

Jim Hills: 37:20 That's a pretty star studded crew you got going on there.

Sharon Howard: 37:23 Yes.

Mike Rosen: 37:23 And she could cook.

Jim Hills: 37:27 I'm curious about, you mentioned, we were just joking about the difference between having to have 30 people carry the crew, and that a studio is virtually inside your phone these days. So, there are lots of people who are out there trying to tell stories. Do you have advice for people who are looking for stories themselves, or the way they tell that?

Mike Rosen: 37:51 I do. I think people who have a calling or driven should follow it. I truly believe people should follow their passions, and if this is a passion, you should, I think you have to in anything you do, regardless of how sophisticated the technology is, you have to

pay your respects to the audience. They don't care. What's in it for them?

Kurt Batdorf: 38:14 They just want the story.

Mike Rosen: 38:16 And I believe that part of what storytelling does is tell you what's going on in the world, tell you how to deal with what's going on in the world, or help you escape what's going on in the world. And so, I think-

Jim Hills: 38:27 Wait wait, I got to write that down. That sounds really pithy.

Mike Rosen: 38:32 You like the t-shirt. You talked about PRR, and I always felt, I would look at a potential client in a pitch and say, "If I can't do something better different, or better value, it'd be stupid for you to hire us." And I think the same is true if you're doing what you're doing in terms of a video, or whatever it is. You have to provide something unique that they can't get anywhere else. And so, that means the bar is high. If you like what Spielberg does, you should consume Spielberg movies, because that's the bar, there already is a Spielberg. So, what can you learn from that?

Mike Rosen: 39:06 When I first started back in Wisconsin, when I first started, I went to three or four movies a week, and I would look at shadows, and reflections in the eyes, and figure out lighting, and I bought a Rembrandt book so I could look at how he painted with light. The bar is high, and people are not forgiving. They want to know what's in it for them. And there is compelling stuff. Who is it, Charlie Bit My Finger, sometimes are slow, people will consume anything.

Mike Rosen: 39:35 And I think that goes into the help escape what's going on in the world. So, it's just got to be compelling. But I would argue that you should consume what else is out there, and sort of find your voice, and feed that part of your soul. There are reason poets work tollbooths.

Jim Hills: 39:54 I find it really intriguing as you were talking about where you found your inspiration, and where you looked for hints on how to do it better, what others were looking at. And I don't think that that's actually advice that very many people take if they think about it at all. And well worth paying heed to. Yeah absolutely. So, we are in a place, well actually, in a place, we're in a room near a place where there are passionate people about what they're doing. And that's the library, Sno-Isle Libraries. I'm curious about, as you're talking about looking for Rembrandt,

and chairing about how you found perhaps some inspiration in your storytelling if you have connections to libraries, and books, and things that you might want to share with our listeners.

- Sharon Howard: 40:51 I have read an average of 20 books on the subject before I even started interviewing people, or figuring out how I was going to tell the story.
- Jim Hills: 41:01 That's some thorough research.
- Sharon Howard: 41:03 You had to, and back then, oh my gosh, you didn't have that. You had to find magazine articles, and books, and you had to go to the library, and even use encyclopedias way back then, make telephone calls. The amount of research was incredible. And you didn't have a computer.
- Jim Hills: 41:24 When you've done that much reading, what are you looking for to tell the story? Mike was talking about bringing something new. Have you done that much research? As a storyteller, what are you looking for?
- Sharon Howard: 41:39 I'm just looking for information so that I'll know what to ask the scientist. I'm forming questions about how to get what I want to say, and I agree with Mike about, you've got to think about your audience in your storytelling. I mean, they're the ones who count, and there've been numerous times where we've waited three months for a shot. I mean, we've called like Mr. Leakey. We were going to interview him, and we did after three months of trying to, Richard Leakey trying to get an appointment with him. And we left it on the cutting room floor. It didn't work.
- Mike Rosen: 42:22 Didn't add any value.
- Sharon Howard: 42:23 It didn't add value, and Mike has worked for shots for a very long time, and it's very hard to give that up if it doesn't work in the storyline. You have to know what to cut out.
- Jim Hills: 42:34 You have to be brutal at times?
- Sharon Howard: 42:36 Brutal.
- Mike Rosen: 42:37 One of the things that she always leads with, and I think she said it earlier, is the way to the head is through the heart. And so, part of her research, if she found somebody who she thought might make a good subject, she would also try to validate that more than once, was that a fluke, was that a good [inaudible 00:42:56]. It wasn't just what story is going to be

compelling and go hit an emotional chord, but finding the people who could do that. And she always leads with that. The way to the head is through the heart.

- Sharon Howard: 43:09 And you got to lead with a hook. My God, there's so much we can see now, turn the channel. I mean, like that. You can't take a long time getting into your story, you've got to tease your best stuff upfront.
- Mike Rosen: 43:24 Yeah. Attention spans are much much shorter.
- Sharon Howard: 43:26 Yes. And I find that in novels. I mean, I don't have any patients, after 10 or 20 pages when I have to get on television, you get 30 seconds. If an author gets 20 pages to get my interest, other people will stick with the book no matter what. And I say there's so many books out there that are so great. I'm getting old, I don't want to waste my time on something that's not good.
- Jim Hills: 43:52 That's a really interesting thing. And it reinforces a lesson that I learned here when I first came to work at Sno-Isle Libraries. I felt very guilty if I checked out a book and then I didn't read it. I sat around the lunch table with a bunch of librarians, I one time shared that, and they all looked at me like I was an idiot, and one of them said, "Life is way too short for bad books. Check them out, see if you like them, you don't like them, close it, move on to the next one. Find books you like, and just return them. That's the beauty of the library, you can just borrow it, and then send it back if you didn't like it." That's so freeing.
- Kurt Batdorf: 44:30 I got to remember that.
- Jim Hills: 44:33 All this guilt melted away. Anyway, thank you so much for sharing your work, your tips, an insight into your life. I'm very excited that you offered to, you'd shown us a clip during one of the breaks, and we're going to put that on the show notes so that people can see a gorilla sitting in your lap. This has just been very rewarding for me. Thank you so much for coming.
- Sharon Howard: 45:02 Thank you for having us.
- Kurt Batdorf: 45:03 That's been great fun, Thank you.
- Mike Rosen: 45:05 It's been a pleasure.
- Speaker 9: 45:07 Did you know you could download some of the best business and finance magazines for free with your Sno-Isle Libraries card? Learn more online at Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 45:29 The voice you're hearing now is Ken Harvey. I'm sitting in the interview space with Kurt Batdorf. Kurt and Jim had interviewed Mike and Sharon. Kurt, it sounds like it was a really good conversation?

Kurt Batdorf: 45:44 Yeah, talking to a couple who worked in kind of a golden age of local television was eye opening.

Ken Harvey: 45:52 Golden age meaning like the J.P. Patches?

Kurt Batdorf: 45:55 Exactly. Sharon was a floor producer for J.P. and as someone who watched J.P. patches as a kid in Seattle, I didn't realize that it wasn't totally unscripted show which as an adult would horrify me, and Sharon had some good anecdotes and laugh too about how horrified she often was when they'd meet in the cafeteria 15 minutes before the show went live, and that's when they would figure out what they were going to do that day.

Ken Harvey: 46:25 Well, those were seat of the pants, and [crosstalk 00:46:30] television. I think as I recall, J.P. Patches started in the black and white era.

Kurt Batdorf: 46:39 It did, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 46:39 And transition to the color television era?

Kurt Batdorf: 46:41 Yeah, I think it did. I don't remember when J.P. started but it was already on the air when I started watching it as a kid, or when I can remember starting to watch it.

Ken Harvey: 46:50 Well neat, and I also understand that Mike had a story around a brush with death.

Kurt Batdorf: 47:02 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 47:03 What did you think about the mountain Helen's account that he shared?

Kurt Batdorf: 47:08 I remember Mount St. Helens erupting because I grew up here, and he was in KIRO when we worked for KIRO TV. They were flying the helicopter down to the crater to get new footage. This particular day, they were flying over the mountain. They had just installed a new live transmission antenna in the helicopter, and they hadn't tested it before, they had just got some footage, they'd just flown out when there was another eruption. And it was a major one. And Mike said, "If 30 seconds

earlier we were there when that thing blew up, and we would not be here today."

Ken Harvey: 47:48 What do you think about that? Could you imagine yourself being that helicopter?

Kurt Batdorf: 47:51 Yeah. Sharon was actually watching the live footage come back. And knowing that, oh God Mike, he's up there. And she was horrified. She was just... They weren't married at the time, but she said, "This is the man I love. And he just nearly died."

Ken Harvey: 48:12 Powerful moment, and thankfully not with-

Kurt Batdorf: 48:16 It turned out well thankfully.

Ken Harvey: 48:17 Not deadly for them.

Kurt Batdorf: 48:19 But it was close.

Ken Harvey: 48:20 What do you think about some of the other experiences they had? How they strike you in terms of the interaction with the gorilla, the interaction with the elephant?

Kurt Batdorf: 48:30 They're very passionate about nature, about wildlife, and about telling the story of how, people, wildlife, we're all related, and we're all, maybe not dependent on each other, but there's-

Ken Harvey: 48:44 Everything is connected.

Kurt Batdorf: 48:46 Everything is connected. During one of the breaks, Mike showed us the video clip of Pablo, the gorilla, 450 pound silverback gorilla that Dian Fossey had been tracking. Pablo just comes out of the woods, out of the brush, pushes it aside. And Mike has the camera rolling, when Pablo just comes right up, and not close. I mean, he comes right up onto Mike-

Ken Harvey: 49:13 Incredible.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:14 Pablo is so close to Mike that all we can see when he's filming is his chest. And then later, and then he turns around, and you see his face, and you can look right into his eye.

Ken Harvey: 49:27 You don't get much closer to nature than that.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:31 No, No. No one got closer to nature.

Ken Harvey: 49:34 A powerful moment.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:35 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 49:37 What my sense is of the two of them, and then listening to the conversation that you and Jim had with him, it's real clear to me that they are award winning storytelling.

Kurt Batdorf: 49:48 Exactly, yeah. They talk about the power of storytelling, and the power of stories. And when they were working in the golden age of TV, there was a lot of big heavy equipment, but they had to tell stories no strings attached primarily. But now, it's a little bit different. But you still get the chance. They both said, you still get the chance to tell a story. It's just you've got to be able to tell it quickly, and tell it efficiently, and tell it visually.

Ken Harvey: 50:21 Let's just let that be the last word in terms of storytelling, and Mike and Sharon, for anyone in the audience who is interested in that type of work, and then just pursuing the ability to tell stories. There are plenty of resources in the Sno-Isle Libraries collection that can help you figure out what the art of telling a story is, and also what some of the technical requirements are, and gear issues around it, and so, invite you to come to our website, and to actually just do a search in our catalog around those things. I just think it's really incredible that we have an award winning film making couple, producing couple just in our backyard in Edmonds, Washington.

Kurt Batdorf: 51:17 Yeah, they were a pleasure to talk to.

Ken Harvey: 51:20 Our thanks again to Mike Rosen and Sharon Howard for taking their time.

Kurt Batdorf: 51:25 Yeah, it was a great interview.

Ken Harvey: 51:27 If you enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe so you can receive every episode automatically. And until next time, remember your library has a lot to offer you. So, what are you waiting for? Check it out.