

History Interview No. 2 with Karen Feather

August 3, 2017

Other Participants - Valerie Cox, Sally Costello, Joyce O'Hara, and Wendy Upton

Lois: I would like to welcome everyone to this North Fork History Fest. Hopefully there will be many more as we explore the history of the North Fork and try to document it. This is the 3rd of August. I'm Lois Walker. This is a follow-on interview with Karen Feather, long-time proprietor of the Polebridge Mercantile and the Northern Lights Saloon. With us today also are Valerie Cox, Sally Costello, Joyce O'Hara, and Wendy Upton, long-time residents of Polebridge, or residents of Polebridge at one time or another. Did all of you work for Karen at one time?

Sally: I did.

Valerie: Val did.

Joyce: I did.

Wendy: No, I did not. Everybody else did.

Lois: She was busy doing other things. What I would like to ask is when you speak for the first time, for the benefit of the transcriber if you would say, "This is Sally," so he or she can get used to our voices. This is a follow-on interview. I would like to go through some of the additional questions that came to mind after we talked the last time, and some things that you brought up. I think we will revisit when you and the O'Briens first purchased the Mercantile and what your dreams and concept were for the Merc at the time. I guess that included the building that became the saloon. That was all part of the package that you bought, right?

Karen: The building was the mother cabin that Adair built and he lived in was part of the package, 25 acres, five rental cabins, and the ice house, the barn, a shop, and a three-hole outhouse.

Lois: What was your vision for all of this, and how did that match up to reality? What changes did you make, did you have to make or decided to make when you first bought it, physically on the outside, as well as on the inside?

Karen: Well, we wanted to spiff it up a little bit. It wasn't a very exciting looking place, and so we painted it and put up a sign. We had a list, which I have somewhere, of projects. They were mostly maintenance and promoting some more business. We promoted skiing in the winter and hiking in the summer. We did some advertising, so we just wanted to build the business and have a nice lifestyle outside of the mainstream. The first winter it was apparent that there were lots of people drinking lots of beer in the store and socializing and having a great time, because the store was always the center of the community. And we were spending too much money buying beers for people and trying to keep the place tidy, so we decided well, we really should have a saloon.

We figured the best place would be in the mother cabin, and we just started in. We wrote to the liquor board and went through all the hoops. One of the hoops was the septic system and the restrooms, so we had to put restrooms in the mother cabin. I think we just had a cesspool. I wasn't too much involved in that part of the project, but I think we had a cesspool for the store and one for the modern cabin, which was the one with the toilet in it.

Lois: Behind the saloon, that cabin?

Karen: Yes. When we called a surveyor/contractor to take a look at how to do it properly, he laid it out connecting the modern cabin, and it would be the saloon and the store, with the big septic tank just to the north of the ice house, and then a really nice drain field all out in the middle of that meadow. So, we had that all figured out, and we talked to whoever was going to contract to put it in. We were putting it in, and it was a pretty wet spring. We dug down I don't know how many inches, 12 or 18 inches, however many you have to, and laid the pipes, and the water came right up and surrounded the pipes. The inspector was looking at it and said, "You can't do this in a watershed." I said, "Well, we have to. That's what we've got," and we did, so it's probably illegal now. I think when Chrys [Landrigan] bought it there was some failure in it, and she had to do a whole lot of reworking of the system.

Lois: And Ed Neneman wasn't here yet.

Karen: Ed was not here. [Chuckles]

Lois: Well, they have since put in a new one. They had to put in a new system. And I think because they had the old one grandfathered, that may have been why they were allowed to. I mean, if you went for a new permit today, you couldn't get one for sure. What shape was the store in?

Karen: It was in pretty good shape. I think one or two windows in the front were gone, and they had them covered with plywood, so we got new glass right away, because that was pretty important. It was really more of a restitution. That's not the word.

Lois: Restoration.

Karen: Yes, exactly, of what was there, what Adair did. He had some good taste, and he built a classy building, and it was fine the way he had envisioned it. We just put a few things back together.

Lois: We have this picture from the 1960s, the postcard. Is that kind of what it looked like at the time, with the beige paint?

Karen: It was gray. Yes, that's exactly what it looked like.

Lois: It looks like there's a big door, but somebody said the porch was there, and these were like louvers or something?

Karen: They were louvers for air circulation, I think. I don't know why otherwise. I've got pictures.

Lois: This is a picture of the mail being delivered early-on, and here's Bill Adair. Are these the louvers you are referring to?

Karen: Yes, must be. And they were gone on that side.

Lois: But that has to be an early picture.

Karen: That's a real early picture.



Early mail delivery at the Polebridge Store.

Lois: The Rovers bought it in 1943, so that has to be pre-1943.

Karen: That doesn't look to me like it's Bill.

Lois: Somebody just told me that was Bill Adair. I don't know.

Karen: That's pretty big, but I don't know. I wonder if Larry would know. He's got lots of old pictures. I can't tell you.

Lois: But, of course, he wouldn't have known the Adairs, because he didn't come up here until he was 10 years old, and that was in 1947.

Karen: They were gone by then.

Lois: Do you know where the Adairs went after they sold the store?

Karen: They went to Kalispell.

Lois: This was his second wife Emma?

Karen: Right. She has been his partner's wife. His partner had died, and his wife Jessie had died. I read somewhere that they had a pact that the four of them would be together—they out from Missouri together—and that they would help each other out if one of them died.

Lois: I have that Jessie died in 1930, but I don't know when Bill Lacher... What was Lacher's first name?

Karen: William was it? [Tom]

Lois: I don't know when he died [1925], because she wouldn't have been free to marry.

Karen: Well, I think they were two or three years apart, and then they waited a year or so. It wasn't immediate. [Bill Adair and Emma Lacher married in 1931.]

Joyce: Can I ask a question, or are we going to have a question and answer period after?

Lois: No, please go ahead. This is Joyce.

Joyce: I wondered how the four of you came across the saloon and knew it was for sale.

Karen: It wasn't a saloon.

Joyce: I mean the Merc.

Karen: Oh, the store. It had a For Sale sign on it. My family was visiting from Oregon. I was taking them on trips around from West Glacier, where John and I lived. I drove down and saw it. I had seen it in 1963, when I first was here, and I loved it and I took pictures of it. I loved the pole bridge and took pictures of it. And when my family came down, there was a big For Sale sign, and I just thought, "Oh God, wouldn't that be fun?" So, we started talking, and they talked a little—my younger sister and her husband and Mom. Mom was all for it, of course. We just started talking, and we knew that we had to have more help. Mom would come when she retired, but she wasn't ready to retire yet.

Joyce: It was 12 more years before you actually bought it?

Karen: Well no, it was in 1974 that I came again. I first saw it in 1963, and then in 1974 we saw the For Sale sign.

Sally: So, you and John were living in West Glacier in the 1960s?

Karen: We got married in 1964, and we lived in West Glacier. I worked and lived in Missoula, and he was always there in the summers. Let's see, in 1974 I guess I had been in West Glacier a couple of years, and I was tired of cooking and waiting tables. I thought that this would be a more fun thing to do, and it would steady him down and we would amount to something.

Lois: How did you know the O'Briens?

Karen: They were West Glacier people, summer jobs, and they were interested, and I kind of talked them into it. I knew it was too much for two people. Bob and Betty Olson were suffering from overwork and under-maintenance.

Sally: That hasn't changed at all, both the saloon and the Merc.

Wendy: But it's bigger.

Karen: Oh gosh, yes.

Sally: There's an incredible amount of traffic today. I mean it's unreal.

Joyce: Can I ask one more question, though? This is Joyce again, and it might be too private, but what at that time in 1974 did you pay for everything?

Karen: \$85,000.

Joyce: \$85,000. I thought I remembered hearing that, but I wasn't sure.

Karen: There's a website where you can convert the money from one time to another time.

Sally: What that would be worth today in today's market?

Karen: Yes, what \$85,000 would be today.

Joyce: Ten times.

Karen: I suppose.

Wendy: Will [Hammerquist] thinks that you bought the store for \$50,000, because I just talked to him today. I said, "I'm going up to the lady's luncheon." Word of mouth is like crazy.

Karen: You know, that's the thing about this kind of stuff, the errors are just rife. It makes me nuts. I want them to be right. It was \$85,000 in those days.

Wendy: Will said that he talked to the Olson kid who got his hand trapped in the trap door in the store when he was five years old. The grandson came and talked to Will, so Will got the word of how much you bought the store for from the grandson.

Lois: Third- or fourth-hand, yes.

Wendy: But this kid actually had scars, the Olson grandson had scars on his fingers. I don't know which fingers, because Will didn't know that.

Karen: When did that happen?

Wendy: When the kid was five.

Karen: And the Olsons owned the store.

Wendy: Right, so I don't know what year.

Karen: One of the first things we did without having known that story, which is a pretty ghastly one, was put up a barricade around the trap door with a pulling thing, so you could block traffic so people wouldn't fall down into the root cellar when the damn door was open. I mean, it was just an open pit.

Sally: I remember going down there. I used to pull up cases of beer out of there.

Wendy: How about the beer chute? You had to watch out for the beer chute. That was lots of fun.

Sally: When they delivered the beer or when John came with the beer, he slid it down the chute.

Lois: How big is that root cellar?

Karen: Well, it's very big now. It was almost the size of the store, but with a lot of dirt. It was excavated, and you could stand up. I think I could stand up.

Lois: The Adairs put that in when they built it?

Karen: Yes.

Lois: And there was a ladder going down? How did you get down there?

Karen: Yes, a ladder with the root cellar door. I think it's still there.

Lois: I've seen the door, yes.

Joyce: That's exactly how it was with whoever built the stairs.

Karen: Yes, but they don't have a barrier now.

Joyce: No, they took the barrier down. Now stop me, but what we've just talked about, I have questions about those few things. If it gets to be too many questions at one time and you need to move on, let me know. But the septic—when we bought the saloon there was a septic for the saloon. The saloon and the modern cabin were hooked into an actual septic tank. So, you didn't do that?

Karen: Well, like I said, I wasn't the engineer who did it, but I need to think about that.

Sally: Was it Chrys?

Karen: Doubtful.

Lois: I'm thinking the Kaufmans had to do something.

Joyce: The Merc actually had its own septic that failed, which is why the new septic was put in that they have now, because the Reiswig family owned all the buildings and the O'Hara-Reiswig thing was just the [saloon] business. They put in a big huge one that could handle the Merc, the saloon, the modern cabin, and whatever—the shower house. They had it projected out for five buildings, going down into this brand new septic system that was astronomically priced at the time. Ours—the saloon and the

modern cabin—actually did not fail, but because the family wanted it all together, that's why they put that big, brand new one in when Reiswigs owned everything.

Valerie: This is Valerie. This is another rumor about the purchase and repurchase of the property of the Polebridge store. The story that I heard, and the Hall family, which would be my mother-in-law's family, has been connected with that store since the Depression. The story that we heard is that the store was sold many times, sometimes less than a year apart, because people who had purchased it didn't understand that the winter wouldn't be profitable enough for them to make their payments, and that the following spring they would sell it back to the original owner.

Lois: I think that was the Rovers. I've heard that story that Ben Rover sold it more than once.

Valerie: More than once, that's the same story we got, yes.

Karen: I know that he sold it one time and had to take it back, or maybe he bought it back, but that's the only one I know. Wilhelms might know, because they were pretty good pals with Ben. And, of course, it's going to be in the plat office, isn't it? When you sign up to buy property then your name goes down, and then if you don't finish the deed then the former owner's name gets back on there, so there should be a chronological list of all of the owners.

Lois: It could have been a land contract arrangement or something, where it may not have gotten as far as the plat room because it wasn't finalized, but it's a good place to start.

Valerie: Yes.

Lois: So, when you knew you were going to be moving in, where did you all plan to live? The O'Briens lived in the addition, is that right?

Karen: Right.

Lois: Where did you and John live?

Karen: Upstairs.

Sally: What year is this picture [looking at aerial photo]?

Lois: That is 1965.

Sally: Okay, so looking at this, the building has the addition on it.

Karen: Yes.

Sally: I thought you built the addition.

Karen: No, that was Ted Ross—I'm quite sure it was, as I've looked at more pictures. I thought maybe the Oiens had, but I don't think so. One of the Ross kids could tell you about that. But when Wilhelm was putting the new foundation in, with the wonderful help of Rick Upton, we took that addition down. It was just sitting on nothing, and it

was flimsily built. It was a wind tunnel in the winter and a heat hog in the summer. And it was really ugly.



1965 aerial of the Polebridge Store and environs.

- Lois: Do you know why they put that addition on?
- Karen: I think they had a lot of kids.
- Lois: They did?
- Karen: Well, where did I read it? I read it in a recent article, because I've been going through this stuff. They wanted to have a restaurant, but they never did get that going. I don't think Ted had much cooperation getting the things done that he wanted to get done.
- Lois: Well, I have heard their oldest son, Bob, say, "My mother hated it there."
- Karen: I know she did.
- Lois: She hated having to homeschool their youngest child or younger two children, and then someone told me that she was deaf. Does anyone know if that is true, was Esther Ross deaf or partially deaf?
- Sally: I have never heard that.
- Karen: I have never heard that either, but it's very possible. You know John Frederick was pals with Ted, so he might know. And Kenny is still alive?
- Lois: As far as I know.

Karen: And their daughter.

Lois: There's Betty and then the other daughter. There's two daughters, right. I'm still tracking that down.

Karen: I can't think of her name now [Norma].

Lois: And the reason you replaced the foundation?

Karen: Well, it was on logs that were rotting and crumbling, and it was going to come down on us at some point. It needed a foundation.

Lois: Ted Ross was the one who subdivided what became the Polebridge Townsite, and he held out the 25 acres that was the store area, but before that time that was all agricultural land? He hayed that? Did he have animals? What did previous owners do with the 160 acres, I presume?

Karen: Yes. One of four quarter sections?

Sally: Yes.

Lois: A section was 640. A quarter section would be 160, and Adair did that very early. You know, he came over from the Park side. He started there and then he moved over, so I assume he had the whole 160 and Chance Beebe and his wife had an adjoining 160, and who was the other? I need a map of those homesteads.

Karen: Right, I know. Well, there were four areas. Ted took two of them and subdivided them, and that's where Wendy lives, and the Hostel.

Lois: Because there's Skyline Acreage 1 and Skyline Acreage 2 that are platted.

Wendy: Yes, Beaver Dr. and Rainbow Dr. are one.

Lois: And Skyline Dr. and River Rd. are the other.

Wendy: Right. You can easily get that at the plat office.

Karen: Then there was the one the store was on and all the other buildings.

Lois: Plus across the road, over where the old dump was.

Sally: No, that belonged to Frank Evans, didn't it?

Karen: I think so.

Sally: The line is 10 feet from the center of the road, is what the Merc owns.

Valerie: Ann Hensen told me that further down there was a store that Hensens, Maeses, and Vances were connected with, and it was built like a railroad train. They started with one building, and then the next one was maybe a little bit shorter and then the third one was a little bit shorter than that.

Sally: That's down by the Wilderness Cabins. On the empty field there, because I used to walk around there all the time and see that collapsed foundation.

Karen: Is that the store you mean, Lois?

Lois: Yes.

Sally: Wasn't that Ben Hensen's store? Wasn't he the one that ran that?

Lois: Yes, Ben Sr. and his wife May ran that.

Sally: So that would have been Ann's parents?

Lois: No. Ben Hensen Jr. married Ann when they lived in California. I'm thinking the area where Will now has the nature trail, where it goes out through the field and comes across the road and back—that's all Merc property.

Sally: Yes, they've got four acres.

Karen: Well, to the north it was all the way to the other side of Rover. Rover held out a quarter of the original homestead, so Rover had that and then each owner seemed to take a little piece out of it, except Adair. He sold the whole homestead. And then Rover saved a quarter of the whole homestead, and that's where his cabin is. [Actually, he sold the whole thing to Ted Ross, but then bought part of it back after Annette died.] And then the next quarter was Adairs, and that's where all his stuff is, and then when Oiens sold it they kept five acres back in the corner of his part, which was that 40 acres? Because now it's down to 25 acres.

Lois: Yes, it's like 20, so there's Lesofski, and there's a couple of other owners between the Mercantile property and Rover cabin now. They are owned by different people, and those properties both extend on both sides of the road, if you look at the map.

Karen: That's interesting. I may have that all wrong.

Lois: Well the Oiens could have sold their piece.

Karen: That's only five, so yes.

Joyce: I believe that's exactly how it is now. There's five acres that still is part of the Merc, where the Nature Trail is on the west side of the road, and then it extends out on his walkway, his Nature Trail. I'm pretty sure of that because it's not right in front of the saloon. They own just from the center of the road out 10 feet, because we went through a parking issue, a legal parking issue with the Evans family when we were trying to set up parking for the saloon, and we wanted to make sure that we had it surveyed out correctly. And there was five acres that Bob Reiswig tried to buy from Stuart and Flannery, but Stuart didn't want to sell that. He wanted to keep that part of the Merc, so there is some on the other side of the road but it's not much.

Lois: We're looking at a map now which is off of the county database, and it shows Bowman Lake LLC, which is the Merc property, and it does cross over the road. This little area is the saloon property.

Joyce: 1.99 acres is the saloon.

Lois: And then this is the road over to the Park and you go through Teskey, which is on both sides of the road, then Lesofski, and then the Forest Service, and here's the Ben Rover cabin. That five acres may be this five acres that the Forest Service owns now.

Karen: Yes.

Lois: This is Polebridge Townsite down there.

Karen: Okay, that's what happened, the road went in there and there were four, there's another two over here and then this was original and this was original, and this was Rover and that went to the Forest Service. Wilhelm sold to the Forest Service.



Polebridge Merc land and surrounding properties.

Lois: Right, or swapped.

Karen: Yes.

Lois: For the property on top of Vance Hill, where Fowler Cary is now.

Karen: Who is Teskey? I know that name.

Lois: I don't know. [Ben Hensen willed it to his second wife; Teskey is her family.] There are no buildings on it. There are no buildings on any of that. It's just land.

Joyce: That little piece of the Forest Service property right in that little chunk right there, right?

Lois: That may have been what the Oiens had.

Karen: Yes, that's the one they kept out, and there was no access to it, really.

Joyce: Panorama Ranch, and then this is the Polebridge Loop Road right here? What is this?

Lois: No, the Loop Road would be up by where Ben Rover's cabin was.

Joyce: Okay. Van Auken. That's right, now I see it. So this is the road here?

Lois: That's the road to the Park, right.

Sally: That other road on the other side is the Loop Road.

Joyce: Right here is this little piece here and this little piece here, and this little chunk out of here is the saloon thing?

Lois: That's the saloon, right.

Joyce: That's 1.99 acres, and this small chunk here is owned by the Mercantile still.

Lois: Right.

Joyce: That amounts to about five acres, and you're saying it comes over here where the dump is too, you think?

Lois: Yes, it comes across the road there.

Joyce: So, the Merc owns the dump?

Lois: I believe so.

Wendy: Yes, we called it Frank Evan's dump, you know, where there's the car parts.

Lois: The burned-out VW van.

Karen: I do kind of now. I didn't remember that.

Wendy: Frank always dumped in there.

Sally: I dug in there.

Joyce: I don't think the Merc owns the dump.

Lois: Well, I know he owns where the Nature Trail is. Whether it goes all the way to the dump, I don't know.

Joyce: It doesn't.

Karen: Take a look at those squares.

Joyce: There is a little slough that is the marker there. See, I see these squares. Is that what you're talking about? Because here's the Loop Road. Now what is this?

Karen: This isn't the Loop Road.

Joyce: Well, that's the road coming in. That is called the Loop Road.

Karen: Now the Loop Road is over here.

Joyce: That's right, believe it or not they call it Polebridge Loop Road. The lane coming in legally, in the plat office, is called Polebridge Loop, because the address for the Merc and the saloon is Polebridge Loop. But what I'm wondering is what is this?

Wendy: I think that's that creek.

Joyce: Yes, it is. So, everything on this side of the creek is Panorama Ranch. This is a little bit deceiving. This creek actually is over here more. See, that's not written in there right, and this creek goes a little bit like this. I only know that because I rode my horse through there a thousand times. And there's a little slough that goes through there, but this creek is up here more. And then, of course, you've got one you cross up here that's a larger body of water that's past Lesofski's.

Karen: Well there's a slough right behind the saloon.

Joyce: A tiny little slough, but it's not big enough to be marked on here. This one, unless it's got a branch, there's a branch of it that's bigger now and it's actually full of water right now. It's the one that connects to the river.

Karen: Well, of course they all go to the river. This square indeed belongs to the Merc.

Joyce: This definitely is the Merc, and that is about five acres, but this is a border of that. This is marked wrong, and it could be that since the fire or the flood or whatever—you guys have known more than me on that. This was more diverted this direction, because that little one now is just a trickle. There's nothing on this side of it, only on this side of it, which makes me think that this map . . . Now where did you get this?

Lois: Off the county database.

Karen: Well this is the Loop Road, because this is the Loop.

Joyce: That is. That's the whole Loop, that's right, and then there's Coolidges. This must have been the old access road now that I'm looking at this.

Karen: No, it's the slough.

Joyce: That's the slough, you're right. I just said that. This is the marker for that old slough. They just have it coming in directly across from the saloon, and that's not right.

Karen: You know, I think the line was right here. This is what demarked the saloon's property, was the slough.

Joyce: It did. And you know what, that little tiny one is now not in here anymore. It goes back here. But that's exactly right, because the 1.99 acres extends 10 feet from the center of the road over into Panorama Ranch's property, legally, for parking for the saloon or ownership. That's how it is on all our roads.

Valerie: It's a 30-foot easement.

Wendy: So, I think that is Evans' dump.

Sally: I've always called it Evans dump.

Wendy: Well, I've watched them dump stuff in there.

Sally: Yes, me too. And I lived in his cabin.

Valerie: Could I ask a question, Karen? Way back to your initial idea of, "Gee, I would like to own the Polebridge Store," during that time after you purchased the store and you were going through the start-up and everything, during the years that followed did you ever have any plans for building other buildings?

Karen: No, because I was alone. I never thought of any more than keeping my head above water. [Chuckles] But I did have an inquiry from a local group who thought about buying it, and they were going to do things that were really important, like a laundromat and showers—people needed that.

Wendy: Rick talked about putting in a garage, because so many people needed their flat tires fixed.

Karen: You know, John used to fix 10 or 12 tires a day, but they don't have rocks like they used to, or they have better tires. Usually one of those was the Huck/Ramon family.

Lois: Did you get into selling propane and gasoline? Was the gasoline tank there?

Karen: Oh yes, gas was there, and propane, and the post office, of course.

Wendy: Rick liked the propane tank, too, because it had all the cat shit on it. Remember, he would go out there and help John fill up propane tanks, and he was always laying in cat shit. That's why he hated cats so much. [Chuckles]

Karen: Was that their little dumping ground?

Wendy: I guess. Tigger and Bridgette loved to go out there.

Karen: Tigger?

Sally: Tigger was funny. Tigger used to lay on the cheese wheel.

Karen: He did not! The only stinking cat that laid on it was the piece of shit that Wendy had.

Wendy: And it didn't lay on it.

Karen: They would have their nose close to it. I do have a picture of Tigger.

Wendy: Shammy and Hooker.

Karen: No, Hooker was a different cat of yours.

Wendy: Well, I got those from Elliotts, remember? It had that crooked tail. Was that the one that laid on it? Which one? I only had two.

Lois: What were your cats doing at the Merc?

Karen: Wendy lived with us for a while.

Joyce: Plus, our cats used to come. They had a ladder going out one of the back windows of the upstairs part of the Merc. I had a male cat; were they fixed?

Karen: No, they must not have been.

Joyce: They would go up that ladder and stay for two weeks in her upstairs.

Wendy: Free meals.

Joyce: I would see them coming down that ladder and say, "That's where you've been."

Karen: I don't remember that.

Joyce: I had Amos and Andy. It was Amos that would come up and hang out in your upstairs in the Merc.

Sally: I have a question to ask Karen. So, you're the one who painted the Merc red and put the lettering up?

Karen: I'm pretty sure all four of us worked on that, on the red, yes.

Lois: That's a lot of painting.

Karen: It is a lot, but we hired Mary McFarland's grandsons, granddaughter Melanie, and then there was another young person over there.

Joyce: With the curly hair.

Karen: Who?

Joyce: It was a friend of their family, and he just showed up here about eight years ago.

Karen: What was his name?

Joyce: With the curly hair, a nice looking young kid. Gosh, what was his name, you guys? We will all remember it.

Karen: Well anyway, the kids helped us, and we paid them to paint it.

Lois: Who had the big ladders? That's high up there.

Karen: Yes. I did some painting, and then John rigged up a ladder to get at the very top from the back. It's a different back now, but there was a peaked roof on kind of an addition, so he put a ladder up to get to the very top of the store. I didn't do it.

Lois: Did you ever paint the metal roof?

Karen: No.

Sally: So, you also made the letters Polebridge Merc?

Karen: Yes.

Lois: How did you decide on the name Polebridge Mercantile?

Karen: Well, I got that inspiration from the West Glacier Merc. I had never seen a mercantile before. I mean, even in the backwoods of Oregon they were called stores, not even convenience stores, but I thought mercantile was a good name for a store like that.

Lois: You mentioned that Wally Nolan had an account at the store, that he was in arrears and you traded him replacing the log foundation on the mother cabin.

Karen: He shored up that cabin pretty well, and it worked out almost to the penny to what he owed. It was pretty interesting.

Lois: And you mentioned replacing the three-hole outhouse with a pit toilet, with a donation box.

Karen: Yes. Well, for a while. I think we had to get rid of that pit toilet. That was primarily for the mother cabin, and then it would have been primarily for the saloon, but we had to have good facilities, so we allowed some people to use our bathrooms. But it got to be a steady parade, so we got an outhouse. It seems to me we might have had two outhouses for a while, a men's and women's, and that was not good environmentally, so four or five years after I had been there I bought just a big septic tank, and I would have it pumped every year. I had a donation box that said, "If you appreciate the convenience, put in 50 cents," or something. And it would come out just about the right amount. I can't remember how much it was—\$150 or something for them to drive up and pump it, but it usually came out just right.

Lois: This was in the current location, back by the icehouse?

Karen: Yes, down the slope a little bit, but there never was any pollution because it was all contained.

Lois: In a vault. Yes, good idea.

Valerie: Was the icehouse ever used?

Karen: Oh yes.

Valerie: Or was it used prior to you purchasing the store?

Karen: We didn't use it. I don't know if Oien's did, but certainly Ted Ross did.

Wendy: But you used it for your pottery studio?

Karen: Well yes, I used it to live in, and we rented it. We used it, but not for ice. We didn't put up ice. That's what Valerie was asking. I don't know about Oiens. They are really mysterious, and I don't know anybody that knows them or knew them. Mary McFarland had some wild tales about them, and I don't think I've ever seen any pictures of them.

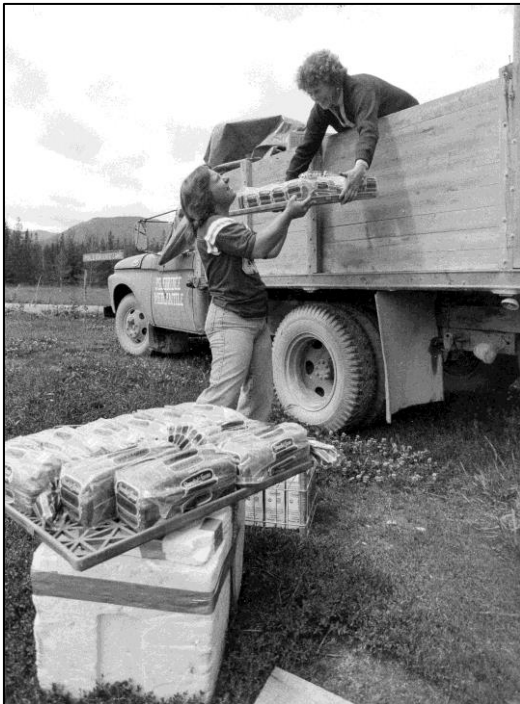
Lois: Mary McFarland is one of the interviews that Cindy Mish did. I saw that she interviewed her. You said one time that taking that addition off helped save the store in the 1995 flood. How so?

Karen: Well, taking it off was a result of the foundation. It's the foundation that saved the store. It would have just *slurp*, because there was water, oh 10 inches up on the store.

Lois: How often did you go to town for supplies?

Karen: In a busy time, I would take the big truck once a week and get everything. I don't know what day I did that, Tuesday maybe. No, that was a mail day, Monday or Wednesday.

Joyce: Monday the saloon was closed, so maybe you did it on Monday.



Paula Dziuk helps Karen unload the Merc truck on town shopping day.

Karen: Yes, it must have been on Monday. Then on Thursday, because that wasn't a mail day, I would go just to Columbia Falls and meet up with the bread man and the milkman, and I would usually fill up the Volkswagen. It was a Volkswagen square-back. I would fill that all the way with bread, milk, and ice cream.

Lois: What were the best sellers? What did you sell the most of? What kind of turnover?

Karen: Beer. [Chuckles]

Wendy: Peanuts. You sold a lot of peanuts.

Karen: A lot of peanuts.

Wendy: And cheese.

Joyce: Hershey Bars with almonds.

Karen: No, that was me. I ate all those. [Chuckles]

Joyce: You and John O'Hara. [Laughs]

Lois: Someone said there was a barrel of peanuts inside the door?

Karen: Right, yes. It was a big barrel, but a lot of it was boxes just to fill it up. We would have one big 30-pound bag of peanuts, and people would just scoop them up.

Lois: Scoop them into bags?

Karen: Yes, and then we would weigh them.

Lois: What kind of cheese was the cheese?

Karen: It was just washed curd, which is a real simple cheese before it begins to age. They didn't put it away. They just shaped it into a great big—I can't tell you if it was a 20 or a 25-pound wheel—but it was a real beautiful classic yellow cheese.

Lois: With the rind on the outside?

Karen: Yes.

Lois: Where did you buy it?

Karen: I got it at Equity Supply for many years, and then they weren't able to get it, and they made it in Ronan at a dairy there. I would make trips down there and just get a whole truckload. Then if I ran out, I would call somebody who was coming from someplace else and have them pick it up. Then they quit making it, and all I could get were big 20-pound squares of cheese, so we would cut it into various size packages and wrap it up and put it on the wheel.

Lois: You would just sell it by the wedge?

Karen: By the pie shape, yes. Did you see it? It's like a little guillotine.

Joyce: It's up on top of the shelf.

Sally: Is it still there?

Joyce: It is still there.

Sally: Oh, that's interesting.

Joyce: You can see it. When you walk in the front door, up to the left on top.

Karen: Yes, it's really a classic.

Lois: I knew it had to be popular, because every single person we've interviewed has mentioned the cheese wheel.

Karen: For Frank Evans it wasn't cheese, it was a binder.

Lois: A binder?

Joyce: He called it a binder?

Lois: Oh, it would bind you. How about candy? All the kids talk about coming for candy.

Karen: We had some glass jars with various penny candy, and of course kids, it doesn't take much to impress them. It wasn't a huge array or anything, but it was fun for them, and we had Tootsie Rolls and jawbreakers.

Lois: Well, the Evans kids and the Edwards kids, people we've interviewed so far, they all mentioned, "We went there for candy."

Joyce: Even my kids. They would get a brown bag filled with candy. I remember that candy very well.

Valerie: I have a question about things that you sold in the store. I don't know if my memory is correct or not, but did you ever sell fishing licenses in there?

Karen: Oh yes.

Valerie: I thought I bought one there one time. How did that work?

Karen: Fishing and hunting licenses. We sold them, filled them out. That was fine. We got 25 cents or something for handling it for the Fish & Game in those days. Then Chrys lost that because she couldn't get bonded. I don't know why. The funny thing is, I can't think of the bonding company now, but it's a big one, that she sent her application in to was where Jerry's DeSanto's nephew Sam worked until he retired in Des Moines, Iowa. Now why they didn't like Chris, I don't know.

Another thing that's kind of interesting, when we decided to have a saloon we went to the liquor board to find out the hoops you jump through. One thing, you had to let your neighbors know what you were intending to do, and then you had to have a petition, in case people didn't think that was a good idea. There were two people who would not sign it and didn't want to have it. One was Rod something-or-other who was a tree guy for the Forest Service, a real nice guy. The other one was Jerry DeSanto. He didn't think we should popularize the place with it.

Valerie: Could I say something about that?

Karen: You didn't sign it either?

Valerie: Well, I understand why he did that. One of the reasons why he did that, he used to tell his help—and Robin would be one of them—he would say, "I just don't think it's a good idea to go over there to that saloon and have a beer with those people, because what if you ever have to write them a ticket?"

Karen: [Laughs] Really?

Valerie: Yes, I know he said that. Then after a while he saw that Robin wouldn't quit going over there, so he decided he would just go over there with him.

Sally: Yes, because he hung out with us over there.

Karen: Well, after he started hanging out in the kitchen with me.

Valerie: For a while Robin took some heat for coming over there to have beer, and he just said, "I'm not listening to that. I'm going to go over there and have a beer anyhow."

Lois: So, to sell a six-pack in the Merc was okay, but not in a saloon?

Karen: Oh yes.

Valerie: It was fraternizing with the civilians.

Karen: Well, it does get complicated.

Valerie: It does get complicated when you are friends with your neighbors.

Karen: Too good of friends, yes.

Lois: And you did all your own bookkeeping?

Karen: Yes.

Lois: Did you have to then keep separate books for business purposes for the Merc and for the saloon?

Karen: No. I think I just threw that all together.

Lois: Just one Schedule C for the whole business when you did your taxes?

Karen: Whatever that is, business taxes, yes. I just lumped everything altogether. I'm sure I couldn't get away with any of that anymore.

Lois: It sounds complex to me, plus the post office, and I've worked at a post office, so I know.

Karen: Well, it was not as complicated as it is now. It was quite simple. And it was a Class 4, and you didn't have to be so up-to-date on everything in a Class 4. Well, if we sent anything to Canada you had to know what you were doing, but that was about the most complicated thing we did.

Lois: One of our questions was Christmas time, I know how bad a post office gets at Christmas. Did you accept packages?

Karen: We used to accept packages from the UPS, put stamps on them and send them up north.

Lois: The Star Route, huh?

Karen: Yes. Because the UPS guy didn't want to drive up to Moose City.

Lois: Do you blame him?

Karen: No, I thought it made perfect sense. It saved him a lot of money. I don't think they do that anymore, but that was kind of fun.

Wendy: Who was that mean mail driver?

Sally: Dingo.

Lois: Ben Ringo.

Wendy: Because the guy before him...

Karen: Virgil [Lane].

Wendy: Virgil Lane would haul Mathison's milk to people, and then Dingo wouldn't do that anymore.

Karen: No, he wouldn't do anything for anybody.

Wendy: Like Becky does now, not Becky, who is the mail carrier?

Karen: Karin [Colby Craver].

Wendy: She will bring something to somebody for free, but Dingo wouldn't.

Sally: Which shouldn't be on public record.

Karen: It's the truth.

Sally: Becky did everything for everybody.

Karen: Becky was a saint.

Sally: Yes, Becky would do anything you asked her to do.

Karen: Well, not everyone. Joe Bush had some tales about Becky that were not true.

Sally: Oh, we know. He had a lot of tales that weren't true, right? [Laughs]

Karen: Right.

Lois: Did you have a garden? Did you have time to do a garden, plant flowers, any of that kind of stuff?

Sally: You grew lettuce.

Karen: I grew lettuce for the saloon. I did a couple of years try to grow a garden. One was wonderful, and it was sunny all day and it rained all night, so I didn't have to worry much about it. But then I had one and the birds or the deer or something got in and ate it just the day before it should have been harvested. I think I kind of gave up on it.

Lois: How was the road when you were having to make the trips once a week?

Karen: It was variable.

Lois: I know what the road was like in the mid-1980s.

Karen: Yes, it was like that, only it hadn't been smoothed out in some of those places, like where Wendy was down right at the Camas Creek and they made it safer and wider and better. And then down at Fool Hen Hill, or just above Great Northern Flats or wherever, they really shaved that down.

Lois: Ellen Horowitz talks about getting caught in a mudslide at Fool Hen Hill.

Karen: Oh yes, it was awful. And sometimes it was not so awful.

Wendy: There weren't guardrails.

Sally: No, I was so glad when they put guardrails in there. I actually went over the edge there.

Karen: Oh Sally.

Sally: Yes, a very scary experience there back in the 1970s.

Karen: Yes, on an icy day.

Sally: No, it was a rainy day.

Joyce: I remember. I was just going to say that.

Sally: And the brakes locked up and I just slid into that and one of my wheels went over the edge, and my knees were just knocking. I put it in reverse and floored it, and my truck flew back. Saved my life. And you know what? I was babysitting for one of the guys that worked at the ranger station. He had a little girl and a little boy, and they were in the truck with me.

Lois: Oh dear.

Sally: They were in the front seat of the truck with me, and we probably didn't even wear seatbelts in those days. You remember that man that worked at the ranger station? He was short, kind of plump, was divorced. He had two little kids. The little kids were like four and six. They were very small, and I babysat for those kids.

Karen: I do remember.

Sally: I can picture him exactly, but I can't think of his name.

Lois: One of the things that Karen gave me last time was a couple of things that will become artifacts for a one-day museum up here. One was a card with a list of registered voters in the Polebridge precinct in 1938. Another was the receipt book that she kept for post office box rent. I will bring it over so y'all can see all the names. I typed them up so we aren't always handling it, you know. There was a Ladenburg, but it was a Charles Ladenburg. Who was Charles Ladenburg?

**REGISTERED VOTERS IN
NORTHFORK PRECINCT NO. 22**

REG. NO.	NAME AND ADDRESS
9837	Adair Martha E. Polebridge
9838	Adair W L Polebridge
9839	Beemis Jesse Polebridge
9840	Beemis Mary A Polebridge
3893	Bowman Gerelda I Polebridge
3894	Bowman Murray C Polebridge
9841	Brill M F Trail Creek
9842	Covey Henry Polebridge
9843	Fisher Joe Polebridge
9845	Holcomb Lena Polebridge
9844	Holcomb Harry Polebridge
7730	LeMasters Jess E Polebridge
4527	Lorence Frank S Trail Creek
9846	Maes Ben Belton
10931	Monahan B J Trail Creek
10930	Olson Andrew J Trail Creek
9849	Perrault John F Polebridge
9848	Perrault Rose Evearts Polebridge
9847	Peterson G E Trail Creek
9853	Peterson Marie M Trail Creek
9851	Peterson T J Trail Creek
9852	Price Frances Trail Creek
9850	Price J E Trail Creek
9854	Thayer R L Polebridge
9855	Waters C A Trail Creek
4427	Walsh Harriet Belton
4425	Walsh John J Belton

Karen: You know, I don't know. Who was Charles?

Sally: I'm pretty sure that was one of his brothers.

Karen: He had a lot of brothers. Who was the guy that had the noose around his neck at your wedding, at the parties? That was the brother.

Joyce: That was John.

Karen: No, John was a big tall handsome guy.

Wendy: I still have those slides, but I don't remember.

Joyce: A Ladenburg?

Wendy: I remember that. He took a noose and put it around Ricky's neck and then held in straight. There's a picture of it.

Karen: He's the one that walked out on Lasalle Road and got run over not long after that.

Sally: He had that farm right there, the Ladenburg farm right there on Lasalle.

Karen: But that wasn't Charles, I don't think.

Lois: John Frederick has donated this [looking at a mailbox front]. He thought it was box 1, but this is box 4. Who had box 4? [The North Fork Preservation Association]

Joyce: Oh, I wish I had mine.

Sally: I have mine.

Karen: I don't know, I thought John had box 1.

Lois: He did, so I don't know where box 4 came from.

Sally: I've got mine. Mine was box 24, and I still have mine. It's sitting on my desk.

Joyce: Who passed them out?

Valerie: I don't remember my box number.

Karen: It was after I was there, so I didn't get one.

Lois: This is the receipt book.

Karen: Do they have box numbers on them?

Lois: You didn't put the numbers, and it wasn't until later that you started stamping the receipts. This is from the store, whenever she would rent a box. It has the names of the people who rented the boxes. It does not give the box number, but it has the name.

Karen: You did print that out.

Lois: I did print it out.

Karen: Good.

Lois: This is a map that shows Mount Adair and Adair Ridge up along Logging Lake. It was named for them. That's just for the period of 1976 to 1980, right in there, so there are other ones somewhere.

Wendy: Who was Harriet Belton Walsh?

Lois: Harriet Walsh was married to Johnny Walsh out on the prairie. They had the first post office.

Sally: Dick Walsh's brother.

Lois: Much older brother.

Karen: Brother? Not his dad?

Lois: No, it was his brother.

Wendy: So then Dick got the land when his brother died or something? How did that happen? He's not even on here.

Lois: I know that story because we interviewed Pat Walsh.

Wendy: Wendy Right-on?

Karen: Is that who it is, Right-on?

Wendy: We had checks made. We weren't married, so R-I-G-H-T [she was Wendy Rightmere] and then Rick Upton O-N, so we were Right-ons.

Sally: Yes, I remember when you were called that.

Karen: Or Upmyer.

Wendy: Upmyer.

Joyce: Gerelda and Murray Bowman, Charlotte married a Bowman.

Lois: She married Sonny Bowman. His name was Hugh, I believe. That could be his father, though. His father bought all that land in the 1930s originally, and then it passed down to Sonny, and then when he died some of it went to his sister, which is the land just south of us that's now for sale, that 130 acres. Did you have to get food handler permits for your people?

Karen: No.

Lois: In Ohio we did. We had to have a chest X-ray and TB tests to handle food.

Karen: No.

Lois: You just hired these disreputable locals? [Laughs]

Karen: I did, and I didn't even put up signs that said you have to wash your hands after you go the bathroom.

Joyce: Well, we never got inspected.

Karen: We did too. Yes, we did.

Joyce: When I was there they never came in.

Karen: We did occasionally, but I hired people intelligent enough to know what they were doing. Now that sign always makes me crazy.

Joyce: No food on the ground.

Wendy: No cats in the peanuts.

Karen: No stinky little piss pants in the marshmallows.

Joyce: What? [Laughs]

Lois: What was that?

Karen: Andrew—whining screaming crying—this big. Wendy brings him up and puts him in the cart that's full of marshmallows. [Laughs] Wheeling him around trying to get him to shut-up.

Wendy: I don't remember that.

Joyce: He was the cryingest baby I've ever been around in my life.

Sally: He had colic, didn't he?

Wendy: Yes, I guess that's what it was.

Joyce: For like three years! [Laughs]

Karen: He had a nervous mother.

Sally: Yes, that's what it was.

Joyce: We love Andrew. He is the greatest.

Sally: And amazing how he turned out, isn't it?

Wendy: He's not crying anymore.

Sally: He's like the most awesome guy.

Wendy: Whatever happened to those carts, I wonder? I never see them in there anymore.

Karen: I don't know.

Lois: What carts?

Wendy: They were old carts you could push around to buy groceries in the Merc.

Karen: Old grocery carts.

Joyce: When it was a mercantile, it really was a mercantile. We did our grocery-shopping in there, some of it.

Wendy: Karen had hamburger when you ran out.

Karen: Well, I had everything you needed.

Joyce: Bread.

Lois: How many propane refrigerators and freezers did you have?

Karen: Well, we had one freezer, but it was just a malfunctioning refrigerator, but when you figure that out . . .

Lois: You said you had ice cream.

Karen: Oh, that was in the top in the freezer compartment. I had 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9—nine refrigerators, anyway.

Lois: How big was your propane tank?

Karen: Oh, 1,000 gallons.

Wendy: But they were shut off in the winter.

Lois: Who did you buy propane from? Who was your provider in those days?

Karen: LP Gas.

Joyce: They were the only ones that would come up.

Karen: I think they might have been the only ones in the valley, possibly.

Valerie: I can remember one time when our old Servel that came from North Dakota, off a farm in North Dakota, wouldn't start when we first got it, and I remember Robin coming over and trying to get the expert—you—to help him with starting that dumb thing.

Karen: Did I do it, or did I just tell him how?

Valerie: Yes, you told him what to do, and it ran for 30 more years until we gave it to somebody. Those old Servels worked really well, but I remember you working on your own refrigerators quite a bit. And I remember one of the things you said was you had to turn it upside down. I thought how did you turn those upside down by yourself?

Karen: Well, I tried to get somebody to do it, but that was kind of the old husband's tale that you had to do that. If you really maintained them, kept them clean and kept them level, they functioned. So, I didn't have to turn very many of them upside down, once I figured that out.

Lois: Did you ever have any problems with them leaking?

Valerie: I thought we used to take them for a ride in the truck so they would bounce up and down on the road.

Karen: Yes, they would get a bubble in the refrigerant, and that would plug them up, kind of.

Sally: We took ours for a ride. Loaded it up in the pick-up truck and bounced it up and down the North Fork and brought it back, and it worked.

Karen: A lot of it might be a little woo-woo New Age, you know. [Chuckles]

Lois: Well, that was an old-time refrigerant too. Did you have any problem with leaks?

Karen: No. Well, not that I can think of.

Wendy: You had to get the thing loaded and unloaded.

Karen: Oh, the refrigerant, once that's gone its curtains. I think you can have them recharged, but they are very, very expensive. It's ammonia, you know. I don't know if you can even have that done anymore. But that doesn't happen, very seldom.

Sally: They did a recall on them. They would pay you \$50 to turn in your Servel.

Karen: Yes, they did that.

Sally: And a lot of people still have them. I think Bill [Brown] next door to me still has his old one.

Valerie: How did you learn to work on these refrigerators? That sounds kind of dangerous to me.

Karen: Well, it's dangerous if you're stupid. I talked to Pete Peterson who ran LP Gas, and I said, "I can't load them up in a truck and bring them down to you every time they malfunction, because they do stop from time to time." He said, "Well they are very simple. They need to be level, and they need to be clean, and they'll work."

Lois: By clean you mean defrosted?

Karen: No. That was something you had to do, and if it were 100 degrees, like the first 4th of July when we were there, they're not going to work. You just have to accept that. I don't know what brilliant person thought of this the first 4th of July when it was 100 degrees; we just went up Red Meadow to where there was snow.

Joyce: Hay Creek.

Karen: Hay Creek.

Joyce: You could also get some at Red Meadow. We did for the saloon.

Karen: In these last couple of years?

Joyce: No, with you guys.

Wendy: That was John Gray's idea, because he could go up there and drink beer.

Karen: I don't think so. He tried.

Valerie: I remember you telling Robin and Tom Riemer to take the old Datsun pick-up up to Red Meadow and get some snow. I do remember that. That was the 4th of July?

Karen: Probably. Yes, I'm sure it was. There would be so many people wanting cold beer that you couldn't keep it in the refrigerators. It was just over capacity for them, but it was only once a year, and it was early so you could get snow, and so that worked.

Wendy: And the "so many people" were like what, 40?

Karen: No, Wendy.

Wendy: Was there less than 40?

Sally: Or was it 4,000 like there is today?

Karen: Not 4,000. There never were that many, but we had some pretty big turnouts.

Wendy: I think I've got a picture of that. One of the first ones.

Karen: The first 4th of July when it was so hot, I remember Dan O'Brien coming into the kitchen. We were all just like this, probably drinking beer at that point. He came into

the kitchen and fanned out \$1,000 in twenty-dollar bills. That's what we had taken in, and that was a huge day in our case.

Joyce: That's huge.

Karen: And that was just the store. Yes, it was huge.

Joyce: So that means a lot of people went up there for the 4th of July.

Karen: Lots and lots of locals.

Wendy: I don't remember that.

Karen: Well, maybe you were drunk.

Wendy: Well, that could have been. I don't know which parade this is, but there were no spectators.

Karen: Well, we didn't have a parade. We didn't even have a saloon the first 4th of July.

Wendy: Here's Doug Chadwick at a Halloween party. I shouldn't probably let that one out. How about this one of John Gray at a Halloween party?

Karen: That one is in drag?

Lois: Oh dear.

Wendy: What year was that?

Joyce: Once we start looking at pictures . . .

Lois: It'll be over.

Karen: I can't tell you, but that's a different 4th of July parade, isn't it?

Lois: There's no spectators.

Wendy: There never was when we had the parades.

Lois: The origin of all the display cases in there, do those date from the Adair period or were they added to?

Karen: We got one. Dan and Carol got one, the watch case that I think was by the cash register. But the big one had always been there, and that was about all. I don't know what's in there now.

Lois: Now you see a lot of earrings and jewelry and things like that. Did you sell those kinds of things, too?

Karen: Some kinds of things, but not an awful lot.

Lois: Local artists?

Karen: We had Ruth Sondreson's moose drop earrings. We had some of Helen Ramon's prints.

Wendy: The cookbook, you sold the cookbook.

Karen: Yes, we sold the cookbook.

Lois: Cecily McNeil's cookbook that came out in 1971.

Karen: That's another reason I was smitten by this store, was I really liked that cookbook. I used it a lot. She must have put it out in the mid-60s.

Lois: In 1971.

Karen: We have to go back to the propane, because somebody has the nasty idea that I blew myself up lighting a refrigerator, but that's not the truth.

Lois: Set the record straight here. Yes, I read that story.

Karen: I was working on a refrigerator. Pete at the LP Gas place was telling me how to do this without bringing them down to him, how to maintain them. He said, "You've got to keep them clean. The flue will soot up." He said, "If you've got a really good vacuum cleaner you can ream them out and then vacuum them out, or you can take a propane tank, because they've got a whole lot of pressure, and just blow them out. But you've got to be kind of careful." He said, "Now you probably know enough to really get yourself in trouble." Well, that's exactly what I did, because I had another lit refrigerator right next to the one I was cleaning out, and that's the one that blew from the propane that I was cleaning it out with. It was completely stupid.

Lois: But it was clean.

Karen: It was clean.

Joyce: The explosion was heard around the meadow.

Karen: Tommy from Chicago was on the telephone. He didn't even know what was going on. But I got a garbage can and turned the water on and filled it up and got in it, because I was burned on my legs and arms, not just my face, and sent for Robin. Robin said, "You'd better go to the hospital." Then he said he lost another handful of hair from that one.

Valerie: Yes, he told me about it.

Karen: It was pretty scary. He was such a valuable guy to have around. He was the go-to guy for everything.

Joyce: He took care of my rooster. [Laughs]

Valerie: Don't you remember, Joyce, he wasn't a veterinarian, he was a veteran. I always got that confused.

Karen: Okay, so I was not lighting my refrigerator when I got burned up.

Sally: But you still got burned.

Karen: Oh yes, I was pretty badly burned.

Lois: What year was that, do you remember?

Karen: It was the year of my 30th class reunion. I graduated in 1959. It was the year after the 1988 fire, so it had to be 1989, because Sam and Maggie were there and they could work the saloon.

Lois: You mentioned that the back of the Merc is different now. When was the kitchen expanded?

Karen: I think Ben Rover did that. I don't know if they had a kitchen in there before.

Wendy: Are you talking about the bakery kitchen? I think that's what Lois is asking.

Lois: I've been told that the building is longer now than it used to be.

Karen: Oh yes.

Wendy: That wasn't on there.

Karen: No, that was Dan Kaufman.

Sally: Yes, Dan. Did he extend the back porch, like made an entrance porch off of there?

Karen: In the back, yes. He expanded that a lot. I can't tell you what all he did to it.

Sally: The whole kitchen?

Lois: You can see how stubby the building is there compared to how far it goes out now, and it has the porch upstairs with the railing around it.

Wendy: Yes, that was never there.

Karen: No, that wasn't there. And you can't see what's behind, but you can kind of see the shadow, that there's a little addition back there. It's small, about half the size. And that was a bathroom and a kitchen, and that was added I think by Ben Rover.

Lois: So, there was indoor plumbing? There is a bathroom in there now.

Sally: Karen used to let us take showers back there.

Karen: I charged you.

Wendy: I never paid.

Karen: Well, you really needed it.

Wendy: Did I? I see.

Sally: You used to tell me that I was using too much water. Cut it short. You're using too much water.

Wendy: She threw a spatula at me at the saloon one time. [Chuckles] Full of grease.

Joyce: She just swore at me. She didn't throw anything. [Laughs] We love you.

Sally: You let my sister Jane do her baby diapers back there in your washing machine, too.

Karen: God, that was nice of me. [Laughs]

Sally: It sure was! She had an emergency, when she was running out of diapers.

Lois: What do you know about all of the old abandoned farm machinery that's all over that part of Polebridge?

Karen: Well, I'll tell you, Ben Rover planted and harvested wheat one year. I know that. At least that's the legend, and the season is never long enough or dry enough or hot enough to do that, but he was able to do that.

Lois: On the road to the Park, where Will has the Nature Trail now, there's dead machinery out there. There's machinery between the Merc and John Frederick's, your place Wendy.

Wendy: Actually, that's my machinery. I own Lot #4, so I just left it there. Ted Ross's hay bailer, or whoever it was left it there. Ted told me that he left it there when he subdivided the meadow. He just left it there, and I've just left it there since then.

Lois: It's very scenic.

Wendy: And one half of a piece is on John Frederick's. Ted left it there before he subdivided, and then he subdivided and one half a piece of farm machinery is on John's place. I think it's the old orange Case. And Grimaldi always hated it. He wanted me to bring it to the dump.

Lois: Well, it's probably worth something now.

Karen: That stone thing that you pull to that beat stuff down, is that still around? That was really nice.

Wendy: The drag?

Karen: It was a great big stone circular, so they roll as you pulled it. Probably a road machine.

Lois: They do use them on the road now. They have rollers, a whole series of rollers.

Karen: Well, I guess Ted Ross would be the answer.

Joyce: The stuff that's north of the slough, just north of the Nature Trail, I don't know this for sure because I wasn't around all the time, but I heard that stuff was moved in there after the fire or the flood, one or the other. Does that ring a bell to anybody?

Sally: Probably since the fire, since the fire devastated everything over there.

Joyce: Yes, that didn't just get left there.

Lois: Yes, that area burned.

Joyce: So, it was pulled there.

Wendy: It must have been all flooded, too. Maybe it moved in the flood.

Sally: Was that the flood of 1995?

Lois: That's why it's rusted.

Wendy: It wouldn't have moved north.

Sally: I heard it was moved there.

Karen: It looks junky doesn't it?

Valerie: Back to the wheat, Karen, I was looking the other day at that lot between you and John Frederick, that lot that you owned there, it doesn't look like wheat. It looks like brome grass. Did somebody plant pasture grass or something in there?

Karen: I suppose. I know Ted used to feed the elk. There are pictures of that, so he probably planted some kind of grass. I don't know what those guys did.

Joyce: Well, it used to get waist high in the summer.

Wendy: The old barn was there that burned down in the Red Bench Fire. That machinery would make more sense, because it was just to the side of it. You could see that it just got parked there, but now that Will has fenced it, I mean so many things have changed. It doesn't look like one whole big place anymore. It looks chopped up, and then the barn isn't there anymore.

Karen: There's one picture of it on fire, in flames. Did you see that in the newspaper?

Lois: Yes. And it looks like there was a corral behind the barn?

Karen: That could be, and I have no idea about it.

Sally: Deb owned horses, Deb Kaufman.

Karen: Oh sure, they had horses.

Lois: Did they have cows? Did Ted Ross have a cow?

Sally: You would think.

Joyce: I don't know, but there was a corral in front, because you let me keep my horse there when I first got my horse.

Karen: Oh, that's right. [Ted Ross had horses and a corral near the Merc.]

Wendy: And you had chickens. They had to stay in somehow. Wasn't that fenced?

Joyce: Oh no, they wandered even down to my place, and the dogs had dinner one night. That's how we met them [the Grays]. No, actually we met you before that.

Karen: I don't remember that. I remember the chickens but I don't remember . . . Oh yeah, I kind of remember that.

Wendy: 14 chickens my dogs did in.

Karen: Did we eat them?

Joyce: I don't remember.

Sally: No, her dogs did.

Joyce: No, they just killed, unfortunately.

Lois: Did Mid Connelly ever work for you?

Karen: No.

Lois: I heard that she worked at the saloon, or she was involved in the saloon.

Karen: Well, she was involved with Heather.

Lois: When Heather had the saloon?

Sally: Yes, she was with Heather.

Karen: Is this a secret?

Wendy: No. I don't think it's a secret.

Sally: Not anymore.

Wendy: Yes, I think everybody knows her involvement with the saloon.

Karen: I know that Heather paid me off early, and the money had come from Mid. Mid had told her that she got her settlement or insurance or something, and she had this money and she could bail Heather out and then just take payments without interest. She would loan her the money without interest. That was the deal.

Lois: Is this because she was close to Dan Kaufman or something?

Joyce: She became very attached to Heather's children.

Valerie: Yes, it was the children. It was the boys.

Karen: Well, and she was lonesome.

Lois: It was after her husband died.

Joyce: She also was very ill for about four years during that time.

Karen: Really? Oh, that's too bad.

Joyce: She wasn't feeling well and was in and out of the hospital, I think. But yes, she got real attached to Heather's children.

Karen: I don't have any idea how much Heather paid her back, if any. How bad did she get stiffed, do we know?

Joyce: She got paid off when the Reiswigs and the O'Haras bought everything.

Karen: Oh good. Oh, that was part of Heather's cost. Well, that was good, so Heather was insisting on that.

Joyce: No, Mid was. Mid ended up having to get a lawyer.

Lois: You talked about a guy named Bob Evans who worked up at the border. I didn't know that name. This was before Joe Lang was there?

Karen: Yes. He was there, yes. I don't know Joe very well.

Lois: Was he on the Canadian side or the American side?

Karen: He was American.

Lois: That's a whole other story, the story of the border up there.

Karen: Yes, it is.

Lois: Because for years there was only a Canadian, and he took care of the Canadian side and he took care of the American side on contract. Then he quit and went away, and then he came back, and then he committed suicide and his wife was in a bad situation.

Karen: What was his name?

Joyce: What year are you in right now?

Karen: The 1930s?

Lois: No, much later than that. The late 1940s or early 1950s. Ethel "Toots" Stevens and her husband Phil worked at Kintla Ranch. I always thought he was the border guy, but then I found out it wasn't; it was a guy named Stevenson, and he committed suicide like in the late 1950s. Then the border was closed, and the only way I know that is when you look at the old NFIA minutes from 1966-1968, they are saying, "We need to get that border opened again." They started a petition to reopen the border, but after he died there was nobody there. In fact, it was Madge Terrian who was lobbying, because they wanted to be able to get their Canadian hunting licenses and things that they did there. I'd like to build a list of who the different border agents were.

Karen: That would be fun, yes.

Lois: In the early day there was a guy named O'Brien who was a Canadian, and he would come down to Polebridge to do his shopping and stuff, because that was closer for him. That was in the 1920s. That was really early, but I don't know where those records are going to be.

Karen: Well, the border patrol, the customs and immigration.

Sally: Yes, they would have a record. I remember John Senger. Do you remember him?

Valerie: Yes, I do, very well.

Lois: What years would that have been?

Valerie: Early 1980s maybe, or late 1970s.

Lois: So, when was Evans there, Bob Evans?

Joyce: That name, I don't even remember Bob Evans.

Karen: Well, he was there in 1975, before Senger.

Joyce: We didn't come until 1976.

Sally: He was definitely before the Sengers.

Lois: Okay, so Stevenson was early. And Joe Lang wasn't until like 1990 or so.

Karen: Oh Lungs, I remember.

Lois: Joe and Joan. The reason I'm thinking about them is I wanted to ask you, I know you were a founding member of the North Fork Preservation Association, and then you gave me some records from the Transboundary Council, which started—some early stuff happened in 1991, and actually the first meeting was in 1992. Joe Lang was involved at first, and then he bailed because you said something untoward about the land use planning and he didn't agree with that, so he took off. But it looks like Joan stayed, though, because her name is on the minutes. There's some stuff in 1993. There's a newsletter from 1994 and then nothing.

Karen: It all fell apart.

Lois: It looks like you built up a good head of steam, and you had the right people involved and everything.

Karen: It was great. Yes.

Lois: I have a newsletter that came out in the fall of 1992 and one in 1994, but none in between. Were there other newsletters?

Karen: No, I think everything is in there, everything that there was. You know, we just got to a point and the next step was mapping, or equal definitions of what we had in the area that we were concerned about, and that never got done. Nobody ever pushed forward.

Lois: There was a draft plan for the different sections of the river.

Karen: Yes, and then it was going to be seriously mapped, and then defining . . .

Lois: What was appropriate for each section.

Karen: Yes.

Lois: I notice that Dave Hadden was involved, and I wondered if that might have been some of the impetus behind what is today Headwaters Montana.

Karen: Could be, yes.

Lois: Because it's the same kind of mission, as we would say.

Karen: Well, it was a coal mine that was threatening everything.

Lois: I see stuff as early as 1974 that kind of led to formation of the Preservation Association, which was in 1982. But then the Transboundary thing is 1991-1992, which was after Ladenburg's gas well. There's a whole history of the environmental movement.

Karen: A lot of fits and starts.

Lois: There would be a threat, and then everybody would respond.

Karen: Well, it was supposed to be based on science. We weren't going to have any emotions. It was just going to be what it is and what it should be.

Lois: It was focused primarily on the river. Is that true? Threats to the river from upstream?

Karen: I thought it was just a whole area, maybe Flathead Lake, because that's where it all drains into. I can't tell you. Isn't there is a mission statement?

Lois: Yes, there is.

Karen: I was the typist and the cook.

Lois: Yes, but you wrote a beautiful letter to Jane Fonda. [Laughs]

Karen: Did I? What did it say?

Valerie: Was that when you were cooking down at their ranch?

Karen: I don't know.

Lois: The letter came back. It never got to her, which is the only reason we have it. She mailed it, and then it came back with a stamp on it.

Sally: Jane Fonda never got to read it?

Lois: Saying they would like to get her and Ted Turner behind this. It's funny, there was an article in the *Whitefish Pilot* about famous Hollywood people who have land in Montana. There's a big page with all their pictures, Kiefer Sutherland and all these people, and I guess you may have written to the others, too. The only one that came back was Jane Fonda.

Valerie: I remember going to a science workshop for a weekend down at the Ted Turner ranch, and you were cooking at the time.

Karen: Yes, I was down there.

Valerie: Is that how you decided to write to her?

Karen: I think so, because she was really environmentally involved.

Valerie: She would stop in and say hi to the teachers. Yes, I was thinking that might be why you chose her.

Karen: Well, I think I thought that she was really open.

Valerie: She is, she was. Because I know some of the high school kids would approach her, too, and say, “We’ve got a fundraiser—we want to go to Washington, D.C.,” or whatever, and she would send them, “Here’s something I wore in a movie and you can auction that.” She was approachable.

Lois: I noticed that Rosalind Yanishevski was also one of your advisors. She had her PhD in biology or whatever. When did Rosalind pass away?

Karen: Ten years ago?

Joyce: About 12 years ago, 10 to 12 years ago.

Lois: That’s where the Ulrichsens [Kevin and Beth] are now. They have her old place.

Joyce: Yes.

Lois: I’ve heard John talk about her, but I never met her, so I don’t know anything about her.

Karen: She was a great gal. She and my mom were real tight.

Joyce: Her mother was a professor, not at Smith College, but there’s a private college right next to Smith—the name escapes me—but it’s in the U-Mass/Smith College area.

Lois: Tell me some of your memories of Hazen and Ruth Lawson. You remember his jeep and his horse and being in the parade.

Joyce: His horse was Sally’s horse.

Karen: He rode your horse?

Sally: He rode my horse, yes. He loved Sierra.

Lois: He just sat so proud in that saddle, so straight coming down the road.

Karen: They were dear folks.

Sally: They were like some of my favorite people on the North Fork.

Karen: Real gentle, kind.

Sally: Very kind; kind and sweet people.

Karen: They traded their house one time. I think I told you this, but they were going to go work at Plentywood, or where did he go to teach school? There was somebody there

that was going to go to where Hazen was? And they traded houses without looking. They just said well, we need a house there and we need a house there.

Sally: They traded temporarily, you mean?

Karen: No, they just signed and swapped. It worked out fine for both of them. They had two daughters who we didn't see very often.

Sally: I never saw his kids.

Lois: I was amazed that his daughters didn't want the Square Peg property.

Sally: They wanted the money, which is what kids want.

Karen: Yes.

Lois: The Square Peg North cabin, I guess, must have been built very early. I assumed that it was built later, but I think it was the Coolidges, Dell Coolidge. Linda sent me a note and said when Dell's parents started coming up here early they stayed in the Square Peg North cabin.

Wendy: What does Square Peg North mean?

Joyce: The main cabin where Hazen lived?

Sally: No, the one he always rented out.

Karen: Wouldn't John Frederick know?

Wendy: Well yes, he owns it.

Karen: Why do I think that he moved it in there?

Lois: No, that cabin has been there a long time. And the old cabin is the original Charlie Wise homestead cabin.

Joyce: The original?

Lois: Yes, the original one. That was Charlie Wise's.

Sally: The Deck family bought from them, correct?

Karen: They were related.

Sally: Yes, Ruth was a Deck. Dan Deck was Ruth's brother.

Karen: Nice people. Really nice people.

Joyce: Denis is the son of Dan and Laura, and Ruth was Dan's sister.

Karen: His aunt.

Joyce: His aunt, okay.

Lois: Originally, in the 1940s when Hazen and Ruth came, I believe they bought a whole quarter section, 160 acres. They sold some of it to Dell Coolidge's dad. They sold some of it to the Decks.

Karen: Weren't Stonestreets part of that family?

Lois: Well, that's interesting. I don't know. They ran the Wilderness Cabins, right?

Karen: Yes, they built those, I think.

Lois: John and Trudy Stonestreet.

Sally: I caretook those for two years.

Lois: Did you really?

Sally: 1975 to 1977.

Joyce: The people from Colorado that you rented from bought it from Stonestreet?

Karen: Yes, Terry Harris.

Sally: Terry and Pam Harris. Terry and Pam Harris bought it from Stonestreets, and then I ran it for Pam and Terry for two years.

Lois: In the mid-70s?

Sally: 1975 to 1977, because I was there in 1977 when you came and told me that Elvis died. You walked down and told me that.

Valerie: Who owned it when D'Ann Wilhelm took care of it?

Sally: Ron and D'Ann kept coming over. They were friends of Harris's from Aspen.

Joyce: From Boulder.

Karen: Really? I don't remember that.

Sally: Ron and D'Ann came. Terry and Pam sent them up to look at their cabins that were for sale. Ben Rover was across the street, and Jerry and I were thinking about buying Ben Rover's.

Karen: Everybody was.

Sally: And every time he would put the sign out and I would run over and talk to him he said, "No, I changed my mind," and he pulled the sign up. So one day Ron and D'Ann pulled up; they were looking at the Harris cabins. We were sitting there eating lunch, and all of a sudden Ben Rover comes outside in the middle of the afternoon and plunks his For Sale sign in the middle of the yard. They jumped up, ran across the street and bought it that day.

Joyce: Do you remember for how much? When you know the price you will go like crazy. \$35,000.

Lois: Oh, my goodness. What year would that have been?

Sally: That would have been in 1977.

Joyce: 1977 or 1978.

Sally: Probably the summer of 1977.

Lois: Who did the Harrises sell to eventually?

Sally: They sold to the Forest Service, and then it burned in the 1988 fire.

Lois: Did the Forest Service rent those cabins or do anything with them?

Sally: No. They just left them sit there.

Lois: Really? What a shame. How many cabins were there?

Sally: Jerry and I lived in the big A-frame, and then there were five like in a half-circle, five little cabins, and they were nice little wood cabins.

Lois: And that's roughly where the Hensen store was? The store was at the intersection of the Loop Road, right?

Sally: You know where the Loop Road comes out next to the Wilderness Cabins? On the opposite side, on the north side was where that old store used to be, because I used to walk there all the time.

Karen: Kind of at the other end of an open area.

Sally: Yes, it was like a big open meadow and I used to walk in there all the time.

Lois: I now have the interview Cindy Mish did with Ben Hensen, Jr. He talks about his dad building that store and renting it, and they did that until 1929. The stock market crash was in 1929. I had heard that the store was open until 1936, but it sounds like they sold it in 1929 [maybe 1932], and that's when they went to Fontana, California. That's where he met Ann. But I have yet to find a picture of that store.

Karen: Yes, I don't know that I've ever seen a picture.

Sally: It was actually dilapidated when I lived there.

Joyce: Maybe Iola has pictures.

Lois: She might, yes.

Valerie: Because I've seen a picture of it.

Karen: Oh, have you?

Valerie: Yes, because Ann told me about the funny way it was built, and so somebody has got a picture of it.

Lois: It was built deliberately to go into competition with the Adairs, because they were mad about his prices and all that.

Valerie: Yes.

Lois: But they built it in 1920, I believe.

Sally: Who actually built it? It wasn't Ben Hensen.

Lois: It was Ben Hensen, Sr. and his wife May. They were the ones that built it and operated it, and supposedly she's the one that gave the town the name Polebridge, because they had the original post office there.

Karen: She named the post office. The post office needed a name.

Sally: What were their names again?

Lois: Hensen, Ben and May.

Sally: Ben and May, so they would have been Ann's parents?

Lois: Parent-in-laws. Their son was Ben Hensen, Jr., and he married Ann.

Sally: I knew Ben Hensen, Jr., who was married to Ann.

Karen: And Juanita, first. No, Juanita is the sister [Ben Jr.'s daughter by his first marriage].

Sally: Iola is their daughter.

Karen: They are half-sisters.

Lois: Yes. Ben Jr. and Ann had a son and a daughter, Iola and Gene.

Valerie: And Gene worked in Deer Lodge.

Lois: Right.

Karen: Juanita is the older of the three. I don't know if she has siblings with Ben as the dad.

Lois: I know that, I just have to look it up somewhere.

Wendy: Gene was here this summer. He stopped by the saloon.

Karen: He was?

Wendy: Back in September. I didn't know who it was. He's the grandson, right? Gene is the grandson. He's like my age.

Karen: No, Gene is Ann's son.

Wendy: Oh, okay, so Ben Jr.'s son.

Valerie: Gene is the one who worked at Deer Lodge.

Karen: Well Gene, who is just a hunk and a cowboy, would be 65. Just a sweetheart.

Valerie: He's the one who worked on the grounds of the prison, where the light-duty prisoners could work, the ones who were trusted and could do the farm work. There was a coyote out there that had mated with a dog and wound up with all these coyote-dog pups in a hole out there. Gene thought Ann needed a pet, so he went out and dug out some pups and got Wylie the Coyote for Ann.

Sally: I remember Wylie.

Valerie: She had Wylie for, I don't know, two or three years before some coyotes came out to the edge of the forest and yip yip yip. Wylie was a female, and they lured her out, but they didn't kill Wylie like they do some dogs, because Wylie still came back and ate for months out of the food that Ann would leave out.

Sally: She told me that. She knew that she came back.

Karen: What years were these?

Valerie: I don't know, late 1970s maybe.

Karen: I missed that entirely.

Joyce: I missed that, too.

Sally: Yes, I remember Wylie Coyote.



**Ann Hensen and friend at the 1988 Polebridge
4th of July parade**

Wendy: We all went to Ann Hensen's tea parties, but you never came.

Joyce: Well, like her Christmas in July we did every year. My kids were the entertainment. Capella's magic shows and singing.

Lois: At Vance Lodge?

Sally: Yes.

Karen: Ann was really social.

Joyce: She was very social.

Karen: She was really fun. She loved being in the store. She worked for me for a while, and then she loved being at the Ranger Station and welcoming people.

Valerie: And telling them the wrong place to fish. I used to sit there and listen to her. They would talk about where to fish, and of course I knew she knew where to fish, and I knew some of the places where she would fish, and she would tell them to go to Bowman Lake. [Laughs]

Lois: Misdirection.

Valerie: Always misdirection. [Laughs]

Sally: Does anybody remember Ben Rover had an album of pictures that he had taken when he owned the store?

Lois: No.

Sally: Well, Jerry and I lived across the street at Wilderness Cabins, and we used to go over there all the time and visit with Ben and sit around his coffee table. He would bring out these albums of pictures. The one that always stuck in my mind was a picture on the Polebridge Mercantile porch of all the wolves strung up.

Karen: Oh, my gosh!

Joyce: I've seen that one.

Sally: Do you remember that?

Karen: I've seen so many.

Sally: I heard it was in the 1950s.

Joyce: How long did he own all that stuff?

Lois: Rover was from 1943-1955.

Sally: What happened to all Ben Rover's pictures?

Karen: They might be in the archives.

Sally: He had albums of pictures.

Joyce: Well, you know he walked away and left everything. I bet Ron and D'Ann have them someplace.

Lois: You think?

Joyce: Unless she donated some of them.

Karen: They might have gone down to the Park.

Joyce: Yes, they might have donated them.

Sally: The government put a bounty on the wolves, and people were killing them and stringing them up on the Merc porch.

Wendy: I think I've seen that in pictures of the lodge at Lake McDonald, because they used to kill them over there, too, and string them up.

Lois: Back to the list. How did you keep the store clean? Did you have a vacuum cleaner? Did you hire somebody to come in and clean?

Karen: Maybe it wasn't real clean. Sally Costello was really good at dusting. She was really good.

Lois: She was Mrs. Clean, yes.

Karen: She looked like she was just kind of hanging out, but at the end of the day everything would be in perfect shape. Otherwise we didn't work too hard at it. We had a vacuum. We'd turn the generator on when we pumped gas, and then we vacuumed quickly.

Sally: I'd pull up the cobwebs. I swept mostly, swept and washed glass.

Karen: Yes, washed the cases.

Sally: Washed the cases, dusted.

Karen: I think that probably was on my list of things to do when we didn't have people in the store, and I had people behind the counter.

Sally: I think that was part of our job.

Joyce: Karen Kraft was probably a good cleaner.

Karen: She probably was.

Sally: How long were they there actually? Were they there two years?

Karen: I think more than that. It seems like it. I can't tell you.

Sally: Well, you know, Jerry worked for Bob Kraft at the sawmill.

Karen: Oh yeah.

Sally: That would have been in the early 1970s.

Lois: You mentioned one of the first things you did was to get the phone installed on the front porch. Eventually there were two phone lines. There were two phones.

Sally: Two booths.

Lois: In the barrels. [Laughs]

Joyce: The Kaufmans put the second one in, I believe. You didn't.

Sally: Neither one of them work.

Karen: They're not working?

Sally: I heard for the last six months neither one of them work.

Joyce: They don't really work regularly.

Karen: Well, people have cell phones, but can you get anything from Polebridge?

Sally: No.

Karen: Well, that's not very good that they're not working, then.

Wendy: Will Hammerquist usually lets people use his phone, and I've let people use Heather's phone at the saloon.

Karen: See, I can't stand that.

Joyce: Well, people have their smart phones, and they've got access to the Internet now.

Karen: Yes, so it's not...

Lois: So, you said what you went through to get the phone installed, to get people out of the O'Brien's living room.

Karen: Yes, because that's where the phone was for the store and people—one very important gentleman who has a place up here—would come in and walk around. Well, he didn't walk around, because you didn't have walking room, but he would stand up and gesture and talk, and it was pretty painful.

Sally: Was it Frank Evans? [Chuckles]

Karen: No, it wasn't Frank. Frank had his own phone.

Joyce: Well, a very important person—who was the very important person?

Karen: Well, there are a lot of very important people.

Wendy: [Laughs] We were all very important.

Karen: And I really had to fight with them, because they didn't want to have to come so far to do anything, and so finally I said, "Well, you know we can't live with this. You can just take them out, take our phone out."

Valerie: Weren't they from Great Falls, because Ma Bell got split up?

Karen: That's where the line went to, but there was a guy in Columbia Falls or Kalispell who could do . . . well, maybe he had to come from Great Falls.

Sally: Remember, they operated over in Great Falls.

Karen: Yes, so maybe they did have to. They didn't want to bother with us. But Mary McFarland had a phone, and Frank Evans had a phone, and there was one at the store, and of course there was one at the ranger station.

Sally: And there was one at the Wilderness Cabins. It was according to how many rings, two shorts and a long.

Karen: Was it a crank phone?

Sally: Yes.

Karen: Well, that was a different system.

Joyce: Were you on the Park crank phone system?

Karen: No. We had Ma Bell.

Wendy: People from north would call on the crank phone to want a message or to know if one of their relatives had called the store and if there were any messages.

Karen: Yes. You know, that wasn't so painful.

Wendy: We took messages.

Karen: That wasn't bad, but it was just the people who came in at any time of day or night and sat down on the couch and started kicking their shoes off.

Joyce: Was John O'Hara one of those?

Karen: No.

Joyce: [Laughs] He always stood in the barrel.

Karen: Well, that was before the barrel. That's why we got the barrel, because then people could...

Wendy: It must not have been me, because I don't even remember them having a phone. I don't remember ever calling anybody.

Sally: Me either.

Karen: Well, that was just the first year. We got it pretty soon after. I think we went a couple of weeks or a month without a telephone. Then I wrote to everybody and said, "You want a phone, you write a letter to Ma Bell." And the Forest Service did, because their people had to be connected, and the Park did, and everybody who was used to using the phone wrote to them.

Lois: And Grimaldi?

Karen: I wonder if he was here then.

Joyce: That was actually in the 1980s, when for \$50 or \$60 you could have a cable run to your house. A land line.

Karen: Oh, in the meadow.

Valerie: The Pittmans also got one.

Joyce: We said, "A phone? What do we want a phone for?" But since then everyone in the meadow that has a house there has now paid. I don't know what it costs now, but you can get a phone.

Wendy: We had them put the box out in front of #5, in front of our house. The box still sits there. I don't know if we could get it hooked up or not.

Joyce: Yes, you probably could.

Wendy: I don't want a phone.

Joyce: There used to be one in our house. I don't think there still is.

Wendy: But I don't think we paid any money for it. I don't remember paying any money for it. I think they just had to do it.

Joyce: I don't know about yours, but down where we are it was going to be \$60, and we said, "We don't want a phone that bad."

Karen: Yes, that was a lot of money.

Joyce: There's a buried line coming up the North Fork Road.

Sally: Well, it wasn't buried everywhere.

Joyce: It's got the green things that come up.

Lois: The pedestals.

Sally: No, this is going back way before.

Joyce: You're talking the cranker?

Sally: It was just a wire that went all the way.

Karen: That was the crank phone.

Sally: The horses would get stuck in that wire.

Joyce: Yes, I do remember those lines.

Sally: They were bad, because they were above the ground and they were curling and you could get caught in them so easily.

Joyce: Yes, I do remember those.

Sally: And they went all the way north, I thought, to the Canadian border.

Lois: They had one at Kintla Ranch.

Karen: Yes.

Sally: Is that the same line then?

Karen: Sure, the crank phone.

Lois: Because Larry said it was interesting that the McFarlands' ring was 2 longs and 3 shorts, 2 adults, 3 children, and theirs was 2 and 2, two parents, two kids.

Sally: When we had one at the Wilderness Cabins that was like that.

Lois: Larry's mom would call Mary McFarland. They would call down to Belton and place their order for groceries. They would serve breakfast, then they would just haul ass to Belton. He said one time his mother made it down to Belton, got the groceries, and was back in two hours or something. He said she really went down that road fast.

Karen: Why?

Lois: Because they had guests. They had the Kintla Ranch. It was a fishing camp.

Karen: Oh, that's right. I forgot that they had paid guests.

Joyce: Was that on the Inside Road then?

Lois: Yes, on the Inside Road to Belton, and Mary McFarland had to do the same thing, because they had all those guests. She would have to go down to Belton weekly. Jack McFarland said at the beginning of the season they would go to the dock there in Kalispell. You know where Brannigan's Bar is now? He said, "We would get 900 pounds of flour and 600 pounds of potatoes," and all that stuff, and they would haul it up and put it in the root cellar. But they still had to go get stuff every week at Belton.

Wendy: So was it the train that dropped it off on the dock?

Lois: Well, it was right beside the train tracks.

Sally: The picture you have is a supply wagon, isn't it?

Lois: That is the stagecoach.

Joyce: Mid Connelly's mother came in on that stagecoach when she was three years old. Mid has some great stories. I don't know if you can talk to Mid.

Lois: The reason I have that picture is that Helen Huck Ramon is standing beside the stage, as a child.

Joyce: Oh, I didn't see that picture.

Karen: Very cool.

Lois: They kept talking about the stage that came on Wednesdays, once a week or whatever. I was envisioning a stagecoach, but it was really just a horse and wagon.

Karen: Did you get most of these from Larry?

Lois: They're a combination. Some are from Esther Day. Some are out of albums that were at the Hall. All these aerials were in there. That one came from Ted Ramon. Wherever I can get them.



The North Fork stage from Belton. Helen Huck Ramon is the child standing beside the wheel. (Courtesy of Ted Ramon)

Karen: How fun.

Wendy: There's the old barn. Where they've got the apartment up there now, the garage.

Sally: Helen Huck lived to be pretty old.

Lois: She was in her 90s, 96 or 97.

Sally: What do you say Wendy?

Wendy: The garage that's behind the Merc. It's still there. Why can you see it in this photo, and this is part of the store? I don't know.

Karen: That's a funny angle.

Lois: So, you sold the Merc to Chrys in 1987, but then continued to own the saloon until 1999.

Karen: Right. We had it separated out.

Lois: I just have questions about when you opened and closed. Was it just Memorial Day to Labor Day, or did you serve on weekends the rest of the year in the saloon?

Karen: It varied. At first I think I was open every weekend all through the winter, and then when I was lazier it was just from the 15th of June to the 15th of September. Nobody came. There was nobody there, except the year after the fire, so it was 1989. We had morels [mushrooms], and it was boom and bust. It was all these locals and Asians who knew what they were doing, and it was a wild thing. May 18th is my morel day,

but they were up here before that. We were just mobbed, and we were selling Jack Daniels and steak.

Sally: This was 1989, the year after the fire?

Karen: Yes.

Sally: Well, during the fire of 1988 you made free pie and coffee and ice cream for all the fire workers.

Karen: I wanted them all to be happy and fight it out.

Sally: I worked for you all night. I kept the saloon open all night and served anybody that came in off the fire.

Karen: Did I pay you?

Sally: For free. No, we donated everything. We all donated. She made all the pies. She bought the ice cream. She served coffee and donated it all to the firefighters.

Karen: I loved them. Oh yes.

Sally: I donated my nights serving them.

Karen: Well, thank you.

Sally: Yes. Well, thank you to them.

Wendy: You fed the BLM?

Karen: We charged for it.

Wendy: But that was another income for the saloon.

Karen: Yes. We did a lot of special groups of people.

Lois: What was the BLM doing?

Karen: Surveying?

Sally: I think they were surveying. I just remember the group. We fed them for six weeks, and we made them six-course meals every night.

Lois: Wow.

Sally: That included soup, the main dish, and dessert.

Wendy: And bread, fresh bread. We baked the buns.

Karen: Well, we didn't have a lot of other people to feed, did we?

Sally: I think the biggest night that was ever in the saloon was post-Cimino's movie [Heaven's Gate], and it was 40 plates a night. Prior to that it must have been half that.

Karen: See, I missed that year. That was the year that I left, because it was all my fault that everything was falling apart, marriages and incomes and all that stuff. I was not there that summer. I didn't get to see how all the money went down ratholes or snorted up noses or whatever. It was a fiasco.

Sally: I know what the income was for the saloon that year.

Karen: It was big. I did the books for it. There was tons of money, and there was no gas in the gas tank when I got back. There was no food on the shelves, and there was no inventory.

Wendy: That's when Honey and Bruce were running things.

Karen: Honey and Bruce and John.

Valerie: And all those kids.

Karen: Honey was the only one who did a lick of work.

Joyce: Who did the saloon that year, and why did I know about it?

Wendy: Honey and Bruce and John.

Joyce: Oh, John did the saloon with Corinne. Was that the year Beth came in?

Karen: No. I don't think Beth was there.

Sally: John Personius ran the saloon, didn't he?

Valerie: Bruce Personius.

Karen: I don't know, but he was the one who sat around in circles and chanted ohm.

Valerie: Him and the dentist dude.

Karen: The dentist dude.

Sally: I remember the dentist.

Karen: He was cute.

Joyce: He was gorgeous. [Laughs] I mean a big, burly guy. Remember the dentist?

Wendy: What year was this? Andrew must have been a baby.

Joyce: Well, the dentist was here Capella's first fall and winter, so that was 1978, 1979.

Wendy: I just remember Doogie.

Karen: You remember who?

Wendy: Duggan.

Joyce: Well, there were two guys that came in on horseback, and Doogie was the one that she fell in love with. The other guy I can't remember, but he was a doll. They were just gorgeous.

Wendy: They rode horse all the way over from Nye, Montana.

Joyce: From Nye, Montana, up to the border and down, but I have pictures of Doogie.

Lois: I remember the guy with the horse. I have a picture of him.

Karen: Well, the one guy on a horse, that's a different story. He was on some kind of a quest, and I can't remember even the year.

Joyce: Well I will tell you, because it was Jack O'Hara's first or second year out here, and we were in the saloon, so that must have been 1978, not 1977, or it was when we leased it from you, so I'm confused on years. But Jack O'Hara was here, and the one guy came with his horses, and he had a pack mule, I think, and they were in horrible shape. Jack O'Hara said something to Dick Walsh, and Dick went out with a gun drawn, I believe, and said, "I'm reporting you for not taking care of animals, cruelty to the animals." And, sure enough, I don't know if it was the Humane Society or they called the police or what they did, but this kid got inspected.

Karen: Well, they were with the Sheriff's office.

Joyce: I freaked out. I left. I don't remember anything about it. Jack and Dick Walsh, who had that night just figured out that they were related through Bridgette O'Hara.

Wendy: Oh, that's how that all started.

Joyce: That's how that all started. Jack and John and the Walshes were all related.

Sally: Dick Walsh?

Valerie: Dick Walsh and John and Jack O'Hara.

Karen: Oh, that's really interesting.

Joyce: That's the only reason I remember that, because that all happened simultaneously.

Lois: Jack is John's brother or something.

Joyce: No, I'm sorry. Jack is John O'Hara's dad, and he came out a lot. He loved it out here.

Sally: Yes, he was out every summer.

Joyce: He was a wild crazy man.

Valerie: He was in on the bridge party. Jack O'Hara was an instigator.

Joyce: Yes, he was.

Karen: Oh, cool.

Joyce: They all signed. Who has that paper?

Karen: We left it there.

Valerie: We tacked it up on the door.

Karen: I have a picture of it somewhere. "Can Bob and Mary come out and play?" [Laughs]

Valerie: Did I really write that?

Karen: I think so.

Valerie: Because I wrote it.

Joyce: Well, they took their son Sam with them.

Valerie: He thought it was the greatest thing ever.

Joyce: And one of our nephews went up there, and they were protesting.

Lois: Bob was the ranger?

Karen: He was a ranger for many years. Bob and Mary Paul were at Bowman Lake.

Joyce: You will have to ask them.

Wendy: What was the problem?

Valerie: Because he was stalling on getting the bridge fixed. The stupid boltless bridge was all that was there. It was a military temporary bridge is all it was.

Karen: I have a picture somebody sent me, one of those that goes up in 3½ days.

Valerie: Yes, but it didn't.

Lois: A Bailey bridge.

Valerie: That's exactly what it was.

Joyce: It had all the kids' names. My father-in-law, the instigator.

Lois: So, we don't have this story on tape, but somebody said that Jerry Costello had organized a bridge party at the saloon.

Karen: Probably.

Valerie: It was kind of spontaneous. Jerry DeSanto told me, because I was a schoolteacher, I had to be the one that wrote up the declaration. Jerry DeSanto was in on it, and Maggie.

Lois: Maggie who?

Karen: DeSanto.

Lois: Were they married?

Karen: Yes, Sam and Maggie.

Valerie: That would have been Jerry's nephew and the wife.

Karen: My Jerry.

Valerie: Then Bill Brown was in on it, I think, and there was a psychologist. Robin was in on it, me, Sam. There was a psychologist from Bozeman who got dragged in on it.

Joyce: I just heard about all this. Were you there? Because I think we all went up to the Hall that night.

Sally: I don't remember being there?

Wendy: I wasn't in on it, either.

Valerie: We got in the back of somebody's truck, Jerry's or Bill Brown's, and it might have taken two trucks to get us all there.

Sally: To get everybody to the river.

Karen: We snuck over the bridge and put it on Roger's porch.

Valerie: And his wife Eileen never forgave Robin.

Sally: Not only that, we had a border party.

Karen: Oh, for Arleen. She had a tough life.

Sally: I had gotten in trouble for crossing over to the Canadian side. We had a birthday party for Arlene [Hewison, Joe Bush's daughter] after that, with her on the Canadian side and us on the American side, and we put the cake in the middle.

Karen: Mary McFarland was too funny. She said, "I went past the ranger station, and there was Eileen Semler taking care of the flowers in front. She had her little gardening bonnet on and her little gloves that came with her little outfit for gardening."

Valerie: She never, ever forgave Robin. One time it was a meeting of graduate students at MSU, and it was an orientation. It was like the day before classes started. And somehow, I don't know how, Robin wound up sitting next to Eileen. And he said to her, "Hi, I'm Robin Cox. Maybe you don't remember who I am?" And she said, "I know very well who you are," and she moved away from him and sat somewhere else. [Laughs]

Lois: How big was this declaration?

Valerie: It was on butcher paper. I don't remember where we got it, but it was huge.

Joyce: Out of the saloon.

Karen: It was probably freezer wrap.

Lois: So, this was like Wittenberg.

Valerie: Yes, the declaration nailed to the church door. That's what it felt like.

Lois: That's hilarious.

Karen: They were the most peculiar people.

Valerie: And they didn't fit in, let's face it.

Wendy: Who were these people?

Karen: Roger Ranger Rulebook.

Sally: He's the one that told me I couldn't ride my horse across the river and into the Park.

Joyce: In the meanwhile, you had been riding the horses in and out of the Park for a hundred years.

Sally: I'd been coming off my bench, going across the river, entering the Park for how many years, I have no idea. When he took over he said, "Well, I have to tell you, Sally, that you need to come to the ranger station with your horse, show your pass and then you can go through the thing." I said, "Roger, if I walk my horse two or three miles down to the bridge, then go back into the Park, come back out, I would have to pack lunch and dinner, when I can just drop off my bench, cross the river and go into the Park." He said, "Well I'm sorry, you can't do that anymore." I said, "But Roger, you know I have a season pass. I always do." He said, "But you have to show it to me every time you enter." [Laughs]

Joyce: I was like, "You will see about that."

Sally: You know what, it kind of discouraged me from riding.

Joyce: That's right, it did.

Karen: That's terrible.

Sally: Well, it's stupid, because how many people float that river, and I watch them every single day of my life. They step on either side of the river.

Valerie: They camp on either side.

Sally: They camp on either side. They have campfires. They walk from their raft into the Park. They're not showing their pass.

Wendy: But he didn't last very long.

Sally: He didn't, because he did not know how to interact.

Valerie: Two years, anyway.

Bill Walker: It seemed like longer. The other factor was his wife didn't like it up here.

Sally: No, she didn't.

Joyce: Well remember, in the old times none of the wives came up. None of the guys' wives came up here until Tom built the cabin, then Joan would come up, and Elsie Sonnenberg came up with Gus.

Wendy: Not very often.

Joyce: The older generation, the women didn't like it up here.

Wendy: And I don't think Roy Cooper's wife ever came here.

Karen: No. I don't think they even lived together.

Lois: Did Sonnenberg work in the Park?

Karen: No.

Joyce: Gus and Elsie owned what's now the Stahr place, Stan Stahr.

Karen: Art and Clarine Harker; you couldn't have gotten rid of her. She was always here.

Sally: She loved it here. That's right. I forgot about Clarine.

Sally: She signed the volleyball.

Karen: And what about Rose Green? Rose Green was always here.

Sally: Yes, Rose Green. She lived right below the Harkers.

Joyce: Their families would come into the saloon and say, "Hey, where are the Greens?"

Karen: And then Rose, the grandmother of them all, would dance and have a great time, and her daughter would just sit there.

Wendy: You know Nick and Lorette Poncelet just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We went to the party. It was so much fun.

Karen: Are they still liking each other?

Wendy: It seems as though.

Lois: They are trying to sell their place.

Joyce: Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't.

Lois: So, who put in the volleyball court?

Karen: That just happened.

Joyce: John Gray and John O'Hara put the volleyball court in.

Wendy: But it wasn't like it is now.

Joyce: It was better.

Valerie: It was sand.

Karen: Wait a minute, at first it was right in front of the saloon.

Joyce: That's right. The first year you were open, 1977, it was right in front of the saloon.

Karen: Yes, it was the front porch of the saloon, and now it's between the store and the saloon.

Valerie: For a while we had a volleyball that had a glowstick on the inside, and we would play until after dark.

Karen: I think Karen Reeves, or maybe Doug's mother, brought it? I think it came from Reeves.

Valerie: Yes, we used to play at night.

Lois: And the skating rink that was over in front of the Hostel.

Joyce: That was Ray Brown, John O'Hara, Rick Upton, Ron Wilhelm.

Wendy: Wilhelm was big on it.

Valerie: Russ Miller. He was into it. Who built the sideboards for it?

Joyce: They got those donated. John O'Hara and Ray Brown got those donated.

Wendy: From the county.

Joyce: Yes, because that's county property.

Valerie: What happened to them?

Lois: They burned in the 1988 fire.

Wendy: And some floated away. After they burned up they floated away. They are probably down in the meadow somewhere.

Valerie: How many years did they play hockey there?

Joyce: Maybe just a couple, because what happened is the men became so competitive that the women, I remember being afraid. They all got professional skates and helmets.

Wendy: Ron quit wanting to maintain it anymore, because he was pretty big about maintaining of it, hauling over water and getting it all smoothed out. I think people lost interest, but maybe because the women were afraid of the men, I don't know.

Valerie: It was a lot of work.

Karen: Where were we skating when I broke my ankle?

Wendy: On the slough.

Karen: Why was Wilhelm involved?

Wendy: Because Wilhelm used to smooth out the slough, then they got the good idea of making an ice skating rink.

Joyce: I don't know, I saved it for all these things. I must have cut it out of a newspaper.

Wendy: We used to use the slough for skating, and he kept that all smooth, but then that got too hard to get to, and the men all talked about making a real rink.

Lois: I'm going to turn the recorder off for now, and then we can turn it on later for when we go through pictures or whatever. Tell me a bit about the box of stuff that you brought, Karen. What all is in here?

Karen: I went through some stuff, and there's some *Montana Magazines*, and an article maybe one about John Frederick, one about Diane Boyd.

Lois: I need Jerry DeSanto's articles that he published, the one on Uncle Jeff. He did a series of them.

Valerie: In *Montana Magazine, The Magazine of Montana History*. There are a lot of articles in there.

Karen: I could make a list of the ones I know about.

Lois: I don't think they are online yet. I probably could get them at a library.

Valerie: There's a rancher from White Sulphur who is coming up here in a few weeks, and his mother used to write articles for *Montana Magazine*, and she saved every single magazine. If you want them she's looking for someone who wants them.

Lois: Well, I think we might be interested.

Valerie: When they are here I will let you know, and you can come over and talk to them. Maybe you can find a way to get in touch with his mother. I think they moved to Bozeman from White Sulphur.

Karen: Why are they coming up here?

Valerie: They are coming up just to visit. They're my skiing partners. She's got boxes and boxes of the magazine.