

COFFEE WITH LYNN AND BONNY OGLE

June 24, 2026

Attendees:

Lois Walker
Rob & Trish Rego and granddaughter Kate
Terry & Karen Atha
Jan Caldwell
Jeannie Coleman (Chubb Davis's daughter)
Pat Elliott
Jack & Sue McFarland
Jane Reardon
Tami Stone
Vickie Wiedmann
Paul & Nancy Winkler

Lois: We want to welcome everybody to another History Day in the North Fork, with a couple of people who go back further than just about everybody here, I think. Lynn bought this property in 1960, but had been coming earlier with scouting groups. Larry Wilson is 89 now. But back when he was in college, in the late 1950s, he and Lynn were in the same scout group.

Lynn: He was the assistant scout master. My dad was the scout master. I was an explorer scout. I was like 15 or 16.

Lois: Whose idea was it to come to the North Fork?

Lynn: Larry suggested it, and my dad said, "You know, that's a good idea. We'll all go." On the first trip we took the whole troop. They didn't mind coming, but you know how parents are. They get a little iffy if the kids are going to go 150 miles away from home, with them not being along. The Mad Seven of Troop 7 came up here all the time. We stayed in the Bart Monahan cabin over at Larry's place. He called it the Boar's Nest. It wasn't big enough for everybody, so we also camped. We actually did snow caves in the snow banks. We camped out in the winter time. We built tents and then covered them up with snow and made our own snow caves.

One year, when I was 14, we went down to Turtle Lake, just south of Polson. They held a Camporee for several troops. They cut the ice with chainsaws, pulled the ice up on the land, and everybody jumped in. We were members of the Polar Bear Club. Let me tell you, it was cold. So, when Whitefish started that tradition, Sheriff Jim Dupont said, "We're all going to go do that." I said, "You know how cold that water is?" He said, "Yes. You don't have to do it, though. You're old now." So, I was the first one in, and out, and got my clothes back on. I had my swimming suit on. They just about had to drag him, kicking and screaming. But he was a good sport about it. He actually got in. We did it for charity.

Bonny: Hon, back to the boy scout thing, tell them about your shenanigans. The reason they called them the Mad Seven of Troop 7. They had been up here camping, and they really didn't want to go home.

Lynn: We got to the Wurtz Hill area. It doesn't sluff off anymore right now, but where you come around the corner on Wurtz Hill there's a spot where it used to sluff off every year. The county

would come up and fix it. We climbed up onto the hill above it and cut a bunch of little poles. We threw them down in there and made a road through it. When we got through, we took the poles out and threw them over the side. When we came back we picked them up and brought them out and went across to keep going south. We got down to Allentown and called my dad. We made our voices all staticky and said, “The road’s not drivable.” My dad got the message alright. We put the poles back and came back to the cabin and spent another couple of days. Pretty soon, here came Search and Rescue. They knew what we’d done. My dad had called the families and said, “They’re stuck up there. They’ll be out in a few days.” But one of the dads panicked and called Search and Rescue. We did several things like that. We had fun.

Lois: So, your dad wasn’t along?

Lynn: No, he was working. My dad worked for the railroad after the war. He was an engineer, and he also sold real estate. He always told me, “Buy land. They’re not making any more of it.” So, when this property came up, Larry and I were talking to Tom Reynolds. He said, “I’ve got 80 acres.” Between Larry and us and the two little pieces at the end here, we bought 80 acres. We paid \$50 an acre for it.

Jan Caldwell: The good ole’ days.

Lynn: Definitely the old days, I can tell you that.

Tami Stone: Where did you live as a boy? Down in the valley?

Lynn: We lived in Missoula. Bonny and I were both raised in Missoula. When Bonny and I got married, I went to Vietnam the day after. She didn’t even know that we had the acres here.

Sue McFarland: How long have you been married?

Bonny: 58 years tomorrow.

Everyone: Congratulations!

[Pat Elliott arrives]

Bonny: Hi, Pat! Good to see you. We’re sharing some stories. I was going to ask everybody to share their memorable stories about just getting home. The things that happen on the road. Do you have one that sticks in your mind?

Lois: The operative word being “stick.” Or stuck.

Jack McFarland: I have one, not concerning me, but in a fun, interesting way. There were days that nobody here can imagine, except as some distant, fond memory, when there weren’t many cars on the road. It was usually well-oiled, with all the logging money. And the biggest risk was logging trucks. But, if you went to town and you were coming back late at night, you weren’t going to find many cars. Logging trucks did their job during the day, and then they were gone. My grandmother [Mary McFarland] used to go to town once every two weeks. She had a little circuit she’d make—raw milk, the health food store, stop at the meat locker, blah blah, and head back up. She was running really late one day. She got past the Camas turnoff, around the bend a little ways, and got a flat tire. And she wasn’t in a position to fix it.

It was like 11:00 at night, and nobody was coming. In her words, the right thing to do was to “contemplate on this.” She said she sat there, and she had a vision of a man showing up in a pickup truck, looking for her. So, she said she thought about that for about 40 minutes. All of a

sudden, here came a truck from behind her. This guy pulls up, rolls down his window, and says to her, "I'm lost!" She said, "Great! I have a flat tire." He said, "Okay, I'll fix that for you." He went about fixing the tire, and he said, "I'm trying to find Columbia Falls. I got back there a ways, and I thought I was supposed to turn left, but something made me turn right. And I meet you." She said, "This is as far as you needed to come. You can turn around and head back to town, and don't turn left at Camas." So, her belief was that you just had to imagine the right outcome. Truth or not, as we all know, but don't let the truth get in the way of a good story.

Bonny: I'll bet the first thing she probably really said was, "I've been waiting for you."

Lynn: One thing you have to remember about those days is that logging trucks had nine and ten foot bunks. They stuck way out. They had a full load on, and they were running 100,000 or 110,000 pounds of logs, and they weren't the little ones they're running today. They were huge, and you had to get out of the way, because the road was so narrow. It was not a two-way road. It was a one-way road, and they ran with CBs then. We had a CB in our old car.

Lois: Yes, Channel 3, right? The sign is still up at end-of-pavement. You could hear them coming and pull off before you met them.

Lynn: You could hear them, because they used their jake brakes coming down the Demers Ridge hill.

Jack: We used to drive with the windows down back then, so you could hear, and you weren't getting dusted out like you are today.

Lynn: The road was better then, I thought.

Jack: Oh, yeah.

Tami: That's what I remember from when I first met Jan and Alice Caldwell. Alice said, "Oh no, the road used to be so much better. It was not like this when we first moved up here."

Lynn: Yes, the logging companies graded it all the time and kept it up.

Pat Elliott: I remember the first winter when we moved here, it was a big winter and the road was just plowed single lane. Who was the family that had the stud mill?

Lois: Sondresons?

Pat: No, this was the family who had a stud mill up where Holtons built. Anyway, he plowed the road with his truck. And if you met someone on the road, one or the other of you had to back up to where there was a pull-out. It wasn't a two-lane road.

Lois: Jack's grandfather, Jack McFarland, used to plow, too, from their place at the Quarter Circle MC Ranch to Polebridge, and probably further.

Jack: Sometimes further, because back in those days the county didn't get up as often as they do now.

Pat: These were all Forest Service roads back then, weren't they?

Lois: Yes. I forget what year they went from the Forest Service to the Flathead County. It was 1979, I think.

Lynn: That brings us to another little story. Mel Wollan was a county commissioner. They'd been rebuilding the road. When I worked for the police department in Columbia Falls, Ross

Wilson was the Sheriff. He came down the hill at Columbia Falls, where the dump used to be. He had a horse trailer on, and he rolled the horse trailer. I was in uniform, and I went up to help take care of things. Ross said, "We've got to get their heads up." The horses made it through it. So, I crawled through the trailer, because Bonny and I had been married for a while then, and I was a dude.

Bonny: He was a fast-learning dude.

Lynn: I admit that I'm a dude. I crawled over the horses and got their heads up. Then we turned them around in the trailer and pulled them out, one at a time. I got my uniform a little bit dirty, but it wasn't bad. Anyway, Mel Wollan was a commissioner, and somebody said, "You can't pave that part. You can't pave the North Fork Road." He said, "Don't tell me what I can't do. I'm a commissioner." That's why the five-mile section there at Home Ranch Bottoms is paved. Mel Mollan told them, "I will pave it if I want to pave it."

Bonny: That section just wouldn't hold up. It was always falling apart.

Lois: But they didn't do it right the first time. They were doing a cheap job at first—I have the details somewhere. In fact, Karen Feather said they had a pot going at the Mercantile to see when the first pothole bigger than a foot would appear. Originally, the road was supposed to be paved from Hay Creek all the way to Coal Creek. But it started breaking up almost right away. So, they had to tear a bunch of it up and re-pave it. And they ran out of money, which is why the paving stops at Lee Downes' old place and doesn't go all the way to Coal Creek. That section between Lee Downes' place and Coal Creek they always called Rabbit Hill. I thought maybe it was because there were rabbits, but no. They called it that because the road would jump in the winter and would jump down to the river. It was close enough to the river to cause a real problem. But that's why that section never got paved.

Bonny: We also call the section of the road coming down to Coal Creek the Serpentine Hill, because it's like a snake. The Heitzes call it Race Track.

Lois: Bonnie Hankey calls it The Wiggles. So Lynn, where did all these buildings come from? How did this property morph into Ogleville over the years?

Lynn: The A-frame, the steepest roof that you see up there, that's part of the Kintla Ranch Lodge. We bought the lodge—we being us, Larry, and our friend Gene Clark. We went down with all of the families—Larry and David, us and our kids, and Gene and his wife and kids—and we dismantled the lodge. They gave us a certain amount of time to tear it down.

Lois: What year was that?

Bonny: 1982 or so. And I think we may have started building up here in 1984 or 1985.

Lynn: At any rate, we saved all of the windows—the great big windows that they used to have in there. None of the windows in the kitchen came from there, though. We built that first section, which is 18' x 24' I think.

Bonny: That's all we were going to do. We figured that was good enough.

Lynn: Yes, that was going to be our cabin. Then Gene couldn't do anything with his logs, so I bought them from him, and on the back side which you can't see from here is a 16' x 24' foot addition. We added it to the building, and that became our kitchen. Because early on we realized

that everybody was in the kitchen all the time. That's where we lived. I don't know about you guys, but most everybody lives in their kitchen.

Bonny: The fun part of it was that Ross Wilson had given me his pool table from the ranch. It had been through the flood in 1995, but Lynn fixed it up pretty well. We really liked shooting pool. People would ask, "Why do you take your kids to the pool hall?" I said, "So they'll learn how not to be." Ross gave us this pool table, and I thought it would be a good regular table, but I didn't want to mess up the top. Lynn built a nice board, and we put oil cloth on it. So, we had a nice table, and we had benches. We'd eat dinner, then take the table top off and move the benches and shoot pool. It was perfect.

Lois: So, when did your current kitchen get added?

Lynn: This one got started in 2006. We were digging a 4-foot crawl space, but I said, "Wait a minute. That's crazy. Let's dig it deep enough to have a basement." This is 24' x 36', because we wanted indoor sit-down plumbing and a basement and a cool room. Our neighbor on McManamy Draw had a cool room. We insulated that and got it all wired in. It would stay about 45 degrees winter and summer. We stored food in there. So, we ended up digging the basement, and I have pictures of all of the kids helping us build this. Elmer Benson came up with the windows, those on this side and one on the other side. Those came out of a house that went through the 1995 flood. He had salvaged them. For those of you who didn't know Elmer, he lived with us for five years. We did finally finish the kitchen, and it's big enough that we've had as many as 50 people in there. We actually had North Valley Search and Rescue do their training here, which we have them do quite often. They go down to the old Kintla Ranch and to Abbott's Flats. We've been everywhere on snowcats.

You see how wide the valley on the roof is there? That's because that valley, when it was narrow like everybody said it should be, was getting all the metal torn up every year. The ice would come down and just crinkle it. So, when we redid it, where you see the yellow, we got 4-foot sheets and had our son bend them for us so that they would fit in the valley. We put them in with two feet on each side, and it actually works really well. It may not be as pretty as everybody likes, but it doesn't fill up with ice.

Bonny: And now we can water all the grounds with the rain water that it gathers.

Lynn: The tank you see there is hooked up to collect rain water off of the main roof. It was plumb full after the last bit of rain that we've had. We've been watering all of the plants with it.

Jan: You just have a little pump that you fire up?

Lynn: Yes, there's a pump right there beside the tank. It's still got 100 gallons in it. And we had 300 gallons inside the garden room.

Bonny: I used to do a lot of flowers. It kind of started when Becky Braunig was having so much trouble and going through everything that she went through. I was recuperating in Kalispell from the surgeries that I had, and I had an immune problem with medications. Lynn bought me some garden stuff and I started making planters. I thought it might be good for Becky, too, because she was a horticulturalist. So, I made her a bunch of planters. I took some that were already planted and some that she could plant, and a bunch of stuff to do with it. Then she taught me a bunch of stuff, and pretty soon we were doing plants for the Meekers and the Kinsolvings and the people who aren't here all summer, but they come in July and were ordering their plants. One year Josie Meeker brought her planters up here for us to keep over the winter, and we just had a little

greenhouse with no floor. And we had a cursed rat. I hate those darned things. You trap them, and I know the same one came back a whole bunch of times. I was going to ask Jerry Wernick where he was taking his.

So, Becky came with her planters, and the rat ran over Josie's sandaled foot. I was horrified, because Josie is a lady. She's a classy, French lady and a real sweetheart. We love her dearly. The first time I met her she came into Larry's. Sue Dupont and I were scrubbing Larry's cabin. She grabbed another rag and started scrubbing with us. I thought, "Oh, that's a neat lady." The rat ran over her foot, and she ran out screaming in French. I'm sure it wasn't pretty. So, Lynn and our brother-in-law moved everything out while I was in town for a couple of days, and they built the garden room.

Lynn: We took everything out of there.

Bonny: Jane Reardon knows about a lot of this. She's been through some of this with us.

Lois: Where did your other cabins come from?

Bonny: Well, we needed a guest cabin, because we had a lot of company. They did that even before this. That was Justin's first house, I think, other than working on the cabin with us.

Lynn: No, his first house was clear over there. This one was second. Then the middle one was third. We made it clear to all the kids that we were not breaking up the property. We weren't giving it to them. We told them, "If you want a cabin we'll help you, but it's *our* cabin." There was a little consternation about that, but I said, "I don't care. It's not for sale. You can't break it up. You have to keep it all whole."

Bonny: That's because of divorces. You don't want the kids owning a cabin, then they get a divorce and the wife gets half of it.

Sue: How many kids do you have?

Bonny: We have three.

Sue: Do they all live in town?

Bonny: Yes.

Sue: Do they spend a lot of time up here?

Bonny: They do. Not as much as they used to. Then came the grandkids and now the great-grandkids. Then there are a few ex-spouses, but you never have ex-grandchildren. Those bonus kids are yours, no matter what.

Lynn: We made a rule. If you marry someone, and you decide you can't live together, that doesn't mean that we're throwing them away. They're all family. That allows them to have grandchildren the same way that we have grandchildren.

Bonny: And you go to games together.

Lynn: In Justin's case, he's got two ex-wives. In our daughter's case, she has had five husbands. And a couple of her former children are our grandkids, too. This world is harsh enough that you have to get along anyway, so you'd better start getting along with your family.

Sue: Did all three of your kids build a cabin up here?

Bonny: Mick didn't. He inherited my folks' place with my blessing, because he was their right-hand man. Then we sold part of our place in McManamy Draw to him, as well, so he didn't get up here as much. And he was the cowboy and the farmer and all that. He's still in McManamy on that place. But he comes up once in awhile.

Lynn: Our boys work together in the same business, so they share doing the jobs up here in the North Fork. And our granddaughter comes up and does jobs up here, too. She runs the office. Justin is our youngest, and he runs the heating and cooling business. He and Mick are actually partners.

Jan: I see their pickups every once in awhile.

Bonny: Mick went to Couer d'Alene with a neighbor woman and came back with a wife and four children. He came into their lives at a very good time. Those boys really needed him, and the girl too. It's been a very good thing. They've been married 25 years now. We're pretty happy about that.

Sue: You do need a kitchen that houses 50.

Lois: You have a barn-like structure, over on that side of the cabin?

Lynn: We have a couple of sheds over there. One of them we call the CAT shed. That's where the backhoe CAT that we used to have was parked in the wintertime, because that's what I plowed with for 10 years. It had an open cab, with a bucket on the front, and we plowed a lot of snow, believe me. The problem with that, as Jack knows, is that you have to find a place to put the snow. You can't just say, "I'll push it over to the side," because there comes a time when you can't get rid of it. So, when Bonny and I were looking for a tractor, and Elmer went along with us, we all sat in different ones. We went to New Holland and Kioti and John Deere and Kubota. We sat in the seats of all of these of similar size, with full cabs with heating and air conditioning. And with a snowblower on the front, but they all kept saying that the snowblower had to go on the back. But Kioti said, "We've got one here that goes on the front." I got in and sat in the seat, and I said, "The seat fits my butt, and the plow is on the front. This is the one that we want."

Bonny: We paid more for it than we did for our first house.

Lynn: If you look around, you see all sorts of equipment here. We have a box scraper and a rake—a horse disc actually, and two or three other things. Forks. When we bought it, we bought everything that we could get at the same place. But it's been wonderful. Now when I'm plowing the road, the snow is thrown 40 feet out in the trees. You just have to set the front end of the blower an inch or two off the ground, and everything's gone. When spring comes, the road is clear.

Bonny: There's a couple of funny stories there. You've probably all heard the snow stories. Pat, I think you and your daughter and Dave were up here. It was Super Bowl time. There were two winters in row where we plowed a way to the Super Bowl parties, two feet one day and three feet the next, and some of the people who were at the Super Bowl party at Dick and Janet Leigh's ended up staying there.

Pat: Some of them got stuck on their way home and had to go back up and spend the night and wait for Kenna Halsey to plow the road.

Bonny: Exactly. And Kenna helped the people who were renting Wurtz Cabin and brought them back to eat something. Very funny. People would never understand how a neighborhood works.

Lois: You have to have a sense of humor, that's for sure.

Bonny: And Joe and Jane. We got our tractor stuck. I got in Lynn's truck and managed to get it stuck. Then I went and got my car, and I did some darned thing with the wrong gear and got the chain tight. Then we couldn't move my car. Elmer was about to die, he was laughing so far. It was just hysterical. Finally, Joe and Jane came over and helped us dig. Jane and I were scraping roofs, too, while we were waiting to get the car out. We had everything stuck, and we were all digging, and we got it done, but what a mess.

Lynn: In that case, the tractor was stuck. What I didn't know—and I was looking all around underneath it—I didn't have chains on the front then. You have to have chains, at least on two wheels. I was looking underneath and the driveline for the blower was sticking down. I couldn't go forward, because it was jamming in the ground. Finally, I backed up, got underneath and hooked it up, and the blower went to working. That was a real blessing, and then I could plow my way out. Her car was stuck with all four wheels spinning. There was that much ice on the ground.

Tami: This reminds me of a couple of years ago. Bill Brown was plowing and managed to go too far off into a ditch. Bernie Wiedmann came over with a tractor and tried to pull him out, but then Bernie got stuck, and we had to go find Ed Neneman. Ed came and pulled them both out.

Vickie Wiedmann: It was night by then.

Tami: It was. It was a long day.

Bonny: There's another good hand for you—Ed.

Jan: You kind of wonder if we're going to have winters like that again.

Lynn: Oh, I believe we will. I can remember when we were younger we'd park on the main road. We'd make a wide spot out there and park, and you couldn't see the top of the truck for where they had plowed up the bank. I don't know how many of you remember Columbia Falls in the winter of 1968-1969. There were snowbanks on the corners 15+ feet high. I went to work for the police department there on February 1, 1969. We put whip antennas on the patrol cars so people at least knew where we were. You couldn't see anybody.

Bonny: It was the first time I had been to the Flathead Valley at all. People were digging the way out of their houses. Their doors were covered, and they were climbing out of their windows, when they could find one they could get out of, then digging the snow away from their door. It was amazing.

Lynn: When we got there the night before, with Bonny and Rachel, who was a baby, I had to go in and see the chief to get my badge and get sworn in so I could go to work the next day. I parked outside the old police station. The fire department had three bays—one for the ambulance and two bays for the fire trucks. You couldn't park in front of them, so I parked at the end under an old 16' tower. I didn't think anything of it. 10:00 p.m. came around and the tower came to life. They had a curfew siren. And also the fire siren.

Bonny: We were parked under the siren, me and baby Rachel.

Lynn: Rachel came to life. She was like five or six days old. And Bonny just about came right up out of the cab. I ran down and found them. She was trying to calm Rachel down, but there was no calming her down by then. It was a wreck.

Lois: Would you like to tell us a little about all of the fires that you've helped fight?

Lynn: I've been through a lot of fires up here. The first fire I helped fight was the Red Bench Fire in September 1988. Bill Wagonfehr was the IC [incident commander]. It was supposed to be the end of season, but the fire came rolling down off of Red Meadow on the south side of the road. Frank Vitale and his buddies were all standing around on the road, bitching about "nobody ever does anything for us." I asked, "What do you need?" I was in my patrol car. He said, "We need tools and equipment for ten guys." I said, "Okay, I'll be back." I went down to the temporary camp at Moran Creek, which used to be the ranger station. That was the only place that had a phone at that time. I went down to supply and said, "I need 10 shovels, 10 axes, 10 this and 10 that, shirts of varying sizes. Don't worry about the pants, because the guys all have jeans on." Then I went to the cook shack and said, "I need 10 meals for a crew." They said, "Which crew?" I said, "The Red Meadow Crew." "Oh, okay." I got the meals and put them in my car, which I called my pickup at that time, because it was being used as a pickup.

Larry Wilson was with me, and he asked, "What are we doing?" I said, "We're going back up to see Frank." I drove in, and I asked, "Where do you want all this stuff?" He said, "I didn't believe you'd ever come back!" I said, "I told you I'd be back." We dumped all the stuff off; it was all brand new stuff. And I said, "I've got to get this food out of here, too." He kept saying, "I don't know if we've got enough." I said, "Let me know what you need, and we'll take care of it." We unloaded all of the equipment and all of the food. Frank and I have become very good friends. He said, "You have changed my mind. I figured that being a hippie nobody would like me." I said, "Frank, all you've got to do is let me know what you want."

Jan: I can't imagine Frank being a hippie. I've known him for the past 25 or 30 years.

Lynn: 40 or 50 years.

Pat: I was part of that group. I wasn't a hippie, but I was one of the recipients of the equipment, and we sort of did spot fires, walking through the woods.

Jack: Was there a missed opportunity, Lynn, to get that fire while it was still in the fire camps?

Lynn: A lot of people thought that, but it really isn't true. By the time Wagonfehr and his crew got here, the fire had already dropped down off the ridge and was coming down. That was late afternoon. I picked them up at the airport, the IC and the two directors, in my patrol car.

Lois: The fire was in Polebridge within a day.

Lynn: More like a night and a day. We went up and looked at the fire, and it was already across Spruce Creek by then. It was going east, because that's usually what the fires do. It never went north across Red Meadow Road. You guys did put out some spot fires over there, but they were right there and you were able to get right on it. They actually did press the fire south. What happened was, we were sitting up on the hill on the north side of Red Meadow. There's a vantage point up there where we could see. Everybody said, "Oh yeah, it was caused by the loggers." Well, it wasn't caused by loggers—it was a lightning strike. It had sat there for a couple of days, and the loggers didn't see it. Nobody saw it. I've been to several fires here, where there's the crotch of a tree and it holds all the needles. They get a lightning strike down through it, and it smolders in that crutch until it burns off and then it falls down. It really was a lightning strike.

Jack: But it wasn't close enough to the logging camp for the equipment to be useful in attacking it early.

Lynn: No. Anyway, we were down on the Red Meadow bridge, and I had on a soft cap. The fire was coming at us, and trees were tumbling through the air, which they do in these fires. In about 30-foot pieces. Because when they're hot, they're moving. The wind shifted from southwest to northeast, about 40 degrees this way, and it pushed everything south. That was good for the Red Meadow people.

Pat: That's what I remember, Lynn. I think that all of us up north were thinking that we had to evacuate. Then all of a sudden the wind whipped around and everything went to Polebridge.

Lynn: Yes.

Pat: We had people from Polebridge who were up helping us haul things and pack trailers, but then it went to Polebridge instead.

Lynn: The Pels. I remember the Pels. Charlene went hysterical, and he said, "I've got to take her to town." He took her to town, but she beat him back. She wasn't going to stay gone. Anyway, we were on the bridge, and I got on the radio. I had the Forest Service on my radio, and I said, "All you Forest Service types, get in your trucks and move, because this fire is coming. Now." They were like, "We don't take orders from you guys." The incident commander said, "Let me talk to them." He got on the radio and said, "This is the incident commander. I'm telling you, get in those trucks and move 'em NOW." It was like ants getting on a hot loaf of bread. They moved up the road. It was an interesting night. They set up the camp at Moran, and they had meetings at night. We did that in almost all of the fires. They all had meetings at night except the Moose Fire.

Lois: Does anyone else have questions for Lynn or Bonny?

Jack: I have one related to that. Was there any change in the way we fight fires that came out of that experience?

Lynn: Absolutely. First of all, my being there was an accident. The Sheriff said, "You're assigned to the fire." That was Chuck Rhodes. His chief deputy, Del Breneman, didn't like that, because he wanted to be on the fire. So, he and the sheriff came up one night, and we were having the briefing. Wagonfehr said, "Wait a minute. There's too many people in here, and there's not enough room for everybody. Everybody who does not have an assigned seat, leave." The sheriff wanted to sit in, but he said, "Sheriff, you don't have an assigned seat, so you're out. Your men here can tell you." We got done and Del Breneman went out, and he was upset. "I'm outranking." The sheriff said, "Wait a minute—I assigned him to this. He stays." They stood around outside and had their radios on. Wagonfehr said, "If you have a radio and it's more important that you hear that radio than it is to hear what's going on, then you need to be outside where you can listen to it." So, we had all of our portable radios turned off. We went through the meeting, then I went out and filled in the sheriff and Delbert. Delbert got into a huff and went back home. And the sheriff went home. So, then I had to report to them, not on a daily basis but often enough. That was the beginning of the changes that started with the Forest Service. The Forest Service has always been good to work with.

Lois: What year did you move from the police department in Columbia Falls to the Sheriff's Office?

Lynn: 1974. I was a policeman in Columbia Falls when I spotted the fire on Huckleberry Peak in 1967. I saw it from the police station in Columbia Falls, because it's a straight line shot. You can see the lookout, if you look from the corner. I got my binoculars, and I was looking at fire on top of the mountain. I called them on the phone at Big Creek Ranger Station. I said, "You know,

you guys have a fire on Huckleberry Mountain. It's about 2/3 of the way up, and it's going toward the lookout." They said, "We don't have any fires up there." I said, "You'd better go look, because I'm looking at it from my vantage point." He came running back in and said, "We've got a fire on the mountain!" He sent a crew up, and they did control the fire. I don't know how big it got, but it did burn up there.

The Forest Service used to believe that when they took on a fire they were in charge of everything. Nobody else. The problem with that is—I was with the Office of Emergency Services, as well, then, along with the sheriff, and I was the chief deputy for the Sheriff's Office. My immediate boss, the director, said, "We're with the County. We provide fire protection for all citizens of Flathead County." We formed a brigade, with firetrucks and tenders and people. When the Moose Fire happened, we came up and we actually did protect properties. The Forest Service was a little iffy about it. "Are you sure...?" I said, "Read the legislation." They started reading it and said, "Oh, I guess you're in charge of that part of it then." So, they ordered people in from other places, because they still thought maybe they should be in charge of it.

Lois: I think it was after the Moose Fire that there was a big brouhaha about how things were done, and a lot of change. That was in 2001.

Lynn: Yes.

Jan: There's always Monday morning quarterbacking, isn't there? I week later everybody has better vision.

Lynn: Yes. When things are on fire, everybody is trying to control. Ultimately, we ended up at what is now Home Ranch Bottoms during the Moose fire. We had two or three tenders and a bunch of firetrucks, and we actually used Barricade on all of the Collins' cabins on the hill and some of the ones across the creek, up where the Schepes and Gib Bissell are. There were five owners up there. Michelotti was one of them. He was a mortician in Billings. We put Barricade on his house, and he said, "What good is this going to do?" I said, "When you're ready to leave, just spray the house down with water. Barricade dries out, and it just sits there. Just spray it again, and it will come back to life and prevent the house from burning down." We did multiple tests with it. We sprayed a building at the Fairgrounds that they wanted to burn down. We sprayed the outside of the building with Barricade. The fire burned from the inside out, so we knew it was a good product, and we started using it a lot.

Jack: What is the chemical that makes things orange?

Lynn: That's the retardant that they drop from aircraft. You see that a lot in California.

Jan: I think Ann Hensen's cabin still has some of that orange on it. The 1988 fire was all around there. I guess the pilot called dispatch and said, "Where do you want me to drop? I can hardly see anything." They said, "Just find a cabin and drop the load and get out of there." I don't know if he came in from the south, but I know that orange stuck on the south side of her cabin and the west side. Ann didn't bother to clean it off, because she appreciated that they saved the cabin for her.

Jack: There's a little more to that story. The pilot's job was to save the pole bridge. That was the assignment, but he couldn't find it for all the smoke. As the story goes, after a few tries he only had so much fuel. He was like, "Shit! I have to find something!" The clouds parted, and there was Ann's cabin, and BOOM! And off he went.

Jan: That was a good day for her, wasn't it? We talked to her a few years after the fire. She said she just knew she was going to come back and find that she'd lost the whole thing, that everything inside would be gone. She was tickled to death when she went up the driveway and the cabin was still standing, pretty much untouched except for the orange stuff all over it.

Jack: Yes, it was like a little island, because everything else was torched.

Lynn: The fact is, a few years later we'd get the big white-tailed bucks coming across that meadow. I've got some pictures. They'd lay down by the cottonwood logs and look at you. They were in velvet then. It was interesting. I did lots of fires after that. In fact, I went to Emmitsburg, Maryland, to a fire academy to learn how to investigate fires. I even investigated fires in the Park. Roger Ranger "Rulebook" [Semler] said the train started one of their fires. He was an investigator, you know. You know who I'm talking about.

Jack: I absolutely know who you're talking about. I thought you were going to say Inspector Clousseau.

Lynn: Well, Inspector Clousseau would have fit him. We hiked up above the hill where that fire was. We actually found the lightning strike. Grass does a funny thing when it burns. If it doesn't burn up, it will tip so that it is away from the fire, and it won't burn. For some reason it doesn't burn, and it will leave a trail that you can watch. We found the strike, and we told them that. They said, "Roger Rulebook said it didn't do that." They blamed the railroad.

Lois: Any questions for Bonny?

Tami: I have a question. You talked about managing an office, and about how the ladies had to have their toenails polished if they wore open-toed shoes. What did you do there?

Bonny: That was the job I retired from, as an insurance agent. I worked there for 23 years. It was so great—the people I got to meet. I'd get to know the grandmother and the grandfather and the children and all who came after, and I'd still run into them in town. You really get to know the people. But I also went out and did inspections, so I got around a lot.

Tami: Was this your agency?

Bonny: No, actually I started working for Don Dorenfeld in 1985. His manager at that time was a friend of mine and a customer at the dentist's office where I worked. We had a day off, and I went to the lunch counter at Albertson's, back when they had a coffee shop. I had my boots and my poncho on, and I was having coffee. Sandy came along and said, "I'm retiring from my job. I'm going to manage Brendan House. I think you would really like this job." I said, "Well, I'm not looking for work." I went over to their office, just the way I was, not fixed up in any particular way. I really liked Don, the boss. He was a great guy. He said, "I think you would really fit here, and I really need somebody because Sandy is leaving and I want to go on vacation." I said, "I'm sure you want references, and I'll go turn in my notice. I think I can work for you." He said,

"No, I hire people, not papers." So, I went in as office manager. I had never done anything like that. He came to work one day, and I went in to talk with him. I looked at him, and his eye was doing something funny. I had worked at a doctor's office before the dentist's office, and I said, "There's something wrong with your eye." He said, "I know. It's been doing something funny." I looked him in the eye and said, "We're going to the ER right now." We went, and he ended up having a quadruple bypass.

So, I was just getting to where I could do the payroll, and I was going to be signed on to the bank account. The next day was payday, and I thought, “Everybody here needs the money.” So, I got in touch with the bookkeeping company that ran everything, and we got the payroll done. I gave him all the figures. Then Don’s wife called, and she said, “We’re in a bad fix. Tomorrow is payday.” And I said, “Checks are in my hand.” Then I ran the office for six months and really did a good job with the business. That was when I decided to get licensed. This was before you had to be licensed to work there. I got every license that I could get. I was licensed in all lines, and then got into banking and just had a blast with it.

Lois: Was this Allstate?

Bonny: No, it was State Farm. And then Don retired. But I didn’t have a college degree. He was trying to work it so that I could get the office, but I didn’t have a degree, so we had to let that go to another gal, and I ended up being very fond of her. She was a very sweet lady, widowed with a little girl. When she got older, I got to send her home for wearing a wrinkled shirt or not wearing the right shoes and not having painted toenails. We had a dress code. If you were going to wear sandals, you either had to wear socks or paint your toenails. We weren’t going to have any ugly toes running around in the office.

Sue: Did you get a stipend for that?

Bonny: No, but it was great. I loved almost all of the jobs that I had. I like doing things with people.

Sue: Do you keep two homes now, one in Columbia Falls and one up here?

Bonny: No. We did for awhile, but we lived in McManamy Draw after we left Columbia Falls. We wanted to be in the country. We had horses and all of that. All those years, we always had this place, and in Columbia Falls and then McManamy Draw out in the West Valley. We had all the same things there. We had two kitchen wood stoves, and we’d have lots of steak. We had our own cattle. And we had lots of neighborhood fun. We were at the foot of a hill that people couldn’t always make it up in the winter, so they’d sleep in our living room. And we had the best well, so people got water there when theirs dried out.

Sue: When did you move here full-time?

Bonny: In 2008. This is our only home, but we can stay with the kids when we go to town. The oldest one who ended up with my folks’ place, their whole basement is like a honeymoon suite. We have our clothes there and our things. We can come and go. Our daughter Rachel has a smaller house, but it has stairs, so we don’t stay there much. Justin has a bar in his house, with a Murphy bed that slides out from behind the bar. We stay there quite often. And he has a pool table.

Jack: Well, Lynn knows how to look forward. It’s easier to stay up here.

Bonny: Yes, it is. My goodness—look at the difference in traffic in the last 10 years.

Sue: It’s horrible, isn’t it?

Jan: And people are running the river earlier every year, in April when there are still trees floating downstream.

Tami: We try to be out of the valley by 4:00, but I wasn’t yesterday. But my husband does not get to complain about traffic, because that’s why we had to leave Seattle. I said, “I can’t deal

with this traffic.” So, whenever he starts to complain about traffic in the valley, I say, “Nope, can’t do it!”

Jan: Can you talk about when you used to do barrel racing?

Bonny: Oh, my gosh. That was all through grade school and high school. That was another amazing time. I started when I was eight or so. I had been riding since I was two. But I was very, very shy. My father came up with the grand idea of me joining a great organization. I didn’t like getting out there in front of everybody, but it was really good for me, and we had a blast. There were 80 in our group at one time. We had a drill team and performed all sorts of grand maneuvers, like double and triple wedding rings, and we did Omoksee things at the fairs. We’d go all around the state in the summertime to the different fairs and perform. The Omoksee stuff was even neater than the drill itself, because we kind of did truck stuff. My biggest problem was that I had glasses. It drove me nuts, because they were always jumping around. I couldn’t get contacts until I was 40, because I had astigmatism.

For example, you’d put your hands behind your back, steer your horse to the center of the arena, and there were strings with donuts hanging down. You had to maneuver your horse to get in position to eat a donut. We did that as teams. Then we had eggs and a spoon, or a dipper and water. One of our favorites was musical tires. They used big tractor tires and would put them in a circle. You’d jump off your horse and bail into one. Then they’d remove a tire each time, just like in musical chairs. We had to perform to make the crowd happy. That’s why we were there, to please the crowd. We’d jump in a tire, and pretty soon we were getting short on tires, so we’d pretend to fight over a tire or two. We did a pretty good job—I think they really believed us. And I was little.

Sue: What kind of horse did you have?

Bonny: She actually was a quarter horse, but she had a little thoroughbred in her. She was awesome. I have a picture of her. Actually, Gary Moris sent me a Christmas card, and it looked like my horse, so I still have that. We had a lot of quarter horses. We had some Morgan breeding in some of them. We liked the ones that could make the mountains, because I grew up in Grant Creek, about ten miles out of Missoula. I’ve always been kind of an end-of-the-roader. Ours was the last place bordering Forest Service on one side and Burlington Northern on another and Grant Creek on the other. My friends would come up, and we’d ride to the falls. There was a pretty little lake up there, too. I took Lynn to where he almost froze himself to death in a little pond. It wasn’t cold to me.

Tami: How did the two of you meet?

Bonny: I lived in the town in the wintertime to go to school. He and his family lived about six blocks away. I had to walk past their house to get to school. I saw him the first time when he was in the 8th grade and I was in the 1st. I saw him standing at the top of the stairs. I thought he was a man. I thought he was the brother of a friend of mine in first grade. I went up and asked him if he had seen Jerry. “No, you must be thinking of somebody else.” He was nice, and I always remembered him after that. Then much later he started dating one of my best friends. We saw each other, but he didn’t remember me at all. I just remembered him because he really did look like an 8th grade man. Lots of hair.

Lynn: I let it grow, but now I can’t stand it.

Bonny: We'll be married 58 years tomorrow. But the horse group became the Charles Russell's Riders. I went and watched them once after we were married and had kids. They had breast collars that were lit up with lights, and they performed beautifully. I don't know if they're still going now. We were just the Junior Riders. I think there were some wealthy people who helped them go further. Until then, my dad made chaps and outfitting and provided horses for anybody. We didn't have much money, but we had horses. There were several kids who didn't have a horse, so he'd let them use a horse and he'd give them chaps and spurs and do whatever he could to help the group go. He was a good hand.

Lynn: She's kept track of a lot of the girls who were in it with her over the years.

Sue: Did your kids grow up with horses?

Bonny: Yes. The kids did the Omoksee stuff and rode horses, went swimming with their horses in Ashley Lake. But I have to admit to being a horrible mother. When my kids were old enough to tie their shoes, they did. And they had chores. We've always had a big garden. We had a huge garden in McManamy. And the kids had to weed their row of garden before they could go play. One day Mick's friends got there early, and he wasn't done. I said, "Well, you can go, but you have to do that right when you get home." He got kicked by another horse in his leg. I was working at the doctor's office then. He came home, and I looked at it. I said, "I think you're alright. No bones sticking out, and there's no blood." I called and made an appointment for 4:00 that afternoon. I usually had Friday off, only working four days a week. I said, "You'd better get that row of garden done while we're waiting. We have just about enough time for you to get that row done." He was down on his hands and knees, dragging the leg behind him. We got to town, and it turned out he had a broken ankle. To this day, Mick says, "My mother made me weed the garden with a broken leg."

Lynn: Life in the fast lane.

Lois: Well, thank you. It's been an hour and half.

Jack: May I ask another question? What's your favorite thing to do in the summer?

Bonny: Floating the river has been the greatest for both Lynn and I. With all of our surgeries we haven't been out there for two years now, and we're hoping that we can again. I can tell you a couple of river stories, because they're funny. We got some pontoon boats because on the big rafts you don't have personal freedom. And I don't like water fights. I used to, but when you get old and you can't flip the paddles like you used to, you can't fight as well and you get drenched. So, we bought the pontoon boats, and they're maneuverable, and you can go off and pull in and rest and watch everything.

We were doing a border float one day. All the family was behind me, because I like to go out ahead and be alone and watch the peregrine falcons and pick out the route to take for the river. I was watching a falcon, and it was the year after the Wedge Canyon Fire. I saw a stump in the water, and I thought, "I didn't think the fire came there. Isn't that funny? Oh, look at that bird." I was going along, and when I looked the stump moved. I was paddling into a grizzly bear sitting there cooling himself in the river on a hot day. I said, "Oh!" And he went, "Uhhh." He ran up the hill, and I paddled across the water and was waving at everybody. "Bear!!" I had never crossed that river that fast.

Lynn: If you've floated this end you know the lower end of Wurtz Rapids. There are slick spots where it's fallen into the river. One day we had about 15 people all floating on different rafts and

pontoons and what have you. We pulled off there, where there's a nice beach where everybody can rest. We looked up, and there were two bear cubs, yearlings anyway. They crawled up the mud and got on it and slid down into the river. They did that for half an hour.

Bonny: And we couldn't leave. They were so fun to watch. Another time I was being the ferry person and giving people rides and dropping Lynn and Larry off and picking them up later. I was reading a book, and I was sitting down there at Wurtz when the water was not where it is now.

Lynn: The water used to go by Steve Berg's place.

Bonny: I was reading, and I got stung on the back of the neck. I got up and walked back to the car and opened the glove compartment to get the serum, and a sow and a cub walked past the car and right over to where I had been sitting. I've been very fond of bees ever since.

Lois: We had a grizzly cub on our back deck last night. I had the window open and was sitting on the couch. I looked over, and there was a second-year cub coming up the steps and onto the deck, just a few feet away. I yelled, "What are you doing on our deck?!" He didn't turn around and go back down the steps. He squeezed under the railing and went out into the back yard. So, I went to the door, and he was sitting out in the middle of the yard like, "What was that about?" Then I saw its sibling over by the garage. I started yelling and waving my arms. They thought about it for a minute, then took off and ran into the woods.

Bonny: We live in a great place, don't we?

Tami: While we were gone recently Bernie and Vickie came down to get tulips. They had to try several times.

Vicki: The first time we were walking over, and we could see into the yard from the road. There was a beautiful black bear. I decided I didn't need the tulips that bad, and we went home. Two days later we went down, and I said, "Bernie, there's a bear. And it's got a red ball in its mouth." They had left a ball that the dogs play with, and the bear was playing with the ball. He ran down toward their barn, so we did proceed to the house. We unlocked the doors, then went out where we could watch the bear, but knew that we could run into the house. We still didn't get the tulips that day. It took about a week to get those silly tulips.

Tami: We found the ball later, down by the barn. It went in the trash. There wasn't much left of it after the bear got done with it.

Bonny: We had a sow out here in the yard, seven or eight years ago. We had the fire pit, and I had cardboard pots. The bottom had come out of them, and I was just going to burn them. Lynn and I had been someplace. We came in, and our cameras were in the car. We watched those bears for about half an hour. It must have been the boy cub, because he was in the fire pit with one of those pots. He was looking through the pot like he was saying, "Hey, look Ma!" It was very cool.

Lynn: I have a picture on the frig of a sow laying down in the field. She was flattened out as best she could. She had one paw up like this. I couldn't resist, so I titled the photo, "I have one helluva hangover, and I don't want to listen to anybody."

Bonny: That's what it looks like.

Jack: One of my favorite grizzly bear stories took place in the spring. North of us a sow and two cubs were chewing on a carcass. Of course, the road was closed, so they weren't being disturbed. After a while, I thought, "I really want to go biking up there. I wonder if they're far

enough off the road that I could just scoot by.” I finally got up there, and I started biking along. Everything was going just fine. They didn’t really see me; they were 50 or 60 yards off. Then the wind changed, blowing from me to them. Mom started looking around, and she saw me. I had stopped biking by then. She was like, “Okay, this isn’t good. We’re out of here.” She barked at the cubs, and off she went. And off they went, except for the last one, who kind of stopped and was looking at me. It turned around and started going back. Oh, my goodness. I watched that sow turn around, chase after him, and go Wham! “I said we were leaving!” She got up and looked at me. I hadn’t moved. “Never mind. Let’s go back to eating.” But the next time the wind blew from me to them, when she said it was time to leave, he left! He was right behind her. Off they went into the trees.

Bonny: Parenting skills.

Jack: A different question. You’ve got all of these plants. What is your favorite?

Bonny: We don’t even have them all out. I was explaining that to Tami. We’ve been running up and down the road to doctor appointments and whatnot. I’ve got seeds still to plant, and it’s getting too late. But my favorites... We’ve got a bunch of herbs. We’ve been taking those to Flannery at Home Ranch Bottoms. We trade for meals, so that works out pretty well. But we usually have tomatoes and peppers. I am pretty fond of the peppers. Squash does very well, and we have those and peas and beans. And we usually have a lot of dill and kale. I do the lettuces on the porch, because they’re handy and they do well there.

Pat: Do you not have problems with the deer?

Bonny: No, and we put netting up if we do. We have trouble with the deer earlier, until it greens up in the yard, then they’re gone. And we haven’t seen any babies yet, so it’s a different year. We have the Army-Navy netting that we can put over any of the beds. It keeps the deer away, and it keeps the hail damage down to a dull roar. And they don’t get drowned in a downpour.

Lynn: I’m the geranium man. There’s the pink one, and the white one is a holdover from five years ago. I’ve kept it going for five years now. Those are lilies there.

Jan: We have two or three flowers that come up every year. Somebody told me that they think Becky gave Alice a whole bunch of seeds. Because every spring different things come up that are really colorful. They come up on their own—all I have to do is water them.

Lois: I brought some Dan Block books with me, if anyone would like to buy one.

Bonny: And you guys take some goodies home with you, please.

SESSION OVER