

Naomi_Hoiland_May_2013

This interview was conducted by Karen McDonough.

Karen: My name is Karen McDonough. Today is Friday, May 31, 2013. I'm interviewing for the first time Naomi Hoiland. This interview is taking place at the Noiland cabin at 450 Trail Creek Road, Polebridge, Montana. This interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and is part of the North Fork History Project. Naomi today our first question for you is we would like a little bit of your early background, where and when you were born.

Naomi: Well, [laughs] I was born in a log cabin and the log cabin was on Half Moon Lake. My Grampa and Grandma Gaffney, Clyde and Annie Gaffney owned quite a bit of property on Lake 5 Half Moon Lake. They are separated by a little dike, but we're on the Half Moon side. I was born January 31, 1935 and on my birth certificate it says Belton, but the doctor came. My dad went and got the doctor and he came on the train and he had to snowshoe into my place. By then I was born so they tell me but he checked it out and I was perfectly healthy, end of story. [Laughs]

Karen: Can you remember the first time you came to the North Fork?

Naomi: Oh, I think if memory serves me correctly I think I was about 4 years old, 3 or 4. You see I was raised, actually I was raised by my grandparents.

Karen: Are their names were?

Naomi: Ruth and Burt Conn, and I came up with them probably when I was 4 years old, and it was in the summertime. I know it was in the summertime because Grampa Burt worked for the Forest Service. He was a smoke chaser and on a trail crew. He might have come down a couple of years before and done this because he was a seasonal worker for the Forest Service and he lived at Ford Station, Ford Ranger Station. And Nana decided that when he was permanently up here for seasonal workers she would come up here and they bought the house that belongs to Doug Barnes now. It was a junk heap, but oh dear it was a nice house and it was right next to the Holcolms. And I was probably 4 years old because let's see, sometimes I would go... When I was 5 we went up to Lion Lookout and I walked the whole way. Nana and I went up to visit Grampa Burt for the weekend up on Lion Lookout. Oh I had a wonderful childhood because those are fond memories and Grampa Burt always had a couple of chipmunks that he caught in a live trap that he made and I would get to feed them and everything when we were there, and I got to eat little cans of grapefruit. Oh I thought that was wonderful. We appreciated our treats much more than we do now and our treats were very simple, but that was fun.

But anyway, up to the North Fork I had to be about 5. Grampa Burt was on a lookout. They shut the lookout down and then he came up here to do trail work, that was it. Okay. Nana and I came up and they needed a schoolteacher and the one was retired and gone and she was living in the house and Nana bought the house from her and she handed over all of her supplies and everything and I started 1st grade when I was 5 years old at the Ford Schoolhouse. So that was my first time up here. Yeah, that was the first time I think. I was about 5. I have a lot of fond memories on the North Fork, but they are all concerned with just everyday living. It was just a joy because you had the mountains.

We have a funny story. There were quite a few, it seemed like a roomful of kids but there couldn't have been because there couldn't be that many kids, but Noni Day was there and her husband Matheson was one of the students and a roomful of Wurtz kids because there were so many of them. I don't remember the names of the other kids but Noni used to play the organ I think and we used to have fun. Oh gosh we would sing all kinds of good songs. I have the little yellow music book that we sang from that was Ruth A. Conn, my grandmother. Well, anyway one day we were busy doing our work in school and it was cold. It was late in the fall and all of a sudden a whole bunch of men were running back and forth and we couldn't figure it out. I remember Nana, I can just vividly remember Nana saying, "Is there a problem?" And she opened the door and they said the schoolhouse's roof was on fire and there was a chimney fire and oh it was a long ways it seemed forever to the river. Now the river goes right up almost to the schoolhouse in the yard, but it was a long ways away then. They had a bucket brigade and I can just see that, I was just fascinated with it, the bucket brigade of water to put out the chimney fire. [Laughs] But that was them, fond memories of the school. I remember getting slapped on the hands with a ruler by my grandmother because I didn't something bad but I don't remember what it was. [Laughs] Oh dear.

I guess that's all I remember about the 1st grade because actually I don't know that we went the whole year. I don't think we went the whole year. No we didn't. We went through thanksgiving. I remember having Thanksgiving at I think Holcolms and Lena always had everybody there and that was so much fun. Then I think it must have been about Christmas time the school shut down because somebody died and so then they had to move to town and there weren't enough kids in the school, I think. But anyway, that's as I remember it.

Karen: Do you remember when you came back again on the North Fork, about what age you were for summers with your grandma?

Naomi: Oh yeah, every summer I came back. Sometimes like I said Grampa Burt was on a lookout. He was on Canyon Lookout and Lion Lookout. Those were the two that he did there. They are no longer there anymore, but Canyon was just up a little ways and that was a much nicer lookout and that was a real nice

lookout. Lion was up on a huge stand and it scared you have to death to walk up there and oh my gosh, I remember a lightning storm at Lion. I will never forget that. The wind blow, oh and I just knew that we were going to fall right off, but Grampa Burt says, “Oh don’t worry, don’t worry, it’s safe,” and so well okay. And I got up and he get me use the asthmus, kind of look at it and he spotted a fire and called it in and that was the life on the lookout.

Karen: Were the lookouts in the North Fork?

Naomi: Those weren’t in the North Fork. They were around Hungry Horse. Bob Marshall, up that way. Lion Lookout is by the Lion Lake and then Canyon Lookout was farther out. But that led to then he would come up to the North Fork and work on the trail crews, and I suppose he worked with Ralph there and some of those fun guys. There were a bunch of characters up here.

Let’s see, what was it like up at the North Fork? It was beautiful. It was just when they say a piece of heaven like a sign down below, and the last good place in the world it truly was. Every morning was just fun and games for me. I would help. I would go with Grampa Burt, that was the most fun thing to go with Grampa Burt across the road to get water. We had a little spring that he had some property on the other side of the road and we would go and get water. I had little buckets that I carried and he had the big buckets and we would carry the water and we would get Nana all set up with water and everything and then we’d go fishing. And oh if that wasn’t fun. I would walk along with Grampa Burt and we’d fish for ...trout. Sometimes we’d count them, sometimes we didn’t. I remember one time out on the island we waded out. The water was such that we could wade out and there was one – oh my gosh he looked like he was 50 feet long but I know he was only about [20...00:12:15 this long]. He had a bullhead caught in his throat and he drowned and he was up on the shore. Actually I think... I don’t know, maybe I did, I cried a little because I thought well why didn’t we catch him and he wouldn’t die like that? But that’s Mother Nature.

Karen: Did your grandmother fry the fish that you caught or did she can them for you?

Naomi: Both. She did both, yeah. We had many fish fries. Maybe that’s why I don’t have fish now [laughs] because we ate so much. In those days you ate what was available and that was deer and elk and moose and fish. Well we had chicken. We had chickens in Columbia Falls when we lived there.

Karen: That’s a little bit about your youth; can you remember now when you became a teenager and a young adult?

Naomi: Oh. Well, growing up we would come up here in the summer. Even when we didn’t live here we would come up here in the summer because I would go to school with Nana. We lived in the teacherage and various places, Half Moon,

but most of the time was up by Eureka [Alni 00:13:53], in the summertime, then we would come up here and oh it was just delightful. But we would have beautiful wonderful picnics and down in the schoolyard we would have the picnics and they were big affairs.

Karen: The date is now October 8th, Tuesday, 2013. After a break for a busy summer we are continuing our interview with Naomi Hoiland. Naomi.

Naomi: Well hello. [Laughs] Here we are again after a very busy summer and just now getting started. I guess we covered a lot of the background of our being here, but some things happened in various times. I remember one year I was here at the cabin by myself, well with the dogs, and at that time it was Bogey and Clem. It was in '96 and Duke went to meet his buddies from Washington and they were going in the yak and a terrible storm hit, just unbelievable. It was one like I remember from my childhood when we were always snowed in, but this time I was snowed in and Duke was snowed out. His nephew that was going to take us up to his place in the yak was caught in Browning in the snowstorm and couldn't get back, and his friends in Washington had a terrible terrible ice storm. It was just awful. It just ruined so many things and they were over a week without power and they didn't know what to do. So they couldn't meet him either and Duke tried to get home and the road was literally shut with snow, I mean because of snow, and he had to stay in town in Korum with my folks, and if that wasn't something. [Laughs] Oh dear. You would have to know my folks to know what his experience was.

But anyway, he tried every day to get back up here and every day he was turned back and finally, finally the snowplow started up because they got caught up in Kalispell, but they started up to North Fork and he followed the snowplow up and finally got home. He says, "Oh how have you been? What's happened?" I said, "Oh well the dogs and I had a wonderful time. We were warm. We had plenty of food because I have a stockpile of food in the laundry room and everything was fine." He says, "Well, my experience wasn't so good." [Laughs] But be that as it may I had a wonderful time and it was very very beautiful up here. You just don't... You haven't lived until you've been in a place like this and after a snowstorm, a real snowstorm then it clears off and it's just a bluebird day every day, and by that I mean the sky is so blue it just about knocks your eyes out and the sun comes up and it's just sparkly. And oh boy the dogs and I just romped and rolled in the snow waiting for Duke. Then finally one day here he came, but that lasted...I was snowbound for 3 days, that's all. That wasn't very much.

Karen: Okay, and then could you tell us about your fire that you were so close with.

Naomi: Another experience we had and that was very traumatic, was the Wedge Canyon fire of 2003. And every 10 years I have a birthday party for Duke and we had the 50th. It was so much fun with the neighbors and then we had a 60th

where he really... We crowned him and we had lots of different hats and he's a man that wears different hats too. But then the 70th was supposed to be a big party and the plans were all set and made and along comes the fire, and the only way I can describe the fire when it really got going was we'd look out the window and it sounded like you were in a freight yard with freight trains coming and going and then you'd look around and it would look like a war zone because the flames were coming so high and every once in a while there would be an explosion and that of course was a tree instead of a bomb, but there's not much difference in the two. The destruction anyway that they wreak is just unbelievable, but we watched it and every night we'd go to bed and think well thank God for this day and if we live to see another one well thank God for that, and the next morning we would wake up and things hadn't really changed.

It did burn a swath starting on Wedge Canyon and Cleft Rock and what they called the Horseshoe and swept on down and across the creek and Duke was just fighting with the crews that were here because we were a safe zone and [Ken Solvings 00:20:53] were a safe zone too and we watched the fire go over their place and thought oh no, but they survived and it just over the top. And it all happened that way because we all listened to Len Ogle. Well not all, but some of us did and we were prepared. We had fire hydrants. We had hoses coming up from the creek and our place was so easily accessible and so fire safe that they would come down and our granddaughter Callie had to direct traffic and she finally made a sign because she got so darn busy keeping the pump going down in the creek. They would drive up and they would stop and fill up and it took about 7 minutes to fill and take off again and the next truck would come and stop and fill up and it was that way every day. I think it last for how long was it, about 3 or 4 weeks?

Karen: I believe.

Naomi: Yeah, something like that. Anyway, when Duke is interviewing he will get the facts straight because he is a fact man and I'm not. Anyway, it was a very scary experience. We tried to get up to turn our neighbor's water on and they turned us back and they were just coming... The fire crews and everything were just leaving and coming out and it was just a mass exodus and it was so scary. I just can't even describe how we felt, but we were so doggone busy that you just worked and did your thing and exhausted at night and fell asleep and woke up the next morning and we were still alive and we were still all in one piece, our property, our place. We had plywood boards on all the windows but Duke ahead of time had marked them so that he would be able to put them up in a hurry because we knew same day the fire was going to come. The glass on the old screen porch which we have glassed-in we had it all covered. And the only thing the fire people said that we hadn't taken care of properly was our deck because fire could have gotten in under that and the whole place would have gone up. But we watered. We had huge fire hoses and we watered down

all the buildings and the sawmill was saved because the fire hydrant was out by the sawmill and the big tank on the hill and the pump in the creek. Boy we were like a bunch of bees in a beehive; we were busy.

Karen: And it's just such a miracle that just buildings were lost in that fire.

Naomi: Oh yes. It was a miracle. God watched out for us that's for me.

Karen: Okay Naomi I think we're going to finish up with just a couple of changes that you've seen over the time that you can share with us before we wear you out tonight.

Naomi: Changes over the time, you mean in the North Fork?

Karen: Hmm.

Naomi: Oh yes and I have a change too. I was born on January 21st 1935 and I said 31st. I don't know why I said that, but anyway I was born on January 21, 1935. My grandmother bought this second place which was on Trail Creek, this place, and it's 150 acres instead of 80. We own 80 acres but it's 150 acres altogether. And most homesteads were 160 acres, especially...well, almost everywhere, but apparently Wikert didn't prove up completely and so he lost 10 acres to the Forest Service across the creek.

Karen: That's interesting.

Naomi: Yeah. That's the only thing we can figure out.

Karen: Okay. Can you think of any changes that come to your mind right away? I'm sure there's so many.

Naomi: Well, I've seen a change in the population. There's been quite an influx of people. I've seen changes in the types of houses that are built. There are a million and \$2-million homes being built around here and our little humble abode, our little log house looks kind of funny compared to those, but it's home sweet home and we do enjoy every single day that we're in it. Our kids enjoy it an awful lot too.

Then I guess it was impossible to stop, but the advent of technology has been a pain, a puzzle and as technology goes it's good when it works but it's horrible when it doesn't, like the little girl with the curl. Technology has really changed things. They even changed the name of the hall. It's no longer the North Fork Improvement Association which is very sad because that was a bit of history; it's now the North Fork Landowners Association and I don't like that too much, because well, when you get our age, and Duke had his 80th birthday this year it's hard to accept change. And I guess that's the biggest changes that I've seen. We've got some wonderful people that have moved in though. I tell you,

I just can't even begin to name them all, but our neighbors and our friends that are here are so neat and we cherish every minute that we have with them.

Karen: Naomi thank you so much. I've really appreciated having this time with you and sharing it with you.

Naomi: I've appreciated you too. Then when our kids were a little bit older we started going to the Community Hall a lot, like every Saturday night and they had wonderful things. They had the hat dance and they had a costume dance and our kids always went to it and they always won. [Laughs] Very competitive. The hat dance was an awful lot of fun and then the ice cream social; that's been going on forever, forever and forever. A lot of young kids up here, you'd be surprised and our kids really enjoyed all the grandkids and kids up here.

Mid Conley says that my grandmother stole this property from her parents. Her parents left and went out in Washington, I'm not sure where, to try and make a living because they weren't making one up here, or a very good one anyway. And they all packed up and left and didn't pay the taxes. It came up at a sheriff's sale for taxes and my grandmother bought it from the county for taxes. It was oh I don't know, well it was in 1947 but it was about \$300 that she paid for 80 acres. Mid Conley told us that she thought it was theft because her mother had almost saved enough money to buy it, to pay the taxes and your grandmother got it first. And be that as it may I like to think that my grandmother didn't even know [Wikerts] and I'm sure she didn't and bought it for taxes from the county. And you know the county has a long time before they put it up for sale.

Karen: Before it goes up for auction, yeah, it does.

Naomi: But those were lean years. Those were war years.

[Starts to repeat what has been dictated starting October 8th...]

00:31:00

[End of recording]