

Gathering Our Voice

Interviewee: Harriet Bullitt

Interviewer: Nancy Warner

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NW: What I would like to talk to you about today is your early years in Leavenworth and basically what you knew of how people made a living here in terms of food production, farming and their use of even timber – how they made their living off the land here. So I think it might be good if we started with your earliest experiences coming here as a little girl, if you could tell me a little bit about that.

HB: That was when my mother had first decided to build here – to acquire some land and build here for the family. Although we were at school in Seattle, home was in Seattle, she had been born in Seattle. My father had just died and they had done a lot of camping around here. Horse camping around Lake Chelan and up Icicle with Dude Brown and Oscar Getty, old time names here. I was considered too little to go. So I mostly just heard about it, intensely jealous at the age of 4 and determined when I had to go to bed with my doll and cry myself to sleep because I couldn't go and my brother and sister went. They were going to ride horses in these wonderful places and I was too little to go even though I promised that I would be good. I couldn't go anyway. I had to stay with the governess and determined that someday I would be big enough to go. So I have been making up for it ever since, obviously.

But, when I was 7 years old she did acquire property. My father had died and she just loved the area and she felt that she had just a feeling and a connection here to this area around Icicle Canyon. She really liked Leavenworth. It was a sleepy little friendly town and she had made some friends. She made friends with the banker, R.B.Fields who was the former owner of the house which is now Barn Beach Reserve. So we stayed there at that house. My sister and I slept out on swinging beds that hung by chains from the porch which is now the (what do they use that for now?) it was the dining room as long as it was a bed and breakfast. The porch is all enclosed but it used to be an open porch and you could look out and see the river. While our house was being built we used to stay there with the Fields and they had Arabian horses. This is why it is called Barn Beach, because he had his barns down there.

She found a little log cabin in a clearing. She was bushwhacking a little bit and found her way up – it opened into kind of a horse trail or maybe some four-wheel vehicles that came up – to what's now our family home at Copper Notch. She followed the road up for about a mile and it opened up to a clearing and there was a little log cabin there. Exploring around, she was by herself. She peeked inside the log cabin and the floor was covered with sheep. Yeah! It was a dirt floor that was kind of dug into a saucer and all these sheep were nestled in there. There was a young teenager in charge of the sheep and he was around – that was young Jim Fromm, teenager. His father was Frank Fromm. Well they made friends and it was their property and they had sheep running up there, up above the ditch. The irrigation ditch was there already. It had been there for

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some time. Yes, they sheared their sheep up along side the ditch up there. She ended up buying some land from Frank Fromm. That was our first. After that she acquired some other pieces that took up a good part of the hillside there. Then she built that is now the caretaker's house and that was where we stayed. My mother always likes lots of help so she started out sleeping in the log cabin herself but not for very long because, as the new cabin got built, she stayed there and brought us there and I was included. And she found a caretaker who would sleep in the log cabin and he got scared away by a skunk. (NW: really scared away?) I think so, I think so but it wasn't long before she started building on our family house. Then we moved there.

NW: So about what year did you move into that house?

HB: 1932, I guess. Well maybe it was 1933 because my father died in 1932 and it was after that. She may have started when he was still alive. That period is very foggy to me.

NW: Maybe he had interest in having a house over here too.

HB: Well he loved coming over here but he was so deep into his political world that I found out later that those trips were not all that much fun for my mother because sometimes he would leave in the middle. He would go home. They would be up in the back country and he would decide he had to get home for some political campaign or other because that's what he was. He was deep into political organizing.

NW: Okay, I'd like to talk more about that on another session. One thing I wanted to follow-up on now, that I'd really like to know more about is the sheep.

HB: There were quite a few sheep. You'd drive along the road and you'd come across a flock of sheep in the road and you'd have to slow down and go behind the sheep. There were some Basque sheep herders, I remember.

NW: Are there particular names that you remember?

HB: Of the sheep herders? I never knew any of them. I just knew that there were some Basque people who did that and we would occasionally meet somebody on the road. Yeah, there were sheep and there were sheep trails up on the property above our house, up around Mountain Home and Boundary Butte. That was laced with sheep trails.

NW: When you came into the valley as a young girl, say in the springtime – did you ever come over here in the spring? Did you see sheep down in the valley bottom before they started to drive them up into the mountains?

HB: I don't remember. I just remember being taken in a car somewhere, like driving to Wenatchee, which took a lot longer that it does today. Just driving somewhere. I just remember there were sheep. I don't remember what time of year. I suppose in the spring but spring started

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later than it does today. Spring didn't start until May. There was snow on the ground until the end of April. Longer season.

NW: When would you typically come over from Seattle to start spending the summers?

HB: Oh anytime of year. We came in the winter too. The snow was deep. We had caretakers who lived at the house, in the little house and they kept the road clear. They didn't have tractors and blades like we do today and I don't exactly know how they kept. I guess they had a truck with a blade. But they did a lot of clearing of snow. That's about all anybody did. People who lived here – all they did was clear snow from their houses and their windows and take care of their animals and their children. They all worked at home. They called it rocking chair, which was unemployment. Nobody worked in the winter. The men worked all summer. All the snow-free months they worked in the woods – dangerous work. They worked for the Forest Service. They had mules and horses and they worked in the woods. Women didn't work. Women did a lot of work at home and everybody had their gardens and their farms of different sizes. There weren't that many people so they had big tracts of land. People grew their own animal feed. They grew hay. We grew alfalfa.

NW: Where did you grow alfalfa?

HB: In the lower field where the Lunz's live, beside the river. It was rich with silt that had come in from the flooding river – silt that the river had left there. That's in the lower part that's toward the river. It was fertile and it grew wonderful alfalfa.

NW: How many cuttings would you get a year? Do you remember?

HB: Probably two, but I didn't really keep track of that. I think most people got two. Maybe that had to be a good year.

NW: When you say people had large tracts of land, do you have a feel for how large those tracts were?

HB: I suppose that in the beginning, long before we got there. Back in the '80s, before the railroad came, farmers came in and before Leavenworth was incorporated or anything people just came and made some farms. There was a beautiful little family farm over here on the other side of Sleeping Lady where the RV camp is. That was the Fisher family. It's not a huge piece of land but they had a beautiful, productive very large garden with goats. Just about everybody had chickens and a pig, and usually a cow and a calf or two, or people would trade.

But the earliest people that came here were farmers, before logging or trucks or railroad or anything. They didn't get along too well with the Indians, of course because the Indians were used to using the place for their fishing and hunting and gathering. People weren't very nice to the Indians. They built fences. And, they didn't really want them around. The Indians had gotten kind of discouraged because a lot of their fishing grounds had been pretty much destroyed –

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heavily damaged anyway – as time went on, because they were building dams and then they were cutting trees. Then they built a mill down below, when they started logging. They destroyed a lot of the fishing habitat – long before this fish hatchery came into being, a lot of it was gone already.

Maybe fewer people came, there are better sources than I am because that was before, but I know that farmers came first. We heard that this property was in strawberries and potatoes, I think. This is what I've been told. But this has never had any chemicals on the soil because we got it approved from Master Gardeners. When it was farmed, they didn't have any pesticides or anything in those days. After that it turned into pasture. Dude Brown, then Slim Hollingsworth, who followed Dude Brown had pasture. A lot of this was pasture.

But just the lifestyle that I remember were families. And my children, then as we came back and I had children, my children were the same age as some of the children around here. My kids went to school here for a little while. The friends that they had we would go back and forth, just around the neighborhood here. The family where the father that worked in the woods, they had four ... let's see three boys and they all worked at home and did chores and they had a, not huge, but a really good garden and they had a pig and there was 4H. He would kill a pig every year and butcher it. When we were invited over there for breakfast or something, they would serve the biggest slab of ham that you ever saw. It would cover a quarter of the table. It would cover a whole platter and be more than a half-an-inch thick. In today's menu it would be enough to feed an entire family and have leftovers. Then they'd fry four eggs and put on top of it. (NW: for each person?) Yes! That's how people ate.

NW: Of course they were burning a lot of calories.

HB: Well he worked in the woods all summer. He worked hard and in the winter he took care of things at home. That's what most people did. I don't know anybody who worked in the winter. Unless it was downtown, like in the drugstore and the bank. At that time Leavenworth was all a service economy because the logging was over, the mill was closed, the mining was over because there was train that came through the tunnel and they didn't need to mine. Coal, we burned coal for a long time. The house was built for coal. I think most houses were built either for coal or you know what they did – and this family I just referred to and I think a lot of other people here – they went down to the Peshastin Mill and put a load of sawdust into their trucks. They brought sawdust. You got it for free. They would bring it back and they would feed an oil drum, a great big oil tank that they had fitted with a stove pipe. That was the heating system for the house. And did it ever heat! It really heated. The children's job was to keep it fed because you had to pouring sawdust in it about four times a day. It was a completely free source of heat. You just had to be there to keep putting sawdust in.

NW: Kind of like an early pellet stove.

HB: Probably the forerunner. It was free and it was a while before they didn't have that any more and then the mill closed down of course.

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NW: Could we back up a little bit, just to make sure that I've got this clear about when your mother bought the property over at Copper Notch. This property that you later purchased for Sleeping Lady was owned by the church?

HB: Not then. It was owned by the federal government. It was taken over. When we came over here, that was the year that Franklin Roosevelt was elected President. And, it was the time of the Great Depression. One of the steps that was taken when he came into office was work programs all over the country because unemployment was so widespread. To put young men to work, well they started Coulee Dam pretty soon and that gave a lot of employment. This was a program called Civilian Conservation Corps and it was a paramilitary organization where young men would have the job. It was active in the summer. I don't know what they did in the winter. It probably closed down. I don't remember. Or else it was just a skeleton crew maybe that kept the place open, or something. They did a lot of building. They built Icicle Road for one. That's how we got Icicle Road.

NW: All the way from the highway?

HB: I think, I don't know if they went up as far as Chatter Creek right away. I think they did, because in my memory, that's where I rode my horse was at Chatter Creek and that's the end of the road. So I guess they built it all that way. Then they built the beautiful ski lodge up on Ski Hill. You know that lovely old lodge. They built some other things around here, I don't know what. CCC all over the country built different things. They did a lot of building and it was high quality building and they built the buildings that they were living in here. We have four of them still on the property. The front office is one. Some of them burned and some of them you just couldn't save. When it was converted to a dude ranch they made some changes. That's when the CCC ended its program. That was umm, I guess that was before World War I started. But the economy recovered.

NW: Before World War II, you mean?

HB: Before World War II. Well, then World War II of course gave it a huge boost and everything flourished from then on. And it was after World War II that a young couple came here and wanted to acquire this place and make a dude ranch. It had been, I don't know exactly, I guess it must have been just doing nothing for a little while. And then they did. They borrowed money from the local bank.

NW: From Mr. Fields?

HB: Yes, and maybe some other people gave them some money I think my mother helped them a little bit. And they started out, they did a little remodeling here and then opened a dude ranch. He had been in the mountain troops. So he was pretty good with horses and mules and they got a pack string of horses and riding horses and she ran the food and lodging service. And he wrangled the horses. And that lasted for a while. They called it Icicle River Ranch.

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NW: What was their name?

HB: Umm, Davie. Jerry and Wilfred Davie. That turned out not to work for them and they closed the dude ranch, divided some of the property and he died. [break].

NW: Let's go back to some of those farms. That's great context.

HB: Well he's responsible for a lot of the farming because he was a shrewd banker and he made loans to people for their land. And Sam Beecher, he's a legend around here. And you know with the planning of the irrigation ditches up here. And it was a farming boom. It was all platted for farms and homes. A lot of it never happened because it turned out you can't grow apples commercially. But they were trying to then. They thought they could. There's Wenatchee growing all these apples, we can too. So there was all this speculation and Mr. Field funded it.

NW: So that was in the 30s and 40s?

HB: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah and 20s I guess. Forties, I guess they must have been discovering it wasn't working.

NW: '48 was that terrible flood year. Did that really have a big affect up here?

HB: Oh, was it? I don't remember. In '48 I was in Germany so I don't ... I was disconnected for awhile there. That was then eh?

NW: Well how about in terms of what you would see in town like dairies and places to buy cheese and local meat. With all these people running farms. When you came here with your family, did you buy food here? Did the caretakers have food already?

HB: We didn't um ... I don't remember the local dairies. Well in town, of course there were no chain stores, naturally. But there were some shops in town where you could get specialty things and you could get all the staples. We had our own milk because we had a cow and if our cow was dry we got it from somebody else, I guess. And we had cream off the top of the bucket. It was thick. You had to eat it with a spoon. So on buckwheat cakes and real maple syrup and big blob of that cream, that was breakfast. And we had a pig. And then there was a calf every once in awhile you know so the cow had plenty of milk. But we didn't like seeing the ... you know the calf always had a name, so our caretakers would swap our calf with somebody else's calf and then each would butcher the other's calf and then we could eat it. And there were a lot of chickens and a little barn where we kept our horses. And there was the pig. And the pig had a fence around it cuz the pig would root up the ground and make it nice and fertile and soft for our vegetables. And then we'd move the fence the next year for the next pig.

NW: So you helped in some of these activities?

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HB: No, I just had my horse and I just rode all over the place on my horse.

NW: Was that a common practice, moving the pig pen around?

HB: Yeah, because they'd dig up the soil for you. They're great cultivators. But I don't remember ever seeing a pig getting killed. I think maybe we might have sold the pig or I don't remember eating a lot of ham and pork. But I remember the beef and the chicken and we had a big ram for awhile. And he was a lot of trouble because he fell down the bank and got tangled on the bushes. He was more trouble than he was worth. But we had, I mean the horses were the big thing in my life was just my own horse that I went everywhere with. And I had friends over here and we just did things that kids do, went off on the horse.

NW: When you went riding, other than going up Icicle Road to Chatter Creek, did you go riding on any of the neighboring farms with your friends?

HB: I don't think so. We rode into Leavenworth and tied up in front of the drugstore for an ice cream soda. You could tie up your horse anyplace, and just being able to do that. It's not a horse friendly place anymore. Yeah, we'd go into Leavenworth fairly often. It was the safe thing to do.

NW: Well one of the things I'm really interested in is that people had hogs and they moved their hog pens around so that the hogs would dig up the soil and fertilize the soil.

HB: Yes, because you ran lots of water into the pig pen because they like water and then you could recycle a lot of your household meals, naturally because between the pigs and the chickens you had very little garbage because they would just about eat anything. Nobody had a dumpster. That was ridiculous and there was no plastic. And very little cans. People had jars of things that they'd reuse the jars. So there wasn't much to throw away. And we didn't have enormous newspapers and any paper products I suppose got burned so there wasn't really very much to throw away. I don't know what we did throw away. I suppose some cans once in awhile.

NW: But mostly people were doing their own gardens and doing their own canning. Do you remember having canned meat ever?

HB: Horse meat during World War II.

NW: Really? Here?

HB: Well anywhere. I mean it was just in the stores.

NW: Really?

HB: Yeah, and that's what dog food was made of, canned dog food. I don't know if it still is or not. I don't know why it wouldn't be because it's really nourishing. But we'd get fresh horse meat in the market.

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NW: Really?

HB: You didn't know that? Well that was in World War II and beef was, you know everything went to the troops and beef was in short supply so horse meat was sold in the stores. It was very rich and very red and it was common. It was good. You'd make gravy with it, you'd just roast it like anything else. In Iceland it's a regular menu item all the time today. So it's a perfectly good food. I didn't like it much because it's so rich that two mouthfuls is about enough. I mean it's just really rich.

NW: So how is that linked, if it links at all to all the horses there were running wild after the Depression in the Dust Bowl, all the horses in North Central Washington? Were they rounding some of them up for meat?

HB: I don't know. I would think that they would. I would think that a lot of them would have been eaten but I just don't know. I know that we never felt our horses were in danger when we took them down to the, they were always taken down to the Clockum Range for winter pasture. That was what everybody did. They didn't keep, very few people kept their horses on their property during the winter. It was a long winter and deep snow, we'd have six feet on the ground and you can't use your horses then and you'd have to feed them hay all winter and that's. Uhm, hay was cheap in those days. It wasn't really an expense item everybody had a horse. There were more horses than they could use. There were horses everywhere. Everybody had two or more horses. And a lot of them stood around until fall when guys took them back into the hills for hunting and fishing. And they were house pets, pasture ornaments. But a lot of them got used in the woods for work and they were pets. There was 4H. It was just something just about everybody did was have horses and it wasn't for rich people. Everybody had horses because hay was cheap if you had to buy it and a lot of people grew it there for feed. And then in the winter you didn't feed them at all because you took them down, drove them on their own feet down to Wenatchee and turned them loose.

NW: Down on the Clockum.

HB: Yes, yes and it was open range down there and the snow was light down there so they could dig through and find feed. And then in the spring they'd be able to nibble and get the new growth. And they were brought back. Cowboys, guys who did this, would bring them back. Everybody's would come back because they would, you know, knot together in herds down there. And so they'd all be driven back at once. And then ours would be sorted out and we'd get ours back about the middle of May or something.

NW: That must have been fun. When they brought the horses back to town did everybody just kind of come to one central place to claim theirs?

HB: No. Well ours were brought to our house. Maybe our care, no I think, I don't know I don't remember exactly how they got there but they were suddenly there and they were in pretty good shape too because they'd been moving around all winter. It was good for them. And then in the

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fall they'd go back the same way so it didn't really cost anything to over-winter a horse and they were safe down there. There wasn't barbed wire they could get caught in and there was, I think they were fine. Of course, I suppose there were some casualties, a horse that got sick or something would probably die. But somebody was, at least in more recent times somebody was there to go up and check on them once in awhile and take them some grain or some extra feed if it was any deep cold or very heavy snow down there. There'd be somebody who would see that they got something.

NW: Was that Clockum Bill?

HB: Oh, he lived up here. He lived on this place.

NW: But he had land on the Clockum too.

HB: Well I don't know how long he had that land. He moved down there after he left here. He trained my first horse. I mean broke him to ride. And, as he put it, gentled him. He wasn't a tough cowboy. He was, he trained him the way some people train today's horses, they make them gentle. They don't just get on and let them buck and run it off. He really delivered me a gentle horse. My mother bought him and he was a wonderful little horse.

NW: So was that the horse you got when you were seven or were you older when you got your first horse.

HB: There was a family horse when I was that age and I was probably closer to ten when she bought me Danger. You know when I was little we had Shetland ponies in the Highlands.

NW: You did?

HB: Yes, right at the house.

NW: So how much land did you have at the Highlands? Could you take them on the golf course?

HB: Oh, not supposed to, but I did. Not supposed to. No, when I was a young teenager because we'd bring my horse to Seattle sometimes for the winter. And I'd keep him at, there was a riding academy not very far away. I'd keep him there and then ride him over to the Highlands. It was safe to ride over then. There was a lot of woods and you'd have to cross Aurora and 145th Street, but that wasn't bad and I'd keep him at the house for a while in my grandmother's garage before she had, it was one time a stable and then she used it for storage but there were box stalls down below and I'd keep him there. Danielle, my friend and I would ride together and I can remember tearing across the golf course. I don't know if anybody found out. But they must have left hoof prints in the greens because it was a very beautifully manicured golf course and I think that was part of the fun. chuckle And then we'd ride down the banks into the beach and into some sort of god-awful places, I don't know ... it was a very creative horse that was able to survive our days together.

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