

# Dorothy Molter Oral History Project

Ten interviews remembering

Dorothy Molter “The Root Beer Lady” and the Isle of Pines

Interviews conducted in 2015



A Project of the Dorothy Molter Museum and  
Gina Temple-Rhodes, Cedar Story Services

*Financed with funds provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts  
and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society*



Financed with funds provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society

## **Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants**

**Grantee:** Dorothy Molter Museum

***Cover photos, clockwise from top left:*** Moose Lake area map; Paul Smith and Dorothy, 1986; Peg Rosett, friend and museum volunteer; Memorial service gathering, 1986; Don Beland, local outfitter

## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project Summary**

The Dorothy Molter Oral History Project was completed in 2015 to record the memories and stories of those who knew and loved Dorothy, or who had often visited the Isle of Pines or worked with her in some way. 10 interviews were conducted in the summer of 2015 with friends, visitors, a Forest Service employee, a Voyageur Outward Bound employee and local outfitters. This created ten hour hours of audio files and 225 pages of interview transcripts. Video of most of the interviews was also recorded.

Interview questions focused on what narrators remembered about Dorothy's personality, life and her home at the Isle of Pines. Depending on the narrator's perspective, questions covered the establishment of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, other local residents, trips to Moose and Knife Lake, and preserving Dorothy's cabins for the Dorothy Molter Museum. Some questions related to Dorothy's desire and fight to stay at the Isle of Pines.

The narrators often remembered Dorothy fondly or with deep admiration and emotion. Dorothy passed away in 1986, but still lives large in the memories of friends and relatives. She lived during a pivotal time in the development of the Canoe Country into a quiet sports recreation destination, and many narrators had strong feelings about the snowmobile ban and other non-motorized regulations. Other narrators shared insights into their own love of the North Woods and shared Dorothy's commitment to living there, and emphasized the importance of sharing Dorothy's story of independence, simplicity and hospitality with future generations.

Interviews were conducted by Gina Temple-Rhodes of Cedar Story Services, an oral and family history recording service in Duluth, MN. The oral history project was managed by the Dorothy Molter Museum in Ely. Project funding was provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society. Interview files are housed at the Iron Range Research Center.

## Interview Summary List/Table of Contents

<b>Narrator First</b>	<b>Narrator Last</b>	<b>DOB</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Interview Length (min)</b>	<b>Transcript length (pages)</b>	<b>Video files</b>	<b>Pages in this collection</b>
Don	Beland	1933	Friend and Outfitter	76	16	3	5-21
Bob	Cotton	1931	Friend/visitor	78	17	3	22-39
Bob	Haapala	1934	Friend/visitor	59	27	1	40-67
Marilyn	McCain	1942	Parents were friends of Dorothy/visitor	41	17	0	68-85
Loretta	Molter	1939	Wife of Dorothy's Nephew/visitor	115	44	2	86-129
Robert	Olson	1933	Local Outfitter/visitor	40	14	2	130-143
Roger	Parrat	1953	Helped with Cabin moving	78	31	2	144-174
John	Pierce	1963	Outward Bound/Helped with Cabin moving	39	12	1	175-188
Peg	Rosett	1935	Friend/Visitor	56	21	2	189-211
Paul	Smith	1935	USFS employee/visitor	67	26	2	212-237



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrator:**

Don Beland (b. 1933) - **DB**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes -**GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

Recorded June 23, 2015

Ely, MN

**Don Beland- DB:** I grew up in Illinois, and there's a river that runs through it. Maybe 500 yards or more in different places. Dorothy worked for a State Hospital on the River. Although it wasn't a place I traveled on the river, I did pass it many times, and there she was, nursing! Then when I came up here, my birthday is in August, so I didn't have to go back to school, so I decided to come up here, live my dream, which I knew I wanted to do when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I set my traps, equipment I need for trapping a month ahead of time, and when I got to Duluth, it was going to Isabella, about 20 miles north at the end of the railroad. So, that was the year, that article, Saturday Evening's Post, you know (laughs). Then I went to Two Harbors and waited for several more days, maybe a week, so I had a chance to read about Dorothy Molter, "the loneliest woman in America!" Anyway! A little connection there.

**GTR:** That is! A little connection there. Did you ever talk to her about that, that you...

**DB:** No, no. I didn't' even know about it until later when maybe I read it there, I don't know.

**GTR:** That's fun. I'll officially start this and say this is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Don Beland on June 22, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History project. I know you said you don't want to talk about yourself, but you just told me about when you were coming back here. When did you first come to Ely?

**DB:** 1950. Give or take... I'm pretty sure it was 1950. Yeah. I was 16. A grown man in those times.

**GTR:** So you were born in 1934?

**DB:** 1933.

**GTR:** Okay. When did you meet Dorothy?

**DB:** I can't even tell you that. I came up trapping, and I would be out for two to three months at a time, without seeing or seeing signs of another human. Twice in probably six or seven years I did see a commercial airplane up high, but other than that... Because I trapped south at first,

south of where Knife Lake was. I would go up near her, so a few years later, I was asked to be a guide. I met a person after I had trapped in the spring, you know the beaver season is in the spring, so you got into May, still trapping. It was about the middle of May. I met a person that had a resort on Moose Lake. Which is right down from Knife Lake. So, he offered me a job. I didn't know if I wanted it. I thought about it and then I went up and took the job. So, I was on Moose Lake. I trapped beaver in the spring... here's one time, an incident with Dorothy, one of the early ones.

When you go out in the spring, you're trapping, the ice is leaving... so, trapping like that, you've got to skin your beaver, you've got to take all the fat off of them, put them together, roll them up, put them in the snowbank. And they'll keep for a month. But then, the bears are coming out of hibernation. All of a sudden, there's a bear track. Well, I'm about six or seven miles from this Dorothy Molter's. So, I went out, took my pack of beaver, maybe 35 beaver hides, and right across from her, her cabin... I fired three times, which means distress. A series of three. And then a second series of three. Pretty soon, she came around the corner of her island and I was on the shoreline. Now, when the ice goes out in a lake like Knife Lake, the ice raises, separates from shore, so there was about 20 feet between me and good ice. So, when she got right up across from me, she had a life jacket. I said, "Dorothy, put that life jacket on!" So, as she was putting it on, the ice broke loose. Of course, it pushed the canoe into me where I could grab it. But I was looking right at her. That water is 32 degrees. She didn't utter a thing. It could have been 60 degrees! So, then I pulled the canoe in, Dorothy's holding onto it, she's soaked up to her neck. "I should get a fire for you!" And she said, "No, Don, let's just go to the cabin."

Okay, get in the canoe, get up on the ice. When you're traveling on ice that you don't know, you're traveling with a canoe. If it goes down, you'll jump in the canoe. Maybe get a little farther on the lake where it's solid. So, there she is, dragging the canoe. Typical of how you would do this. That happened twice. The first time, I don't remember, but the routine would have been the same. But I remember that instance that she put the life jacket on and went down. And didn't even utter a word! And you're talking about freezing water. Tough gal!

**GTR:** She was tough!

**DB:** And then, what she was wearing? (laughs) Her blue tennis shoes that she wears in the summer. Now, there's water on the ice, you know, spots melting here. Freezing is 32 degrees either way, right? She was tough! She was a tough woman. You would never know it, though, if you met her. No. Okay... I'll go here. We can always backtrack.



**DB:** If you met her, or stopped to visit, whether there was one or five people, she would quietly come out of her cabin, and walk slowly with you. Usually it would be down a trail. You ended up there. But her hands.... I've seen two women this way. Beautiful women, internally beautiful. (shows holding out both hands, palms up). She was presenting those hands. Have you ever had that done? It's just the way it happens!

**GTR:** And then people would just... (put their hands out too)?

**DB:** Well, they might do this (holds hands back). But she would talk with her hands. And they were... Two women that I knew. Senior women. They both strike me. Then she would quietly talk of whatever you talked about, always the same. Quietly walk out, quietly talk. That was Dorothy.

8:49

Now, I knew two wilderness women. Three. Tempest Storm who lived up in Grand Marais, the Eastern side, and her husband, I never asked if they were married, was a trapper. She was a woodsman. If she was my wife, she would go maybe east 10 miles on a trapline loop, and I'd go the other direction. She may stay overnight in a trapper's hut, a place that basically was only a 4-foot wall, but it's just a place to sleep for the night, make another run, of traps and then return. She was a woodsperson. If you needed a moose, maybe you'd go out to kill a moose, and maybe she'd kill a moose before you would! Dorothy wasn't a woodsman. In fact, she wouldn't want to kill anything. Fish, yes, she was a fisherperson.

Another one who lived up in Alaska... I ran sled dogs, competitively. I race up in Alaska. I flew into an isolated village south of the Brooks Range, Huslia. 140 air miles from Fairbanks. There Katherine Atla, another woman. My wife was with me, she also ran dogs. She's three time women's world champion. But anyway... She has her picture of the cover of the Smithsonian Institute (magazine) with a dog!

**GTR:** What's her first name?

**DB:** I forget what year... but anyway. She liked Val, a tough gal, too. She asked: "I'd like to make you a parka." The water will be going out, so I'll trap muskrats and she made her a parka. Tanned the muskrat hides, and then beaded the whole bottom of that. She was a woodsperson. Like I said, she might kill the moose before her husband would. Dorothy wasn't that. All of them are women of the wilderness. Hmmm.

The loneliest woman in America? Exactly not that, at all. The lonely place is coming to town. Because you want to get back. That's where you live. You see dangers in the wilderness. There ain't no danger out there! Nature's perfect. If you want to commit suicide, then be careless. But

there's no danger out there. Why? (laughs). There ain't no people out there! No, but there really isn't. Yeah. I always trapped alone, because I could always go farther and faster. And I didn't have to take care of anybody. And, always, when I'm getting ready to sell... you want to sell your furs in January, early January. So, I'd like to get to Duluth and buy some long johns from the bakery. You get packed up, ready to go, you really don't want to go. So, that's the difference.

Now, Spring tracking is May, early May, so you have some sunny days. So, maybe once during the day. And you've gotta skin some beaver. So, I'd usually, one part of the sunny day, I'd get a rock or a piece of wood and lay down. No snow. Here's the feeling you get... that I got. I wasn't laying on the top of the ground. I was part of the ground. I felt I was in the ground. So, that's the feeling you get. That's an example of it. You've got the trees which is all your brothers and sisters, the water, beautiful water, trees, everything. There's no loneliness out there. Can you understand that?

14:00

**GTR:** Mmm-hmmm.

**DB:** No!

**GTR:** Probably 20 years ago I came up here and sent my parents a postcard saying, "I'm going back to the real world! See you later!"

**DB:** Is that right? (laughs) So, the loneliest woman in America is just the opposite of what you really are.

**GTR:** But Dorothy had a lot of visitors, too, right? She wasn't just by herself?

**DB:** In the summer. But in the old days, before snowmobiles, no. She did go to get her nursing... this is what I've heard, I guess it was true. She had to spend so much time nursing, keeping her license. But if you asked her, I'm sure she didn't want to do that. It was basically a day's travel by snowshoe to come down. Yeah. There as time when she was alone. Tchaikovsky said, "When I'm alone, I'm with the greatest person in the world!" (laughs) Well, anyway.

**GTR:** When you mentioned that woman in Alaska, what was her last name?

**DB:** Katherine Alta. A-L-T-A.

**GTR:** Thank you.

**DB:** Hulsia.

**GTR:** That's the town, okay. Thank you.



**DB:** I don't think Dorothy ever shot a deer. But, a wilderness woman, who wanted to be there. And certainly not lonely. It sold a story, I guess. Yes, in the summer, it's a popular, a fairly popular lake, Knife Lake. There are four portages to Knife. One of them is near 400 yards, the last one. But it's a good place to go. Clear water, a lot of side trips off of Knife Lake.

So, yes. Normally I'd take a part, when I was guiding canoe trips, to a more isolated place, and then come down Knife Lake towards the end of the trip. Sometimes I would stop, sometimes not. Depends on the party and things like that.

One thing that's disgusted to me is Bob Cary, the author, wrote the book and you probably read it... Root Beer Lady. It's a disgrace to her. In my opinion. I never read the book, but to call Dorothy a Root Beer Woman... there's a few other people who feel the same way.

**GTR:** Why so? Because she did so much other work?

**DB:** I'm not even sure she made root beer! She always had some nephew or someone who made it. It was good root beer if you stopped and get it in the hot summer. It was cold! Oh, when I stopped at Dorothy's in the spring, with the beaver hides? She had an ice house. So, that's where the beaver would be put. That's why I would stop there, to put the beaver hides in her ice house. Twice I did that.

**GTR:** You had to do the distress call because the ice was getting so rotten?

**DB:** No, it's because of the bear.

**GTR:** Oh, okay...

**DB:** He'll get my beaver I've got under the snowbank!

**GTR:** Sure!

**DB:** Yeah. I might come back someday and find them gone. Yeah. So, I was on Moose Lake, and she would stop.

**GTR:** Which outfitter? Was it an outfitter? Where did you work?

**DB:** Yeah, I had an outfitting business on Moose Lake. She would usually stop for a quick visit on the way down. So, my visits from her was those type of visits. I'd meet her if I stopped with a party, and knew her, and she would stop... if she had a snowmobile, she'd leave her snowmobile there and get a ride to town. One time I was going to show my brother how to throw a canoe on, and she happened to be there. She said, "Oh, Don, I'll show him!" Having a woman show how to do it! (laughing). I said, "Fine!" She threw the canoe up. My brother reminded me of that when I said there was going to be an interview. I don't remember... she was a tough, tough gal. She'd carry a canoe, a pack, maybe a gas can in one hand. So, she wasn't.... she was a kind person. I don't know what name you might use.

She was a nurse. She did help people who had medical problems. One of them was me. I had a party up on the north end of Knife Lake. I think it was a family group. But anyway, this young girl, a teenager if I remember right, probably 15 or 16, had some severe cramps. Hmm. So, that's kind of typical sometimes, right? Can be. But what if it's not. So, I got spooked at that. So, the group was that I could leave someone in charge, and they would be pretty responsible. Maybe there was only two or three people left there. But I got a good paddler, another gal and myself, and we paddled down to Dorothy's. But, if it was bad enough, we've got to go to town, so that's another 20 miles down. So, Dorothy examined her, I'm outside the tent. Dorothy knew that if it was serious, I'm going to town. She convinced me that it wasn't. It wasn't necessary to go to town. That was my only experience (with Dorothy's nursing).

But there was a case when you don't want to camp on an island. Beautiful island. No mosquitoes, maybe, maybe no bear, but some nice tall trees. Don't want to be there! Lightening! Roots! That happened on Knife Lake. I don't think anybody... there was, seemed like four or five people in that party. I don't think anybody died. But there was a case where they went to Dorothy's. I don't know any other specific cases, but I know that she got those visits. So, would we call her... what's that nurse's name?

**GTR:** Florence Nightingale?

**DB:** There, that's the word. How come you got it right away when I was thinking (laughs).

**GTR:** I've been reading the book!

**DB:** Florence Nightingale. The Forest Nightingale of Knife Lake. She was there. Yeah. She was part of it. And she was an inspiration to these teenage kids. Here, this woman out there? Living all winter, alone? I mean there was the trip south, of course, and in the summer she had visitors. Visitors June July and August. And a few in those other months. Yes. But always a gentle, gracious person. Always the same. Now, her father was a character! Jack. (laughs). You've heard of him?

**GTR:** I've heard, but tell me!

**DB:** A pipe, that he'd hold on his teeth. If I stopped with a party, he would call this girlfriend of his, on the phone (indicates kidding). And they'd talk and talk. "What's the weather like? You probably want to know the weather, Don, right?" Sure! Although I'd be back that evening. So, he'd flirt with them, hang up, and they'd come up, in those days we didn't have that communication, you know, dishes and that. People would be looking for the power lines... (laughs). So, there was humor there, mmmhmm. Yeah.

**GTR:** Food...So, you had the root beer. Was there ever fish or other food around? You wouldn't necessarily be there overnight, huh?

**DB:** I knew she fished. She had visitors, her father and I think her sister. And nephews. I think they made the root beer. Maybe she did, I don't know. I really don't know the history of the root beer thing. But anyway, as restrictions came in, closing the cabins, they didn't do anything with that.

**GTR:** You mean at her place?

**DB:** Yeah... and then, when another Bill was passed, that because none of the technical people, the crews and like that, they didn't want to lock her cabins up! And they didn't. And then, she was going to be taken out of there. So, I was president of the outfitters a couple times and got the best compliment I've ever had. I'm a difficult man to deal with. (laughs). They got a new Ranger in town, a female ranger. I don't know, at a meeting or something. She said, "You know, you're considered a difficult man to deal with!" (laughs). Well, that's because it's my forest. Our forest. They're working for me. They're managers, but they're my employee. So, don't tell me "my forest"... don't ever use that term in front of me. But anyway. Why don't you just make her some position so she can stay there? You can figure out some reason why she should stay there, and not have to think about having to leave. Finally they did it. But it would have been better if they would have done it sooner.

You know, twists and turns, different language, because she had a lot of support. There was a letter... did you know about that? Thousands of people called. Yeah! She's part of the wilderness. And an inspiration to young people. If I was guiding a young party, like I said I may make more of a wilderness trip, but then coming that way, so that's what they'd want. Yeah, that was an inspiration. I make hunting knives, to keep my time. So, I keep public radio on. There was a guy who came on who wrote a book, maybe you know of it. People now have a problem, Homo Sapien, the most stupid creature on the face of the earth. Poisons the air, poisons the earth. I'll argue that point! But anyway. That there is such a thing as lack of nature. I can understand that. We're not that far from that cave, you know. I don't know the name of the book, but he wrote about it in a book. And I didn't hear too much of what he said, I was busy. It's an ailment or something, whatever you want to call it. But the term was absence of nature. You can understand it, I'll bet.

**GTR:** Yes. Nature Deficient disorder.

**DB:** What's that?

**GTR:** Maybe Nature Deficient Disorder?

**DB:** Yes, that's it.

**GTR:** There was a book called the Last Child in the Woods.

**DB:** Okay, you read that?

**GTR:** Mmmhmm.

**DB:** And that pertained to that?

**GTR:** Yes, definitely. Kids these days don't have much freedom. It's unfortunate.

**DB:** Jesus, my parents. There was eight kids in our family, four boys and four girls. I don't remember any of us getting a licking. And I never heard the word love. Never! Showed it! We're still very close. One of my sisters passed away. My other sister's 89. Yeah. As a kid I had all kinds of freedom. You want to hear one?

**GTR:** Sure!

**DB:** See, I'm talking about myself!

**GTR:** That's okay! It's all context.

**DB:** After the war, the economy grew, so these mountain people, like in the Ozarks, the father would go to cities like St. Louis and or the kids might... when you're 16 there, you're gone. They keep one kid. One boy. So, he came to his uncle's house. Which was only one door away (laughs). Okay, the Ozark Mountains. Gotta go there. It's March. I always had money. Us kids always earned money. I caught fish, sold it to relatives, shoveled snow, mowed grass, whatever. The family, you could say, in a sense, had everything but money. My father worked as a roofer, worked 5 days a week, never lost a day. But 8 kids? Hmm. I took a train. I left 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

**GTR:** Went north?

**DB:** No, I went to the Ozarks! I was only 14! I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. But my parents let me go! And I spend the summer there. I plowed with a mule. There was no cars there. Everybody had a four-wheeled cart and two mules. So, that was an experience. Yeah, when I came back to go to school, they passed me! But I didn't know that. I repeated 8<sup>th</sup> grade again in a public school. Of course, the teachers always said, "You've got to get a high school education!" I said, "My education is up north. That's where it is."

**GTR:** What was your outfitting name?

**DB:** Don Beland's Wilderness Canoe Trips. I outfitted over 10,000 canoe trips. But I trapped and guided in the Boundary Waters and the outer edges of it, so I got to know it good. Never had a fatality or serious accident, because I knew where to keep the people away from trouble that they would get into. Say a wild river like Basswood River, or the Moline River. You can tell them how to be safe, but they don't always do what they're supposed to. That's when I got married! I had to leave it... but I still trapped one more year. Or maybe it was two years, trapped and guided.

**GTR:** What years was that?

**DB:** Jeez. You want to tell me. About 1962, '63? Yeah.

**GTR:** So, did the Wilderness Act change how your outfitting was working?

34:00

**DB:** Well, I was... the Wilderness Act, it didn't do much. It was the Bills after that that... But I think it had to happen, because there was a lot of property, private property... Yeah, I got interviewed. I know who it was. Public Radio. I really didn't have much to say about the Wilderness Bill. But since both sides were not satisfied, it's probably a pretty good Bill. But some of the Bills, the restrictions later... my feeling is, where do I stand? I've got my own opinion, both sides of the story. But if you want to restrict an area from people, and it's passed, it ain't gonna be changed. Why don't you use a little leniency? And give the people time to... whatever they (need) before they leave. Because the Bill is there, and you got what you want. So, you should be satisfied. Have a deadline, of course, but allow the people, maybe some of them would live their dreams out, and maybe some would have a chance to adjust. Yeah. I didn't think there was... like Dorothy. I guided a group of... I hate the word VIP's on the canoe trip regarding a Bill. They wanted me to guide the group. It was a supervisor, the local ranger, Congressman Oberstar and his two children. It was interesting, because the supervisor in Duluth, on his pack (laughs)... Robert Service's... (book). Okay? The two best poems? I knew them by heart! (laughs). Hmmm. Okay.

I think if you want to solve a problem, a serious problem? The best place to solve it is in front of a campfire. We talked a lot about reasonable things. So, The Cremation of Sam McGee, came on the last night. So, the Wilderness Bill was necessary. You bet it was. And like I said, both sides were not satisfied, so it was probably a pretty good Bill, in that sense.

**GTR:** Necessary to preserve some space, in that sense?

**DB:** Yes, right. Well, preserve is maybe not the word. Maybe there's a better word. Save it for you and your children, you know. The people who were opposed to it, maybe their grandkids. Yeah. It would mean something. Big meaning from them. Like I said, we're not that far out of the cave.

**GTR:** What about restricting access? I know, even the snowmobile... Prohibiting snowmobiles, some people were very offended by that, because then they couldn't get there.

**DB:** Yes, right. But there are plenty of other places. I did think the border should have been left open, because of the treaty. They had a treaty. And not being able to use a motor restricted families, young people who would go with a small motor. But they could go to Knife Lake. I had my own ideas about that. Take two of the routes out, no motors, but keep the border open. The person, I talked to him. I said, Well, do you know the meeting of the Senators coming to Ely? They did. Senator Abourezk from North Dakota. Well, anyway. I thought, if we could get the Senators up Fall Lake, onto Basswood, down through Moose Lake, they would see the country that really isn't canoe country. Basswood is a big lake. People travel through it. And maybe there

could be some compromise in there. So, the group adopted it. Then from Moose Lake, they flew from Grand Portage, Gunflint Lake, on the end of the Gunflint, at the Grand Portage trail. But anyway, in each boat, there was a guy running the motor, and I'll say, an environmentalist, and a multiple use person. I was a multiple use person. Was I? Yeah, but I felt I had my own ideas. So, we took the trip. As things usually go, I wanted to see a few curls up on Basswood! Calm as glass. And I knew Abourezk was a tough guy. I said, "You know, this is a pretty good size canoe lake. Canoeist you know, get through it. "Oh, but I don't like the noise of a motor!" Well, maybe we can do something about the noise. And then we got onto Moose Lake, and here's some canoe corps going on a trip. I had to slow the boat really down, low. They said certain words regarding the restrictions. And when we passed each other. All I had to say is: where's all their equipment, in their canoe? He said, "I noticed that!" Then when they flew to Grand Marais, somebody brought a big boat in. Inboard/Outboard. Nobody heard that! But anyway!

I can go on and on about that...

**GTR:** You had hoped for bigger waves, because then he would feel more that it needed some power?

**DB:** Yeah, and then I could tell a story better.

**GTR:** The canoeists were supportive? That you saw...?

**DB:** They were on the Moose Lake Chain...

**GTR:** Were they supportive of the restrictions?

**DB:** No, they were supporting more restrictions. And you know like any Bill, as I understand it, on both sides, on the end, that agree! Right? Yeah! The extremes. So, well, you know, they pass a Bill and then the people that it affects... they make the laws, the Forest Service does. I don't want to go there, because that's a long discussion.

**GTR:** Do you think Dorothy felt... obviously she was battling them for a while. Did she feel that there was some need ... (for preservation- talking over)?

**DB:** You know, I never got that from her. And I didn't want to bring it up. I never talked to her about that. And because I thought that someday somehow, like I said, I told them what they could do...and it would be legal (?). And it was, but there was a number of years where she didn't really know. I knew that. She was afraid that she would have to go, yes. Ah, yeah. Things kind of get complicated. Things like that, you know? You've got laws. Laws don't always bring justice, but without them there isn't anything.

**GTR:** Why do you think she ended up getting to stay longer than so many other people?

**DB:** I think they must have gave her... well, I guess maybe they won't even answer that. Maybe an overseer or some other term. This woman there is whatever. But she was allowed, as I

understand, several years. So, she really did live out her lifetime. And how important is that? Well, it's important to one person. But the idea is maybe what we should live by. Respect things like that.

**GTR:** The idea of...

**DB:** Sherlock Holmes says that if there is an exception to a rule, there is no rule. But Onassis said, "The only rule is that there is no rules!" (laughs) You know who I'm talking about. The husband of Kennedy's wife. Very wealthy ship guy. So, there you go.

**GTR:** So, she got to stay, and that was important.

**DB:** I don't know the details of that.

**GTR:** There was the volunteer thing, and all that.

**DB:** Yes, that had a massive bunch of names, and there must have been some identifiable names on there. There should have been.

**GTR:** There might be something in the book. But why her, as opposed to some other resort that people enjoyed. She just had so many visitors?

**DB:** Well, fortunately, people on Moose Lake, a lot of them came up during the Depression, so they were all seniors. For some there must have been some advantages. They did pay a good price. So at least the money was there. The ones I know of, three of them, they were ready. So that worked out. If it happens to one, it happens to everybody. That's not exactly true. You know, it's... consider these things.

**GTR:** Did you visit Dorothy into the 1980's, or was it more earlier years?

**DB:** Oh, yeah. Let's see... 60's... probably I saw her in the winter once maybe, or twice. I wasn't guiding, but if there was somebody they wanted me to guide for some reason. The state did. They used to contact me when... I was on "To Tell the Truth"! (laughs) You know the program? To Tell the Truth?

**GTR:** I've heard of it!

**DB:** Well, the State didn't have much of a budget for resorts and that. So, they connected me with... they wanted me to go to New York and be on the To Tell the Truth and some other interviews. I don't know what year it was. So I was "Don Beland of Ely, MN". (laughs) Oh, we flew out of Duluth. They took a picture of my wife and I, getting on the airplane. A big deal! The kids got to watch it on TV! Now, that's when not everyone had a TV! Of course the kids liked it.

**GTR:** How did that connect with the State? Getting you on there...

**DB:** Where do you do your canoeing?

**GTR:** I live in Duluth now, and have young kids so we stay pretty close...

**DB:** In the lakes?

**GTR:** All over, but often out of Ely. It's been a long time, I'm realizing.

**DB:** So, what was the question?

**GTR:** You talked about the State, and not having much money for (promoting) outfitting, and then you ended up on To Tell the Truth, the show? How did that link?

**DB:** Okay. That was part of it.

**GTR:** They sent you out there?

**DB:** Public relations! "Where do you do your canoeing?"... "In the Lakes and Rivers of Minnesota." You know. This public relations guy that I travelled with... he was a bombardier in the Second World War. That stuck with them guys. I guided one guy, two guys that were bombardiers. One guy's plane got hit, and the family kept him alive. But Sidney Shore who went with me, that stayed with him. Killing civilians. But anyway. It was on the Avenues of America, all these public relations firms. You know how it works, don't you? If there's something in the paper, that's worth so much! They're cutting all this out. So year, the fact that I then interviewed with, I don't remember... a guy who was a world champion outboard motor guy. They had an interview with us two. Anything printed is worth something. That's the best way for advertising and public relations! Stuff you read in the paper. So, that's why they did it.

**GTR:** The state did it, or was it Ely to promote...

**DB:** No, the Department of Tourism, in Minneapolis. We got a lot of publicity! The write-ups. A number of things.

**GTR:** That would have been in the 60s, the 1960s if your kids were young?

**DB:** Probably. When you live up here, you forget what month it is, what day it is, what year it is... yes, 60's. Absolutely.

**GTR:** What was your wife's name?

**DB:** Valerie. Val.

**GTR:** She was with you on that trip, to be interviewed too, or just you on that show.



**DB:** No, that was my former wife. Margot was her name. She was from Philadelphia. We're very best of friends. We always were, even in the divorce. She said a couple times, "You know I kind of get tired of being interviewed... "my former wife"... (laughs) and then my present wife. Great friends of my wife. One of those partings that made sense. Yeah.

53:20

**GTR:** Okay. So, it was promotion.

**DB:** Promotion, you bet! They got.. I mean, when you read a story, you know what PR is! Better than an ad in that same magazine! Because the ad they paid for. Yea, I guided sportswriters from Chicago. Well, one of them was the editor of the travel magazine, then became managing editor of Field and Stream. Things that were tourism things. Another magazine, Field and Stream, every year he'd write about the trip we took. Anybody looking to go to Northern MN? Blah blah blah. When we ran dogs, we were sponsored by Tuffy's. They paid us pretty well. The amount was about 16,000 cash, with different things that was paid for, plus the dog food which was worth 8 or 9 thousand. But that was the deal. When you went in for an interview, you can... ask me about sled dogs. Anything! You can ask me what color of eyes they have! Ask me that question!

**GTR:** Okay, so what color eyes do your sled dogs have?

**DB:** Well, there's some blue eyed dogs, but most of their eyes are dog. We raise about 50 pups a year just to be competitive. And fortunately, we're sponsored by Tuffy's dog food, which is a good nutrition. (laughs). I'll get it out! But that's the deal. You're spending your time on that program, making it interesting to them, so they want their share of it. Another friend of mine, a musher, was sponsored by a real popular food. My company was regional. His was national. Well, we won a lot of races. I won the world championship twice. Naturally, they sponsor winners. My wife is three times women's. So, you get the write-ups! The magazines... well, I told you, the Smithsonian. In the race, she'd get the write-ups.

56:10.

I raced the pro class, or the open class. So, everybody knew they had to behave themselves, or you were not going to get a sponsor. Sled dog racing is a thing of the past, now. You never knew who you were talking to. I taught my kids before that. You never knew who you were talking to! So, if they'd come over and want to interview you, it was usually after the race and you had to feed the dogs. So you said to them, if that was the case, just follow me along because I have to feed the dogs, but I can answer any question you have. Well, outdoor writer for the New York Times. I didn't know him. The best one was the Head of Arctic Studies in Yelp, Canada. Whoooo.... That's one guy I really wanted to meet, and there he was, talking to me. We talked about dogs! Little guy, about 5 foot 2. After I gave him the interviews, I wish I would have known that ahead of time. (more discussion of write-ups)

58:14

Now, see, I talked about myself, not more about Dorothy!

**GTR:** Well, we can talk a little bit more about Dorothy. Were you ever involved with anything like getting the cabins out, or the museum?

**DB:** No. When there was no snowmobiles, guys in town, you can write his name, Hollis Latteral, and his son would go up and help put up this ice. You know what putting up ice is, don't you? They'd put up ice in her ice house. But she never got that many visitors, not before snowmobiles! Because you had to snowshoe up there.

**GTR:** And not after, either... those last couple years? Probably pretty quiet?

**DB:** Yeah.

**GTR:** People could take dog sleds in?

**DB:** And they did... at least one person took a snowmobile up there.

**GTR:** After '84?

**DB:** Yeah. And that broke a trail for dog teams. I really don't know who he is, but at least one person! (laughs). It didn't go to Dorothy's cabin, it just went to the lake. Yeah.

**GTR:** So, what do you hope that future generations will remember about Dorothy and her Isle of Pines?

**DB:** Like I said, I just...

**GTR:** You said she was tough, a good role model?

**DB:** She was a gracious, gentle woman. But she was tough. She wasn't a woodsperson, a hunter or trapper, but she was part of the wilderness. A rare part of the wilderness. It was a part of her. I don't know what you'd (call her)... maybe a wilderness rose or something. I don't know. Maybe you could give her a name... Knife Lake, like you said.

**GTR:** You said she didn't like to kill anything, so she'd have pets, kind of, or she'd help animals that were hurt?

**DB:** Oh, I think she would, and not many people brought their animals. Some did...

**GTR:** But if she found a hurt bird, or something?

**DB:** Yeah. She... but it was kind of in a gentle way! Not, this is an emergency! She was always gentle with her speaking, gentle... she'd walk out from the tent, and always the same walk, and

always the same gentleness with those hands. She'd use those hands to talk, like some people do. But like I've said, I've only seen two women, senior women just, ahhh....

**GTR:** Calm?

**DB:** Yeah. And the hands! You know... just this way (holding them out, open, in front of himself). Calm, an inspiration for kids. Where would they see that? We're all connected by very few people, I think. What is it, 13? Yeah, everybody knows everybody, if you take those 13, and 26, then blah blah blah... so, it's worth having things like that. At least you can read about the people. There were actually people like that. Maybe they didn't climb the highest mountain... Hilary did (Sir Edmond Hilary), he was the first one. How many people know about him? Dorothy didn't kill a moose, didn't kill 20 beaver a season, but she was a wilderness person, because she was part of it. That's where her heart was. Not everyone can do that, of course. But you know, a real wilderness person. And what is wilderness? What's a wilderness? At least a day's travel to the nearest road. To some people, it'd have to be five days or something. But the loneliest woman in America? She was anything but that! That was where she lived. She came to town. I know the feeling. I came to town, and wanted to get back. Lived in the woods. That was her home.

Like I said, I can't... that's the best I can do! Really, it is!

**GTR:** My last little question then would be the wilderness, you just said... wilderness has to be farther. It can't be a little park in Duluth, or something.

**DB:** No! It should be at least a day's travel or something to the nearest road, not by snowmobile, on foot. Now, to some people, you call that wilderness? Well, you can be in an airplane, you can be... Huslia, 140 miles by air, you could get to Huslia in an airplane quicker than I could get from Knife Lake in the winter on snowshoes to the nearest roads. So, it's different things to different people. But... I don't know. What do you call wilderness? My opinion is at least, maybe you could start with a day's travel by foot or snowshoe to the nearest road. That might be a start, at least that.

**GTR:** That makes sense.

**DB:** Now, what's those questions? (referring to GTR's sheet).

**GTR:** We've mostly covered them, round and about. Is there... you've told me, I think, but your most lasting memory of Dorothy, just her hands, and her calmness. Would that be your main memory?

**DB:** Yes. Not seeing her carrying a canoe across the portage. Just a gracious human being. A woman. Rare, something you don't see. That's what I remember her about. Although we said funny things, things I thought were funny. She had a sense of humor. That's how I see Dorothy. Just talking about... I can't see what she was talking about! But she was outside because of that tent. It wasn't that big. Those hands! And she would use those hands... "Well, there is a beaver

lodge in that bay, and if you go over there around evening, you'll probably see them!" Or maybe, "They're getting some good fish up on Eddy lake, right below the falls." Or giving advice, or just visiting. I don't remember the questions they asked her...

**GTR:** I'm trying to take a picture of you doing that!

**DB:** Okay. The other person was the owner of a resort on Moose Lake, Mrs. Kirk was her name. Kirk's Lodge, Minette Kirk. Same thing. Just identical. You have to see it to feel it. Yes. And talk the same way, quiet. And... I think the museum is a good thing. How else can you? First of all, it's true! However you want to see how Dorothy lived... certainly not the loneliest woman in America. Certainly the opposite is true. That was her home. She was never lonely! I know that, because I felt the same way. Not lonely. We did different things... I trapped and killing animals, and I don't think she ever thought of catching a beaver. I sold the fur, but beaver meat is good eating. I don't think she ever shot a deer. But still in all the same feeling. There's other people. Want to know about, who feel the same way. Yes, not lonely. An inspiration. Even though they couldn't meet Dorothy, they could know about her. Yes. And the truth about her, you know. In the winter, before snowmobiles, this was a wilderness up there. When snowmobiles came in, and they could go to and from her cabin. I did go up with a dog team. Nothing... she was the same Dorothy. I wasn't there with a lot of the snowmobilers, but I think she was the same person. I don't know. Maybe, well, snowmobiles could only go a certain time. Ice melts! Yeah.

**GTR:** Is there something about being very rooted in one place, or being satisfied with where she was and what she had?

**DB:** Yeah. This is where she wanted to be. Obviously! Where she felt the best. I never ever saw any sadness in her face. Always the same. Yeah. Never heard her say an unkind word, either. When they were doing this stupid stuff with her cabins, never a negative word. On this trip with the Senators and that, I stopped and there's a plaque there, and told her the story about living several years, not knowing if she was going to be there or not! Boy, you can't buy time, can you? Precious time.

The later years, I was running dogs, gone all winter, running an outfitting business. So, I never saw her that much. But if she came down, she'd stop. Yeah, a couple of times when she had a snowmobile. She had the first ones. And I went to get her snowmobile. And she had them farther down the lake. The opposite on it... you pushed it forward, instead of back when you wanted gas. I ended up holding onto the snowmobile, because it was the opposite of what you normally do, but I got back on and got it stopped. Yeah, and the guys that went up there and put up ice, Hollis Latteral was a great friend. Hollis's son Jeep... we called him Jeep.

**GTR:** I've heard that name. I guess he wasn't sure if he wanted to be interviewed or not.

**DB:** I thought he should have been!

**GTR:** I guess he agreed and backed out. Sarah is still working on him, I guess.

**DB:** In fact I called him, and said, “What am I going to say?” Because she stayed in his home at times when she came out, and he couldn’t tell me! And I was surprise. I said, “Geez, I might have said you would be the one to be interviewed because of those years when you and your dad...and probably a couple other guys who I don’t know went up to put up ice for her...So, you know that story.

**GTR:** He would have been pretty young at that time.

**DB:** I don’t know why he didn’t want to...

**GTR:** Maybe he’ll change his mind.

**DB:** Well, he thought that the thing is being successful and the person running it is doing a great job, I think doing a great job, and to have those visitors. Yeah. What he told me, he figured that she’s doing well.

76:32



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Bob Cotton – (b. 1931) BC**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes - GTR  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded June 23, 2015  
Ely, MN**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Mr. Bob Cotton on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History project. So, thanks for meeting with me! Can you tell me when you first came up here and met Dorothy?

**BC:** Sure. I worked in Indianapolis for a pharmaceutical company there, from which I retired. For years prior to me coming up here, a couple anyway, my good friend Bob Wansley tried to get me to come to this little cabin on an island on Knife Lake. Well, I resisted for a couple of years. I was kind of an Indiana crappie fisherman. That's the only kind of fish I knew about. So, I came up the first time in 1962 with Bob. I was hooked immediately.

**GTR:** On the fish? Or the area?

**BC:** The fish are just a bonus! It was the people. I really enjoyed meeting Dorothy and it took a while, a couple, three years, but we became good friends. Of course, I'm just one of a million! (emotional pause) Every time I think of Dorothy I tear up a little bit. Sorry.

**GTR:** No, that's okay! She was just a good friend...

**BC:** So, really, I spent my entire working career in Indiana, and raised a family there. We lived there until about five years ago. But I've been coming back up here every year since. I missed one year, and that was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was in the Navy Reserve, and I didn't make it that year. But I've been here every year since then, come hell or high water!

**GTR:** So, it was 1962 that was your first visit?

**BD:** Yes, that was my first visit, with Dorothy.

**GTR:** What year were you born?

**BC:** I was born in 1931.

**GTR:** So, you met Dorothy in the 1960s...

**BC:** 1962, that's right.

**GTR:** Did you usually always come in the summer, or did you ever come up in winter?

**BC:** No, I was up mostly summer. I really didn't start coming up in the winter time until maybe after I retired, or thereabouts. I've been retired since 1990. I would sneak up during the fall and winter on business trips. We had a company in St. Paul Minnesota, which I got to visit on business. So, I'd sneak away like on a Thursday afternoon, and go up with usually a friend of mine, Norm Saari who lived out on Moose Lake Road. He had Tofte Lake Resort out there. He would make a late trip up every year, that he was able, to pick up beaver pelts. So, I got to go along on these late November canoe trips. I did that two years in a row. The thing I reminisce about on those trips was showing up at Dorothy's about noon, because it would take us that long to motor on up from Moose Lake, and Dorothy always had a big washtub full of mulligan stew on her woodstove. It was literally in a washtub. It was just full of vegetables and meat. Ham and pork and bacon, chicken, you name it, it was in the pot. Oh, did that taste good!

I did snowshoe up once. I can't remember exactly when. That's when the snowmobiles were running, and there were easy trails to follow. It was an easy trip, up through Snowbank Lake.

**GTR:** How far up is your cabin on Moose Lake? (looking at map).

**BC:** I think it's about here... you know about where the Forest Service landing is?

**GTR:** I haven't been up there for a long time...

**BC:** Okay. My cabin would be right about, right there, see that little bay right there? That's Canadian Border Lodge, so right around where this road ends...

**GTR:** Okay.

**BC:** It's part of a resort which is owned by the Forest Service now. It's their landing for patrolling and administering all of these lakes up there.

**GTR:** Would Dorothy ever come down to your cabin, to visit?

**BC:** yes, you have to go right by it to get there.

**GTR:** Would Dorothy every come out, back in the day? Would she come visit you, or you were usually going up to her?

**BC:** No, she did. She would come and visit... I didn't have the cabin then. I didn't really have the cabin until after I retired, the year after I retired. But I did have a little cabin on One Pine Lake... it's about 10 miles south toward Babbitt. Dorothy, she was out there, once. Speaking of visits, she would leave after Christmas, and visit her family in the Chicago area. But she had relatives all over. She had so many friends around, especially in the Indianapolis area, that she

would stop and usually spend... well, one time she spent two nights there. So, we'd all have get togethers down there. She... one time she came by herself. The other time, she had a sister Ruth, who you've probably heard about if you've interviewed other people.

**GTR:** Not a lot, really. Did you visit with her, too? What was she like?

**BC:** Ruth was... a very picturesque lady. You've undoubtedly seen the movie the Wizard of Oz. There's a character in there, I think her name was Hermione Gingold, who played the Wicked Witch of the North. Well, the Wicked Witch of the North was a beauty queen compared to Ruth. Just a beautiful lady. She gave me my nickname for up in the woods. Rotten Cotton. Some of the old timers still remember that.

**GTR:** A fond one, or not?

**BC:** Oh, that's a fond one. But I've never really been able to figure out why she came up with the word rotten.

**GTR:** I've heard that rhyme before...

**BC:** It rhymed, yeah.

**GTR:** Well, cotton in rotten, for socks. (in cold weather).

**BC:** She was probably just getting even, because we'd tease each other back and forth, and I think I called her the Wicked Witch of the North one time, and she retaliated by publicly giving me that name.

**GTR:** So there was a bunch of kidding around out there?

**BC:** Yes, a lot of kidding around.

**GTR:** Did you stay ever on the island with them?

**BC:** Oh, yeah. I made it a point to, every year, except the year... up until, including the year she died, would spend two weeks.

10:00

After I developed enough seniority, I'd spend two weeks, usually around the Forth of July, on the Island. And then I would usually come back for a week in September, about the second week of September. That's when the summer heat leaves these parts, and you can really feel the bit in the air. Like this morning!

**GTR:** Would you bring your family at that point?



**BC:** Yeah, my kids came up. My wife came up a couple times, but this wasn't her thing.

**GTR:** Would you stay in the winter cabin, or where would you stay?

**BC:** We've stayed in them all. The Cady cabin, the Winter cabin, the Point cabin, and there was a trapper's cabin there, too.

**GTR:** Which was the favorite or the best?

**BC:** I really liked the Point Cabin, on the western tip of the Island. You could look down all the way to the portage. It was kind of a long hike over toward Dorothy's summer tent. You'd have to go up over the mountain and over the foot bridges. Especially if there were guests there that were regulars, they liked h happy hour and party times. Of course, I did too, back in those days. We had a good time.

**GTR:** Would you bring your own food or liquor, too?

**BC:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** Did she mind some liquor?

**BC:** When we first started coming up, Dorothy did have beer, up there. But that got to be burdensome, probably along toward the late 60s. If you wanted beer, you had to supply your own. Which was no problem in those days. You're young enough to do the portages.

**GTR:** I suppose. Was it a canoe with a motor to get up there?

**BC:** Oh, yeah. We started out renting this stuff from an outfitter called Quetico Superior Outfitters, Bernie Carlson was his name. That's who kind of looked out after Dorothy and her friend. Everybody'd go through Benny's. That's where the Forest Service is located now. And my little three-quarter acre plot.

**GTR:** So, they would go in there. So, what do you remember about root beer there? Did you ever see her making that, or help her make it?

**BC:** A couple times. Most of the help that I made was hauling the stuff from town when she was short on supplies. We'd stay for two weeks. Bernie had a list of things and some stuff... always sending stuff up to Dorothy's. The people who did this regularly, especially the local people, were called Dorothy's Angels. Some of them are still around. Have you met Peg Rosette?

**GTR:** Yes, I interviewed her yesterday.

**BC:** Chiemewlinski, have you met them?

**GTR:** No... how do you spell that last name?

**BC:** Ca... they're still in town. They live just past the Museum. On Hematite drive. They were regulars. And very good friends of Dorothy's. I mentioned this to Sarah, but not recently, but I don't think she knew them too well.

**GTR:** How do you spell that last name, again?

**BC:** Chiemewlinski. Don't ask me to spell it again because it's not going to come out the same!

**GTR:** I'll look it up, that's enough. That's a lot.

**BC:** They're in the phone book. I think Noreen especially would make a good interviewee for you. If you need someone else.

**GTR:** Yeah, I'm going to come up in August to do a few more interviews.

**BC:** And Jerry Jusilla?

**GTR:** Yes, I guess he was interviewed a few years ago. People mentioned his name a lot.

**BC:** Pete (Whitman?)... Maybe not so much. He was in the Forest Service. I'm trying to think of some others. Especially Jerry Jusilla. Oh, and Chip Elkins. Do you know Chip?

**GTR:** No.

**BC:** Retired Forest Service enforcement officer, in Ely. Spent a lot of time at Dorothy's.

**GTR:** What did you feel like about how the Forest Service worked with her?

**BC:** Super people. Just really great. There were a few that had to undergo special training before they shaped up, but they either shaped up or shipped out! One or the other.

**GTR:** Like what? How would you reform someone?

**BC:** Well, I don't know. It's hard to say. But you know! You get a group of people, some people fit in better than others. They relate to people better. There's one thing you have to relate to if you're out in the woods. If you're sitting around a campfire, you'd better relate to people. If you can't do that, you've got no business being there.

**GTR:** So, people and the wilderness, not just the wilderness or being a hermit?

**BC:** Yeah! There were a few people in the Forest Service who gave themselves a hard time, really, because their main interest was...can't blame them, career motivated, stab each other in the back, like the New York 5<sup>th</sup> Ave Syndrome... "A few of the friends so kind and true, you better screw him before he screws you"?

**GTR:** The government... I've heard that, the local people were good, but they had all these laws and all these things that they had to...

**BC:** They had to do their jobs! This is what most people around here don't even realize, the locals don't. "The Forest Service, they're a bunch of idiots!" They've got to do what their told, and especially if their boss is travelling with them. But usually, I cannot think of a bad experience I ever had with the Forest Service.

**GTR:** That's good. What did Dorothy think about the whole Wilderness Act and all of that?

19:00

**BC:** Oh, she was... she never really talked much about the Act itself. She was very possessive of her own way of life, probably moreso than I would have been. She didn't take the money and run. She wanted to stay on Knife Lake till the day she died, and she did! (pause). December of 1986. (gets emotional).

**GTR:** Had you seen her recently, or shortly before that?

**BC:** Yeah! I talked about Norm Saari? For two years in a row... the year she died, we didn't go up in November. But September. I saw her in September, maybe around the first of October. That's quiet time up in the woods. The campers are gone. A few locals come up. There was a local game warden that always came up. She was the first up to Dorothy's by canoe, and the last one to go out by canoe, and the first one to go up on a snow machine, and a last one to go up on a snow machine. His name was Bob Jacobson. He was a good friend of Dorothy's. He took care of her good. But usually if... as long as you were discreet and not going around busting rules or creating a nuisance, Forest Service wouldn't give you a problem. They'd do their patrols, they'd go by the camps... They'd say, "Is everything alright up there?" "Yeah". Occasionally they would, if they thought they had a reason, they'd stop and ask you for permits. Especially if they had the people from Milwaukee, which was the Forest Service office, along. Let's go out and check... the boss would want to go out and see how they were checking permits.

So, a couple guys I knew very well... they knew damn well who I was and everything, but they had the supervisor along from Milwaukee, and that's the only time I got checked on anything official.

**GTR:** You had it? (the permit)

**BC:** Oh, yeah! I pretty much always stayed legal. Sometimes I overextended my stay a little bit, but that was mostly after Dorothy left and they started camping up there. That's when I really got to know the Forest Service.

**GTR:** But Dorothy had to kind of fight the Forest Service, to be able to stay?

**BC:** She had to fight the Bureau. She did. She had a few good Samaritans who helped her out a great deal, including one gentleman who she didn't really... her personality clashed with a local sportswriter. His name was Bob Cary. He probably did as much or more to help Dorothy stay on that island. He and a Supreme Court Justice who used to stay with another fellow up on Otter Track Lake. You've probably heard of Benny Ambrose.

**GTR:** Yes. I hadn't heard that story before. Which Justice was that?

**BC:** I don't know. Back in the... I can't think of his name, but I met the guy at Benny's. I didn't know who the hell I was talking with until after he was gone.

**GTR:** Benny wasn't quite as social, right?

**BC:** He was not social at all.

**GTR:** How did he know that guy, then?

**BC:** Dorothy had a friend that camped all summer on Knife Lake. His name is Knife Lake Pete. He's mentioned in a couple books around. My dad and I got started camping some, at Pete's invitation, way on the north arm, about half way from Dorothy's Island, probably about another 12 miles up the lake, on Otter Track Lake. Pete... Benny had a wonderful garden. Have you seen any of the pictures?

**GTR:** A little bit. Did you ever get any of the produce?

**BC:** Oh, yeah. Now, Benny would not have anything to do with people who just... If I'd have stopped by in a canoe the first time, and just nosed around, Benny would say, "I'm too busy now, boys, you'll have to leave." He didn't want company. But Pete would bake pies and cakes, right up on the island. He would take pressure canners up there. He'd go up in May, as soon as the ice was out, and stay until October.

**GTR:** Can on a fire?

**BC:** Yeah, a Coleman stove and propane. Bottles. A couple of camper freezers. The blueberry picking up there was just amazing, especially on the Canadian side. I remember one summer a friend and I, when we were coming in for a shopping visit, brought in for Pete 37 quarts, canned, of blueberries that he canned up on Knife Lake! Plus, two of these five gallon drywall buckets, full of blueberries to put in Pete's freezer. Yeah, it was that good.

**GTR:** Oh my gosh! He would bring the materials up and then send it back, and then he lived here in the winter?

**BC:** Yeah. Pete would again, he was a good friend of Dorothy's. But Pete was uncommunicative. You could not talk with him until you knew him for three or four years, and understood Pete's language.

**GTR:** Just a quiet guy?

**BC:** No, he wasn't quiet. He just... there's all kinds of people. He was a good guy. But anyway, Dorothy and Cary must have clashed about something at some time. Bergman... the Supreme court justice's name?

**GTR:** I'm not sure.

**BC:** He was a friend of Benny's. But anyway, my friend and I would go up and spend a few days camping, at Pete's camp, about seven miles up the lake from Dorothy's. Not during a Dorothy visit, but just to visit Pete and all the other guys that hung around up there. The Knife Lake crew, they were called. Pete would bake pies and cakes and can berries. He'd bake pies and cakes, and say, "Let's take the pies to Benny's, Cotton." Okay. Well, on one of those early trips, I got to go with Pete while he was delivering pies or cakes. And then Pete would pick rhubarb or berries from his garden and bring 'em back to camp.

30:00

**GTR:** Pete would do this in a reflector oven? Or how would he bake the pies?

**BC:** He had an oven!

**GTR:** In his camp? Because he didn't have a cabin?

**BC:** No, but he might as well have... he had a kitchen built and covered with plastic and tarps and canvas. He had a barrel stove. He had propane freezers, Coleman gas.

**GTR:** Oh, my gosh. That's quite a spot!

**BC:** That's where we really could have got into trouble with the Forest Service. But...

**GTR:** Just too much stuff, or being too permanent?

**BC:** Yeah, too much stuff. But at the time, when Pete started that, he formally was on the Canadian side, until the Canadians kicked him off the Canadian island. But there were still checkerboarded in the BWCA, some state-owned islands. So, a certain supporter of Dorothy's and Pete's told Pete where there was a state-owned island. It wasn't subject to all the camping restrictions. So, as I said Pete would go up there in May and stay until October.

**GTR:** Nice. He was friends enough with Benny?

**BC:** Yes. And Pete and Dorothy were good friends. Like in the winter time when Pete would break camp, like usually in October. My dad and I were up at Dorothy's the year before my dad died, in October. Pete comes down with his canoe. Dorothy let him store, dry his stuff out and

store them in the trapper's cabin. No, not in the trapper's cabin, but in the trapper's cabin cache. You know what I'm talking about? Where they'd...

**GTR:** Underneath?

**BC:** Yes, underneath, but it was like a separate structure back, like a root cellar almost, where I guess they'd keep beaver pelts and stuff like that. Martin and Mink. Pete would stay at Dorothy's a couple days and then he'd have to get back to Moose Lake.

**GTR:** Did he work somewhere in the winter?

**BC:** Not if he could avoid it! He did stay, before he owned the property which I bought from him in 1997 I guess, he'd stay at Bernie Carlson's, Quetico Outfitters. He was kind of a caretaker and plumber and carpenter, electrician. A character in his own right. I ought to write a book about him! I'm having too much fun making interviews.

**GTR:** That's good! I can send you a copy of the interview. Knife Lake Pete. Nice.

**BC:** We're talking... these were just friends of Dorothy's. Part of my experience, kind of a little deviation from talking about Dorothy.

**GTR:** That's okay. What was she like? Why did she have so many friends like that?

**BC:** Because she was just a good person. Everyone she came in contact with recognized it. Not everyone, but she would give you the shirt off her back. She helped so many people up there.

**GTR:** Did you ever see her doing nursing things up there?

**BC:** Oh, sure. Usually, if anything was really bad, she had a radio. She could contact either the Boy Scout base, in the early days, Sandy Bridges was out at the Scout Base, or in the latter time she was made an honorary member, a volunteer for the Forest Service. And they gave her an official Forest Service radio.

**GTR:** I hadn't heard about the Boy Scout landing. So, she had her own radio that would have been... before the Forest Service time?

**BC:** Well, at times she... Bridges would broadcast. It wasn't even a two-way radio in the early days. I can't really remember. But I know before the WELY radio message service, which still runs, she would get information, if someone wanted to get word to Dorothy, they would... I think it might have been a shortwave radio out there, but again I'm not sure. I didn't care much about that at that time anyway.

**GTR:** How, if you were going to stay there for two weeks, how did you usually arrange that with her? By mail?

**BC:** Usually you had to make your reservations a year in advance! Dorothy, can I come up and visit you? She'd look and see who was coming up and when they were coming up.

**GTR:** She had a calendar kind of thing?

**BC:** She had a calendar. And then Bernie Carlson took care of that, too. He kept her books and got her mail and sent it up. Occasionally there were mix-ups, too! I don't recall I ever having a mix-up, but two parties would show up the same week for the same cabin! But somehow or another things got accommodated. They'd clean out a tent... did you ever heard the term McGee's? That was the supply tent. It was just a plain old tent. Stayed up all year. A tent cabin kind of thing.

**GTR:** Canvas?

**BC:** Canvas on the top. That was full of emergencies supplies, including food, noodles and margarine. The mink and martin, weasels, would get into it.

**GTR:** I've heard one story of a bear knocking over a shed kind of thing?

**BC:** Yes, that was the boathouse. I remember that. He ripped a whole side of it out, and got in. That was the root beer tent, where she kept bottles and stuff like that, if it's the same story.

**GTR:** Could be. She always had candy bars around, right? So that would have attracted bears and things?

**BC:** She kept the candy bars... that was a solid wood building. That wasn't a tent. She'd keep the stuff in there just for bears. But a smart bear came along and ripped the whole side of it out!

40:00

**BC:** I just heard about it like everybody else. I wasn't there or anything.

**GTR:** Bears are determined! How much did it cost, to rent a cabin?

**BC:** Everything was by donation!

**GTR:** Okay, I suppose, by that point.

**BC:** She didn't have any...

**GTR:** How much would you pay?

**BC:** I don't know! I liked to come up with just one person, plus myself, or my family. Not a bunch of guys, sit around and drink and fish all night, although I've done my share of that, too! Back in the 60's I would guess that if you gave her \$100 for the week that would do...

**GTR:** I suppose people did cash, mostly?

**BC:** Cash or check, yeah.

**GTR:** I suppose even by '62 when you came there it was starting to have government rules, and you couldn't really run things...

**BC:** She didn't post any rates or anything. You'd find out what the customer donation was from other people, or from her relatives who were up there. What do other people give? And then you could give. We were always on the generous side. Not overly so, because we weren't made out of money, but it all worked out. It did work out.

**GTR:** Why do you think she stayed?

**BC:** Well, just read the books and watch the tapes. That will tell you everything better than I can.

**GTR:** What's your most lasting memory when you think of her?

**BC:** Last time I saw her alive.

**GTR:** Which was up at the cabins?

**BC:** Yes, September.

**GTR:** She was doing okay at that point, or could you tell she was kind of slowing down, or did she seem okay?

**BC:** Oh, same way people can see that I'm slowing down. She was like maybe 79 or 78 years old.

**GTR:** Someone said she was getting arthritis, a little bit?

**BC:** She had arthritic hands and her knees.

**GTR:** It seems like she was so strong when she was younger!

**BC:** Oh, she'd pick up a log... she was very strong. But yeah, I've seen her... you mentioned earlier, did you ever see her give first aid? Taking things out of people's eyes. I do remember that. You'd get a grain of sand in a kid's eye, and they'd come and be compressed. Anything major would get word back to town to either have someone come and get 'em... I remember I was there on this.

When the campsite right across from Dorothy's was struck by lightning, on the Canadian side. This island right there (shows on map)...



**GTR:** The little one... yeah. There's a campsite on there? Or is it back on the mainland? Sometimes you can't tell.

**BC:** See this little one right there? That just shows maybe one isle in there, but there are really three. The Canadian campsite is right across the... the Canadian one wasn't even marked, but you could see that Canadian campsite from the Point Cabin, where (Lonzy? Unclear) and I were staying. We got up one morning and there's a woman, waving at us. So, Lonzy went down to get water. He kind of mentioned... "There's a woman waving and she won't stop waving!" We both thought about it for a little bit and said that's unusual. So, we hopped in the canoe and motored across. There was a thunderstorm the night before, and their tent got hit by lightning. He was unconscious, with a blister in the back of his ear where his head was probably close to the ground. So, we immediately went and got Dorothy. He was starting to come around. Dorothy and her nephews loaded him up in the boat and took him just that short distance back to her island. She let him stay there for a couple of days. It took him two or three days to really recuperate. He finally did, and she just watched him. They finally left and I don't think Dorothy ever heard from them again. But that's probably the extent of most of the nursing. Usually in the area there was someone around usually who had medical training. Hell, I worked for Eli Lilly. In the summertime there was always someone up there... you know, doctors, people who knew what to do.

**GTR:** That's good.

**BC:** A kid showed up with appendicitis one night, and Dorothy diagnosed it correctly. Said this kid's got to get to town, in the middle of the night. 10, 11:00. So, my friend Chuck Cary was going into town the next day. He was one of the guys that was camped up by Pete's. Loaded the kid up in the canoe and they left about 10:00 at night. Middle of summer, around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Ran him back to town, which would take runnin' empty, three hours you could be back from Dorothy's. If you're experienced with the rapids, you didn't carry five portages. You could float the canoe right down the rivers, which we did.

**GTR:** Three hours to get to Moose Lake?

**BC:** Yep. From Dorothy's. Running the motor all the way. Not portaging. Not shooting the rapids, but you'd wade the canoe down. I could write a book about the experiences on the portages, people trying to shoot those rapids and even people that should have known better. People that trust their canoe by telling a 12 year old to hold onto the rope while I go pull the other canoe up over the logs, and then standing at the bottom of the dam and watching the first canoe go over the waterfall! (laughs)

50:00

**GTR:** Yikes! I haven't been up there. Did you ever go up there after the motors were banned?

**BC:** Oh, all the time!

**GTR:** So you paddled. How long would it take to paddle?

**BC:** Oh, I never paddled all the way. I'd run a motor all the way up the Moose Lake chain... did you hear of Prairie Portage?

**GTR:** That's long, yes?

**BC:** It would be ten miles up the lakes. You only had one lake to paddle, that's Birch Lake. Then you've got the five portages or rapids, and then you're at Knife Lake and Dorothy's. If you were experienced, it didn't take that long. It would take... I ran a square stern, after motors, and I'd put the motor in a duffle bag, a small motor, it would take me an hour to get from Moose Lake up to where you had to take the motor off. It's about a four and a half mile paddle across Birch Lake before the portages. That would take like an hour and a half to two hours. But then after paddling it a couple times I got smart, and had a little extra money, so I bought oars. Have you seen the oars in a canoe? With the yoke seat, where you could fit it over your neck? I got a set of those. That was the greatest thing for paddling. Because you get a heavy wind, if you're in a canoe, that wind blows more than 10 miles an hour, you're not going anyplace!

52:00

**GTR:** Especially when you're by yourself? With those paddles, would you be alone? Or would you be?

**BC:** Mmm, it didn't make any difference. I got them... well, after Dorothy died, I started camping with Pete. Then I would take Pete up, and he was probably 85, 86 years old... my age, when he made his last trip up there. So, I'd take him up there and I'd go up in May myself, set up the camp, and come back to town and get Pete, take him up. He sat at camp all summer!

**GTR:** Nice!

**BC:** You know, friends would come up. Relatives would come up. They'd bring all the supplies he'd need, take him blueberry picking. He sat there... I've seen him probably as long as two months, give or take a few days, not come to town.

**GTR:** That's a good run!

**BC:** Not take a bath, either!

**GTR:** Not go swimming?

**BC:** Yeah, right. I never did see him go swimming. Not him!

**GTR:** Interesting. So, why do you think we should keep teaching future generations about these guys, these characters, Dorothy or Pete?

**BC:** Oh, it makes interesting reading material! You know, books for people. Uh, future generations, you know, kids, could care less about this stuff. But as you get older, your perspective changes a little bit, and you pick up a book and read it. That's when the "oh yes's" start.

**GTR:** Right. What do you hope people remember about Dorothy? What do you hope people know about Dorothy in the future?

**BC:** That if you can choose just a very limited number of friends, who would you pick?

**GTR:** That she would be one, that you'd pick? Or that she'd pick good friends?

**BC:** No. That I'd want to be friends with.

**GTR:** Dorothy would be?

**BC:** Yeah. She was just an ordinary person, really, but didn't have a bad thing to say about anybody. Never badmouth, even you know, people that had been up there that she knew that had got in trouble with the law, stuff like that. She was just a good person to know.

**GTR:** It sounds like it, definitely!

**BC:** Yeah.

**GTR:** So, why do you keep coming back to this area? What's the draw for you?

**BC:** Sometimes I ask myself the same question. I just like the change of pace. My family and stuff are all down in Illinois, Indiana, stuff like that. So, why don't you move up here? Well, then I wouldn't have a place to come to! (laughs)

**GTR:** That's true, get some variety.

**BC:** So, I bought a couple little cabins over the years. Sold them, and I keep coming back. I enjoy my family, but it's the people that really make the area. You can get used to, not because you want to, the climate changes and stuff, but you can get used to that. You can adapt to it. But if you don't like anything to do with people, what reasons do you have to stay, really? I've got friends that are worth millions of dollars! Would I trade places with them? Not at this point. This one person is the most miserable person that I've ever run into. Got millions of dollars, and he was just consumed with making money and losing money, collecting rents, doing this and that. Too busy to even talk to other people. I don't want to be like that!

**GTR:** Nope. Do you think Dorothy and Pete and those guys...

**BC:** (inaudible)... Not there are aren't people up here that wouldn't get you into people if you associated... no different than any place else. But I notice the big difference is that most of the

kids... not all, but a lot of the kids that grow up here, are much different than they are around the Cities and stuff like that.

**GTR:** Because they are out(side) more? Or just different?

**BC:** Oh, I think that has to do with their parents and the way they were brought up, who learned it from their parents.

**GTR:** Just a calmer, or how?

**BC:** Yes, and they appreciate the... they've been exposed to the natural things, and either appreciate it or you ignore it, and if you ignore it you move to the Cities and forget about it. You get lost in the hub-drub.

**GTR:** Mmm-hmm. But with Dorothy, people still in the boundary waters... you had the woods, and then you had people.

**BC:** Yes. There's stories about Dorothy being the loneliest person in the world? You've seen some of these old magazine articles? A bunch of malarkey! When's the last time you had 3500 people visiting you during the summer months? (laughs).

**GTR:** Right. She was busy! But it added that flavor, too... that she was still in there.

**BC:** Oh, yeah, you have to! Thinking back to an earlier question, if Dorothy didn't get along with Bob Cary? Well, Bob Cary had a way of embellishing stories. And a way of exposing maybe things that other people would think should be held in confidence.

60:00

**GTR:** He the one that wrote that book!

**BC:** Well, he wrote lots of books.

**GTR:** Well, the Root Beer Lady book, the first one?

**BC:** Yeah, the Root Beer Lady.

**GTR:** So, she didn't approve of him, so much?

**BC:** No, because the stories were never quite factual enough for Dorothy. So she thought "He's a big blowhard!"

**GTR:** Mmmm.

**BC:** I didn't think too much of it at the time. After reading his books and stuff like that, talking... well, he's a neighbor of mine for years, out there where he lived, Moose Lake. If he

didn't have that knack of embellishing a story or telling it as an author has to do, enhancing it a little bit, it probably wouldn't be interesting and no one would pay much attention to it.

**GTR:** Right. I did notice...

**BC:** I think that might have had something to do with Dorothy's thinking Bob Cary was a big blowhard. But Cary was one of those guys who really went to bat for Dorothy, locally, helped raise a lot of money, he did a lot of this behind the scenes, too. Raising money so they could send a lawyer to Washington, go to see Benny Ambrose's friend.

**GTR:** I did notice in the book. The Root Beer Lady book, there was quite a few examples of "Dorothy was mad about that, or she grumbled about having to pay a fine on her taxes one year..."

**BC:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** Stories about her being mad, or grumbling. People say she was never mad, really, so?

**BC:** Well, she never really got mad or had a temper or anything that I've seen her. I've seen her disturbed a little bit, with her nephew. With my wife, and my sixteen year old daughter and her girlfriend. We were spending a week at Dorothy's cabin, at the island. Dorothy's nephew was also a teenager. Danny Gallante. There's a picture of Danny in there (in the book). And the kids, they'd do their own thing in their canoes during the day and stuff. Well, they took off in the evening to take a canoe ride. Well, they parked the canoe on the beach on the Canadian side, and went to a beaver pond, which no one knew where they were going. Well, they didn't come back. As it turns out, Danny was going to show them this beaver pond on the Canadian side, and it got dark on them. If you're out on the lake at midnight, you can see. But if you're walking a path in the woods, you can't see your hand in front of your face. They got lost. And so about 11:30 when they didn't show up, Dorothy and I started looking for them. Dorothy spread the word around that the kids are somewhere around, in a canoe. Has anyone seen them? Well, about 2:00 am in the morning, a couple of fisherman came in and said, "Oh, yeah, we were fishing this bay way up by Canada and we heard a bunch of hollering and stuff like that. It sounded like a bunch of kids." Dorothy and I motored back there, in her boat. It was probably between 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning when we found our canoe, parked high and dry at the mouth of the creek. It was probably coming down from the hills and the beaver pond. So, we... Dorothy in particular knew not to go walking in the woods, to go look for them. We'd get lost, too. So, then next we went up to this one kid's camp, a retired Marine whose son was along, and we both had firearms. So, we waited until it started to get light, and then Chuck and I took off. We looked for... well, we'll never be able to find them by looking, so these big ledge rocks where the glacier came through, carved out the lakes but they left the high ridges? I crawled on top of one high ridge. Chuck's on another one, a quarter mile away, on the other side of this bay. We simultaneously fired shots. About the second round of shots, either Chuck heard, or I heard, "Here we are!" And they came walking out of the woods, a mile from where their canoe was.

**GTR:** Oh, no! So you didn't hear them at night, at all? They couldn't hear you at night?

**BC:** Well, the funny thing... if you've been out in the woods, ever... you can be 100 yards away and fire a cannon, and you're not going to hear it. If you're down on the lake and there's big ledge rock going up there, a bomb could go off on the other side of that high ledge and you're not going to hear it. You won't know where it's coming from.

**GTR:** So, Dorothy was upset with her (nephew)?

**BC:** Dorothy was very upset with Danny. We took them back to camp, not back to camp, back to Dorothy's island. Put them in our boat. Dorothy... "What'd you do a dumb thing like that, for?" was about the way it came out. But then she would not let Danny off the hook that day, just because he was up all night, swatting mosquitoes and worrying about wolves and bears and stuff. She made him work and do his chores all the next day.

**GTR:** Did he learn his lesson pretty well?

**BC:** Yeah. My daughter... I've only seem him a couple times since then. As he grew a little older, I was still working, before I retired. Danny's father was... liked to drink a lot. He died while... the word came up. His mom and dad was divorced. I hauled him back to Illinois when he was about... just maybe a year or two after his getting lost in the woods. I hear of him occasionally. He turned out real fine, to my knowledge. But that end of the family... Dorothy's sister, were his grandparents. So, Dorothy would have been his great aunt or something like that.

**GTR:** Yeah, so she had her own family, but it sounds like a lot of other people maybe thought of her...

**BC:** Dorothy never married or had a family, but she sure had a pseudo-family. She really did.

**GTR:** It seems like people might have thought of her as like an aunt or a grandma that they could just stop by and say hi?

**BC:** I shouldn't probably... I have a puppy dog down here. I parked her under a shade tree (referring to his time to go soon)!

**GTR:** I don't know if I have any other questions right now. If you have anything more you think of, you can let me know.

**BC:** Dorothy was a very special person. I'm honored to have known her.

**GTR:** That sounds great. Thank you!

62:00

(discussion about contact info... gives small chocolate treat)

**GTR:** I know Dorothy liked her candy, too.

**BC:** Yeah, I know a million stories about Dorothy's candy, too.

**GTR:** The ones she'd sell? Or?

**BC:** Her donation jar for candy. Do you know the story of when her money jar was stolen?

**GTR:** No! I haven't heard that one.

**BC:** She trusted people. Strangers would come in, "Where's the candy?" (She'd say) "Go help yourself. A quarter a bar, put the money in the jar." Well, one day the jar was missing! And somebody noticed it. But she got the jar back. It was a boy scout, either a Boy Scout group or a church group. The word got around that Dorothy's candy jar... you'd be surprised how fast word travels on Knife Lake, with 75 campsites. The word kind of got around that Dorothy's candy jar was missing. I don't know if it was the next day or the day after, a scout leader of one of the scout masters heard about the candy jar missing and he found out that one of his boys had it, or took it, and gave it back to Dorothy. But that's not the point of the story. The point of the story though was that Dorothy never had a cash register or a cashier... she just trusted people so much.

**GTR:** And people didn't usually take advantage, it sounds like?

**BC:** Well, if they did, I only know about the story of the missing candy jar. I don't think anybody ever stole anything, that I ever heard of. Maybe pick up a rock here or there. Good old Knife Lake! (Gets up to leave....discussion of taking a photo, leaving)

**GTR:** Thanks for coming in! We'll be in touch, or be in touch with Sarah!



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrators:**

Robert (Bob) Haapala (b. 1934) - **BH**  
Daughter Terry Pykla - **TP**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes - **GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

**Recorded August 4, 2015**  
**Ely, MN**

**GTR:** We could start this just by, if you say your name into this so I can get your sound levels, and also how to pronounce your last name.

**BH:** Robert Haapala.

**GTR:** Haapala, okay.

**BH:** Better known as Bob, I guess.

**GTR:** Yep. All right. How long have you been in the Ely area?

**BH:** Eighty years.

**GTR:** Your whole life? When were you born?

**BH:** Ely.

**GTR:** Okay. What year?

**BH:** Thirty-four.

**GTR:** All right. Very good. When did you meet Dorothy the first time?

**BH:** Probably '46.

**GTR:** Okay. You would have been ... wow, 1946? You would have been a teenager.

**BH:** Yeah.



**GTR:** Oh. Were you paddling up there? What were you doing?

**BH:** Motoring.

**GTR:** Okay. With your family?

**BH:** Brother, yeah.

**GTR:** Okay. Just paddling, doing longer trips, or you'd started-

**BH:** Just a nice way to go camping and fishing.

**GTR:** Okay. Specifically at Isle of Pines with Dorothy?

**BH:** We stopped, yeah.

**GTR:** Okay. You just visited?

**BH:** We stayed at Birch Point if that makes any difference.

**GTR:** That's good, yeah. Were you camping then?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Okay. That spot. What was it like when you first saw the island?

**BH:** Unexpected.

**GTR:** How so?

**BH:** It seemed like forever to get there. A lot of work.

**GTR:** Even with the motor?

**BH:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah, because you had to portage.

**BH:** I didn't have to carry it, but I had to carry enough.

**GTR:** Did you buy anything from her, or anything?

**BH:** I think the root beer was available.

**GTR:** Oh.

**BH:** At that time. I can't really be sure.

**GTR:** Did it taste good? Do you remember? (BH shrugs). Do you remember anything about being there, or tasting cold root beer? Any memories of that?

**BH:** I don't know much about it.

**GTR:** Okay. All right. Then did you visit more and more over the years?

**BH:** What was that?

**GTR:** Did you visit her more over the years, then, as you got older?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** How did you usually get there?

**BH:** Used to go up on (Steeler) most of the time.

**GTR:** By motorboat?

**BH:** No, snow machine.

**GTR:** Okay. In the wintertime. All right. When did you start doing those?

**BH:** About '66 I think it was.

**GTR:** What kind did you have?

**BH:** Polaris.

**GTR:** Is that what Dorothy had at the beginning? Do you remember hers?

**BH:** I think so.

**TP:** Didn't she have a Traveler?

**BH:** A Snow Traveler, but the big one.

**GTR:** Okay. Yeah.

**BH:** I think it was the tractor.

**GTR:** Someone said those had the opposite controls?

**BH:** They had brakes and one of them was the throttle, on the other one.

**GTR:** It was different than people were used to?

**BH:** Hmm?

**GTR:** Was it different than people might be used to with a car?

**BH:** Yeah. It was a belt-driven thing. A fast motor. It runs the faster you go, or don't go.

**GTR:** Right. Someone just told me with those old machines he accidentally made himself go backwards because he didn't understand.

**BH:** Some do.

**GTR:** Yeah, okay. You had a Polaris and you'd go up there. How long would you say?

**BH:** Sometimes four days, four nights. It depends on what time I went there.

**GTR:** Would you bring food or did she have food there?

**BH:** No, we brought food.

**GTR:** You brought your own food. Okay. What would you ... would you interact with her? Would she come over and talk, or play cards, or how did that go?

**BH:** Yeah. Most of the time we'd stop there and if we got the cabin, what cabin, or whatever. She'd come by in the morning or that evening and see how we're doing. You name it.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** If she had something on the table, we'd eat it.

**GTR:** Like what did she bake?

**BH:** Everything.

**GTR:** Like what?

**BH:** Soups, and breads, and little things.

**GTR:** Was she a good cook?

**BH:** Apparently, yeah.

**GTR:** Do you remember maybe?

**BH:** We ate it.

**GTR:** It was there. That's good. All right, cool. Which cabins did you usually stay in?

**BH:** The Point cabin and the, I guess they call it the Island cabin.

**GTR:** Right. Nice.

**BH:** And the trapper shack sometimes.

**GTR:** Oh, really? You'd end up there?

**BH:** Depending on what the deal was, and her old summer tent. That was very warm at 30 below.

**GTR:** Really? You would stay in that in the winter?

**BH:** Yeah. The sleeping bag would freeze to the wall just by breathing in it.

**GTR:** Oh, no.

**BH:** The garbage can about this high would be froze all solid by morning. It was so cold.

**GTR:** Yeah. Was there a stove in there?

**BH:** Yeah, but nobody got up at 3:00 in the morning and started the stove up, so... It was cold. Not too often that we'd have to stay there, but...

**GTR:** Right, yeah. I thought it was the summer...

**BH:** That's the story, yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah. She would stay there in the summer, but then in the winter she would usually move into the cabin?

**BH:** Cabin, yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah, okay. That's where you'd be at. It was a busy time sometimes, you'd have to end up in the tent because there was more people around?

**BH:** People, people. She was happy with them sometimes and wasn't happy sometimes.

**GTR:** Why?

**BH:** She'd let you know.

**GTR:** Why would she not be happy?

**BH:** There are types of people that she was never agreeing with at the time, that wanted to know more about her than she was going to give, type of thing.

**GTR:** Private. What would she do? She would do that? What do you think? Did Dorothy ... were you around then in the 60s and 70s?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** With people starting to come interview her, or pester her more at that point.

**BH:** That's when the war was going on with the government and that side of the people.

**GTR:** Right. Did she get more attention then, do you think? People would come and try to ask?

**BH:** She didn't care for the idea, but she was the only one that managed... her and Benny.

**GTR:** Right. To stay.

**BH:** The government was good to two people, but I can't say the rest.

**GTR:** Yeah, that's hard. I suppose you were frequently snowmobiling in those years before they closed the access?

**BH:** Yeah, like I said, a thousand different reasons, for just the reasons.

**TP:** How often did you go up in the wintertime?

**BH:** Probably four or five depending on some with the weather and some were not. Some were short weekends and some were longer ones, because we used to get a four-day weekend and then we'd have a better trip out of it once in a while. We'd get off between 11:00 and go up in the dark and fish for two days, and come back.

**GTR:** Nice. Did you go on your own, or who did you go with?

**BH:** A few friends went.

**GTR:** Friends or family? Your friends would go?

**BH:** Friends, yeah. Some family.

**GTR:** Some family, like once. You would be younger, right? (asking Daughter Terry) You were-

**TP:** My brother did.

**GTR:** Okay. When was your brother born?

**TP:** My brother, he's 63. How old is Larry, 62, 63?

**BH:** Sixty-three, somewhere in there.

**GTR:** You'd bring with? Would kids come to the resort?

**BH:** Him and Dorothy got along real fine.

**GTR:** She liked kids?

**BH:** He stayed right with her in her cabin.

**GTR:** How old would he have been when he started doing that?

**TP:** Like, eight, 17. Teenager, 14, 15. Yeah. Fifteen-and-a-half, I think, right? In the 60s.

**BH:** I thought about 18, by that time.

**GTR:** Did he ever stay longer to help her? I know some people would stay. Teenagers would end up staying out there to help her some. Did he ever do that?

**BH:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah? Like what would he do?

**BH:** Ice.

**GTR:** Oh. Cutting?

**BH:** That was a nice job. Very cool.

**GTR:** Right. Would you help with that with the snowmobiles?

**BH:** Some, yeah. We used to carry it to the top of the hill there which would be imagine, which was probably 30 feet, 40 feet or something like that, of the island. Then go up into the slaughter shed, you might call it and bury them, then they'd use them all summer.

**GTR:** Right to make the cold.

**BH:** A lot of root beer was cooled off.

**GTR:** Yeah. That was part of the appeal, right, that it was cold?

**BH:** Yeah. Some people need it that way.

**GTR:** How would you carry the ice? How did you carry the ice up there?

**BH:** Tong.

**GTR:** Tong things, yeah.

**BH:** And pulleys and different things to get it up higher at different levels.

**GTR:** How were they cutting it in those years? Were there chainsaws, or was it cut?

**BH:** Chainsaw to cut it, yeah.

**GTR:** Oh, it was chainsaws. Did it change? Did you ever do it after the snowmobile ban?

**BH:** No, I didn't go up there at all.

**GTR:** Yeah, okay.

**BH:** They cut my throat so I stopped. It was bleeding. You might call it that way. Parked the machine and that was it. Never went up again.

**GTR:** You didn't go other areas, too, or just didn't go to Dorothy's?

**BH:** Never went back into that country at all.

**GTR:** That's tough.

**BH:** It hurts. Sit back and well, it happened. That's why this is here. At least they can't forget everything.

**GTR:** Right. The people that lived there and the things that were there before the changes.

**BH:** What was that?

**GTR:** You mean like remembering the people that were there?

**TP:** Or the things probably, more so.

**GTR:** The things.

**BH:** Were they moving?

**GTR:** Before the bans, before the government.

**BH:** All kinds of different people. Not so often.

**GTR:** You think that's a good reason for this place is to remember other things besides wilderness? This museum is good for remembering the people, or the resorts, rather than just wilderness?

**BH:** Never got to too many people, really. Come to think of it. Even fishing any of it. We didn't like the people that came to help us fish. Sit next to you and ask you why they're not catching any fish, you know, little things like that.

**GTR:** You wanted to be quiet. Quiet and fish.

**BH:** Yeah. That would have been more better.

**13:00**

**GTR:** Yeah. When did you last see Dorothy, do you think?

**BH:** Somewhere in the 80s... I don't know when the bans became fully effective.

**GTR:** It would have been before the ban, then. Did she ever come to town? Did you ever see her? I know she came to town, but did you ever see her?

**BH:** Never ran into her in town, no.

**GTR:** Okay. Just the island.

**BH:** I knew she'd come, though. We used to go there when she was going to Chicago and visit her sister, or wherever. We had the whole... rent the building then. There was a full list of people that wanted to be there.

**TP:** You're saying when she'd go to Chicago, you guys would stay there alone?

**BH:** Yeah. Everybody was taking care of it. There was a guy from Two Harbors that became a major helper, I guess. I can't even remember his name.

**GTR:** They would stay in the winter while she was gone?

**BH:** They would stay there.

**GTR:** They would stay there?



**BH:** Do whatever. He was a carpenter type or a manager, or whatever you want to call it. Monkey with this or that and fish.

**GTR:** The ice fishing. Ice fish? If he'd be there, she'd usually leave in the winter, right?

**BH:** As far as I know. I think she did make several early season trips, I think.

**GTR:** Then the manager or someone else would stay in the winter and you could still visit?

**BH:** Why can't I think of his name?

**GTR:** We might have it in ... it might be in some of these things. Here's the book. (The Root Beer Lady book by Sarah Guy-Levar). This is an autographed copy. Let's see. People you might know in here. You might be in here for all I know. I don't know. There's a lot of pictures of people.

**BH:** I don't know if I've got that book.

**TP:** Yes, we do. It's on the coffee table.

**BH:** Same book?

**TP:** The same book.

**BH:** You're sure?

**TP:** Well, not the same book, because that book was here.

**BH:** Same people's in the book.

**TP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Same people, yeah. Would you have considered yourself one of Dorothy's angels?

**BH:** Me?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** No. Not until she died.

**GTR:** What was that?

**BH:** Then I become a dummy angel.

**GTR:** All right. Would you ever deliver supplies and stuff to her? Did you ever deliver supplies or anything to her in the winter?

**BH:** Yeah, we'd bring things. Gas tanks and who knows what was on the list.

**GTR:** Just whatever. Would you stop at the resorts? I can't remember where. She would leave a list somewhere?

**BH:** Somebody would be leaving a note.

**GTR:** Okay. How would you get word if you were going up there? Oh, Dorothy needs a gas can. How would you get that?

**BH:** Just, who knows.

**TP:** Was it like, you just knew that you checked in with somebody before you went up there to see if it was needed?

**BH:** Well people... if somebody is going. I'd usually bump into them and they'd say, oh, she wants gas. We'd pick up a tank. We had a sled made for it and bring it up, or whatever. Pretty much that. We had the grocery people, all different types.

**GTR:** Okay. You didn't do groceries?

**BH:** She didn't need much groceries.

**GTR:** Yeah. She would store stuff?

**BH:** She ate bear meat, I guess.

**GTR:** (laughs). Fish, right?

**BH:** She'd get the bear. Some people think that she was a mean person and yeah, but just aren't.

**GTR:** Right. Somebody told me she didn't want to kill a bear or a deer.

**BH:** She didn't want to, but had to.

**GTR:** Right.

**BH:** You would have to.

**GTR:** People would help her, though, too. They'd give her the meat sometimes rather than her hunting. Yeah.

**BH:** I don't remember that book.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**TP:** Now you have something to read tonight when you go home.

**GTR:** Yeah. These guys, do those guys look familiar?

**BH:** [Churnack 00:17:29]. [inaudible 00:17:29 ] Churnack the land dealer here.

**TP:** That's Churnack.

**BH:** Churnack, yeah. I knew the name was coming really close.

**TP:** Is that the guy from Two Harbors?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**BH:** Yeah she'd stay right with 'em. Mert.

**GTR:** Mert, okay. Nice. Did you ever bring her root beer supplies? Supplies for root beer?

**BH:** I don't remember.

**GTR:** Different people remember doing that.

**BH:** I'm old enough to forget enough that I can't remember. Yeah. Now I can remember.

**GTR:** That's okay. There's a lot of stuff in there.

**BH:** He used to go out the door.

**GTR:** Yeah. Why do you think she stayed so long? Why stay there so long?

**TP:** Why do you think she did that type of lifestyle?

**BH:** Because she enjoyed it. She didn't like that one other type, the one that's kicking her out of there. She'd let us know what unhappiness was there.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** The airplanes would stop in and you name it.

**GTR:** Do you remember when she became an official volunteer and had a radio, and that whole business?

**BH:** I don't remember what was happening with that radio.

**GTR:** Yeah. They figured out a way she could stay, I guess, a little bit longer. Right? Make her an official volunteer, government rules, you know. Then they could say, oh there we go. That's the loophole to let her stay for a while. Yeah. Then what happened after she passed away? How did you get involved with the cabins?

**BH:** We were at the resort, Bear Island Resort, I guess they call it. Yeah.

**TP:** Where we live?

**BH:** Yeah.

**TP:** Yeah.

**BH:** Guy had been there maybe twice. Decided they want to move it, like a boss. So John Rosette and I said, well, let's move the darn thing. He got up and organized some kind of a crew and down it came. In fact, they went up twice.

**GTR:** What went up? What, you said, back?

**BH:** Twice. We built this twice. Once down at the Chamber of Commerce building and again here.

**GTR:** That sounds crazy. Did it go in storage for a while though? When you first took it off the island?

**BH:** Yeah they stored it down by the... what's the name of that place? I believe that was the old seed store. Flower and seed.

**TP:** Oh, the flower and seed?

**BH:** Yeah.

**TP:** Just the Ely Flower and Seed.

**BH:** Yeah we stored it there for one season, or whatever.

**GTR:** There's a picture in here of people. It's towards the back, but it's of moving the cabins. Not the way back. I'll find it real quick.

**BH:** Maybe you can find it.

**GTR:** Let me see here. If that spurs a memory at all. Help from the dogsleds first.

**BH:** Yeah there was going to happen. That's all they said, it was going to happen. All of a sudden the guy that run that show he says, "It ain't going to happen."

**GTR:** The forest service guy, or which guy running the show?

**BH:** Running the dogsleds.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**BH:** Voyageur Outward Bound.

**GTR:** It got too warm? What happened?

**BH:** Well, a 200 pound weight is one thing, but a 500 pound weight is another thing. Try to take care of dogs and weather all at one time.

**GTR:** Yeah. I've heard stories of John with a chainsaw taking stuff apart. Were you in on that?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah. How did it work to take it apart and know that you'd be able to put it back together? Did you guys number, or what was going on?

**TP:** Yeah.

**BH:** We numbered everything. Stickers, metal sticker and staple them on or nail them on.

**GTR:** Yeah. I think some are still on. I've seen those on the cabin. What was the thinking? Why did people want to work so hard to save the cabins?

**BH:** I'm not sure.

**TP:** I would think just, being who she was. Just to save some of her history.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. For sure. I wondered, just talking with people if she just felt like an honorary family member or something? This was kind of like grandma's house. Let's not let grandma's house burn down. Let's somehow ... a lot of people felt connected to her and they just wanted to help preserve.

**TP:** I think that's how my brother would probably have put it.

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Okay.

**TP:** He was part of the...

**BH:** He knew.

**TP:** He was pretty upset when that all happened. He was the, what do they call them? The 12. What did they call them? That went up on their snowmobiles right after, or something like that.

**GTR:** Yeah. I think even when, someone had told me that when the dogsled work was starting, suddenly there was a trail broken. I don't know who did that.(laughs) There was a little bit of that. I can't imagine. That would have been a really hard transition, a really hard thing to have always visited via snowmobile and not be able to anymore. You probably didn't talk to Dorothy about that, because you didn't see her much after the snowmobile ban, right?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** You remember, but you don't ...No, I didn't visit up there by foot or dogsled. Probably would have after a few years. Like now, when the dogsledders are going up there, but they weren't going up there that much at that time. The condition of myself was probably better then, too, though. Do different things.

**GTR:** That was a while ago. Yeah, she's been gone for almost 30 years. It's amazing to think we're still talking about her and interviewing people about her and it's been 30 years, almost.

**BH:** Somewhere this morning I had one of those not sleepy nights thinking about three different things at one time and I run into that. My mind was, not even knowing I was going to be here today. Got no plans.

**GTR:** Just remember her, or remembering those days? Remembering Dorothy?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah. She seems like she was an interesting person. What do you hope people would remember about Dorothy?

**BH:** Just her personality.

**GTR:** She was kind?

**BH:** To most people.

**TP:** Was she kind but rough on the edges?

**BH:** Yeah. She's got a paddle in her hand. One for the backside, and one for the front side. She'd paddle frontwards and then she'd whop somebody with a paddle from the backside. You might say...

**GTR:** Keep people in line.

**BH:** She would have put her packsack on her back it's probably got to be a 100-pounder.

**GTR:** She was an ox.

**TP:** Tough, yeah.

**GTR:** Tough. She was an ox.

**BH:** She'd pick up her canoe and go. Put a pack on her back.

**GTR:** Strong, yeah. Did you ever see her help people with any medical things, because she was a nurse? You didn't see that?

**BH:** No record of that.

**GTR:** You didn't see that. Yeah.

**BH:** I understood that she did it.

**GTR:** Okay. And strong. Someone said she was always the same with all the different people. She'd be just friendly with everyone, but you're saying she definitely had her favorites.

**BH:** The different badges.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** And not really something she wants to give coffee to, right away.

**TP:** She probably, if I was in that position... I guess I don't have any room to talk, because I wasn't there. I would imagine that she would be the type that wouldn't let her guard down for everybody, because she'd be vulnerable if she did in that type of living conditions. Granted, times were different back then, but definitely now.

**GTR:** Right, yeah. Some of the things you read that she was ... yeah, people knew she was really strong and that she would not take any nonsense. That's good.

**BH:** You never missed coffee, I know that. Freshwater coffee. She was probably going to keep the fresh water up there for a while yet.

**GTR:** The percolator thing on the stove kind of thing?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Boil it. Have you been in the cabins recently?

**TP:** No, oh gosh. It's been many years.

**BH:** I haven't been to them now for ... did you come last year?

**TP:** No. I think it's been five or six. We came one time. I can't remember. It was a long time ago.

**GTR:** Did you help with setting up the museum, then? Getting the stuff all?

**BH:** The little stuff?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** Oh, not the little stuff.

**GTR:** Just the big stuff? Getting the cabins redone.

**BH:** Getting the cabins together. I'll take them down, then put them together.

**GTR:** Yeah. That's a lot. What?

**BH:** Like a dummy.

**GTR:** How did they look up there? How do they look? Does it look sort of the same? Does it have the same feel?

**BH:** Do I have the same feeling?

**TP:** Yeah. Do the cabins have the same feeling? Just looking at the exterior of them and everything?

**BH:** Yeah. I can still feel into it, but different size trees. Yeah. Nothing like... That one did fall down onto the cabin (later).

**GTR:** Really?

**BH:** If it was there.

**GTR:** Out on the island?



**BH:** Windstorm.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. Did you think about that when you were out there?

**BH:** That was after.

**GTR:** Oh, after, one did?

**BH:** I don't remember which storm it was that went through that area. Anyways, one of the big ones. It was right next to the hole, of the building. So, if the government didn't take it out, I don't know.

**GTR:** You guys, right. You only took a couple of them when you were doing that.

**TP:** How many cabins were there?

**BH:** We took down three.

**TP:** And how many were there?

**GTR:** There's a map here.

**BH:** Four, really.

**TP:** What happened to the other one?

**BH:** It was going to go to a ... one of the school effects. I can't remember which one or what. Someplace in the inside of it. There was people that were against it, I guess, and it sat too long.

**GTR:** Oh, and then a tree fell on it? Then the tree fell on that one?

**BH:** No, no. They were already parked, already down here.

**GTR:** Oh, okay. One of these after the museum was set up. Okay. I thought you meant out there. You don't know, then, whatever happened to that one?

**TP:** That cabin.

**GTR:** It burned?

**BH:** No. It just sat on the hillside until it got rotted, I guess.

**GTR:** Oh, okay. Out on the island. Okay. I heard there was, the Forest Service's standard practice would have been just to burn stuff down. Once someone left a property they'd just want to get rid of it and burn it down. (thumping upstairs). It's not as quiet down here as we thought.

**BH:** The end of the day.

**GTR:** It is. They're wrapping up. It's only open for 15 more minutes. What was I saying? I totally lost my thought there. Let's see. Oh, putting that up there. People knew apparently that the Forest Service might want to just burn the cabins right away after she (died)?

**BH:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Was that part of everyone's urgency to get that?

**BH:** That's where John Rosette got it in on his speaking ability. Got really noisy about it. Mike Rice from the resort, he was kind of a noisy guy, too.

**GTR:** Mike who?

**BH:** Rice.

**GTR:** Rice, okay.

**BH:** He ran that resort, I don't know, five, six years I guess. Wasn't it?

**GTR:** Which resort?

**TP:** Bear Island Resort.

**GTR:** Bear Island, okay. He was there, okay. Because you guys were up there. Oh, yeah. I must say, I haven't been up there as much as I'd like.

**BH:** I don't know where he's at now. I have no idea. Somebody said he was out in the east end somewhere. Connecticut or some strange odd place.

**30:00**

**GTR:** That's where you guys live now?

**TP:** No. We live right outside of ... well, it's out of Babbitt actually.

**BH:** The same road as the resort.

**TP:** The resort used to be on there back in the 90s when everything went downhill. Tourism and everything really took a dive and they closed. Just weren't getting the business. I think it tried to turn hands a couple of times and they just couldn't make it go.

**GTR:** That was part of, some of those people were only interested preserving these?

**TP:** Preserving. Mm-hmm.

**GTR:** Yeah. That's great that it happened. Then you, what did you use? Snowmobile or ATV at that point to try to get stuff out?

**BH:** Get the logs out?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** Both.

**GTR:** Both. Were you driving?

**BH:** Both.

**GTR:** Both that day, okay.

**BH:** Most of them was ATV. I had the longest loads.

**GTR:** Okay.

**BH:** For the trailer I had.

**GTR:** Dragging some, or was there always?

**BH:** It was on a trailer. Some were dragged, but not very much.

**GTR:** Okay. Who was putting all the little stuff away? I was wondering who was packing up before you guys took down the logs.

**BH:** I don't know what happened there. I missed that part.

**GTR:** Okay. It was already done.

**TP:** Nobody's really said who's done that?

**GTR:** I don't know that I've heard specifically. Peg Rosette, she said she wasn't on the island. That she helped set it up once everything was here, but that she didn't go.

**BH:** I never went all through that stuff lately. What do you call that resort over there? By the mine, anyway.

**GTR:** That's where it went? That's where the material, where the little stuff went?

**TP:** The interior. That's where the interior stuff went?

**BH:** Yeah.

**TP:** I wonder who did that.

**BH:** What's the name of that place?

**TP:** I really have no idea.

**BH:** The north side of Shagawa Lake, or Island island. What is that?

**TP:** Shagawa?

**BH:** That little lake.

**TP:** Shagawa.

**BH:** No, the little lake right next to the mine.

**TP:** Miner's Lake. No, Miner's. Oh there's that little building there that's now an art something. It has to do with...

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. It was a mine building, maybe, at one time.

**TP:** Yeah and I think they used to store things before. Now it's actually...

**BH:** I think that's where most of it. I didn't follow it. All I know is, the book came here.

**TP:** I'm sure it had to be a woman's touch.

**GTR:** Yeah. Probably, I know. I wonder who it was.

**BH:** The book came here and the beds.

**GTR:** The what did?

**BH:** The book came here and the beds. That's all I know.

**GTR:** The book.

**BH:** The book, that everybody signed.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. And the beds.

**BH:** And the beds.

**GTR:** Did they look familiar?

**BH:** We got two beds in here.

**GTR:** I don't know for sure what's up there. You'll have to go back in. [crosstalk 00:34:47]

**BH:** One of the place I guess. Two in there? No, there's a hallway through it.

**GTR:** Right.

**TP:** Now we're just going to have to come back.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah, because they're going to close up.

**TP:** We're going to have to come back one of these days. Maybe Saturday or something.

**GTR:** They have a big event coming up on Sunday, I think. Donuts.

**TP:** Oh, okay. Donuts with Dorothy or something, yeah. That would be fun.

**BH:** What was that?

**TP:** Donuts for Dorothy, or something, on Sunday. I'll have to ask them. Actually, we were going to do it, but we were in Michigan. We're not in Michigan this year so can do it.

**GTR:** Sounds good. There was a woman visiting this summer, earlier this summer, who, her parents were good friends with Dorothy and she'd visited many times in the 60s and 70s. It was Marilyn McCain... I think was her last name. She lives in Tennessee or something, so when she came into the cabins for the first time she said she just started crying, because it just looked right. It just felt so familiar. Whoever did it, did a good job, apparently. It looks kind of like it did with her stuff arranged and that. Yeah.

**TP:** Mom never did any of that stuff, did she?

**BH:** I don't think so.

**GTR:** Would she have gone out there as much? Yeah.

**TP:** How many times did mom go out there, or did she?

**BH:** Did she? I don't know. I don't remember. All I know is Floyd was there and her dad was there, your grandpa.

**TP:** Maybe she was just telling me things from stories, then.

**BH:** I don't remember. I think I forget pretty easy!

**TP:** So can I.

**BH:** She missed the place?

**TP:** I did. I drove right by. He's like, where are we going? I'm like, oh.

**BH:** We'd probably get to the wolf center.

**GTR:** Let's see here. Anything else you would want to share or remember about saving the cabins, or setting up the museum, or anything?

37:00

**TP:** Or her personality, or anything about her?

**BH:** No. She was just an out-of-town-mom type of person. You've got coffee, or soup, or whatever she had. She'd offer some... that was how she acted to people.

**TP:** Like your out-of-town-mom.

**BH:** Play cards. Well, we'd play cards. Sometimes you'd wonder if you're ever going to stop, like 4:00 in the morning and you're supposed to go fishing at 5:30, 6:00. Just a few times, but I mean, not...

**GTR:** What would you be playing? What did she like?

**BH:** She liked Canasta, she liked cribbage a little bit. A little bit of everything. Whatever came up as far as..Uno or what. (? Inaudible)

**GTR:** She was good? Was she good at it?

**BH:** In my opinion, yeah. She had a very good stare out of herself. She could figure things that most people don't. You would think that she was so busy that she had no time to do anything, but she still had her moments where she wanted to be doing what she wanted to do and with like, Johnny Rosette. Every night he'd be up there pert-near that he could get there and they'd ride up there in the dark and hopefully the machines are together, and come home the next day and work on the machine. Figure, maybe that night he'd get there, or whatever, but he spent a lot of time up there. Him and Peg... that whole Ely bunch or Babbitt bunch, you might call it.

**GTR:** Up there a lot. Somebody said they would keep bottles of their own liquor and they'd line them up. Was that part of the cards nights, or not always?

**BH:** Different people.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**TP:** That wouldn't have been in my family.

**GTR:** Okay, yeah.

**TP:** In later days, especially.

**BH:** Yeah the early days, I don't know much about them. When the dock (Doc?) was there.

**GTR:** Okay.

**BH:** Grandpa (Cap?) or something like that, his name was.

**GTR:** Oh, her dad, Dorothy's father? Do you remember him much? Was he around when you were around? Sounds like he was there in the summer more.

**BH:** I think I met him once. No real conversation. We were at the dock I think is the time. We were just saying this and she was doing that.

**GTR:** Okay. Sounds good. Would you say she had a poker face? Could she be really serious and then...

**BH:** She didn't have a face that would admit to anything, really.

**GTR:** Kind of calm?

**BH:** A workable face. Tough.

**GTR:** What about her hands. Someone said she would speak with her hands more often. Do you remember that at all?

**BH:** Well.

**TP:** She's like Claudia and talk with her hands?

**BH:** Depends on who you're talking about.

**TP:** Yeah, I supposed. Depending on the subject.

**BH:** Yeah, I missed those last years. Oh, well. I don't think I would have enjoyed them. Just hear the second stories.

**GTR:** It was probably a lot quieter there for her, huh.

**BH:** I don't know who was doing the narration of it, but I know that she was getting a chance to stay there. I don't think she'd complained if she knew it was here (The Museum) by normal ways...

**GTR:** You think she'd be happy?

**BH:** I think so. Got no choice, you might say, in a way.

**TP:** No, but I mean, do you think she'd be happy with how it's portrayed and the setup? That something was preserved of her life, or do you think she was the humble type that really didn't think that she...

**BH:** I think she took on the nice side of people enough. Give her a good snow machine, that's good. Give her a cabin again, that's I think good to her. Meaning that, she wasn't complaining about it, or wouldn't complain about it. She wasn't too happy with her little spot on Moose Lake.

**GTR:** A different spot of where she would stay sometimes?

**BH:** Well, that was her hopeful place to go. But then she died, so...

**GTR:** I didn't know about that. She had like a retirement plan?

**BH:** Just a piece of land that they kind of traded. I don't know if it ever became a full trade or not. I had no knowledge of that for sure.

**TP:** Oh, so they gave her, here. We want what you have but we'll give you this little piece of land over here to go to.

**BH:** More than likely, in that words, yeah.

**GTR:** There was no cabin or anything there?

**BH:** Not that I know of.

**GTR:** Just land.

**BH:** If there was, I don't remember. I don't remember any discussion about it.

**GTR:** Why do you think she did want to just stay there so much?

**BH:** Right where she's at.

**GTR:** That was just her place?

**BH:** How many years she did there? Forty years or 50 years she put there.



**GTR:** Right.

**TP:** That was her home.

**GTR:** She didn't want to leave.

**TP:** That was her home and that's why she didn't want to leave, I would imagine.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** She became a wilderness nurse by some people's ways. She managed to get her trout when she needed them, and walleyes when she wanted them.

**GTR:** Some good eating. Are those, you eat those fish?

**BH:** She had a little garden, but I don't know what was in it because there was snow on it.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. In winter. Would it be beef stew, when she did stew was it beef, or whatever?

**BH:** Whatever.

**GTR:** Yeah, just whatever.

**TP:** Or would you not even really know? (laughs)

**GTR:** I know. Something in there.

**TP:** Which was not really ... it's just soup. Just soup.

**BH:** Well, she had a big kettle of it for people.

**GTR:** Would it be out on the ice, that one? Would you come in those days?

**BH:** I hadn't been there, no.

**GTR:** No, okay.

**BH:** I heard about them, but I never ... people buzzing up.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**BH:** We worked Saturdays and Sundays all the time at that time of the year.

**GTR:** What did you do for work?

**BH:** A shovel runner. I don't know if you take the pictures of them big machines that load the little trucks.

**TP:** In the mines.

**GTR:** Okay.

**BH:** Mines. I spent 32 years there, then they whistled us out the door.

**GTR:** Mmmhmm. You were working weekends so you weren't necessarily in those bigger gatherings?

**TP:** No.

**GTR:** Okay. You got the quiet days. Sounds good. It was quiet days to visit.

**TP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah. Can I take your picture?

**BH:** Yeah. I guess some people, for some reason missed something. Not that I can't see water. I took a cabin from Basswood Lake and we're still living in it. Took it apart, and hauled it, and put it back up. She's still living in it.

**GTR:** That's great. The fish, what's the draw to live up here? Is it fish, or quiet?

**TP:** For now?

**GTR:** Different people like to talk about different things. Just even asking, why do you stay? What's the draw to the canoe country for you? Why be here?

**TP:** I think for him it would be, just like for her, it's his home. When you're lived in some area for 80 years. In hers, she lived there 40 years, probably was equivalent. That type of lifestyle, I would think. For us it's home. I don't think you could call us outdoorsy people anymore. Fish or hunt, or... granted age makes that not happen anymore. I'm sure if he could he'd still be out there fishing and hunting every..

**GTR:** Yeah. That's nice.

**TP:** Every moment.

**GTR:** It's been fun to come up here again and remember. I used to do more of this when I was younger, too, before I had kids and stuff. It's a good place.

**TP:** Yeah.

(Chatting about taking photos, etc).

**GTR:** You signed the form. Thank you much.



**Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

Marilyn (McCain) McCord (b. 1942) - **MM**  
Husband Steven McCord

**Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes -**GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

**Recorded June 11, 2015**

**Marilyn's Motorhome near the road in Two Harbors, MN**  
*(sound quality is challenging sometimes due to traffic)*

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Marilyn McCain McCord. Is that how you say your name?

**MM:** That's correct.

**GTR:** On June 11th, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter oral history project.

**MM:** Very good.

**GTR:** Thank you for meeting with me. Could you just tell me a little bit ... Start by telling me how you first met Dorothy.

**MM:** My father was ... He was a consulting engineer and was sent to the Erie Mining Company at Aurora to spend some time helping out with the production, or whatever. I think he went ... Came up in about March, and he was never away from home for very long. He came home every weekend if he was in Pennsylvania or so. We lived in Ohio. He couldn't come home from Aurora very easily on weekend. When school was out, he just said pack your bags, come on up. I've rented a cabin on Eagles Nest Lake too. In the meantime ... That was between Tower and Ely. In the meantime he had gone up with some friends that he'd met from Sudek Tower-Sudan, up to Dorothy's.

When we got up he said, "Oh you guys have got to go up to Dorothy's." He couldn't get time off, but he told my mom, who was quite a woodsman herself. He said, you and your two brothers, and your mom, go on up, or Bud take the kids and go on up to Dorothy's. We rented a canoe from Bill Robinson, took off. We tore that canoe up on the way. We shot rapids, and went up places we should not have gone in that canoe.

**GTR:** What kind of canoe?

**MM:** It was just a ...

**GTR:** Wood?

**MM:** No, it was a little blue canoe, but it was leaking like a sieve when we got back, but we met Dorothy. She was, it was a lifelong friendship for my mom, and my dad with Dorothy Molter.

**GTR:** What year would that have been?

**MM:** I can't remember. I'd have to look at the old pictures, or ask my two brothers. I think I was maybe a freshman in high school, which would have been 1960.

**GTR:** This is, she would have been there okay. Then what were your parents ... Your parents the same age as Dorothy about?

**MM:** No, they would have been ... Let's see when I was ...

**GTR:** What years were they born?

**MM:** Mom was born in 1919, so that would have been 1960.

**GTR:** They were a little younger than her.

**MM:** Right.

**GTR:** Dorothy was born in 1907 guess.

**MM:** They found a kindred friendship. Dad would take, every year he would make homemade jelly. He found out what kind Dorothy liked best, and he'd make ... I think it was Strawberry Rhubarb that she really liked. He'd carry those jars of jelly over the portages. He's also take her a watermelon in a burlap bag. We'd carry those things over. "Don't hurt the jelly!" you know. Here we are trying to get that canoe and paddles and stuff. "Watch the jelly, be careful with the jelly for Dorothy!" They did that until they closed the Boundary Waters to motors up Moose Lake, and then mom and dad were so old they couldn't do it without the motors. They could do it with the motors.

**GTR:** Because you would take the motors. I meant to print out a map.

**MM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Because you could take the motors to a certain point, but then you did canoe in to get to her place.

**MM:** Right, you took the canoe up Moose Lake, I think it was Newfound Lake, Birch Lake, Sucker Lake. I'm not sure what order. There was one portage that you could take, that made an extra portage, but it was a really short little one, but instead of going around a big long point before you go up to Prairie Portage. We'd often just do that portage, and that made six portages instead of five. It was five portages up to Dorothy's.

**GTR:** How long did that take then?

**MM:** We would start early in the morning, and probably get there about five o'clock in the evening.

**GTR:** Wow.

**MM:** Of course, we took our time.

**GTR:** Just enjoyed it. You would start out from ...

**MM:** Moose Lake Landing. (sound of trucks in background)

**GTR:** Okay. All right, and that's ... Would you stay at a resort there?

**MM:** No, we would just stay at Eagle's Nest Lake in the cabin, and then we'd go on up to Dorothy's, or we'd just ...

**GTR:** Okay, and just stay there then.

**MM:** Then when dad and mom ... After well I think we only stayed at Eagles Nest Lake for two years. Then we would just come up, and we bought a square stern canoe, and our motor, and we just come up and stay at a motel. Then just take off the next morning.

**GTR:** Motor up, but not quite all the way to Dorothy's. Because you would do the ...

**MM:** Right, motor up to the first portage.

**GTR:** Okay, all right. I do need to get a map, that's a good reminder.

**Steven:** You might tell them about the road being gravel from Ely on.

**MM:** Oh yeah, it was the Fernberg, it was just gravel at that time. Then the first portage there was a waterfall, so you couldn't ... You had to carry over that one. That was real, it had real bad shale on it that were stuck up that cut people. Then two, I think you could pull two up the river, and three was a rollover. They had logs across that you just pulled your canoe up the logs. Four was a river that you could pull up. Then five was a half mile portage. There was a river, and

that's the one we shouldn't have pulled the canoe up and did, and shot the rapids going back down.

**GTR:** You tried to cut out that one, but of course it was different in different years with the water too, the water levels.

**MM:** I'm sure it was.

**GTR:** A little different, yeah. You got in there. What was Dorothy like?

**MM:** Dorothy was the sweetest person when you got to know her. She could be a little gruff, but she was always a lady. She never ... That was one thing that impressed me. Because I was college ... High school and college years when we went up. Everybody was using words that they shouldn't be using in proper company. My mom had a favorite phrase. She never cussed, she wouldn't allow us to say a bad word, but she used to say the S-H-I-T word. One day mom was standing around, somewhere around Dorothy, and something happened that went wrong, and mom said, "Oh mmm (meaning s-h-i-t)."

Dorothy, who usually called my mom by her nickname... Everybody called my mom Bud. Because my dad never liked my mom's real name, which was Inez May. He said she was his buddy, so he called her Bud. My dad being McCain, everybody called him Mac, so my mom and dad's name were Mac and Bud. Dorothy always called my mom Bud. This day mom said that word, and Dorothy looked and she said, "Well, Mrs. McCain, that's a fine way for a lady to talk." My mom just hung her head and she says, "Oh, I'm sorry." (laughs)

A lot of people that I've talked to and said I knew Dorothy, and they said, "Oh she must have been a pretty rough character." No, she was not. She was quite an interesting character, and she could carry ... I've seen her put a canoe on her shoulders with the paddles crossed in the gunwales, grab two Duluth packs, one on the front and one on the back full of stuff, motor in one hand, and gas can in the other, and go across the portage.

**GTR:** Oh my gosh, that's confident in your balance of the canoe.

**MM:** Well, I'll take that back with the gas can, because she would have had to balance the canoe. Sorry.

**GTR:** Still though that's a lot.

**MM:** Yeah, motor, canoe, paddles, and the two Duluth packs. Because she'd have to carry her candy bars in to sell and stuff, and her supplies.

**GTR:** Oh my gosh, so that's when she'd be out ...

**MM:** Oh yeah that's when she came out.

8:40

(Chatting with GTR's daughter)

**Steven:** Tell her about her fixing those people up while you were there now.

**MM:** Oh yeah. Well, that was the time when they were trying to get Dorothy out of the Superior Quetico.

**GTR:** Because that would have been the 60s, started in the 60s, and then you knew her.

**MM:** Right, and they were trying to get her out, and the Forest Service liked her. Because being a nurse, she helped so many people up there. One night she was called over. A boy in a Boy Scout troop had gone into a diabetic coma. She sat up with him all night, and being a nurse knew what to do, and called the Forest Service before she left, and said, "In the morning fly ... We need a plane in." They flew the plane in, and took the little boy out and saved his life.

Then, I remember one time a girl ... She was probably about 20. She came in and she'd fallen on the shale, and cut her leg almost to the bone. Dorothy bandaged it, cleaned it out, bandaged it, and then we took her out. Because we were going out for a load of supplies anyway. Dorothy was indispensable up there in the wilderness with numerous cuts, lacerations, anything you can think of, broken bones.

**GTR:** Oh my gosh. Did she have communication?

**MM:** She had a Forest Service radio, yeah she could call the Forest Service to come in at any time.

**GTR:** That's good.

**MM:** Often, used it quite often. The Forest ... We'd be there and the Forest Service would call Dorothy, and say we're looking for such and such, a Boy Scout troop, or a Girl Scout troop, or so and so. They haven't come in yet, have you seen them come by?

**GTR:** That's good, yeah. It was the same communication then at that point. Did she ever say anything about the Forest Service, or the wilderness, or ...

**MM:** Well, she was really distressed about the closing the canoe country. Because you couldn't use motors on any lakes that you had to portage into. It was just on those main lakes, so it was ... The canoe country was still sort of pristine, and of course it ruined the livelihood for most of the



outfitters in Ely, and Winton, and they didn't like it. They didn't like that up there, and Dorothy ... They sure didn't like to lose Dorothy. Because she was a stopping place. Everybody loved Dorothy. Snowmobilers would go up in the winter, take her supplies. They always called her ahead, or ...

**GTR:** That's good. Because she would of ... When she could still use motors ... She would motor out to what stores? Where would she get her materials when she still could use motors?

**MM:** I think she just went to Bernie Carlson's place on Moose Lake Landing. Now he may have had a car that she drove in, or he may have driven her in. I'm not sure exactly. We came part way out with her one time, but she went zooming on ahead of us.

**GTR:** At paddling, she was good.

**MM:** Yeah, well she had the motor when she got to the last portage, and then could go down the lakes.

**GTR:** Was she a really fast paddler though too?

**MM:** Well she ... I don't know about the paddling. I don't remember the paddling. We just met her on the one portage going out, but she could really scoot down the lakes good. I know she stayed overnight in Ely sometimes. At least I'm pretty sure she did.

**GTR:** Get the stuff there. What about root beer? What do you know about that?

**MM:** She used to sit and bottle root beer by the hour. She and Helen, her sister Helen, and her sister Ruth. They would come up and help. I think they were her sisters. Either they were sisters, or they were related somehow. Then they would ... Helen or Ruth would bring their kids, or grandkids up, and they'd help out. Dorothy had to carry the water from the lake to make her root beer, and then she'd go through the process, and then she'd sit and use the funnel, and put it in cases. Then she'd cap it. I know my dad brought in bottle caps for her, and I think one time a bottle capper. Because we lived down in the Amish country where they did that kind of thing, and he could find those at the sales.

**GTR:** You told me his name quickly I think but ...

**MM:** His name was Denver McCain, but everybody called him Mac. McCain.

**Steven:** Found his signatures in some of those guest books!

**GTR:** Oh really, guest book from Dorothy's?

**MM:** Yeah, they got those at the visitor center, the guest books.

**GTR:** Then if people would... (some talking in the background about cats in the camper, etc).

**GTR:** If people, so he's bringing in bottle caps, because those you can't reuse, but did people then just drink the Root Beer there, and leave the bottles?

**MM:** Leave the bottles, and she'd wash them out. Yep, she'd wash them out and reuse them.

**GTR:** I don't even know how you make Root Beer. I'll need to look that up, but does it kind of brew for a while, and then you cook it?

**MM:** It's an extract, and you just put it in there, and put yeast in it, and sugar, and it ferments. My mom tried it after she got home and put it up in our attic, and we heard the "ker-ker" and root beer would come down the ceiling. Because mom's broke. She didn't ...

**GTR:** Too much yeast or something?

**MM:** Uh-huh.

**GTR:** Was it good, do you remember tasting it? Hers.

**MM:** Well, anything was good once you got up there into canoe country.

**GTR:** Was it cold, did she have ice?

**MM:** Yeah, she'd put it in the ice house. She'd cut her own ice in the winter time, and had an ice house, so yeah. It was nice and cold.

**GTR:** That would be good.

15:00

**MM:** Then she had ... She brought in candy bars and sold them. Of course when we first went up there, she wasn't allowed to sell anything. They said that since it was a National Forest, she couldn't sell anything. Then you just went in and you said, "Dorothy how much is the "donation" for this candy bar?" She said, "Ah, ten cents." I think she bought them at five cents at that time, and then sold them for ten. Which we were glad to have up there. Because we didn't want to carry them in, candy bars.

**GTR:** I'm sure that would taste good too. Sugar, when you're up there.

**Steven:** Playing cards.

**MM:** Oh yeah. Dorothy used to come over quite often in the evenings with my mom and dad and play cards. She loved to play Euchre, and Pinochle, and ...

**GTR:** When you were staying at the cabins?

**MM:** Mm-hmm.

**GTR:** Yeah, I was curious about the cabins. All I've seen, the pictures of there's the winter cabin... (talking in background....)

**MM:** Yeah, we have stayed at each and every one of her cabins. I know we stayed at ... Most of the time we stayed at Winter cabin.

**Steven:** She was over at the trading post. She was over there in her summer house.

**MM:** Yeah, she'd stay at the trading post in the summer time. Which was on the little island. Then the next island had what she called honeymoon cabin or Cady cabin. We've stayed in that once or twice, and trapper cabin I know we stayed in once. That was on the island, but there were three on the big island. There were three cabins on the big island. There was winter cabin, and then trapper cabin, and then point cabin. Point cabin was the first one you saw when you got off the portage, and it was on the end of that big island. Then on down the path was Trapper, and then Winter cabin was on the north side of the island.

**GTR:** That was maybe the bigger, nicer one.

**MM:** Yeah, that was her winter cabin. That was where she stayed in the winter time.

**GTR:** Was her stuff in there then too?

**MM:** Oh yeah.

**GTR:** People would see, and she'd still rent it out though with her stuff in it.

**MM:** Uh-huh.

**GTR:** What were they ... Were they really comfortable, or keep the bugs out, or what was it like to stay?

**MM:** Well there was the ... Have you ever been up to the museum?

**GTR:** I haven't yet.

**MM:** Oh.

**GTR:** I'm going soon.

**MM:** Yeah, you need to. **Steven** would you get my phone over there on the ... I need my purse.

**GTR:** We can look at them now, but what were they like when you were sleeping in them? Did they...

**MM:** They were really comfortable. Mom and I would stay in one bedroom, and then my dad in the other, and then the boys would stay out on the front porch.

**Steven:** About a three room cabin, wasn't it?

**MM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Okay, two of them there.

**MM:** It was the ... There were two bedrooms in the winter cabin, and the big main room was the dining room and kitchen. Then there was the screened in front porch.

**GTR:** That was cozy, well you probably wouldn't have needed a wood stove or anything at that time?

**MM:** Oh yeah we did.

**GTR:** Did it get cold enough? Yeah.

**MM:** Absolutely.

**GTR:** What kind of wood stove, did you have a wood cook stove, or a ...

**MM:** Yeah it was a wood, big old barrel stove. Let's see. I thought I took pictures on my phone.

**GTR:** I can head up ... I'm going up there soon. I just haven't ... The last time I was in Ely, I don't even think they were open. It's been awhile.

**MM:** Well, this is in the corner of winter cabin. That little plaque. My mom made that out of nails. My dad always built birdhouses after he retired, and she made that for Dorothy. (flower design with painted nail heads)

**GTR:** Nice.

**MM:** Then there was a ...

**GTR:** Yep, the plaque. The pink pot with flowers. Nice. Did you write, would they write back and forth during the off seasons?

**MM:** Not ... Well, probably later on in years. Because mom and dad stayed in communication. Dorothy even came down and visited mom and dad one time. I'm not sure whether that was in Michigan or in Ohio. Because they bought a cabin after we kids moved out, and they bought a cabin ... Yeah, they bought a cabin up on the Escanaba River. I know Dorothy came and visited.

**GTR:** Did she have a car?

**MM:** You can see the (looking at pictures) ... I don't remember how she got down there. That was the porch. This is where we did dishes. Just an old pan. That was the bed in one of the bedrooms. That was a birdhouse my dad made and carried in for her. A bird feeder.

**GTR:** Oh wow. When you see it at the museum, does it look right?

**MM:** Oh absolutely. I stood and cried when I saw the ... That's the corner, that's the plaque on the wall, and that was the table that we sat at.

**GTR:** The birdhouse from your dad, too.

**MM:** There's the kitchen with the stove and the ...(looking at photos)

**GTR:** Did it get some gas then?

**MM:** Uh-huh. It was ...

**GTR:** How did that get in there?

**MM:** She snowmobiled that in, in the winter time. Big tanks of propane. Big ones. I mean the hundred pound ones.

**GTR:** Wow.

**MM:** At one time I remember my dad was... Mom and dad had invited Dorothy over for supper. I don't know what we were having. Because we usually packed in ... We'd carry in some fresh meat, and as soon as we'd get there, then we'd make Dorothy a meal of fresh meat. Because she didn't get that very often. Mom was cooking dinner and ran out of propane in the tank. So, Dad, she says, "Mac, I got to have propane!" He went out and changed the nozzle on the tanks, and he was easily moved the empty one out of the way. My dad was a pretty good sized man. He worked, in the winter time. We'd go hiking in the woods, and he was strong. He tried to lift that full tank and he couldn't budge it. By that time Dorothy came out of the path and she says, "Mac,

move aside!" (laughs) She just picked it up with both hands and plopped it down. Wounded my dad's pride for the rest of the evening. (laughs)

**GTR:** Then she could get cooking, so then your mom could finish cooking. That's funny. Did guests always bring their own food in, or did she ... Did Dorothy ever provide ...

**MM:** Dorothy never provided food, because she didn't have it to provide. There was one time that I remember that a Boy Scout troop had ... At some island down they were camping, and they came in and they were just, "You don't have any sugar do you?" Dorothy says, "Well, why?" They said, "Well, we were taking our stuff, we left our canoes by the lake, and we were carrying out stuff up to the campsite. While we were carrying stuff up, a bear came down, and tore the sugar pack open." They said, "We've been eating oatmeal with lime Kool Aide to sweeten it." Dorothy gave them the sugar. She gave them the stuff, but she usually didn't sell anything but the Root Beer and the candy bars.

**GTR:** Okay, because she had to bring it all in. What did she eat, usually? Just canned stuff, or do you know what her normal ...

**MM:** Probably. I mean she didn't ...

**GTR:** Fresh meat when people would bring it in.

**MM:** Well, most people didn't bring in fresh meat. They'd bring in ... When you packed in, you were supposed to bring in dried rice, and dried macaroni and cheese, and anything you could carry in a bag. Because they didn't want to ...

**GTR:** If you brought fresh meat the first night. That was my dad's tradition always too. It was steak in for the first night. And Fish later too, but yeah, you could always bring in that meat for that first night.

**Steven:** Tell her about the time that Dale had to go help what's his name.

**MM:** Oh, Bob Carey. In Bob Carey's book the Root Beer Lady. He tells about the time that Dorothy was coming across the portages, and had a Duluth pack on, and she was on third portage. I believe it was, and a bear just came out of the bushes, just ripped that pack right off her back, and dragged it into the bush. Well Dorothy, he just reared up, and Dorothy said he was big. She said she just left. She just went on to Knife Lake. Then when she got up there Bob Carey was there, and he said, "Well, we'll go after the pack and see if we can retrieve the candy bars." My brother Dale went with him. Dale still says Bob Carey should have put him in the book. Because ... (laughs) I guess Bob didn't remember a little teenage kid. Anyway, they went back and they found the pack, and they retrieved some of the candy bars. Not all of them,

because I guess the bear had a favorite kind of candy bar and he ate all those, but he didn't eat every one of them.

**GTR:** Some tooth marks on some of them...

**MM:** ... The other kinds, yeah.

**GTR:** I suppose that would be really attractive. A whole Duluth pack full of candy bars going down the trail. How would you resist, as a bear?

**MM:** My dad and my brothers would help Dorothy with anything when they went up. Of course everybody did. The men that went up there, a lot of them were regulars from Ely, and they'd go up. I remember a guy named Bob Cotton, and then Bob Carey, and then was a guy named ... Somebody that was ... His name is Stewart. Anyway they'd repair the bridges for her, and fix anything around that ... Because she was busy doing the Root Beer in the summer time, and she'd always greet you when people would come in. She stand there and say, "Hey morning glory!" In the evening she'd go, "Evening star." (laughs)

**GTR:** Nice, and those people would kind of hang out even if they didn't stay...

**MM:** Oh yeah. People would come and talk. Sit and talk and talk. The Saturday Evening Post wrote her up as the loneliest woman in the world, and she said, "I'm not lonely." She says, "If I don't have people," she says, "I've got hundreds of visitors," and she says, "When I don't have people, I got my deer." She had a deer over on Robin's Island, which was the next island over, and she'd carry food over to it every day. Rhonda the deer would come down and eat. Then she had all the little birds that she ...

**GTR:** What would she give a deer that she had there?

**MM:** Just scraps and stuff. Well she fed the ducks. In the morning time she'd carry in food for the ducks. She could carry in quite a bit on snowmobile I understand, in the winter time. Then everybody that would come up on snowmobile in the winter. They'd radio up to Dorothy and say, "What do you need?" She'd tell them.

**GTR:** That's true, so I thought winter would have been really quiet, but I guess not.

**MM:** No, winter was probably as busy as the summer with the snowmobilers and the ...

**GTR:** Then that would have quit sooner than the paddlers, because with the Forest Service, did they say no snowmobiles sooner?

**MM:** I don't know about the snowmobiles. I think they did, but I'm not sure.

**GTR:** You weren't up there at that time. You guys were usually summer. You were summer visitors.

**MM:** Yeah. When I was talking to Peg ... Steve didn't she say that when they outlawed motors and stuff, they also outlawed the snowmobiles.

**Steven:** Yeah, I think it was the same time.

**MM:** Because they had to get special permission to go up and carry the cabins out on snowmobile.

**GTR:** Oh right.

**MM:** Then they couldn't carry them out on snowmobiles, she said. Because I think it thawed too early. Then they had to wait, and they had to then go back and get permission again to pull them out on boats, and just take the motors up and bring the logs out, on boats.

**GTR:** That's great that they did that.

**MM:** Oh I know.

**GTR:** You guys weren't around during that time of dismantling and then bringing them back.

**MM:** No, but as I say my mom and dad quit going as soon as they stopped the motors in the boundary waters, because they couldn't paddle all that way.

**GTR:** That's true, that would be ... Dorothy stayed that long. Did people help her more then? Do you know? You wouldn't have been there as much then...

**MM:** No, but I imagine they did. I think she was quite capable until she was ...

**Steven:** She only lived two years after they outlawed that right?

**MM:** Yeah, I think so.

**GTR:** Yeah, she died in '86.

**MM:** '86.

**Steven:** They outlawed them in '84.

**GTR:** Yeah, I need to look into those too. I could imagine for you then, if you're to go see this cabin like it was, when you were a kid?



**MM:** Oh, I stood and cried when I saw winter cabin.

**GTR:** Yeah... The things your parents made.

**MM:** I still cry thinking of it. It was just such a neat ... I remember you didn't pack a lot of stuff in with you backpacks and stuff, and especially when you're carrying watermelons and jelly jars. There were 40 just for Dorothy. I think I only had two pair of blue jeans, and I'd wash one pair. Because you'd been fishing and you'd just wash your wormy hands, crawdads, and everything on your pants. I washed one pair, and I had the only pair left on, and my brother spilled Kool Aid all over me at the table. I'm going, "I can't go anywhere until my pants dry." You had to go down to the lake and wash your stuff in the lake... your clothes and everything.

**GTR:** How long would you usually stay in the cabin?

**MM:** We usually stayed at least two weeks. Sometimes three. Whatever my dad could get off. One time my dad and I went up by ourselves, just the two of us, and I don't know why. I guess mom just decided ... I think she'd fallen and hurt her knees or something. Dad and I went up, and we camped out on the south arm of Knife Lake. We didn't stay with Dorothy, because we didn't have time. It was just on a whim. Dad just said let's go to Dorothy's, so we went.

**GTR:** That would have been when you were in your 20s.

**MM:** Mm-hmm.

**GTR:** In the 1960s.

**MM:** Yeah, I was in college then. After I got out of college I taught for three years, and then I went to Maine, so after I ... I think I was probably teaching that one year, that dad and I went up.

**GTR:** During the summertime..

**MM:** Probably my first year of teaching, '69.

**GTR:** Nice, my parents were both teachers, so we had those summers and they took me to the Boundary Waters, because they have time off. That's great they get up there. Let's see... One of the questions Sara had here, the director. What are your impressions of Dorothy's lifestyle? Why do you think she stayed so long?

**MM:** She loved the outdoors. She loved the solitude, but she loved the people, too. I think I'm kind of like that. I guess I felt close to Dorothy because I feel like that too. I can spend lots of time alone, but I still love people.

**GTR:** I understand, so that's...

**MM:** She was a reader. She had the whole collection of Zane Grey on the shelf in her bedroom, and I'd just read when I'd go up there in the evenings. She had all kinds of bird books, and all kinds of books about wildlife.

**GTR:** She'd lend them to, people, or people would bring books?

**MM:** When you stayed in the cabin they were just there, and you could read them and look through.

**GTR:** Oh yeah, of course. You were in her bedroom that's true. It was her winter bedroom, interesting.

**MM:** There's one thing she had.. a collection, but I don't know where it went to. I didn't see it in any of the cabins up there. She had a little thing hanging on the wall that had little drawers in, like you'd put nails, and screws, and stuff to organize your things in the garage. In each one of those she had them labeled with states. Every time she got a letter, she'd save the postmark, and sometimes the stamp if it was an unusual stamp. She had them categorized from letters that she got. You can see that in the movie that they made about Dorothy. As I say, I didn't see them in the cabins.

**GTR:** Hmm, I wonder. Yeah because she didn't have ... Did she have nieces or nephews, or other people that would have been interested in any of her stuff?

**MM:** She had a lot of ... I remember three nephews, I think. Steve was one, and I can't remember the ... My brothers might remember the names of the other ones but I don't. Because I didn't hang out with the boys. (laughs)

**GTR:** You were reading.

**MM:** Reading or eating fish.

**GTR:** Nice, that sounds good. Let's see, so anything ... What's your most lasting memory of Dorothy? You already told me some, but anything else that would be just in your head.

**MM:** I think it was probably just sitting and playing cards with her, and laughing and joking with her, and telling tales.

**GTR:** Was she good at cards?

**MM:** Oh yeah.

**GTR:** Good at them, yeah. Did she have any accent or, was she ... My grandparents were her age, and they had German accents still.

**MM:** No, I don't think so. I didn't notice any anyway.

**GTR:** Yeah, I don't know what her heritage even was. I just wondered. When I think of sitting around playing cards I think of my German great-grandma.

**MM:** Well, she was from Chicago, so she had basically just a standard mid-western. She may have picked up a little bit of the Minnesota accent, but I don't recall.

**GTR:** She was social, she was not a hermit in the woods.

**MM:** Oh no, absolutely not. She loved people, and she loved ... She enjoyed them coming, but she enjoyed her solitude. She enjoyed the birds. Of course every year you would get a Christmas letter from Dorothy. Only it wasn't written as from Dorothy. It was written as Charlie the Squirrel, or Bill the Blue Jay, or Rhonda the Deer.

**GTR:** Nice.

**Steven:** From an animals' point of view.

**MM:** Yeah from an animals' point of view. What Dorothy had done all year, and who would visit, and major people that visited.

**GTR:** Do they have those at the museum? Hopefully they have some of those.

**MM:** I don't know. I hinted around about it, but they didn't say anything about them, so I don't know for sure. I wish my mother and dad had saved theirs, but you just can't save everything you get from everybody everywhere.

**GTR:** Was it handwritten all, or did she somehow have a way to copy a bunch, and send them.

**MM:** They were typed, if I remember. I think she must of had an old typewriter, and maybe went down and had them.

**GTR:** Just curious how that would work.

**MM:** Because they were all the same. I mean she'd send for ... She'd send to all kinds of people. There's got to be a big collection around somewhere, but I don't know where. I'd like to find some of them.

**GTR:** Yeah, that'd be fun to find. Did people ever say like, "When are you ever going to move to town? Are you ever going to ..."

**MM:** Well I'm sure they did, but she said, "No, I just like my life here. As long as they're going to let me stay, I'll stay."

**GTR:** That's good.... (talking about GTR's daughter, present with toys). Well, anything else? This is great.

35:00

**MM:** Well, there was another guy that was interesting. He was a friend of Dorothy named Cosme. He'd been a chef in Chicago, and he lived up on the north arm when we first met him. He was living on what we called Blueberry Island. Because there were blueberries all over it. We didn't see his cabin, because it was on the north side of island, the northwest side of the island. Because it was angled. I got off, my dad and mom laid a lake trout lane, and I got off and went to climb the hill to pick blueberries. All of a sudden I heard this noise, and I thought oh my goodness, it's a bear, and I was scared. It was a dog, and I thought, "What?" Then Pete came around it was like, "This is my island!" you know. He didn't own it but he was like, "What are you doing here picking my blueberries?"

**GTR:** How do you spell that last name?

**MM:** C-O-S-M-E I think, or M-I. We made friends with him, and he'd be down at Dorothy's quite often. He was one of Dorothy's friends. He was a crusty old guy. Wouldn't, he had secret recipe. He could bake a pie in a hole in the ground. Delicious. Absolutely, so he'd take a pie down to Dorothy. Bake one, take it down to Dorothy, and they'd sit around and eat Pete's pie.

**GTR:** I wonder if those people stayed as long as she. Probably not as long maybe.

**MM:** I don't know how long Pete still went up.

**GTR:** He would have been just a summer guy, mostly.

**MM:** Now some of the other people up there, like that Peg that works at the Dorothy Molter Center. She might know. She and her husband went up, and local Ely people would probably know a whole lot more.

**GTR:** Yeah, I'm going to talk to a lot of local Ely people, and basically this is my very first one with this project. I've done a lot of interviews, but not on this topic. Let's see, picture too. If I get a picture of you on my phone now. There we go. Yeah, was that a copy?

**MM:** Mm-hmm. I'll leave that with you (hand-written description of her experiences at Dorothy's).

**GTR:** Great, because I didn't hear back from Sara.

**MM:** Okay.

**GTR:** If she had a copy of this ...

**MM:** If she does, she made a copy for me, but she kept the original and she gave me a copy, and another copy of this for you.

**GTR:** Excellent, thank you. Nice. Well, that was great. I got some great quotes from you too.

**MM:** Yeah, you can quote anything in there you want to.

**GTR:** Great, thank you!

**37:57 end of interview**



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Loretta Molter (b. 1939) – LM**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes - GTR  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded August 5, 2015  
Ely, Minnesota**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Loretta Molter on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History Project. Could you start by just saying your name?

**LM:** I'm Loretta Molter.

**GTR:** And where are you from?

**LM:** I'm from Tinley Park, Illinois and my husband was John Charles Molter, they called him Chuck, and he was the nephew. His father was John Molter, which was Dorothy's brother.

**GTR:** Where in age? Who was older? Where was John in the age order with Dorothy?

**LM:** You know, I'm not certain who was older. I tend to think John is, but I'm not certain on that.

**GTR:** Okay, that's okay. And when did you first meet Dorothy?

**LM:** I met Dorothy on my honeymoon, when Chuck and I got married, and this was our destination.

**GTR:** What year was that?

**LM:** 1958.

**GTR:** Okay, great.

**LM:** And I always loved fishing and I had not done too much camping, but to me this was a dream vacation.

**GTR:** How long did you come up for?

**LM:** I believe it was about two weeks that we were here and we camped out and, of course, my husband knew the place really well. He had lived with Dorothy for quite a while before he went into the service. So, he knew the lakes, he had been to most of them, he knew Dorothy well, he knew the whole routine of what it took to help her for the few years that he was there.

**GTR:** What did he mostly do? Did he tell you?

**LM:** Well, just maintaining. Going to town to pick up groceries. Cutting the ice in the wintertime and putting it in the icehouse, which I also helped him do that also one year.

**GTR:** Using chainsaws still at that point?

**LM:** At that point, no. It was not a chainsaw; it was a handsaw. And there's a picture of an old movie of Chuck on the site with Dorothy and some other people and this particular movie he was using this big, I don't know what kind they call it, it's the big one with one big blade, and he was doing it with one hand, cutting the ice with one hand as opposed to two! [Laughs] And Dorothy commented about that, that, 'Well, some people can use one hand, you know!' [Laughs]

**GTR:** Was he real strong, too?

**LM:** Yes, he was.

**GTR:** I hear Dorothy was really strong.

**LM:** Very much so. Very much so.

**GTR:** What would she do? What did you see her do?

**LM:** Well, for one, when she was on a portage, she could carry a packsack and the canoe. And I'm not sure about if the motor, if she could carry the motor, at that time it was motor. It was nothing for her to grab a heavy packsack or two. Or take somebody else's across the portage, if they happened to be going the way she was going. So, she was very helpful.

**GTR:** Did you usually, when you first went there, did you go on a boat with a motor?

**LM:** We had a canoe with a motor. And so, we could go throughout Knife Lake, which was really good, to get to know that. With all the years that Chuck was with Dorothy, he always talks about going up the lake and they got blueberries they picked, and they were in a washtub, there were so many of them.

**GTR:** Oh, my gosh.

**0:05:03.5**

**LM:** It was huge. So, you know, when I got to find out where all these places were.

**GTR:** And this would be the time of year right now, wouldn't it? August.

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** Did you find any out when you were just out now?

**LM:** We didn't look, we didn't look at all.

**GTR:** We were wishing we could find a secret spot somewhere with my kids.

**LM:** Well, we camped one year, when we had two of the kids, three of the kids, and we camped and Dorothy was very upset with us because we camped right over her blueberry patch! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Oh, no! On the island or further up?

**LM:** Farther up, yes. But this one that she went to, to pick her blueberries.

**GTR:** People are very protective of their spots.

**LM:** Yes. Very much so.

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** And then would she can them? Or what would she do with all of those?

**LM:** She canned them, yes. And she would make pies.

**GTR:** Jam stuff, kind of?

**LM:** I don't recall any jam, but I don't see any reason why she wouldn't.

**GTR:** Pies.

**LM:** It was quite a delicacy.

**GTR:** Yeah. Would she do the full, like, the lard crusts or how was her baking?

**LM:** Yeah, double crust. It was delicious. When she baked bread, oh, it was wonderful. It smelled so good you had to have a piece right away and load it with butter.

**GTR:** Did she keep butter, like, did she keep things cool with an icebox?



**LM:** She had a refrigerator that didn't, that wasn't used as a refrigerator because there wasn't electric, and it housed ice and then she also had a cooler where one of the old Pepsi coolers, or something, a red one that you could slide the doors. So, they had ice in there to keep the soda cool.

**GTR:** Right.

**LM:** She was making root beer when I went up there.

**GTR:** Even right away in the '50s when you were there?

**LM:** Yeah. She was making it pretty often, because she had quite a following at that point and a lot of people stopping by. Originally, they brought up soda, from town on an airplane or whatever, whether it'd be a sled or something, a canoe, but it was quite a load. So, her groceries could have been brought up with a plane at one point.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** And, they cut that out, and then, of course, at one point they cut out the motors for the boats, also. But we started, when I started, we were using motors.

**GTR:** And still bringing in some supplies for her that way?

**LM:** Yeah, yeah. When he would go to town, the grocery list and, of course, the soda list and this sort of thing, but, a lot of candy, because she was selling candy, and she was renting the cabins. And the boat would be full, and sometimes he would be having a second boat full, that he would put the groceries in. So, it was a lot. It was a lot of trips over the portages, you know, so it was a long trip. To get to town wasn't bad, but to get all these and get them in canoes and bring them up there was very labor intensive.

**GTR:** Right. And to do the portages. Could you do wheels or anything? How would people get all that stuff over the portages?

**LM:** Hand carry everything.

**GTR:** Just backpacks or...

**LM:** There would be some that we could pull up, as opposed to carry over, but when you have a load like that, it's, you'd have to do them separate.

**GTR:** Yeah, I wondered with those boats. Was it always canoes? Or was it sometimes, like an aluminum fishing boat?

**LM:** Always canoes. She had boats up on the lake, the regular fishing boats with the motor and if she was going to go out to get wood or something like that, she would use her boat. When she

was moving from the summer tent to the winter cabin, she would put everything in boxes and put them in the boat and then she'd ride around to the cabin, close to the cabin, and take them out there and put them in. But that was the procedure every year and then spring time it was a procedure going the other way.

**GTR:** Right, yeah. Were you always there in the summer or sometimes during those times of switching from winter?

**0:10:00.0**

**LM:** We were there, we were there when she was moving, you know, saw the process and how much work was involved in it. Her summer tent was full of things and things that she needed for cooking and for making coffee. She always had a coffee pot on and going. She was very meticulous when people would come in with something there on their shoes, she wouldn't say anything, but she would, she was sweeping at the carpeting all the time and cleaning up. So, but she had a way about her, when she would walk into the tent...

[Interruption]

**LM:** We were talking about her moving, I think, can you back play something?

**GTR:** I would have to start a new recording. You were talking about her being meticulous and sweeping up and all the moving the cabins.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** The cabins, so, if you remember, or even just the winter, no, the summer tent, kind of describe how that was and what she would leave in there. Because she had guests in there in the summer. She would stay there in the summer and rent out her winter cabin, right?

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** But then she'd leave some stuff in there for the guests.

**LM:** Her summer tent was, I'm trying to think size-wise, I will describe what was in it. When you walked in on the left, there was a double bunk bed and, because generally she had her sister living with her for quite a while, through the summer to help her out. And this was Ruth, was there quite a bit. So, next to that she had, kind of an easy chair that swiveled, not real large. Straight in from the door, of course, at the door she had a mat for you to wipe her feet. She wiped her feet, you know, she stomped on them and she would wipe her feet and scratch like a chicken with her shoes. [Laughs] And then she would walk into the cabin. Straight ahead was a wood table and it was kind of a little bit more long than it was deep. She always had, there were three chairs there, if we needed more, she'd bring in more chairs. On the right, when you first come in, was a stove, too keep warm when it was cold during the time that she was in the tent. And next to that was a four burner, small propane stove that she maintained. Always a pot of coffee on it.

Around that and around the wall was all shelves. And the shelves she had covered with a fabric, so you didn't know what was inside of them, but it was groceries for the, you know, the candies that she didn't have out on the table. She would have spices and different things for cooking. There was a donation jar on the table that, you know, is where she would put her money, so people would buy what they want.

**GTR:** Inside the tent?

**LM:** Pardon me?

**GTR:** Inside the tent?

**LM:** Yes. And at that time, she was able to sell things. It was before the government bought it from her and then she had to ask just for a donation. The area with the candy was always exposed so people could come in and select. I think that pretty well covers what that was. She had, you know, a step going up to it, and always a screen door was always open.

**GTR:** All right.

**LM:** There wasn't a hard door on it, it was just a screen door, and she could add visqueen or something plastic on it.

**0:15:06.9**

**GTR:** Were the bugs kind of thick there? Or was it a pretty nice spot as far as bugs?

**LM:** She was right off the water. When you first came to the island, you came over the portage and then you paddle to her island, and it's a small island, the smallest, I think, it was. And she had a dock there, that was tall enough, that the canoes, you would park the canoe there and then there was filled in a lot of gravel, so you stepped out on that. When you, they actually, she also had a parking meter. [Laughs] And it said, 'We only accept dollar bills'.

[Both laugh]

**LM:** And then straight up from that was an outhouse. So, if people needed to use the facility, it was right there. You took a, probably about, I would say ten or fifteen steps to the left of that, and that was where her tent was. The back of her tent faced the water. But she could go, she had binoculars, and if she knew somebody was coming up and she could hear them on the portage, so she would take the binoculars and go behind the tent and be able to see who was on the portage. And sometimes if it was someone she expected, she'd go over there and help them get up the rest of the way. She walked that same path to the door, to the tent, if you walked straight, there was another tent over here which she kept, like an overflow on stock and in front of it was the root beer cooler and the ice box type thing. And straight ahead was a diving board that you could jump in the water. The kids liked it. Dorothy went in, too. She went in often. She was gutsier than I am; the water is cold!

[Both laugh]

**LM:** And then she had a woodpile stacked next to the tent, quite a large woodpile for the cold times.

**GTR:** Would it get kind of chilly? Would she have the stove going sometimes in the summer in the cabin? The stove?

**LM:** The stove? Yes. You have to take the chill off in the morning.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** She also had what was called the boathouse. When you walked up to where the outhouse was, and took a little bit of a left, there was a boathouse there that was pretty much in disrepair and it was getting worse, but she still stored things there.

**GTR:** Was it part of an old boat? Is that why it was called the boathouse?

**LM:** Yes, I believe so. It was small and narrow. Now, past her storage tent, if you went a little bit further passed that, there was a washing machine on the edge of the island. And she would soak things, soak the sheets and the clothing in there for a day or two, or whatever it took, when she had time, she'd finish washing and then hanging it up. She had an old boat, that wooden boat on land, and that's where she planted her flowers.

**GTR:** Ah, yeah. Like the one they have at the museum now? Have you seen that?

**LM:** Um, I'm not... I don't recall which flowers she planted. She had wild ones that she did directly out of the door of the summer tent, was a big rock, a long rock, and she had a fence down there, in fact, every time somebody broke a paddle, they would bring it to her. Eventually, my sons were the ones that painted different names on it and there's also some other young people that would come up and they would paint on them also. And she would use that as her paddle fence. Behind that is where she would have a lot of wildflowers.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** And eventually, her brother built an airplane and he put it on that rock and, like a windmill type of a thing. You've probably seen pictures of it.

**GTR:** Which brother?

**0:20:02.9**

**LM:** It was Bud, her brother Bud that did that.

**GTR:** The whole family would spend time up there.

**LM:** They would visit her, yeah. Those that could. She had, her youngest sister, would be up there sometimes, too, just helping. Her sister-in-law was up there cleaning cabins for her and the years, um, Cap, you know, would be basically he's like the maitre d', I guess I could call him. He talked a lot and welcomed people and this sort of thing.

[Laughter]

**GTR:** Sounds fun. So, the cabins, you said they'd be cleaning and there'd be sheets, she would provide sheets and pillows and all that?

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** Nice.

**LM:** And it was a chore. There were, you know, a lot to keep clean every summer and before summer started there was a heavy cleaning of the tent.

**GTR:** I suppose, clean everything up, mice or whatever.

**LM:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** Did the washing machine drain right into the lake?

**LM:** It was on shore actually, I can't recall how they powered it, but it basically was more soaking. And then she would rinse. But she could wring over the water, uh, the land more. I don't recall her ever doing it over the water.

**GTR:** Spinning. Right? Washing machine that would spin would be nice, right, to get some of the water out?

**LM:** At one time she had some sort of an electrical system set up. And then, when that went, she didn't have it.

**GTR:** Like a battery?

**LM:** It could be? I can't recall exactly how it was.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** But she would do multiple rinses on them and bring them out and then hang them up to dry and they were usually up a while before they, you know, dried.

**GTR:** Probably, yeah. When did she stop hosting people in the cabins with sheets and all that? Did that end just when the government came?

**LM:** She fought the government a long time. They wanted the property and she did not want to move and she didn't want... That was her home. Many years that she fought and she pretty well, you know, there were a lot of news articles about her in the course of this time. Part of the arrangement, they paid her some money, very little money, for her property, but they allowed her to stay for her life. And she was no longer supposed to sell anything. The cabins, you know, it really got to the point where she was older, her sister was older, you know, they had some young people, but the young people were helping with the root beer and this sort of thing. And Dorothy had so many visitors. I know when I first, I mean, she kept them all in a book. Everybody signed in and she wanted to know where you would go. So, if there was something that happened or if she wanted to know which direction you were going to go or where you were going to camp. And she generally would mark that down also. Accidents happen, or something at home had happen and she'd try to send somebody out to get them. If you dumped your canoe and lost your food, she was there. You know, she had some stock at the other tent.

**GTR:** Um-hmm.

**LM:** If you were injured, they came to her.

**GTR:** Did you ever see that happen? Were you there?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** What kinds of situations?

**LM:** Well, anything from fishing hooks, you know, to hurting a limp. But fishing hooks are what I had seen. And her nursing skills were used. At the time I first started going up, we talked about the fellow that was camped on one of the twin islands, and with his son, I think, and lightning struck the tree right by their tent. And the fellow lived, the son lived, you know, but Dorothy was there to help this fellow.

**GTR:** That's good, yeah. I heard about that. You weren't there during that time?

**0:25:01.8**

**LM:** No, that was before. That happened before 1958.

**GTR:** Okay, that was before that time. Would she do the fish hook thing where you'd have to push it through and snip it off?

**LM:** Depending on how you, it's easier to push it through as opposed to try to pull it out.

**GTR:** Right.

**LM:** With the barb that's on a hook.

**GTR:** Um-hmm. She would know how to help people with that?

**LM:** Kids, young people would think they're stronger than they are. They would climb and they would fall off, you know. And you fall on rocks, it's, well, many rocks around there. So, they eventually are brought to her.

**GTR:** And what was her manner like with them?

**LM:** Same. What you see is what you get. She didn't panic. She just kind of, "I'll take care of that", you know, type of thing. Just a real easygoing type of nature.

**GTR:** And calm.

**LM:** She didn't talk fast, you know. You had to sometimes wait for her to finish the sentence.

**GTR:** German, right?

**LM:** Pardon?

**GTR:** All German? German background, apparently she was mostly German?

**LM:** There's German in there, yeah. I don't know what her mother was.

**GTR:** I just wondered. My great grandmother was German and just had this very kind of calm way about her. I wondered. That's great.

**LM:** Yeah. Well, her father was... When her mother died, the kids went into an orphanage, but they stayed together. And there were six kids. And he met a woman that he married, and she was a wonderful person, very well loved by all the kids. And she loved the kids. And Dorothy talked so much about her.

**GTR:** Did she pass away, though, before...

**LM:** Yes. Yeah, and I think that's why she (Dorothy) wanted to be buried in, uh, what state is that? Pennsylvania. Yeah, is where she's buried.

**GTR:** And that is where the stepmother was buried, too?

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** Okay. Do you know about when she would have passed away?

**LM:** No, I'm not certain. She was already gone when I started going up there.

**GTR:** Okay. I've seen photos and things of Cap, her father, visiting and stuff, but I hadn't heard of any other stepmother or anyone. That's great. So, family sounds like it was pretty important.

**LM:** Yes, very much so. When she came out in the wintertime, she would come down to Chicago, she would stay with, you know, one of her sisters wherever it was convenient for her and then, and then she would visit everybody. And it was funny to see her in city clothes as opposed to the, you know, the pants and kind of a plaid shirt up here.

**GTR:** She'd have different clothes for her trips?

**LM:** She did!

[Both laugh]

**LM:** Not many, but enough.

**GTR:** She would do nursing, in Chicago area? Or was that before?

**LM:** Not at the time I knew her.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** But, she had her nursing degree and I'm not real certain.

**GTR:** People say she would try to keep her license active by doing a little something in Chicago?

**LM:** Yes, yes. She had to do, I think take exams or whatever, something. But eventually she wasn't, once she was on the island, she wasn't going to work somewhere else, but she had the skills to help other people.

**GTR:** So, maybe didn't keep it as active after a while officially? Okay, sounds good.

**LM:** And the main thing was just to take care of people that were hurt up there, because she planned on staying there all her life.

**GTR:** Um-hmm. It was her place, right?

**LM:** She was unique, very unique.

**GTR:** Did she ever talk about why she wanted to stay?

**LM:** She fell in love with it. She fell in love with listening to the birds.



**0:30:00.6**

**LM:** Walk in the woods, seeing the flowers that were there. She loved the birds. She fed them. In the winter cabin, right outside her window, where the table was, was the bird feeder.

**GTR:** Nice.

**LM:** And if she found one, nest that was on the ground, she would try to put it back in the tree, or put it where the mother would care for it.

**GTR:** Nice. Would she have baby birds sometimes that she would help?

**LM:** That I don't know. I haven't seen that.

**GTR:** Definitely bird feeding. That's nice. Did it feel a little odd to leave her winter cabin to guests, then, if she, it sounds like it was just her place in the winter, and then to switch and let other people be in there?

**LM:** It didn't bother her at all. In fact, she had dollar bills that had some writing on them from different people, or whatever, and she had them around the window and those dollar bills stayed there. I think one time, somebody did go in there and take them, and she immediately went to the campsite, she had a good feeling who it was, and got them back.

**GTR:** She knew. And was it, because the guests that would come, I mean, often, I'm sure, repeat customers, but sometimes she'd just get anyone, right? Just random people that she didn't know very well?

**LM:** Yes. She had the Cady cabin they call the Honeymoon cabin that was on the island right **next** to her, the footbridge went from her island to the Cady cabin and we stayed, I stayed there when my sister and her, the kids one time, several times. Then from that one there was a bridge going over to the, um, big island and it had a big hill to go over and then down. And then that's where her winter cabin was right there. Behind that was another cabin, they called it the Trapper's cabin, it was just a really small one, just be able to be in there and out of the weather. And then if you kept walking the path, next to, the other side of the island toward the portage, there was h, the Point cabin, they called it. So, depending on how many people were gonna be there, certain cabins could accommodate more people.

**GTR:** Um-hmm.

**LM:** The Winter cabin had a large porch that she stored a lot of things out of the weather and then when you got into the cabin itself she had two separate bedrooms, they were half walls, or three quarter walls, but there were two double beds in there, made out of the wood, local wood, very unique. To the left, she had a sewing machine there that was always, when she wasn't using

it it was covered up. And then the window was over here and the table was right in front of the window where she'd sit and write her letters.

**GTR:** On the left?

**LM:** Um-hmm. And that's facing the US side not toward Canada. And she had something, something else, there were some pictures on the wall that reference the different areas. The bedroom you could walk in and there was a curtain you could put up just for privacy and then the other one was the same thing.

**GTR:** The door? The door had a curtain?

**LM:** The doorway was close together, at each kind of in the middle of the room.

**GTR:** Okay. And then the curtain would cover the doors because there wasn't an actual door?

**LM:** Individual. No, there wasn't an actual door.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** And then there was, on the right of there, which would be when you walked in, on the right, she had, first off there was a stove for warming yourself, a fire, for a fire. And then cabinets and a propane stove and then the cupboard with all her dishes and that, which were a little bit of everything. She also, there was something right next to that and I can't recall just exactly what that was.

**0:35.03.1**

**GTR:** Was there like a washstand kind of thing somewhere?

**LM:** She had a radio. I believe the radio was over there.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** On the wall there that was part of the porch.

**GTR:** Okay. Which bedroom would she stay in in the winter?

**LM:** I don't know which one she used.

**GTR:** Where you ever there, you didn't go much in the winter?

**LM:** Not too often. We went, I think, a couple of times in the winter, but I don't remember where she was sleeping.

**GTR:** Did you ever snowmobile up or how did you get up in the winter? Was it snowmobile at that time?

**LM:** Snowmobile. Yeah. We never did anything, snowshoeing or anything like that. We had three snowmobiles and we would go up with the sons and the one time that we were on the lake and it was really interesting because it was like forty below [degrees below zero] and when you're still, it crinkled, you know the way the snow sounded when it was really cold.

**GTR:** Speaking of crinkly...

[Brief exchange about something crinkling under narrator's shoe]

**GTR:** Yes, that crinkling ice sound. That's a great sound.

**LM:** Yeah. And that year we cut trees for her and dragged them over to the island where she cut them up.

**GTR:** For firewood?

**LM:** Firewood, yeah.

**GTR:** Would she saw?

**LM:** She sawed and she had an axe that she could swing really good! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Wow. Yeah, it sounds like she was strong. Any chainsaw, would she do chainsaws or anything?

**LM:** When they banned that, she didn't want any noise either. She pretty well went along with what was said. If, um, she had a chainsaw, she had different things, but she didn't want to upset anybody, any of the campers and people that wanted the, just the quietness of being up there.

**GTR:** Um-hmm. How did she feel about that whole wilderness, Boundary Waters idea?

**LM:** She never complained. You know, when the new rules were going on and they changed what she could do and couldn't do, I never heard her complain. You know, she accepted it, part of it, you know, she may have complained to others, but I've never heard her to do that.

**GTR:** But she did officially fight in some ways, obviously, wanting to stay.

**LM:** She fought in court, in federal court. She did not want to move. And she was, she and Benny Ambrose were the last people that still had their own place. But Benny was quite a bit further up the chain. And he pretty much was a hermit. He had daughters. He had built a gorgeous cabin for guests. He was a geologist and he had all these different rocks that he put in the fireplace. But he himself lived in a tent and cooked outside.

**GTR:** Did you ever meet him much? Was he around?

**LM:** Did we see him?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** We did. We would go up there, not every trip. If he didn't know who you were he came down with a shotgun. [Laughs] And that's how you were greeted. [Laughs again] Until you said who you were.

**GTR:** He would just disappear? Sometimes someone would say he would just leave.

**LM:** Well, he would be down on the dock. One time we fished on the way up there and we happened to fish in his spot. [Laughs] So, we learned that in a hurry and never fished there again!

**GTR:** Did he bake?

**LM:** He would send some things down and, by way of another fellow called Pete Cosme. Pete would go up to see Benny and Benny would give something to Pete to give to Dorothy.

**GTR:** He gardened, right?

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** What were those like?

**LM:** Fantastic garden. There was spring water right on the site.

**GTR:** Nice. Flowers and vegetables, do you remember seeing?

**0:40:01.1**

**LM:** He had some flowers, I don't recall that much, that I was so amazed at seeing this place and seeing this big long table out, just sitting out in a half tent and he cooked under that.

**GTR:** Would he have other guests? He never had paying guest, right?

**LM:** No.

**GTR:** Just visitors.

**LM:** Mostly, I heard, his daughters would come up to see him. But I don't know of anyone who stayed there.

**GTR:** Yeah. But they would socialize some. Would Benny ever come to Dorothy's?

**LM:** As I understand it, talking to Jeep Latourell, they had talked once, Dorothy and Penny directly and it was, Jeep had gone up there and took Dorothy and said, "Come on, we're going up to visit Benny". And he had told me that that was only the second time they had actually talked face to face.

**GTR:** Oh, wow.

**LM:** And they enjoyed each other very much.

**GTR:** Hmmm. Benny just stayed to himself more?

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** It would have been how far, how long would it take to paddle...

**LM:** To paddle up there?

**GTR:** Between the places.

**LM:** I would say probably, depending on the wind, and you had to go all the way to, all of Knife Lake to Little Knife, to go there, which was another couple hours, easy. And then you'd go, maybe a half hour to Benny's, up Otter Track.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** And, of course, you got a portage to get to Otter Track, a short one, I mean a very short one. But it was really beautiful up there. But it's a ways, it was a long ways. And Dorothy was always tried to be around when the guests were there. The kids that would want to see her, talk to her.

**GTR:** Hm-mmm. So, she stayed put often and didn't go wandering, go visit Benny or anyone. Yeah, that's true.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** So, tell me about your sons and what they did for her.

**LM:** Well, they, Steve was the one that stayed the longest. He was my middle child. And he was kind of a big burly guy. My first-born were twins, and one of them was Jay. Jay was up here and he's, he's slender, he always was slender. He's not real muscular, although he's got power behind him. When you compare Steve with him, you know, Steve looks like he's from another family, because he is just very muscular and very strong.

**GTR:** His twin was a girl? Or, Jay's twin?

**LM:** Alan. Alan is also very small, I say small build, but they were muscular and they were a man-type of thing, but not as Steve was. I mean, he's got biceps that you wonder, "Where did it come from?" you know? [Laughs] So, Steve enjoyed being up here the most. He would do his chores and Dorothy would tell him each day, you know, what she wanted done and he would try to get it done so he could go out fishing or he enjoyed taking photos of birds and he would spend a long time to try to get closer and closer to them and just see, you know, their babies and that. And he came back with a lot of really nice photos that he did up and I've got, you know, a big photo of, whether it be the flowers or the loon. The loon was one of his favorites.

**GTR:** Cool.

**LM:** He would do that. He just liked the woods. Similar to Dorothy. She loved it up there. She, the city life was not for her.

**GTR:** Would he stay for weeks on end? Or how long would he usually stay?

**LM:** Steve? Steve stayed the whole summer. The minute he got out of school, in high school, to when he had to go back. And then when he got out of high school, he stayed up year round. He loved it more than anything. When Jay was here, you know, he worked hard and he did what she wanted, but he's not that much of a fisherman, so those things weren't that important to him.

**0:45:06.4**

**GTR:** How many years then would Steve have done that?

**LM:** You know, I can't recall.

**GTR:** High school age when he started?

**LM:** It was during high school that they were up, Jay was up. And they started in high school when they could really be a help to Dorothy.

**GTR:** Hm-mmm. Nice.

**LM:** Just can't remember how many years or what.

**GTR:** And then would you come visit a little bit or would you say, you'd be back home?

**LM:** We'd be up, we tried to come up every year. Because I loved it up here, too. I loved to fish and my husband and I both enjoyed this place.

**GTR:** Would you come for a week or how long would you get to stay?

**LM:** If we could get two weeks, we would try for two weeks, you know, if it had to be one week, so be it. It just depended on work and anything else. But we tried religiously to get there every year.

**GTR:** Nice.

**LM:** Didn't always work, but we tried.

**GTR:** How did Steve usually get up here then? How would you do that? Because was there anyway that he could catch a bus or train or anything at that point?

**LM:** To get up to Dorothy's? We, over the years, we would go to certain people who lived on Moose Lake, depending on, Dorothy had different friends. So, we would start up from their place and I'm trying to remember the first ones we went to. Her mail was taken by them and so we would bring up her mail and leave from their place. But I can't, I'm not certain exactly, I can't remember their name right now. And then later years we went by Bernie Carlson, we went through his... he had an outfitting and so went from his place at Moose Lake. Sometimes we went before Latourell had a place on Moose Lake, there was a fellow named Leo, um, he was an Indian [Native American] and he had a, like a small, sizable one car garage, I guess, and this was a dirt road. We'd go there and we'd leave from there, park our car and leave from there. Leo [Chosa?] I think was his name. And gradually we became more, Bernie Carlson, until the Forest Service took over and sometimes when they took over, of course, the buildings were gone and the road was locked to get to the water.

**GTR:** At the place on Moose Lake?

**LM:** Pardon?

**GTR:** At the place on Moose Lake?

**LM:** It's on Moose, yeah. It's still that way, you know, they have a long building down there and they keep different kinds of boats down there. So, there's a public landing further down the road that we take off from there. And right now Latourell had bought the property from Leo and so he's right there next to the public boat landing.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** And his, he's got his, what do you call it, store where you buy all of the rental stuff you need?

**GTR:** Outfitter?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** How would Steve come for the whole summer? Would Dorothy come and meet him? Or how would he get out when he was young?

**LM:** Somebody would bring him. She had a lot of angels in town that would bring things up. There's Chmielewski's, they would bring up flowers, or vegetable plants for her.

**GTR:** Nice.

**LM:** I let them know that I was coming up many times, meeting them on the portage and they'd have all these perishable things, if you want to call it that.

**GTR:** Nice.

**LM:** And trying to make sure that they got up there and she was able to plant them. They would have been flowers.

**0:50:11.6**

**GTR:** Nice. That's good. Chmielewski, how do you spell that? I can figure it out. Nice.

**LM:** And, of course, whatever Dorothy wanted, you know, needed, and the things she used to moan was the big sacks of corn to feed the ducks. I know they're big, but I don't know the weight is on them.

**GTR:** Forty, fifty pounds, probably.

**LM:** Oh, easily!

[Both laugh]

**LM:** So, he'd have to carry those things up. [Laughs]

**GTR:** So, she'd keep him busy.

**LM:** But the ducks just kept multiplying and multiplying and expecting to be fed and they generally were fed pretty well.

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** That's nice. Nice of Dorothy. It sounds like she had kind of a soft spot, too, for things.

**LM:** Her birds, yeah. Yeah.

**GTR:** That's nice. And it sounds like people really did want to help her out. Why would people want to help her so much?



**LM:** Well, that was Dorothy. She had the nature that she appreciated people. They wanted to do something good for somebody. I mean, the snowmobiles, clubs used to come up to help with the ice up. People would check in on her just to see her and just go to see her sometimes for the day.

**GTR:** Hm-mmm.

**LM:** When she died, there was a huge gathering. Snowmobiles were allowed that day.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** The ceremony where they just talked about her and there were, I don't know, hundreds of people?

**GTR:** Did you come for that?

**LM:** No. No, I didn't make that. Steve was there. When Dorothy used to entertain, when the snowmobile clubs would come up to help her, she would get a wash tub and she would make soup in that, in these washtubs, to feed this kind of a crowd.

**GTR:** Wow. And then put it out on the ice, I've heard?

**LM:** Um-hmm, right.

**GTR:** She'd have a stove on the ice?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Wow. Sounds great. How old, what year was Steve born? How old was he when...?

**LM:** Steve was born in 1961.

**GTR:** Okay. So, he would have been...

**LM:** Jay was born in '59.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** And my youngest son came up with us, but he did not, I don't believe he ever went and helped Dorothy.

**GTR:** Did Dorothy ever pay them as a summer job? Or was it just, kind of...?

**LM:** They did get some pay. It was very, very little. But she was appreciative. She didn't have a lot. Money was not that important to her. Just enough to get by and to live on.

**GTR:** That's simple. But then Steve, it could kind of be his summer job, or his summer place to be?

**LM:** And, really, it felt that he was safer then, you know, sometimes, some people, they were friendly with the Forest Service, which were also young men and it just felt that that would be okay.

**GTR:** A good place for him to be for the summer.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** That's great. And so, after she passed away did you do the memorial service? Because there was a memorial, right? What happened after she passed away?

**LM:** I'm not real certain how it happened. I know that when she didn't respond on the radio, they finally sent someone out, I don't know if it was by plane and found her in the, on the porch of her winter cabin. Although she wanted to be buried in Pennsylvania, which is what happened, there was no closure for the local people. I've seen movies of it. Steve was speaking and I don't recall who else, but they showed pictures of it and all the people that were there.

**0:55:00.3**

**GTR:** Was there a little ceremony in Illinois, too, that you would have been at?

**LM:** No, no, not at that point that I recall.

**GTR:** Okay. Did people... Was it a surprise at that point? Or was she really slowing down? How did people, were you surprised that year?

**LM:** She was still able to, she was arthritic, she never complained about that either. Her hands were getting deformed, very large hands from the type of work she was doing, and strong looking. But she never complained about her health. Being a nurse, you know, I'm sure she knew the dangers and that, which is why the Forest Service expected a call from her every day, just to touch base. And that's what triggered it. They knew something had happened when she didn't respond.

**GTR:** Right. Was she really planning, did she ever talk about, someplace where she might, maybe when she got older, she had a plan to go somewhere else? Or did she just really want to stay?

**LM:** No. She wanted, she was not going to walk out.

**GTR:** It worked the way she wanted it to work.

**LM:** Yeah. Very much so. By being able to stay until she died, that was what she wanted.

**GTR:** But then, I'm sure, people had hoped that she had a few more years?

**LM:** Well, have you seen the video that was taken at the different, summer, winter, spring and fall?

**GTR:** Some of it, little parts. I should watch the whole thing, I guess, shouldn't I?

**LM:** That had just finally come out where people could see it and there was a showing at Indiana at a theater and she had just died before that came out, by, within maybe a couple of months. And, like she says on there, you know, she'd be sorry to leave, but nobody doesn't leave. So, you know, whatever she was like to me, she was the same to you.

**GTR:** Very natural.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Someone mentioned she would talk, or would kind of greet people almost like with her hands?

**LM:** I don't remember anything about...

**GTR:** Or just talking with her hands? Or anything like that?

**LM:** I don't recall any of that, no. She'd come out and greet everybody. Carry the book under her hand, most of the time.

**GTR:** I was just going to ask that. What did she read? What did she like most?

**LM:** What did she like?

**GTR:** Yeah. For reading.

**LM:** Just being there.

**GTR:** But the books, what did she read? What would she often have in her hand?

**LM:** Oh, no, the book for them to sign.

**GTR:** Oh, that book. Right, right. Okay.

**LM:** She wanted them, she wanted to make sure they signed. She enjoyed playing cards at night. When everybody was gone, um, sometimes it would be Pinochle, sometimes it would be just her and her sister playing a game and just laughing. Laughing at everything and anything. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Was her sister, was it usually Ruth that was there?

**LM:** Ruth, yeah.

**GTR:** What was she like?

**LM:** Ruth was more quiet. Dorothy was the person that, you know, that would go out, usually. Ruth was always there to back up and help her and do whatever.

**GTR:** And then laugh and play cards. [Laughs]

**LM:** Yeah, and laugh at night. You know after they started playing cards, they played until midnight, easily. And all of a sudden they'd look at the clock and, "Oh, my golly!" You know, "It's so late!"

**GTR:** Drinking coffee?

**LM:** Always coffee. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Even at night, the middle of the night, coffee?

**LM:** I doubt that. But Dorothy had a cup with a broken handle, it was a very old cup and that was hers so she always knew that was hers. So, she'd leave it, that's always on the table or on the stove or whatever and nobody took that cup.

[Both laugh]

**1:00:10.6**

**GTR:** So, that was hers!

[Both laugh]

**LM:** You know, in the winter she would, she was making those eggs and scenes in these eggs and putting like sequins or beads on eggs.

**GTR:** Inside? Like a sugar egg or like a regular egg?

**LM:** They actually were real eggs, too, but I think she had help doing that. Her hands were very, very large and these figures that would go in there were very small and you'd have to place and glue them in there. But she made a lot with beads.

**GTR:** Gluing? I've seen some in the museum with balls?

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** A Styrofoam ball and the beads?

**LM:** Yes.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** Yeah. She always decorated for Christmas. The best time of the year for her was when it froze up, because nobody could come, and when it thawed, because nobody could come. That was her solitude time. That's what she loved and she'd write letters, poems and the Christmas letter that she used to send.

**GTR:** Yeah, I've seen that. That sounds great.

**LM:** And she'd always, she'd be the person, a character of a bird or a critter.

**GTR:** Those are fun. They have them in the books.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** They've copied them.

**LM:** One of the things that was noteworthy, she really was different, even in high school. She went to Calumet High School in Chicago. And they had shooting, a shooting range. She was an excellent shot in high school.

**GTR:** Wow.

**LM:** Marksman.

**GTR:** Did she hunt on the island at all, or not as much?

**LM:** You know, she didn't want to kill. I've never seen her hunt.

**GTR:** Yeah. So, what do you think would be the most important thing to remember, or to know about Dorothy now?

**LM:** I would say the love of nature. Just finding the beauty in that. To enjoy it. Don't take it for granted.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** And every season she found beauty. To be alone that many years and not get tired of it.

**GTR:** She was very steady and present.

**LM:** Um-hmmm.

**GTR:** She was just there.

**LM:** Yeah. Yeah.

**GTR:** What's your most lasting memory, if you just think of Dorothy, what do you think of?

**LM:** I think the laughter at night. Playing card games. They'd giggle. [Laughs]

**GTR:** That's great. Just about anything. Somebody said, not a, like a raunchy sense of humor or swearing or anything, right? It was all pretty clean and fun.

**LM:** No, no. Dorothy didn't swear. Not at all. I don't think Ruth did, either, or anyone. It's not part of their life at all.

**GTR:** Hm-hmmm. Do you think she was a good role model for all the groups, the kids, who would come to visit?

**LM:** Yeah. Really. When you see, have you ever been up there?

**GTR:** I haven't been to the Isle of Pines yet. I've just seen the pictures.

**LM:** It's hard to get there. You know, it's not an easy trek; it's work. But, it's beautiful. And she, she was in harmony with nature, you know, she would love picking the berries, looking for birds, she fed, she had a deer that she fed for years. And, you know, when finally she didn't see it anymore she knew it was killed.

**1:05:08.3**

**GTR:** Does that one have a name? I think that's in the book somewhere. Do you remember it?

**LM:** Um, Rhonda? Was that? Rhonda?

**GTR:** Rhonda. Yeah, that sounds right. Yeah.

**LM:** But she would put food out for it and it would see it on Robin's Island.

**GTR:** It would be up there?

**LM:** And, I think, a pet squirrel she had. She had her dog, that she really loved, Peggy.

**GTR:** Oh, a cocker spaniel?

**LM:** Peg, I think it was. I think that's, if I recall.

**GTR:** But just one dog? She didn't get more?

**LM:** That was, that was, yeah, that was her dog. You know, if you want to come and go and leave in the wintertime, it's hard to take a dog with you when you're staying with other people.

**GTR:** It sounds like she got around quite well in the winters. Would go visiting.

**LM:** People in Ely helped her a lot. Friends that knew her. If she wanted something, everybody would try to help her to get whatever she needed.

**GTR:** Do you think people felt kind of protective of her? Or just knew she could take care of herself but they still just wanted to help.

**LM:** Yes, yes.

**GTR:** Okay. Because she knew, she knew, she could take care of herself, too, right?

**LM:** Right. You know, the first time I went up there, too, it's just a, something you don't see anywhere else and you enjoy...

**GTR:** Her independence or just the island and...?

**LM:** Both, really! She was very, very much attuned to everything, she was capable and, you know, you could see the years as she changed and became more difficult for her to do everything.

**GTR:** Hm-hmmm.

**LM:** But, you know, somehow, somebody else came along to help.

**GTR:** Yeah. What do you think she'd think about all the root beer focus now? I mean, did she brew the root beer? Or did she make Steve do it?

**LM:** [Laughing] I think she'd be astounded. [Laughing] First off, to have a museum in her, with her name, you know, she would have never, probably, wanted that. She did what she liked to do and wanted to do. And wouldn't have cared for the thing.

**GTR:** But why do you think people wanted to keep her cabin so much?

**LM:** Because she was so unique, you know, in her way.

**GTR:** Yeah. Do you think people felt she was almost an honorary family member of theirs? You know, wanted to visit her a lot.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Or, didn't want to see her cabins just destroyed because they felt connected?

**LM:** Yeah. She was, she was so unique in her being, and her choice of living and you just don't see people like that.

**GTR:** Yeah. Have you been in the cabins at the museum?

**LM:** I have.

**GTR:** Did they look the same, kind of?

**LM:** Very similar.

**GTR:** Yeah?

**LM:** Yeah. Pretty much. They are close.

**GTR:** Were you involved at all with the saving the stuff or getting...?

**LM:** Somewhat. Steve had some things of hers that are in the museum. And, we stopped here all the time. Occasionally I talk to Sarah and Sarah's doing a wonderful job. You know, a massive job.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** You know, her expertise has worked well.

**GTR:** The root beer angle.

**LM:** Yeah. Yeah.

**GTR:** Someone said, "Dorothy didn't really..." You know, to call her the Root Beer Lady, might seem a little silly, because that's not really, that wasn't really her focus of her life. She didn't focus on root beer all the time, right?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** But it's a good thing to sell now.

**LM:** It is. It's wonderful. It keeps the museum going.



**GTR:** Did Steve ever remember making it?

**LM:** Oh, yeah. [Laughs] Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** The extract?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** I always wondered if they boiled it. Because it was lake water, right?

**1:10:00.2**

**LM:** You took lake water.

**GTR:** Right.

**LM:** You actually, it wasn't boiled, it was just lake water and then you add all the ingredients and stir it and then, it was so funny to watch her when she was going to fill a jar because she had this little scoop and you got these small bottles, six ounce or seven ounce bottles, and she knew exactly how far it had to be, so sometimes, it would just be a few drops she would add to the, when she was doing it. [Laughs] And it would always work out. She even bottles. She had it down to a science, "If I do it this way, I have enough to do all that I need to do for a case". You know? And not any extras.

**GTR:** Nice.

**LM:** So, when there were so many empty cases, then it was time to make it and the more people that came that sometimes didn't have time to really develop a, um, the yeast to develop the bubbles. But people, you know, it was cold on a hot day after you worked hard and it was great.

**GTR:** Yeah, to get something cold and sweet when you're out there, I'm sure, was good.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Would the bubbles, so, she mixed the yeast in, just mix up a big batch and put it in the bottles right away? Or would it sit in the batch for a while? I don't quite know how that works with the bubbles.

**LM:** No. They had to cure so many days for the bubbles to develop, the yeast to start action.

**GTR:** In the bottles themselves?

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** Steve's got the bottler and he has quite a few of her mementoes. One of her doors from the cabin he's got. A coffee table. He cherished, more than anything, the things that she had.

**GTR:** Did he help get anything out? I always wonder... We talked to guys that helped, you know, dismantle the cabins, but I always wondered who, kind of, packed up all the stuff, all her stuff in there.

**LM:** Uh, my husband had a lot to do with that. At that time we were divorced, when that happened so, but he was seeing that things were being taken out and he was instrumental in that with Steve. He came up here, he went with Dorothy's body to burial.

**GTR:** His name was John, you said? What was his name?

**LM:** They called him Chuck, and his name was John Charles Molter.

**GTR:** Okay. So, he was still a good connection. Whoever's seen the cabins say they look really right. People say, "There must have been a woman involved, somehow to get everything laid out nice".

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** No one can tell me who did that. Well, Peg, Peg Rosette. You know her.

**LM:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** She, I think, helped, once it was here. We just wonder, who packed it all up and...

**LM:** Her husband did a lot. John, I think, John was the one who really spearheaded bringing all the cabins back.

**GTR:** Hm-mmm.

**LM:** And actually becoming a museum. And they built it twice. They built it on that triangle right in town with no, with hardly any trees on it, where [highway] one goes and [highway] 169 and they built it on that corner, because at that time, I went with it to the dedication, with my husband, and then it was not for Dorothy. There's no trees, it didn't even look like it even. So, it was moved to where it is now, which is more the kind of woods that Dorothy would have loved.

**GTR:** That's good, yeah. So, it looks kind of right now?

**LM:** But, John did so much. And, of course, Peg, too. And I think Peg was, the two of them are probably the most involved with Dorothy's life and with the museum being here.

**GTR:** That's great. And she still works there, I think, Peg Rosette.

**LM:** Yeah, yeah. She's a super lady.

**GTR:** Yeah, yeah. And people just couldn't bear to think of those cabins being burned down or something.

**LM:** Dismantled, you're right.

**GTR:** It sounds like that's what the Forest Service would have done.

**LM:** The amount of stuff there was tremendous.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** You know, the storage, and they had to keep everything. Anything that broke, keep the parts that you can keep, because you don't have a grocery store, you don't have a hardware store right at your beck and call, so, they had to have...

**1:15:08.2**

[Brief interruption and unrelated conversation]

**GTR:** Any other main things that we want to talk about?

**LM:** There was something I wanted to talk about and now it's gone.

[More unrelated conversation]

**LM:** You know, it's funny, because I didn't think I knew that much about Dorothy, and "What can I tell you?" [Laughs] And yet, you know, there was a lot about her that's probably been repeated.

**GTR:** Everyone has their own memories or own things...

**LM:** Recollections of how they were impressed with her.

**GTR:** Definitely.

**LM:** I wish I could remember what had come to my mind before, but...

**GTR:** What are your thoughts on how the government ended up treating her or agreeing...

**LM:** We were very upset over that, with her, knowing that she was going to be off the land. You know, they started a campaign of buying and buying more things, you know, two of the resorts

were gone when I went up there originally. And, there were three people we knew up in the woods, you know, Dorothy, there was Pete Cosme, and there was Benny. And, you know, they were all up in years, yet they had to go through the heart ache, Dorothy had to go through the heart ache, of almost losing her ability to stay until she died.

**GTR:** Did you...

**LM:** Pete, of course, you know, is, couldn't go up there anymore, it was just too difficult for him and health and he died. And now Benny, also, he died. So, it's, when you're willing and able to be pushed off your land, it hurts.

**GTR:** She really thought for a while that it wasn't going to work? That she really was going to have to leave?

**LM:** Dorothy always wanted to be there. And she was able to at least stay, as she wanted.

**GTR:** Hm-mmm. Were you ever involved with having to, or your sons, or anyone helping with the trial things or any of the fight?

**LM:** Um, some of the newspaper people helped quite a bit by publishing what she was going through. And I think the people that would come up there and enjoyed it and enjoyed having her, knowing that she was there, because she was a nurse, for one. My father was up there and happened to meet Dorothy once in Chicago for a funeral and he developed ulcers, uh, perforated ulcers and, you know, she came in, that one day, and that's what she thought he had, and we had to get him out of there, and get him into the hospital in Ely. So, just knowing just how serious is what he's got, was great.

**1:20:04.0**

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** I think that was the greatest benefit she gave to the area.

**GTR:** That medical piece. Yeah. It was really the end of an era, too, when she passed, too, wasn't it?

**LM:** Very much so.

**GTR:** People in the wilderness.

**LM:** She's so unique that she could enjoy nature, enjoy the peaceful times, the tranquility and that. And yet, still be civil to the people that stopped by. One time, they were counting, and it was like 10,000 in one summer.

**GTR:** Wow!

**LM:** And, I can't remember how many years ago that was. You know, did it get more than that? But at that time, it was averaging 10,000 people.

**GTR:** Yeah. That was a lot.

**LM:** That signed her book.

**GTR:** Wow. That's nice that she had the variety of the quiet times and the busy times.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** And it sounds like winter wasn't very quiet sometimes, with snowmobiles.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** How did she feel about the snowmobile ban, do you think?

**LM:** That troubled her, because she had, herself, was her means of transportation in and out.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** And so she had one of the original snowmobiles, and then had her own snowmobile that was more up to date, with her jacket with all the logos and that she was so proud of.

**GTR:** They still have that in the museum, it's still hanging in the museum. In the cabin.

**LM:** Right. And, like I say, Steve, you know, his... I don't think he's donated them, he hasn't parted with them, so to speak. But, you know, this is where they belong. And he's never talked any further about it.

**GTR:** That's okay. He can eventually, right?

**LM:** You know to see the movie completed, was wonderful, of her life.

**GTR:** Hm-mmm.

**LM:** Did you know she was in the Saturday Evening Post?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** That article? Funny thing about that, is that when the picture was taken with Cap showing the fish and he's by the canoe? Actually, he had fallen in the water.

[Both laugh]

**LM:** And he's standing in the water, behind the canoe, holding the fish!

[Both laugh]

**LM:** And that was one of the pictures that was in the Saturday Evening Post! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Did she tell you he had fallen in? He hadn't just walked over there?

**LM:** Yeah.

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** But they said she was the loneliest woman in America.

**LM:** Yes. [Laughs] With 10,000 people come to see her! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Exactly.

**LM:** It wasn't the right topic by her life, but you know, it made good press. [Laughs]

**GTR:** So, she was a celebrity, kind of. That's nice. So, did she just shake her head when all these people wanted to make stories about her or all that?

**LM:** Yeah, she wasn't partial to that, you know. But, and yet, it made interesting reading. You know, in some of the stories are fabricated or a little, thought of in a different light, but...

**GTR:** There's the Root Beer Lady book.

**LM:** Right. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Someone said, oh, that doesn't... But he hadn't read it. The person that was most upset by that book hadn't actually read it.

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** He didn't like the name "Root Beer Lady". He thought that was, you know, kind of too much, that wasn't enough of what she did. That it was more that she was a nurse and all this other stuff that she did than root beer was.

**LM:** No, fame was of no interest to her, but yet she had it.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**LM:** You know, whether she liked it or not. [Laughs] When you live your life like that, you're known by that.

**GTR:** She was unique, I suppose. And she wanted people to enjoy that country, too, right? So, she was wanting to greet the groups or show...

**LM:** Just the fact that Berglund's family allowed her to take the property, because it wasn't, I don't think it was in a will, but they had agreed, you know, "You go ahead". That was unique.

**1:25:04.4**

**GTR:** And that he had passed away before you started coming, right?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** I can't remember what year that was, the '50s?

**LM:** I think in the '40s, somewhere in the '40s that he passed away and didn't write it, but they allowed her to take it, gave it to Dorothy, basically. And that's unique in itself.

**GTR:** Right. That's good.

**LM:** That the family felt that way about Dorothy, because of the relationship that developed with her helping him.

**GTR:** Someone said that the Forest Service had even offered her some land, like, on Moose Lake as a trade or something? Did you hear about that?

**LM:** She had property on Moose Lake, I think it's from Berglund, it is not in the Boundary Water, so to speak, well, it isn't Boundary Water, but they started buying all the property in Moose Lake, trying to get some of the businesses and that. Dorothy had property and no intent of moving to Moose Lake.

**GTR:** Had she just gotten it more recently when the Forest Service was doing all that, or it was somehow related to the...

**LM:** I think when he died, he had that and he had the Isle of Pines.

**GTR:** And some on Moose Lake, too.

**LM:** Yeah, so she got that. And she had another piece of property, too, I think, that she sold or, I think she sold it. But, it was the thought that maybe she could move to Moose Lake if she needed to, but she didn't want that.

**GTR:** Right, that was her place, was there. It did sound like she was rooted there. But she liked to travel a bit it sounds like, so she didn't just stay all the time, right?

**LM:** Just to go and see everybody. You know, if there was a death, she would try to go, you know, with family or something. But she was content to be where she is.

**GTR:** And write up those newsletters. Would she type them or would she have a...

**LM:** She wrote them.

**GTR:** By hand?

**LM:** She hand wrote all of them.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** And multiple pages.

**GTR:** And then get them copied somehow? How did she mail them out to everyone?

**LM:** Well, the one, the one with the, Christmas letter, was done differently and just, it was her Christmas card.

**GTR:** Somehow she'd get it copied to mail them to a bunch of people?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** But otherwise handwriting all the long letters?

**LM:** I think most of those were typed. You know, I'm not real certain on that.

**GTR:** Would she and Steve write back and forth? Would she ever write in the winter?

**LM:** You know, she would write and of course there wasn't always mail at the time, depended on someone coming up there. But, I'm not a letter writer and she would include me on some of, she would write to me, and it's nothing to get a five to six page letter of what's going on.

**GTR:** Hmmm.

**LM:** And I always felt so guilty because I hated to write! [Laughs] And yet she took the time to write to me.

**GTR:** That's great. She maybe had a little more time to. [Laughs]



**LM:** Yeah, true, true. You know, but to be included in her thoughts in the wintertime, that was nice. She would send me some of her recipes for ice cream and I would copy it and I'd give them to Sarah as I found things that were part of her...

**GTR:** Would she make homemade ice cream on the island?

**LM:** Yeah. Heaven! [Laughs] She'd go in that other tent I was telling you about where she had a lot of storage, there was a bed in there, but it got so much other stuff. But she would come up with evaporated milk and this and this can of this and a can of that or powder something or other and, you know, you get the ice from the ice house and you just keep working it until it became ice cream and it was heavenly! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Wow, that would be good. A crank one?

**LM:** Yeah. Generally, well, when we were up here, there would be one night where we would have ice cream.

**1:30:04.7**

**GTR:** Like vanilla, usually, or all sorts of things?

**LM:** Anything she had, she'd throw in there! [Laughs] Whatever she had available that she thought would be good.

**GTR:** That would be a treat on the island.

**LM:** Yeah, yeah. When you're that far from civilization, it is quite a treat.

**GTR:** Nice. Would you do root beer floats?

[Both laugh]

**LM:** Everybody wanted the ice cream. She ate big dishes of ice cream. And Steve does the same thing; he eats a big dish of ice cream. Can't let any of it go to waste.

**GTR:** Right. There's no way to store it.

**LM:** Right.

**GTR:** Well, somebody, I can't remember who it was, said that they would bring strawberry ice cream to her from town. She would just eat it right away.

**LM:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** Because you had to, kind of, because it wouldn't stay that cold.

**LM:** We would bring it up in dry ice. And, you know, it had to be eaten pretty quick.

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** So, strawberry was a favorite?

**LM:** I don't recall if they ever.

**GTR:** It's a good treat.

**LM:** She was thankful for anything. [Laughs]

**GTR:** A good treat. But then baking, she would bake, you said, bread.

**LM:** Excellent bread.

**GTR:** Just, like a white bread, or a wheat?

**LM:** Usually it was a white. Yeah. Whatever she had and she also, for dinner was at anytime. Anytime that you could possibly stop and she would make something in a big pot, like a stew or that. You might be eating at ten o'clock at night, you know. Up there, anything is good. You're camping out, a homemade meal is delicious.

**GTR:** Definitely, that would be good. Yeah, I've heard of her stews and all that and people liked. Would she make cookies and that kind of stuff or was it more the pie?

**LM:** Mostly pies. It's the easiest to make in comparison.

**GTR:** I suppose. Some people would say a piecrust is not too easy to do it right. You have to have the right touch.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** And the lard.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Lard's important. My grandma could do that. She wouldn't write down her recipes though.

**LM:** Kind of true, you miss a lot of those things. Yeah, they didn't have a recipe, they just knew. A handful of this and...

**GTR:** How it felt right.

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** That would be good. So, why do you keep coming back to this area?

**LM:** Why do I keep coming back? I love it. I love it very much. It's getting harder for me. I'm falling. You know, my balance isn't great. So, it's, you know, and last year when I came up, they didn't want me to carry anything. I said, "I've got to help." Everybody was carrying over the portage. So, they gave me a packsack, and I think I took about two, three steps and fell backwards. And luckily the packsack hit the ground and not me.

**GTR:** That turtle thing. I've done that.

**LM:** And this year, too, Robin had been terrific and I've fallen on this trip. Last year was the first time I fell. And this time, we were at our campsite and the latrine was way up the hill, and I was coming down and I fell forward, so, I've fallen into the water. [Laughs] So...

**GTR:** Better to fall in the water, right?

**LM:** So, I don't know, it's going to be harder for me to get up, also.

**GTR:** What year were you born? How old are you?

**LM:** How old am I?

**GTR:** For oral history we have to ask what year people are born.

**LM:** Yeah, 1939. I'm seventy-six.

**GTR:** Okay, good.

**LM:** But I still look forward to coming up. Steve usually comes with me and, you know, he carries a lot and his wife is a super hard worker. And, you know, I can tag along with him. He's getting up there, too.

**1:35:01.4**

**GTR:** He would be fifty-something, right?

**LM:** Yeah, he would have, he'll come as long as he can. And I will, too.

**GTR:** Just the fishing and the quiet or birds or...

**LM:** Yeah, it's difficult to go to her island and see it, but it's almost to the point you can't recognize where everything was. You know, the trees have started growing and all.

**GTR:** Raspberry bushes and stuff. You've been there recently?

**LM:** Yeah. So, it's kind of... We didn't get up there this trip, because it was just Robin and I and Steve is doing his aquaculture. He's raising rainbow trout, so, he couldn't leave. He felt like he could lose all of the fish he was raising, but as long as he's willing and able and I can still walk across I'll be there.

**GTR:** You'll visit the island when you can?

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** And still get up there?

**LM:** Yeah. We walk it. It's bittersweet.

**GTR:** I'm sure.

**LM:** For many reasons, you know. But again, what are you going to do? (emotional)

**GTR:** A lot of people know about her now, and they know her story. So, we won't forget about her. A lot of people, not many people that, right? Have that story remembered so much.

**LM:** I think, of anyplace, I've even thought of moving her in the summer, I don't think I could handle the winter. But yet, you know, it's not the same. So, I haven't retired yet; I'm still working.

**GTR:** Oh, really?

**LM:** [Laughs] Right.

**GTR:** What do you do?

**LM:** I have a construction company.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** I keep thinking, what am I going to retire to? I have to do something, and I don't know if I could just do nothing and I can't keep track of the days.

**GTR:** It'd be hard to sit around.

**LM:** So, my weeks are full. You know, of working. I try to keep my brain moving and not stagnating. So we now are doing federal work and I just bid a job, in Voyageur Park to rebuild

some culverts that had been washed away by the water, where they had stone around them. I didn't get the job, but I bid it. Thought, oh, it'd be a good excuse to be in the area.

**GTR:** Yeah, definitely.

**LM:** So, we work for NAVFAC, the Navy, we work for the Corps of Engineers and I'm trying to get a job with the National Park Service in St. Louis. It keeps me busy.

**GTR:** Wow. Yeah, that would be very busy. It's a good spot. I used to work for the National Park Service myself.

**LM:** Did you?

**GTR:** More history, interpretive stuff. It's a big system if you can kind of get in, get in that loop, it's a good system.

**LM:** Well, you know, you bid against everyone else and I see more, you know, of what's going to be entailed than other people, and that's my downfall. Right now we're finishing a job in Great Lakes, the Navy Base of Great Lakes...

**1:40:00.0**

**LM:** And I was bidding this one in St. Louis when I was coming up here and we were trying to coordinate before I got into the woods what needed to be done and, you know, my feeling is, I've got to keep my mind active. Otherwise, it'd be difficult. I saw Jeep Latourell yesterday; I hadn't talked to him in a few years. I didn't recognize him at first, he was sitting there and I didn't look at him twice to realize who it was. And he came up to me and I think we talked for over an hour. And, it was nice to see him, because my husband was a good friend with Jeep. The two of them hung around together when my husband was up here with Dorothy. So, the connection is good, you know, to keep connecting with people who are important in your life.

**GTR:** Definitely. He's in Illinois? (Speaking of Jeep Latourell)

**LM:** He's living on Shagawa Lake. He told me where, so I'm going to stop by and see him again. And talk some more. He's so knowledgeable of the area and of everything going on, of Dorothy, of Berglund, he's knowledgeable on him. (Jeep)

**GTR:** Oh, really? Because he was here? Would he have been here before he passed away? I suppose? Berglund, the guy that had the...

**LM:** Yeah, the Isle of Pines, yeah, he was a game warden, right? (Berglund)

**GTR:** I think so. Does Sarah ever talk with him? (Jeep?)

**LM:** He doesn't want to talk. [Laughs] (Jeep)

**GTR:** Oh, really?

**LM:** I said, “You, of all people, should”.

**GTR:** Yeah. Definitely.

**LM:** He has a wealth of knowledge. So, I will go see him today or tomorrow and convince him that he should be part of that.

**GTR:** I’m staying at the Shagawa Inn Resort tonight, last night, because I brought my kids up and so, I’d never been out to Shagawa Lake. It’s this cute little old resort with cabins close to each other, but it’s great. It’s kind of nice.

**LM:** We’re going to go and have those hamburgers, there’s a place that has great hamburgers on Shagawa.

**GTR:** Okay, I wondered. I’ve never really spent that much time here. I was always just stopping in Ely and just going out to the lakes. So, now I have the kids, we’re trying to kind of ease into it. Is it a little café that’s farther out on Shagawa?

**LM:** It’s just, I think, luncheon and the hamburgers are just the specialty, but that hamburger will be that good, between the bun and a big piece of meat, there’re all kinds, but you have them, onions or mushrooms or something on there. If you get a chance. I can’t recall the name of the place, I just know how to get there.

**GTR:** There was a sign, I know, when we were driving towards the resort, it said, “Café”. I can’t remember the name, either, but it was that same direction.

**LM:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Shagawa in is out on that little point on the lake, so you have to come back out, I guess. The little old cabins, we kind of like.

**LM:** Yeah. Like years ago, they all were.

**GTR:** Yeah, I like it, it’s got the old paneling and... My husband said, “I don’t think it’s that old”. I said, “No, look at this paneling. It doesn’t get that color right away when it’s brand new!” It’s got the little old doorknobs, I like that, too.

**LM:** [Laughs]

**GTR:** It’s fun to be able to see Dorothy’s old cabins, you know, and get that feeling that this was a resort, it wasn’t just her. That other people could come and stay in these little cabins and just that fun of little cabins. Cabins are fun, right?

**LM:** Oh, yeah. They're special. Just to have a log cabin is special.

**GTR:** Definitely.

**LM:** We always look at the place coming into Ely. If they're building one, they pre-build them and ship the parts and tag them off so you know how to put them together. No construction going on right then, but you watch to see a cabin being laid.

**1:45:02.1**

[More conversation and wrapping up]

**LM:** Well, Sarah wanted me to meet with you and I kept thinking, "What have I got to say?" [Laughs] And yet, she felt it was important. I'm glad I did.

**GTR:** Yeah, thank you. That's supposed to be one of my jobs, too, to help people remember, or encourage people to talk. Most people will. I interviewed Bob Hoppala yesterday? I don't know if you ever met him? He worked in the mines and then he was a snowmobiler who would snowmobile and he's Finnish, so he was kind of the one-word answer guy. [Laughs] And that's a little harder.

[Both laugh]

**LM:** To pull it out.

**GTR:** He'd say, "Well, we'd eat whatever she had". Well, "What did she have around?" "Soup".

[Both laugh]

**GTR:** It's like, "Okay!"

**LM:** I couldn't believe how long you could keep things in her icebox and still eat them, you know? You'd think, maybe three, four days? But it'd be a week and she'd mix everything together. And it was great! [Laughs]

**GTR:** She was tough, tough, right? An iron stomach. [Laughs] Here's a little picture that was on the internet somewhere, I'm not sure. That's the cabin. I'd love to find a map.

**LM:** This was taken right about the door of her tent.

**GTR:** Okay.

**LM:** You can see the, you know, the paddles that were there.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. So, not the... I wanted to find a little map.

**LM:** So, you can see. Here's her tent and cabin and dock. Did you hear the story about the ribbon rock that my kids brought to her?

**GTR:** There's a little bit in the book, but tell me, that would be fun to hear!

**LM:** [Laughs] It was **Jay** and Steve that wanted to do something for her birthday and she loved that ribbon rock and they went over and got that huge thing that's in the water. [Laughs] And in the process of trying to get it in the boat, they put it in the front and the front started to sink, so they had to get it back and get it over to her and then they damaged the boat, big time. And Dorothy was so angry with them but yet glad that she made them do some extra chores. [Laughs] And move, "No, I don't like it there. Move it this way. No, move it this way".

[Both laugh]

**LM:** And it was some time that they really remember, Steve remembers greatly! [Laughs]

**GTR:** And is it still there? I mean, it's there, right?

**LM:** Oh, yeah, it's there. It's a beautiful rock.

**GTR:** Yeah. Where had it been? How far away that they'd get it?

**LM:** Oh, I'd say, a couple blocks away, city blocks.

**GTR:** On the mainland somewhere? Or they moved it from... Where did they get it?

**LM:** That would be on the north side, on the Canadian side. Which they shouldn't have done, either! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Probably not. And where is it now on the island?

**LM:** Here's the dock, it's right about in here. This area, right here. Part in the water and part up. But it is so beautiful. It's red and black and light and spectacular.

**GTR:** There's a good picture in the book. That book with the photos. That's fun.

**LM:** So gorgeous.

**GTR:** That it would still be there though.

**LM:** Yeah, nobody's going to move that thing! [Laughs] I don't know how many hours they worked to get it over to her. But that was her birthday...



**GTR:** It's nice to do something.

**LM:** Steve has talked about it. He brought up his version of it.

**GTR:** There's a picture of it in the book and a little story. That's great. So, he's been in touch with Sarah quite a bit?

**LM:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** That's good.

**LM:** Well, Sarah is really, you know, brought the museum up to a healthy point. It's great.

**GTR:** It takes skill to get all those non-profits to survive, so that's great.

**LM:** Yeah.

**1:55:26.3**

[End of recording]



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrator:**

Robert Olson (b. 1933) - **RO**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes - **GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

**Recorded June 23, 2015**  
**Ely, MN**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Mr. Robert Olson on June 23rd, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter oral history project. Thanks for being willing to meet with me. Can you start by just saying when you first came to the Ely area yourself?

**RO:** Well, I was born and raised in Ely. Right now I'm 82 years old, and I've been in the canoe outfitting business. This will be my 65th summer coming up.

**GTR:** Wow.

**RO:** So, pretty familiar with the area.

**GTR:** Were your parents running an outfitting operation, or how did you start?

**RO:** Well, I started out right after high school, working at Canoe Country Outfitters and I was with them for about 25 years and then I purchased the business in '75 and it's still going. This will be the 69th summer that Canoe Country Outfitters has been in operation.

**GTR:** I've definitely heard ... I used to canoe up here more than 20 years ago and I remember that name.

**RO:** I probably first met Dorothy early '50s. Most likely after the air ban went on when she couldn't get her supplies in by airplane. Jeep Latourell and I, when we had the day off, we'd load up a canoe and haul some supplies up to her. Gasoline and whatever she needed.

**GTR:** At that time, you could still use a motor?

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** Okay, so, a little canoe.

**RO:** We would haul it up and probably once a month we'd haul up another batch of supplies.

**GTR:** Would she send money or would you ... Somehow would she buy them when she was in town and you would bring them back, or?

**RO:** No, she probably had a standing line of credit at some of the businesses in town.

**GTR:** Mm-hmm (affirmative). What was she like when you first met her?

**RO:** Well, Dorothy always was, to me, a person that kind of quiet, kept to herself. A private lady, and never spent a lot of time chit chatting.

**GTR:** Just get things done.

**RO:** But we were always yelling and in a hurry to get up there, drop everything off, and head back.

**GTR:** And you would have been 20s at that stage?

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** What year were you born, just for the record?

**RO:** 1933.

**GTR:** Okay.

**RO:** Then later, we would haul some of her guests up there. I remember one party in particular, some newspapermen from St. Louis, they would come in and we'd bring them up. Haul their stuff over to portage and Dorothy would meet us at the end of the portage, bring them to her place, and then week later, we'd go up and pick them up and bring them back. We did that for a couple years.

**GTR:** Up to the portage, right at the ...

**RO:** Up to the last portage and then we'd drop them off and she'd bring them over by boat.

**GTR:** Still using motor at that point?

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** All right.

**RO:** Then in the latter 50s, my father-in-law, Lloyd Nelson, brought the first snowmobile up to Ely in 1957, and everybody said, "Just a fad. It'd never go," so we had, more or less, the area to ourselves with the only snowmobile in Ely at the time, so it was just about every other weekend we'd be up the Knife Lake fishing, helping Dorothy get some firewood for the winter.

**GTR:** What type of snowmobile was that one?

**RO:** They were Duplairs (?). Then Dorothy purchased one from him and she'd use it to go back and forth. She wasn't too mechanically minded, so a lot of times after being sitting for a week, we'd have to go up there and start it up and then she'd follow us back to town. Pick up some supplies and bring them back.

**GTR:** That sounds like, I was reading a little bit in here about how the, you know, obviously the lake, the conditions aren't always great and they would get stuck, or snowmobiles would get stuck and all that. Did you ever end up helping her chip one out of the ice or anything like that?

**RO:** Then later in the 60s, when the lakes weren't froze, we'd go up there, do some deer hunting and get some meat for her for the winter.

**GTR:** Oh, and give it to her?

6:00

**RO:** And I remember one time, we were up there hunting and we came back to her camp. We went in and made supper. It'd probably been dark for about an hour, and Dorothy wasn't around. We saw the boat was gone. She always diddled and dallied around and never was in a hurry, so we went out on the porch, fired off a volley with the gun and pretty soon, we hear a shot way down the lake, so we jumped in the boat, go down, and she was about a mile from her boat. "Dorothy, were you lost?", "No, I wasn't lost!" I suppose like the lumberjack said, "I'm not lost. They moved the camp." So, she always never dressed real heavily. She was out there deer hunting in just tennis shoes and so we picked her up, brought her back to her boat and back to the camp.

**GTR:** Did she do some hunting herself?

**RO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Deer?

**RO:** Yeah, she had a ... instead of running to the grocery store every day to pick up some supplies, you know, kind of live off the land, but we'd help her out. Then another time we were up there, we were going up there deer hunting and we got up to one of the portages and the rest of the river was froze so we couldn't make it up there so we camped for the night and I noticed a little ways down the shoreline, there was a fire going, so I jumped in the canoe and went over there. Here was a young lad about my age sitting around the camp fire, so he introduced himself. His name was Jim Kyle. He had a couple beagle dogs with him and I says, "What are you doing up here?" If I remember right, I think he had just got a divorce and he was going up to live off the land.

I says, "Jim," I said, "If things get tough," I marked on his map where Dorothy was, and I said "If things get tough," I says, "and you get some ice, head over to Dorothy's." Then the next day we did some hunting, went back, and then I think we got up to Dorothy's maybe week after Christmas or somewhere around there, and who's sitting at Dorothy's but Jim Kyle. So, I asked Dorothy, I said, "When did he get here?" She says, "Day before Christmas." He walked across the ice. I said, "What did he have when he came here?" She says, "All he had was one deer roast left." The dogs disappeared. I suppose they went out chasing a rabbit and the wolves got them, and he stayed with Dorothy that winter and I think he stayed there the next summer, helped her out.

He didn't have much when he got up there, so we brought him some clothes the next time we came up. Some cold weather gear and some boots and different things, but he turned out to be a real good friend of mine. He ended up in British Columbia.

**GTR:** Dorothy was somewhat softhearted or would kind of ...

**RO:** Well, I imagine she, you know, little company and somebody around. You know, young, help her get firewood and do different things.

**GTR:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**RO:** So, he stayed there about, like I say, that winter and the next summer, I think it was.

**GTR:** Nice. Yeah. Did you see any root beer making? Did you, were you familiar with that process of hers?

**RO:** No, I kind of kept my nose out of that, let her make her own root beer.

**GTR:** Did you ever bring in supplies for root beer at all?

**RO:** Well, we'd bring, you know, whatever she needed. Then, like I say, we had the only snowmobile in the area, so we were up there just about every other weekend fishing and helping her out.

**GTR:** Okay. You said you gave her some meat, or some deer. Would she end up canning it, or did she have a ...?

**RO:** No, this is in the winter.

**GTR:** Freeze it somewhere?

**RO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Okay.

**RO:** Then she used to always make her big stews for ...

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RO:** Like when the Ely snowmobile club came up there. She'd make a big stew and when the Grand Marais snowmobile club came through, she always had a big stew waiting for the whole crew.

**GTR:** Out on the ice? I've heard stories of that.

**RO:** No, up in the cabin.

**GTR:** Oh, okay, in the cabin. But then, were you part of the Dorothy Molter Day with the big snowmobile, like other people have talked about those days of helping her once a year and then she ...

**RO:** Well, yeah, putting up her ice and you know, whenever we'd go up there, sometimes we'd drag a big propane canister up there if she was running out. So every time you left, and usually about every May, after the ice go out, my father-in-law and I'd go up there fishing lake trout and we'd always bring her up her one of her favorites, that was ice cream. She just liked the ice cream.

**GTR:** Any flavor, or just a certain ...

**RO:** Strawberry, if I remember right.

**GTR:** Did you have a cooler?

**RO:** Yeah, we had to package up dry ice and keep it cold for her. She'd gobble it down pretty fast.

**GTR:** So, it wouldn't keep very well. She's got the ice house. Did you help her cut the ice sometimes, too? Or?

**RO:** I never did get in on cutting the ice except one time. Usually at that time of year, I was busy doing sports shows down in different cities. Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, but I did get in on it one time, but that was a big event. Everybody would go up there and spend a couple days putting up her ice, couple weekends.

**GTR:** Using still, like chainsaws still at that point? Or?

**RO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Okay.

**RO:** And hand saws, and then drag it up. Make a skid and fill up her ice chest for her for the summer. Then when I was guiding during the summer, we'd always stop in if we did head up in that direction.

**GTR:** Have a friend buy some root beer or whatever? The kids or families?

**RO:** Well, you know, we were guiding a party, you know, we'd stop in at Dorothy's so they could walk around and get to see her and everything.

**GTR:** What was she like during those visits? Would she chat with everyone?

14:00

**RO:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. I remember one time we brought, this was in early Spring before the ice went out, we brought, Laurel Bennett and I, the sportswriter from Peoria came up and he wanted to do a story on Dorothy, Bob Cary, who later moved to Ely and we brought him and his wife up. He wanted to do a story on Dorothy, so we brought them up there, Laurel Bennett and I, and we got over to the last portage and he wanted to, he was driving one of Laurel's snowmobiles. It was one where two people could sit side to side and he had a cab on it and he wanted to get some pictures of the island, so he headed out first and this was in the spring when the trails were hard but if you got off the trail, it was kind of soft.

He started headed out toward the island and he got off the trail and pretty soon, the snowmobile went on its side, so we ran over there and Lil, she was no lightweight. She was laying on top of him, so we had to pry her out first and then get Bob out and lift the snowmobile back on the trail. But he got up and did the story on Dorothy and then later he moved up to Ely and spent the rest of his life up here, which he enjoyed.

**GTR:** And wrote the book about Dorothy?

**RO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Root Beer Lady.

**RO:** But that's the first time he ever got up to meet her and he did do a story on her for the newspaper down in Peoria.

**GTR:** When would that have been? In the 60s?

**RO:** It was in the 60s, yeah.

**GTR:** Why do you think she stayed there? Do you know?

**RO:** What's that?

**GTR:** Why do you think she did stay so long? What was her ...

**RO:** Well, she enjoyed the wilderness. She enjoyed being up there. I don't think she was ever that lonely because all winter she had traffic. Summertime, she had all kinds of people and a lot of times in the winter, she'd make her rounds. Go to different places. Go back to Chicago. Earlier she'd go back, keep up her nursing degree, I guess.

**GTR:** Mm-hmm. Did you ever experience, have to bring someone to her to get any nursing help?

**RO:** No.

**GTR:** In the groups?

**RO:** No.

**GTR:** Sounds like she did help a bunch of people that way.

**RO:** Oh, yeah. I think the last time I saw Dorothy was probably the year before she died. Laurel Bennett and I had a place down in Arizona, and we picked her up at the Phoenix airport, brought her up to Wickenburg. She spent a couple days with us and then she went around, meeting, you know, to see different friends and I think that's the last time I saw her. She looked real good shape.

**GTR:** In Arizona.

**RO:** But I suppose, it was in the 90s, so it wasn't 40 below like she'd have to put up with, so ...

**GTR:** Seems like that would be a totally different world, but she wasn't out of her element too much? She just looked around, met people?

**RO:** Right. I used to get a kick. We'd come out there with a snowmobile and she'd come out and meet us. Short sleeved shirt on, 10 below or whatever, and chit chat for about 10 minutes and didn't seem to bother her.

**GTR:** She was tough. But she could deal with the heat, too, huh?

**RO:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** That's tough. Just one of those tough German ladies. What about the stew? I'm trying to think now. I know now they focus so much on the root beer and the root beer recipe, or whatever, but a lot of people have talked about the stew. Would there be vegetables or like barley, or, do you remember?

**RO:** No, probably what normally what they'd put in there. Cabbage, barley, deer meat.



**GTR:** Yeah. Potatoes?

**RO:** Potatoes.

**GTR:** Okay. She didn't grow anything that you're familiar with, though, right?

**RO:** No.

**GTR:** Yeah, it'll be hard to get fresh stuff, I imagine. What are your thoughts about how she was treated by the Forest Service? How that all went?

20:00

**RO:** Well, it's like any of us being treated by the Forest Service. We were under the same thing in a canoe outfitting business. Permits and this and that, but, well, it's like I worked at the resorts on Basswood in the 40s and they were all the same. They had to sell. It's like Jack Hansen that had Quetico Lodge up on Basswood. He was in the Korean War and he didn't want to sell and he came back and, you know, testified. He said, "You know, I think I was fighting the wrong people." He says, "I was out there fighting for you and I come back and here you take my livelihood away." So, everybody had to sell out.

**GTR:** How do you think Dorothy managed to stay as long as she did then?

**RO:** Well, I think there was a lot of uproar, you know, and people wanted her to stay. Once the snowmobile ban came on, I imagine it was pretty lonely, you know, during the winters.

**GTR:** Right.

**RO:** She didn't have the traffic.

**GTR:** Yeah. Were you still snowmobiling a lot at that point, like when the last ride would have happened in the '83, was it '83? When, right before they closed it to snowmobiles?

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** Do you remember that? Was there like a big event? People visiting her that day?

**RO:** I wasn't in on that, because I was probably out doing some sport shows.

**GTR:** Yeah, that would have been the [inaudible 00:22:03].

**RO:** The only one that would get up there in the winter time would be the game wardens. I imagine they patrol in the area.

**GTR:** They could still use snowmobiles?

**RO:** Yeah. But, like I say, she got treated just like everybody else. We had to get out. Just like we had some two and a half acres in the Boundary Waters and when the '78 Wilderness bill came on and we fought them for a number of years and finally they says, "Either you settle, or you've got to go to court." So we settled for a lifetime estate and we still have the land in the Boundary Waters, but when the last person dies that's in on the thing, then it goes back to the Forest Service, so we still have property in the Boundary Waters.

**GTR:** You still ...

**RO:** But we've got to walk in to get to it.

**GTR:** That's different. Do you think there was some benefit now, looking back, you know, with the ... I used to work for the National Park Service and know, yeah a lot of people in the Apostle Islands who struggled with that because they didn't establish that until 1970 and there were a lot of people out there, so, and they have lots of debates there right now about wilderness versus history of people.

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** Because people have been there a long time. Have there been some positives, too?

**RO:** What's that?

**GTR:** Have you seen positive since those years or is it still frustrating?

**RO:** Well, I don't know. As far as the canoe outfitting goes?

**GTR:** Mm-hmm.

**RO:** I say it's going downhill.

**GTR:** Since the Wilderness Act or even just more recently?

**RO:** Oh, probably for the last dozen years. Or, you know, half a dozen years. To me, you're losing your customer base because the kids nowadays, they don't want to go out in the wilderness. They got their cell phones and computers and different things. They just aren't interested in the wilderness, so we're losing our customer base. I mean, like, we can see up at Moose Lake up there, we have one of our bases and up there we have a bunk house to accommodate Scout troops. It can sleep about 30 people, and these kids come up there and right away they got their cell phones out. They can't get any reception. They're going squirrely.

**GTR:** Scary.

**RO:** I mean, they can't get any reception. They're going ballistic. Then pretty soon you tell them, well, we've got a booster here. You can get up on the porch of our store and get reception. Pretty

soon, you've got 20 or 30 of them up there with their cell phones out and they're all happy again. The kids aren't, to me, interested in it. Like your Forest Service figures on the average age going into the Boundary Waters is probably a little over 60.

**GTR:** Really? Well, I suppose. Yeah, and I wonder if Scout troops ... You know, I grew up and our church group would go to the Boundary Waters and but maybe even adults aren't so apt to organize those trips and bring those groups up anymore. People are ...

**RO:** Well, it's probably one of our, you know, you've still got your Scout troops coming up and once they get done with Scouting, then they come up and then they bring their kids up. Sometimes they even bring their grandkids later. You know, so it's ...

**GTR:** Right. You need that family.

**RO:** ... keeps on going, but I'd say your average, probably the average kids even in Ely probably 50% of them have never been in the Boundary Waters. Like I say, they're just not into it.

**GTR:** That's too bad. It's like this nature deficit disorder. I'm old enough that I remember not having cell phones and not being up there, but I can see how. And parents are worry warts now. They don't want to let their kids go off and do dangerous things, you know. Why do you think, why is it important for future generations to know about Dorothy and have a museum about Dorothy. Why?

**RO:** Well, I don't think, you know, I don't know if she, you know, would really probably have been in favor of having something like that because she was a real private person, but probably now if she took a look at it, you know, 20 years down the line, I think she'd be happy about it. You know, showing what she went through and I think they're doing a real good job down there.

**GTR:** It seems nice. What do you think people should remember? How do you hope people remember Dorothy?

**RO:** What's that?

**GTR:** How would you hope people remember Dorothy or what should people remember about her?

**RO:** Well, I think they do a good job helping her, you know, showing what she went through. Different things, hardships and I know a few times we'd meet her on the portage and she'd be pulling the canoe up there whether we were coming out or going in during the summer or in the spring and she'd always be wet up to her knees, pulling the canoe up through the rapids, feet all wet.

**GTR:** She was tough.

**RO:** Yeah, and then, in her later years, just like the rest of us, you start getting the arthritis, which I think started bothering her in her later years. You know, it's going to catch up to you, but she hung in there for quite a while.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RO:** And I think, like I say, they do a good job reminding the public what she went through, how she lived.

**GTR:** Being out there and being tough and strong, it sounds like.

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** Were you involved at all, then, after she passed away with removing cabins or anything like that?

**RO:** No. Like I say, I was in and out of town doing sport shows, so ...

**GTR:** Did you ever talk to her after, like right after the snowmobile ban? It sounds like she got around. Even saw you in Arizona. Did she, what do you think she felt about that snowmobile time ending? A big change.

**RO:** Well, she probably wasn't too happy about it, you know, because after that she sat up there all alone. You know, like, before that is somebody coming and going every day, stopping in, chit chatting, hauling something out.

**GTR:** Right. It sounds like it wasn't very private, even. She talked about not, people just kind of coming in and out whenever.

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** Yeah. You think people kind of thought of her as like a grandma or aunt or something, like, you know, they felt they could just come on in, you know?

**RO:** Right. Well, even my boys, you know, like my father-in-law used to bring them up there because he was up there probably every other week in winter summer and he used to bring the boys up when they were, you know, 8, 9, 10, and they still remember that. You know, going up there.

**GTR:** Did she like kids? Was she pretty friendly to kids?

**RO:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**GTR:** Interesting. I think, because some people might think of her as like this hermit in the woods or something, and it's sounds like ...

**RO:** No.

**GTR:** ... Very much not.

**RO:** She was always, you know, appreciative when we'd stop in. Chit chat over coffee.

**GTR:** Coffee and other foods people would bring. Did she bake herself? Someone said she loved chocolate cake, but they would bring her the chocolate cake. Did she ...

**RO:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** She baked stuff, too?

**RO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah, and you guys sometimes?

**RO:** Yeah, everybody was always bringing something up. Like I say, every time we'd go up there early May, we'd bring her ice cream, which she really liked.

**GTR:** Yeah. That's good. It's a treat to get something cold up there, I'm sure. Although, she had her ice, so, that's good. Yeah. Let's see, I've gotten in those questions. What would be your most lasting memory, if you just think of Dorothy, what would you think of?

**RO:** Oh, probably, she'd always send out some real interesting Christmas cards. In fact, I've still got quite a few of them. Or the wife has quite a few of them at home. In fact, she's got a couple decorations that Dorothy gave her off her Christmas tree.

**GTR:** Nice. The beads? Or the ball kind of thing?

**RO:** Yeah. I don't know if she made them herself or whatever they were, but she gave the wife a couple and the Christmas cards.

**GTR:** Nice. I've seen a couple of excerpts that puts some in his book about the animals. Like, she would write it from the perspective of a bird or something.

**RO:** Right, yeah.

**GTR:** That sounds fun, yeah.

**RO:** And probably the last time I saw her in Arizona, like I say, she looked probably the best I, you know, in her latter years, that she ever looked.

**GTR:** Mmm-hmmm.

**RO:** So who knows. Maybe she was making her rounds knowing there was something wrong, that not going to be on this earth too much longer, but we had a good two days.

**GTR:** She'd just do everything by letters, I suppose. Arrangements by letter?

**RO:** Hmm?

**GTR:** Would she make all the arrangements by mail? You know? Because she couldn't call you guys to make arrangements?

**RO:** No, she called, because she was spending time in other parts of the country.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah.

**RO:** Seeing different people that she knew.

**GTR:** Yeah. That's great. Seems like a pretty good life. Getting around, visiting.

**RO:** Right. No, she had a good life.

**GTR:** Good friends, it sounds like. Old friends.

**RO:** Didn't have too much to worry about. Everybody took care of her as much as they could. She helped people out. People would help her out.

**GTR:** Yeah, it sounds like it was a two way street. That she was able to help people, and then a lot of people were really inspired to help her. Someone said, one of the books or somewhere, was talking about how she didn't really worry about money or, you know, was just kind of relaxed about a lot of things and then everything would just kind of work out.

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** So she just didn't worry.

**RO:** No, she didn't worry too much about anything, just have I got enough ice in the ice house to last for the summer? Have I got enough wood in the wood pile to last through the winter?

**GTR:** And people would help her out, not because she wasn't capable, but just because they wanted to, right?

**RO:** And one thing, even before the snowmobiles came in, the ice sled used to go up there quite a bit.

**GTR:** The ice what?

**RO:** They rode an ice sled with an airplane engine on the back. They didn't have wings on them, but they were some of the first guys, especially from Two Harbors. There was about 4 or 5 of them that would come up with their wind sleds before the snowmobiles came in because I remember when we first went up there by snowmobile, they'd be up there and couple times they gave me a ride in them and it was just like being in an airplane flying down that lake at 70 miles an hour. They were the original ones that went up there quite a bit in the winter time.

**GTR:** Your father-in-law didn't get into those?

**RO:** Huh?

**GTR:** You didn't get into those, or ...

**RO:** No, there was 4 or 5 individuals in Two Harbors that had them.

**GTR:** Sounds like it could be dangerous, though. Sounds like.

**RO:** Well, I don't know. They ...

**GTR:** They did okay?

**RO:** They were up there and they had a ball. Flying to her. It was just like, like I say, we did in early, in the latter 50s because we had the first snowmobile that came to Ely. We'd go up there in the winter time and be the only one there. Now if they had snowmobiles in the Boundary Waters, there'd probably be 200 snowmobiles up there every day.

**GTR:** Right. You still get some around the edges, though, right? I mean, is snowmobiling staying pretty active up here or has the weather gotten bad lately for that?

**RO:** Well, we don't get that much snowmobile traffic up here. You got one trail coming in from Tower, another one going down south. You got the entire Boundary Waters. You can't use them, so if the Boundary Waters was open for snowmobiles, it'd be a bonanza here in the winter time.

**GTR:** I suppose that did change things quite a bit. Now, it's hard to get in.

**RO:** Right.

**GTR:** You have to ski or snowshoe, but, yeah, you can't get that far. It's a lot harder than canoeing. I remember when I first tried backpacking, I was like, wait a minute. This is hard. It's harder than ... We need those canoes. The canoes are helpful, rather than just carrying it the whole way, so, yeah, well, great. Well, thank you. Anything else you want to add?

**RO:** No, that should about do it, yeah.

**GTR:** Okay. All right. Well, thank y



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrator:**

Roger Parrott (b.1953) - **RP**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes -**GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

**Recorded August 11, 2015**

**Mr. Parrott's home**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Roger Parrott on August 11, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History Project. If you could start out by saying your name?

**RP:** Roger Parrott.

**GTR:** How did you first meet Dorothy?

**RP:** It was in 1973. A high school buddy of mine and I had heard about the Root Beer Lady and we decided to make a trip. One thing leads to another and he gets kind of tied up with college and other commitments, but I started going back every year. So, it's an annual thing. I took somebody different with me, somebody who hadn't been up there before. My brothers, once they reached about fourteen years old. I figured about fourteen years old, you can handle a pack and a portage. So, my brothers, I took them up one year and I've taken nephews, all four of my children have been up there, when they reached fourteen, thirteen, fourteen years old and my brother-in-law. You know, just somebody who hadn't experienced it. I brought them out there.

**GTR:** Had you been to the Boundary Waters before that first trip?

**RP:** One time. With that friend, the year before, we had gone up out on the Sawbill.

**GTR:** Then your friend said, "Let's go specifically to visit Dorothy?"

**RP:** Well, kind of, we had heard about Knife Lake and the Root Beer Lady, "What's this Root Beer Lady all about?" [Laughs] "Let's go find out."

**GTR:** So, what was it like when you first got there?

**RP:** Well, you're paddling all day long. It was hot. It was during the Fourth of July, longer break for us to be able to find time to get away for a few days. It was hot. It was a hot day. We got up there, maybe by about three o'clock in the afternoon and that cold root beer, never tasted better!



[Laughs] And sitting around talking with her and signing her guest book and just talk about a relaxed environment.

**GTR:** Did she seem kind of relaxed?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. And she would just, I don't know how many times a day she would just tell the stories to people and she just had all the patience of a saint. [Laughs]

**GTR:** The same stories? About things on the island or?

**RP:** Yes, you could hear them if you're standing around, you pretty much heard the same stories. So many are the same questions, too. People are just interested. But it's nice, you see people come and go and, "Well, thank you Dorothy!" "Yes, thank you! It was really nice." "Thanks Dorothy!" And she may never see them again. I was told that she had about ten thousand people a year stop in and looking at her guest book, and talking to her, she said, "You know, July and August [were her] busiest months. Maybe three thousand people a month." That's a lot, a lot of people, a lot of root beer. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Was there a limit when you first got there?

**RP:** It depended on her supply. She would just sometimes say, "Please limit your... just one, just one." I suppose she'd get tired of making, tired of keeping up with it. There were times that we had more than one.

**GTR:** When you were there, would you stay for a while, or just stop in for a couple hours?

**RP:** Not even that long. Really, because you still need to find a campsite and it seems like the first campsites from her place were taken. So, you may paddle and paddle and paddle before you find an open campsite, so you didn't stay too long. But on the way out, we'd stop and visit her and maybe go through our backpack and see what we knew we wouldn't need if we weren't stopping for another night, or it seemed like we always over packed on food, so there was always something to drop off, some kind of dry goods, and she always appreciated that.

**GTR:** Well, that's nice. Would it just be a paddle down and then back to Moose Lake or where did you put in?

**RP:** Yes, Moose Lake. Yes, yes. Well, it depends, the wind, the conditions, the weather, how soon you have to get back, get back to work. [Laughs] Drive all the way back home again, so sometimes that made a difference on your schedule.

**0:05:11.6**

**GTR:** But you could feel comfortable leaving extra food because you knew you'd be home pretty quick.

**RP:** Right, yes.

**GTR:** Well, that's good. Was the root beer in the big old red cooler thing?

**RP:** Yes, with a block of ice.

**GTR:** It was a treat.

**RP:** Yes.

**GTR:** That's great. So, was that before, was she still having people staying in the cabins at that point?

**RP:** They would. It was kind of, what can you say, kind of a secret. You know, she wasn't supposed to be allowing people. But, you know, people like Steve Molter would come up, and, of course, he was family. But there were people from Chicago, old timers, that had been coming up there since in the '40s, or whatever, and that she had known for many, many years and once they put restrictions on her using that, she still allowed certain people to stay.

**GTR:** Mmm-hmm. Friends and family.

**RP:** Yes, yes. Some of the old timers that would come up and stay in them and fish for a week or two. That was about the limit of the stay, typically a week or two.

**GTR:** Did you ever meet or talk to any of her other family?

**RP:** Well, Steve Molter. I remember him as a little kid, splashing around the water and, "Dorothy!" this and, "Dorothy!", "Okay, Steve, we gotta go get some water, you gotta go do the chores, Steve." "Okay, okay." [Laughs] Or maybe I'd see him at the portage or something, but that was really the only... Oh, and the sister, Ruth. I remember meeting her and visiting with her a little bit.

**GTR:** What was she like?

**RP:** She was very quiet. Just pleasant and she just kind of sat in the background a little bit more and listened and watched. But she liked playing cards, too.

**GTR:** Were you ever around during those? Or was that more of an evening thing?

**RP:** That was more of an evening thing.

**GTR:** But you knew she liked to play.

**RP:** Yes. So, I'm sure Dorothy and Ruth played a lot of cards.

**GTR:** Yes. Loretta, her niece-in-law, said they would just laugh and play and laugh.

**RP:** Oh, is that right?

**GTR:** Yes. It's good for you. So, did you ever get up there in the winter?

**RP:** Yes. In '87, January of '87. I had been planning on going up and I wrote a little story about it and the museum has it. But it was my snowshoe trip in. I had talked to Dorothy about it on one of my canoe trips and, "Oh, yeah!" I thought maybe it'd be a little crazy for somebody to snowshoe in, she said, "When I was younger, I used to do it a lot." Snowshoe in and out. And so, I was making some serious plans a year or two later and I had been prepping my wife for this and I made a little sled, I called it a "wickiup", it's like a little toboggan with sides on it, out of aluminum, with poles on it and a harness to pull it along. And that's what I hauled my gear in, pulled my gear in and stuff. Well, I had even done a little winter camping, just to check it out, see how it would go, what to expect a little bit. Well, after I had been up canoeing and told her that I would bring up some root beer extract for her, she was having a hard time finding, she couldn't find Hire's Root Beer Extract, one of the main ingredients, so she had to substitute with something different. I said, "My mom used to make root beer when I was a kid, I'll look and look for it. I'll look for it." Well, she was right, you can't find it. You couldn't find it anywhere.

**GTR:** No brand, like the grocery story, you know, you see these, like vanilla extract, sometimes there'll be root beer right there.

**RP:** Oh, yeah, not Hire's. She was supplementing with Schilling.

**GTR:** Okay.

**RP:** So, I told my wife, "Well, I've got to get up there." Well, one morning I was laying in bed with the radio on, in the winter, this was in December, and the news came on that Dorothy had passed away. And so I said right then, that, "I'm going. I've got to go." So, I made a few phone calls to find out what was going on up there and the Forest Service said there was family up here now and going through things. And I knew that the Forest Service had a job to do once they got things cleaned up and stuff. And so, I needed some winter pictures of the cabins and the islands and stuff. So, I packed up my gear and headed up there with my dog.

**0:10:29.6**

**GTR:** This was still in January?

**RP:** Well, that was in January. Yes, she'd passed away in December and then, yeah, it took me, I didn't want to just crowd in there, I mean, they're busy up there. Well, I took off across Moose Lake, walking across there and got as far as the end of Ensign and then I spent the night and I got up...

**GTR:** In a cabin?

**RP:** No, no, in the tent.

**GTR:** But on that island, not yet on Knife?

**RP:** No, not yet. It was about four miles; I want to say four, five miles from Dorothy's. Right on the end of Ensign Lake. And got up the next morning and headed across Vera [Lake] and I was still tired from the day before. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Hard work.

**RP:** Yes, it was. [Laughs] It was warm out. That's one thing about it, I was sweating a lot, but I was still tired and a little sore and stiff. I stopped, took a break, sitting there on my little wicki-up, looking back down the lake and here comes a... I see a headlight down on the lake. You know, snowmobiles are restricted. And I'm thinking, "Who is this?" You know, "What are they doing up here?" And then, it comes up to about a quarter mile from me and it turns sideways and stops. And there's two people on it and I'm thinking, "What if it breaks down? What are they doing up here?" At least I've got food and a tent and shelter. Pretty soon, here it comes buzzing over to me. And a guy stops and gets off. I think he was off the machine before it was even stopped. And he says, "I want you to know that we're up here on official business." "Oh, okay, okay." Well, I didn't know what was going on. No cell phones, keep that in mind, no cell phones back there. So, I headed up there in the wilderness with no way of communication. So, here it was John Rosette. I'm sure you've heard that name.

**GTR:** Hmmm, yes. I interviewed Peg.

**RP:** Oh, you know Peg. Oh, what a sweetheart. And Art Kanuti was on the back of the sled. Okay? Well, come to find out the Forest Service had lifted the ban on snowmobiles for a memorial service up there. And they got permission to go in and check the portages out and make sure there weren't any trees down and to clear the trails for the winter routes. And Art's machine broke down, right about near the area where I camped that night. I knew exactly where, in a swamp, they were coming through. Okay. So, we each visited and "Where are you heading?" And I said, "I'm going up to Knife Lake." And they both kind of looked at each other. "Well, whereabouts on Knife Lake?" And I said, "Well, I'm going up to Dorothy's." "Well, you're going the wrong way." I had missed the portage.

**GTR:** Oh!

**RP:** Yeah, that's why they stopped. They were probably scratching their head, "What's this clown doing and where is he going? We better find out. He might get himself in trouble." Well, so, they ended up pulling my little wicki-up, up to Dorothy's and they put an axe in my hand and told me to cut any trees that might be in the way. So, "Okay." [Laughs] Well, they got up there to Dorothy's and the Forest Service was up there cleaning things up and Steve Molter was up there getting the personal items and stuff. So, about the time I got there, Rosett and Kanuti were coming out of the cabin and they were going to head on up Knife Lake farther and go all the way

up to Powells [Lake], which comes in off the Gunflint and check those trails out. So I went into the building and got to meet the Forest Service and Steve Molter and they were very, very nice. I suppose they figured, "Man, if this guy snowshoed all the way in here, he can't be all that bad." You know, but they had a job to do and the plane was coming in and out and picking stuff up and they had to get ready for that. So...

**0:15:09.1**

**GTR:** And actually the smaller personal stuff was packing up and flying out?

**RP:** Yes. Pretty much all of Dorothy's supplies and all of her, you know, she had a lot of stuff. And then the Forest Service, of course, they would get stuff out of there that couldn't be burned, you know, beds and whatever, refrigerators and you know, ice chests, stoves, that stuff all had to go out. So, every time the plane came they made sure that it had a load.

**GTR:** And it would just be wheels at that point? Not float planes? Did they have ski planes?

**RP:** Yes, it was on skis, on the ice. Land on the ice and he would just taxi right up and shut the engine off and they'd load everything up and away they'd go. And, anyway, I offered to help if they needed any help. "Oh, no, no, no." But, "Where are you staying?" And I said, "Well, I've got a tent." "Oh, boy, well, um, you know, you're welcome to stay in Point Cabin if you want. There's nothing left in there, it's all pretty well gutted and cleaned out." But, hey, I thought that would be pretty cool to stay in one of her cabins, even if I just pitched the tent in the cabin. So, no heat, I think, in there, so.

Anyway, they said, "We've got that plane coming in, but stay out of sight because our supervisor, he may pop in at any time." They didn't want to get in trouble, okay? So, I took off and I just kind off walked around on Robin's Island and snowshoed around up in there. Then the plane would come in and I'd watch that plane come in and take off and... So, I came back after a couple hours or whatever it took for the plane to leave. It was, I think, about a forty-five minute round trip for that plane to unload and come back. So, about every forty-five minutes to an hour you'd expect them.

And I got there and Steve Molter and the Forest Service must have talked about this guy. And they said, "You know what? There's two cabins here that still have heat in. The Forest Service is staying in Trapper's Cabin and Steve Molter was staying in Winter Cabin. They must have talked and said, "You know, we'll let this guy stay in Trapper's Cabin." So, the Forest Service moved in for a night or two or whatever it was going to be and talk about hospitality! [Laughs] So, I didn't have to pitch a tent, I just rolled out my sleeping bag in a nice warm cabin.

**GTR:** They were all in there still, too? That's interesting that they'd be staying over night rather than just flying in.

**RP:** Oh, well, yeah, I think they could just get more done if they get up in the morning, make breakfast and go to work.

**GTR:** I suppose.

**RP:** And you never knew what the weather would be like. The plane can't always fly, but they could still keep on working, see.

**GTR:** Was that January?

**RP:** That was in January. So, they probably got started in December and went right to work. So, I didn't know there was going to be a memorial service. When I left my house south of the Cities [Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul] and kissed my wife good-bye and said I was going up there for pictures, had no idea they had lifted the ban on snowmobiles and that they were going to have a memorial service. Well, I got to know John Rosette quite well because he was making trips back and forth and they had all these supplies to bring up there as far as donuts and cookies and they were going to be making coffee and I didn't know what to expect for a crowd, but I think they were expecting a big crowd. So, I said to John, "Say, would you call my wife when you get home and tell her that I'm going to stay another day or two, couple of days until after Sunday." Or whatever. And, "Okay." So, he gets back, calls my wife, now here she's getting a call from a stranger, [Laughs] "Your husband's fine, he's going to stay up there for a couple more days." [Laughs] Probably something she didn't want to hear. But, anyway, I was very fortunate to be able to be there for that.

**GTR:** So, that was on a Sunday that they came in?

**RP:** Yeah, I think so, it was like a Sunday service or something, because then people would be off work and they'd be able to make it up there, but there ended up to be four TV crews, if I remember right. Two from the Cities and two from Duluth that came up there for that.

**0:20:11.7**

**GTR:** On snowmobiles, probably?

**RP:** Yes, snowmobile in, yes.

**GTR:** Wow.

**RP:** They say over 500 snowmobiles.

**GTR:** I've seen a picture; it was like a panorama of the whole...

**RP:** Yes, I've got it here, too, someplace. I brought that stuff out.

**GTR:** Oh, yes, that'd be fun to see. So, what was it like? I've seen the pictures, but...

**RP:** Yeah, well, people started showing up and they set up out on the ice there, tables or just a bench or counter type of thing to set the donuts on and they had a big coffee pots going and people just stood around and you listened to the stories about when they used to up there fishing and go up on snowmobiles and be up there. I talked to one guy and he said, “Oh, before the snowmobiles, we used to take our...” what did they call it, it was like an airplane with a propeller? You know those deals down in Florida that go across the water?

**GTR:** Yes.

**RP:** Well, this was like an airplane fuselage with a propeller on the back and it blew, it just pushed that little thing across the lakes on ice, on skis. But they would bring that up, through the portages, and he said, you always carried an extra prop with you, because if you hit a tree branch, your propeller is going to get destroyed. [Laughs] But it was fun listening to those people telling their stories.

**GTR:** And to be able to be there on snowmobile. Because that was hard for a lot of people, obviously, because they could do that until '84, I believe, and then the snowmobile bans happened, so that was hard for a lot of people if they were used to visiting Dorothy.

**RP:** Yes, it was. Before I went snowshoeing up there I was kind of a treehugger and I'd come up here canoeing and, “There goes that canoe across the lake with the motor on it and we want all this nice quiet .... “. And it kind of bothered me, the noise, the motors and stuff. But then, after I got to meet these people, and how many of these people that used to do that, go up with a little three-horse motor, now they can't. And really, their whole feeling was it's going to become an area for the rich and the young.

[Rustling of papers]

**RP:** Anyway, here's that. (refers to photos) I think there might be three shots, I don't know where I'm at.

**GTR:** There's a circle on that one.

**RP:** Oh! Yes, that would be me. Yup, that's me. [Laughs]



**GTR:** There is quite a crowd there.

**RP:** Yes, and in the background, that's all snowmobiles.

**GTR:** Hmmm. Yes.

**RP:** So, you can see the group of people, the crowd this was, what it was like. And we're all standing around, talking, this and that, and pretty soon we heard Dorothy's snowmobile coming. Put-put-put, put-put-put. That little Polaris. And it was Steve Molter coming back. He had spent the night in town. And when he came around the point there, the whole crowd just moved and the TV cameras and everything just circled

around this snowmobile and then they took her, I think they brought Dorothy's snowmobile suit and kind of laid it on there, too. They were interviewing Steve and oh, boy, everybody is just kind of oooing and ahhhhing about this and all of a sudden the ice cracked!

**GTR:** Oh, no!

**RP:** From the weight of all those people! And there was a foot and a half of ice or better. And everybody just scattered! [Laughs] And then they realized that it was okay and they kind of came back again. [Laughs]

**GTR:** That's a lot of people in one spot! [Laughs]

**RP:** Yeah, it was. So, they just had a nice outing and then there was a pastor or priest or somebody from Ely that came and did a little service for her. And he stood up on a rock and so he kind of had his podium, you know. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Did Steve speak?

**RP:** Steve did, yes. Steve, I remember something he said about Dorothy, that her spirit was still up here and yeah, it was nice. And there were a few tears.

**GTR:** Sure.

**0:25:00.2**

**RP:** Yeah. There was some emotion there.



**GTR:** And you just happened into this.

**RP:** I did. It was just dumb luck.

**GTR:** That's wild.

**RP:** Yeah. And I, you know, staying there, the night before, after all the supplies were brought up and the Forest Service, those guys went home, Steve jumps on his snowmobile and takes off for town, he asked me, "Would you watch the place tonight?" [Laughs] So, I was there all by myself and just, oh, so quiet. The night before that Steve and the Forest Service, after supper, we all gathered out on the ice and around a barrel, like a drum, and Steve invited me to join them and just sit around that and tell stories and he says, "Every night we burn some oil or something that Dorothy had." Just kind of have a fire in that barrel and...

**GTR:** Stay warm.

**RP:** Stay warm, yeah, and you're getting rid of it and it's illuminated and light and it was just nice to have that little glow. And Steve went up to the cabin and came back with some of Dorothy's root beer.

**GTR:** Oh...

**RP:** And so we sat there. Yeah. [Laughs]

**GTR:** It wasn't frozen?

**RP:** Well, she had a cellar.

**GTR:** Oh.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah. In fact, that was one job that they let me do after they got to know me a little bit and they said, "Yeah." And they knew that I wanted to help in some way. So, they said, Steve said, "Would you go, you know where the cellar is?" I said, "Yeah." And, "Clean the cellar out. Get that all out." Well, honestly all the canned goods and all the stuff that she had in there. She ate really well. She had, you know, steak sauce and she had spaghetti sauce and she had just some canned goods that you weren't supposed to have up there.

**GTR:** I suppose, in the Boundary Waters, yeah.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** It wasn't like home canned stuff in jars, it was store bought stuff?

**RP:** Some of it, yes. And, so I got that all cleaned out. Another thing was coffee. She always had a lot of coffee around because she was always serving people and guests and friends and blah,

blah, blah. Well, that was one thing they didn't have to buy for the party, for the service, was coffee. Because she had, I don't know how many cases of three pound cans of coffee, that I carried down to the ice for the plane to haul out.

**GTR:** Wow.

**RP:** Yeah, I mean it was cases and cases.

**GTR:** Folgers or something?

**RP:** Folgers, yep.

**GTR:** So, I suppose every time someone would come up they would bring something and it just accumulated?

**RP:** Right, right. And she would have a list of goods that she needed and anytime the Forest Service flew in there, or whatever, they brought her LP [liquid petroleum gas] for her. Yeah, they'd fly it in in the wintertime, many bottles, several bottles of LP so that she would have that for cooking.

**GTR:** Some people do that on snowmobile, but then when they couldn't do that anymore.

**RP:** That's, exactly. Yeah. So, the Forest Service did help her out a lot, they were good, yeah, they really liked her.

**GTR:** Who were the guys that were there that you stayed with?

**RP:** The Forest Service?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** Well, Jerry Jesilla, was, he was kind of in charge a little bit there. But there were a couple other guys, uh, one gal, I can't remember her name now, it might come to me.

**GTR:** At that point, when they were packing up, just her personal stuff, was there any thought of a museum, or saving the cabins?

**RP:** Well, not me.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** Somebody had a... yeah, it was in the back of somebody's mind. So, after the service and after this was all... Okay, these guys that got permission for them to lift the ban for this one day, they kind of went home. I went home with those guys, John Rosette, and then I ended up forgetting my snowshoes up there.

**GTR:** Oh.

**RP:** Yeah. And so, I got to go back with them the next day. Because, you know, they kind of knew how to kind of milk it out a little bit, you know, [Laughs]. “We don’t want to rush this! We gotta go back and get the coffee and donuts and clean up our party and all that.” So, they allowed them another trip in there. [Both laugh] They were like little kids in a toy box, you know.

**GTR:** The coffee, would they have made that on the stoves then, too? Some of the stoves were still working to make the coffee?

**0:30:01.7**

**RP:** Well, this was all out of the ice, so they might have just set up camp stoves or something. Yeah.

**GTR:** They were there, using that cabin, cleaning it up. Even just the personal, I’ve talked to people who helped dismantle the cabins, but I was wondering who packed up all of the little stuff and the personal stuff? They think maybe it was Steve doing the packing.

**RP:** Steve did, oh, yeah.

**GTR:** And the Forest Service, too.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah. Steve was just kind of going through everything of Dorothy’s there and they had some kind of system that this was family, so that would be separated and taken off. A lot of it went to Tofte Lake, Norm Saari’s place, I remember them talking about that. “This plane load would go to Tofte. And this plane load would go to, I don’t know, the airport, I suppose.” Someplace, I don’t know where they were landing.

**GTR:** Even the stove and stuff that they have at the museum, if that was her actual stove. If they had that foresight of, “So, let’s put this all in one place.”

**RP:** Oh, yeah. Well, I’m sure there was something there that they weren’t going to just haul it to the dump.

**GTR:** Yeah, yeah.

**RP:** Then, I said my goodbyes and headed back home. That was in January. In February, I get a call from John Rosette and he says, “Roger”, he says, “We’ve got permission...” He’s the one that had this in the back of his mind that we’re not going to destroy this, but he wanted to have that party and once that was all done, then he’s going to make some waves. And maybe you know that whole story or some of that history there? Peggy... But John started making phone calls and if he wasn’t getting enough satisfaction here, he went to the next level and to the next level. I think he called Washington, DC! [Laughs] The National Historical Society and, uh, the

Smithsonian, and whatever. He was making phone calls to... He was the one that gets credit for stopping the Forest Service from lighting the match. So, he said, "We got permission to go in and dismantle some cabins. Would you like to come up and help?" I said, "Yeah!" So, I talked to my boss and asked if I could get some time off. "Yeah." And he said the Forest Service will fly us in and fly us out. So, I get up there and flew in and we were going to spend a night or two up there, a couple nights, I can't remember. Anyway, we started taking things apart and Dorothy's winter cabin, we got the porch off. That's as far as we got in those few days. Because every log had to be tagged, you know, labeled, so that they could figure out how to put it back together again.

**GTR:** Yeah. Some of those are still on there.

**RP:** Yeah!

**GTR:** Are they metal?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. The little tags. Yep, yep. [Rustling of papers] I was looking for a picture of Dorothy. Yeah, here's her standing in front of her winter cabin. And we took the front porch off here and then the main cabin, you know, you've been in her cabin there?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** The main cabin has that big heavy door that you go in and you're right into her little kitchen area.

**GTR:** So, there were steps down this way.

**RP:** Yes.

**GTR:** I think at the museum they have it a little bit more straight?

**RP:** Probably.

**GTR:** So, you got that porch out.

**RP:** Yeah, that's just the way it looked when we started taking it down. They had gotten a start on it. Hmmm?

**GTR:** Chainsaw stuff?

**RP:** Oh, no.

**GTR:** How did you...?

**RP:** Pull nails and, they had the windows out of it when I got there, they had already been up there. So, and they had plastic over the holes in the main cabin because that's where we spent the

night. And it seemed to be pretty tedious work. We were with nail pullers and little bars and we just took it easy and saved everything that we could. It was kind of amazing how those cabins were built. These vertical logs here, for instance, in between, are, there's a groove in that log.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah.

**RP:** And a groove in the bottom one. And these logs are shaved down so that they fit in that groove. And then in between each log, there's a groove and then a lathe goes down inside there to block the wind. They're very tight. It was a very tight cabin.

**GTR:** And those would have been built before her time? It was the Bill Berglund.

**RP:** Berglund, yeah.

**GTR:** That's cool.

**RP:** I think he's the one that built them, so he was quite the craftsman.

**GTR:** Nice.

**0:35:00.3**

**RP:** Yes.

**GTR:** So, somebody, John, so then later, they were actually taking stuff down to load it. Were you there during the loading of it onto the sleds?

**RP:** Yes. It was like, well, when I was out there, it was pretty much planned on the dogs, sled dogs, were going to take all the cabins out. That was like in February. And, come March, I get another call from John Rosette. [Laughs] He said, "The dogs..." I'm getting ahead of myself now. After I left, John got a real crew out there that could really commit to a whole week or whatever, instead of a day here and a day there. And they went up there and, according to what I was told, the Forest Service said, "Whatever you get down in, say two weeks", or whatever time frame they gave them. The Forest Service will make sure those cabins are out. Whatever you get down laying on the shore. So, dogs were going to go to work and start taking on." And then the weather... So, John went to work, he got a crew up there and got three cabins down.

**GTR:** In a week like?

**RP:** Yeah! [Laughs] Or whatever time it was. He really went to work, yeah. So, now the Forest Service is looking at, "Wow, those guys are good workers. Little beavers, busy beavers, they got a lot done!" [Laughs] And the dogs weren't keeping up. And then the weather got warm. And what I was told was that the portages turned muddy and rocky and just no snow and then the lakes were slush and at night it would freeze and then the dogs were cutting their feet. I don't know if John, what's his name, that?

**GTR:** Pierce.

**RP:** Pierce. Did he mention any of that?

**GTR:** A little bit, just that it wasn't working out.

**RP:** Yeah, okay. I don't want to be saying something that wasn't true, but this is what I heard, see? So, John calls me and said that the dogs... it's just too warm and they're lifting the ban again on motors and will allow ATVs and snowmobiles up there. He said, "Would you want to bring yours?" I said, "Yeah, I'll bring it up." So, I had a four-wheeler. And we got up there, and this was March, and I can't remember how many people showed up for that. It was maybe, I don't know, fifteen, twenty people? It was fun, though. They showed up, everybody was just like kids again. "We get to go up there with motors! With motorized vehicles!" [Laughs]

And they came with everything imaginable, portage wheels, there were a lot of people with portage wheels, small boat trailers, small single snowmobiles, whatever was small enough so a machine could pull it and they could haul something on it. They came and we got up to Dorothy's, we went to Point Cabin first, that's where I loaded up, on a snowmobile trailer, somebody's snowmobile trailer, and I got the four corner posts on the first load. And that was a load. Yep, that was the load for that machine to pull. Well, it ends up to be, I think I had probably, you might say, the biggest machine there, or capable of pulling. There were a lot of three-wheelers back then, very few four-wheelers. Otherwise, three-wheeler just goes on its end, you know, it does a wheelie, more likely to.

So, we were making everything work, make this adjustment, make that adjustment, switch this thing around, switch that thing around, and we made it. Well, we start across the portages, and we had a heck of a time. We got over to, we went all the way out back to Moose Lake that first trip and unloaded, gassed up, and then people came up with a different... "We've got to do something different, this is not working good." So, somebody came up with the idea that, we, the wheelers work at getting the logs to Ensign Lake, if I remember right. Ensign is a long lake, and it took us a long time to get across that lake. If we just start shuttling from Dorothy's to Ensign, back and forth, two to three, four portages, whatever it was, and drop the logs off and go back. The snowmobiles can make better time on the lakes. So, they would come and load up and scoot it across that way. So, we made a lot better progress that way. And, of course, the TV cameras were there again. I think there were one or two from Duluth. And then that was on the news. People saw what was going on and we had lots of help the next day. [Laughs] More people came.

And we had no problem getting all the cabins out. Just maybe a couple pieces were left at the end of the day. If that was a Sunday, or, I can't remember what the last day was, but in two days, we had those cabins out.

**0:40:37.9**

**GTR:** Wow.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** It seems like it would be, was it fun and people were excited?

**RP:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** People were using their machines.

**RP:** Yes, it was really exciting. There were times on the one portage... And the more we used the portages, the rougher they got. I would be pulled, at times I would be pulled by two three-wheelers ahead of me. Yeah. With ropes, one was ahead of the other guy and the other guy was pulling me with my trailer just to get those logs over those portages.

**GTR:** Was it getting slushy?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. It was just mud. It was mud. And there's a picture of me with my coveralls on and I'm just totally mud because the three-wheeler in front of me was just throwing mud back at me! [Both laugh] And there's a picture Norm Saari took of me, I think it was at the end of the day, and Han Ensign, and we took a break there and it was getting almost toward dark and he took a picture of me and he titled it, "Roger and his manure spreader". [Laughs] Because I looked like I had been through a manure spreader. [Laughs]

**GTR:** That'd be cool to see. Have you showed those to Sarah at the museum?

**RP:** No, I haven't.

**GTR:** There are a few pictures in the book. Have you seen the bigger book?

**RP:** No, I'll have to go up there.

**GTR:** Ah, I wish I would have brought a copy, I didn't today. They have it at the public library, but I don't know where they would sell it in town. But Sarah, at the museum, did a really good job. It's this book with photos and scans of some of the Forest Service letters and there're a couple pictures. Yeah, I didn't bring it today. Sometimes I bring it to...

**RP:** Well, I'll come across that stuff. I looked for a little bit this morning. You know, I came up with this stuff and this is my, actually, this is my story of my snowshoeing into the BWCA.

**GTR:** How nice.

**RP:** They have it up there. So, if you ever want to get your hands on it.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** I was just reading it when you came to the door to refresh my memory a little bit.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** [Laughs]

**GTR:** Well, sometimes when doing these interviews, people realize, “Yeah, I’ve got these photos and other things.”

**RP:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** And it’s not really for me, because I’m just doing the interview part, but to encourage people to share copies with Sarah. They’re really liking any little piece of the story that can help tell...

**RP:** Somebody took these pictures of me when I was up there two or three years ago, they called and ask me, I think it was Peggy, probably, oh yeah, the date... that they were going to have an open house thing and asked if I’d... “Oh, gosh, yeah. I wouldn’t miss something like that if I didn’t have to.”

**GTR:** Oh, that’s fun.

**RP:** And it was just fun telling my story a little bit. Maybe that Sarah was there and she seemed to be really interested in asking me a few questions.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** She seems to be doing a good job up there.

**GTR:** Yeah, she’s really active. Well, that’s great. They just had that, this last weekend. Donuts at Dorothy’s. Donuts with Dorothy. The last, like this time of year.

**RP:** Okay.

**GTR:** It’s encouraging.

**RP:** Well, who’s that gal there?

**GTR:** It’s this board member. I have not met her.

**RP:** Okay. That’s the one that was asking me so many questions.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.



**RP:** And that's John Rosette's youngest daughter.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**RP:** Laurie.

**GTR:** I should take a picture, if you don't mind. Where's my camera? Yeah, that's great. I haven't met any of the board members I've just known Sarah, who was just interested in getting more oral histories done. They had done them way back, years ago, maybe like ten, twelve years ago.

**RP:** Okay.

**GTR:** They talked to Jerry Jussila, but I guess those didn't have the best sound quality, or something. So, they just wanted to do some more. It's always fun to just hear the fun stories, the color that maybe the tour guides hadn't heard before so they can share those little things.

**RP:** Sure, well, good, good.

**GTR:** Did John have a sense of what was going to be done with these materials, or he was just, "We have to just not let this be burned."?

**RP:** Right. Yeah, "Let's get it out of here and then figure it out." But I think they had something, like putting it up over at the Chamber [of Commerce].

**GTR:** Hmmm.

**0:45:02.2**

**RP:** That's what they had in mind. And I think it was all starting to develop a little bit and this guy had this idea and that person has that idea and, "Wouldn't it look nice here right by the Chamber?" Because the Chamber is logs, you know, and the tourists can see it and all that. Well, they called it "Honeymoon Cabin" or "Cady Cabin"? Have you heard any of that?

**GTR:** Yeah, I've heard that.

**RP:** Okay. That was one of the three. And that one, I was told, was going to go, hopefully to Canada, to the Canadian side, customs. Because she was very, you know, she knew the Canadians well there. And I don't think it ever happened. Last I heard it was still in a warehouse at the airport. [Laughs] I don't know if it is or not, but...

**GTR:** I don't know for sure either. They have a little display set up about Bob Cary up there and it's like half a cabin, so I don't know what that was about or where that's from.

**RP:** Oh, okay.

**GTR:** It sounds like people's attitude at that time was just fun... (phone ringing).

**RP:** Oh, absolutely.

[Phone ringing]

**GTR:** And being happy that the Forest Service let them do that, at that point?

**RP:** Right.

**GTR:** Because otherwise, your thoughts on how she was treated then, by that whole Federal...

[Phone ringing]

**RP:** I'm sorry.

**GTR:** No, that's okay.

[Pause as answering machine picked up]

**GTR:** So, your thoughts on how Dorothy was treated by the federal government or that federal process?

**RP:** Oh, yeah, well, [sigh] I guess, more of what I have heard from the local people more than anything. You know, Dorothy and I had never discussed it. I wasn't, at the time, I wasn't really up on it. I knew that they had banned motors, and of course, like I told you, I was kind of a tree-hugger, so probably when it happened, I was probably thinking, "Good, now it's going to be quiet up there." You know? But after getting to know the locals and how they lost that part of it, their access and all the good times and fun things they had, memories and stuff, what are you going to do? You listen to them and they say, you know, "If you're old, you're not going to get up here any more." And there's a lot of truth to that.

**GTR:** Yeah, it's hard.

**RP:** I guess after, I think it's probably pretty well healed over by now, but I guess, at the time I was thinking, "Well, you know, why couldn't they just leave the corridor open?" You know, and just allow people to motor in and out of there and if the people want quiet, then they just get off that end and go a lake or two away from it. There could have been, possibly, a little compromise there.

**GTR:** Yeah. Dorothy being able to stay as long as she did.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** People, it seems that people really like that piece of the story; that she was able to stay at the end of her life.

**RP:** Yes.

**GTR:** And didn't end up in town somewhere or something.

**RP:** Right.

**GTR:** I'm sure being there, though, she wasn't that old, you know, so people thinking like maybe she had more years left or just that sadness of, you know, because if you had seen her in that summer in '86, did it seem like she was slowing down?

**RP:** No, not really, I mean, she was slowing down. She wasn't moving around, but she could still carry water from the lake and she might be a little more hunched over but she could work, boy. Last time I saw her, we stopped to visit her on our way out, my nephew and I were up there canoeing that year. And just stopped to say good-bye and well, she was busy working on a fishing, landing net and she was trying to get that thing threaded around that hoop and her fingers were, she had arthritis, and she was struggling there a little bit, but she had all the time in the world and patience and, but anyway, I helped her with that and she was very appreciative of that. And, so, that was the last time I saw her.

**0:50:14.8**

**GTR:** What would be your most lasting memory of her, when you think of Dorothy, what do you think of?

**RP:** Hmm. [Sigh] Well, I guess it would be, of course, my last time I saw her, that's the last. But, her ducks.

**GTR:** Oh.

**RP:** Yeah, those ducks. She loved feeding her ducks and she would talk to them and throw corn and throw grain at them and you know? I canoed up there for several years afterwards, and those ducks were there for two years.

**GTR:** Oh.

**RP:** They were still hanging around her place there.

**GTR:** Oh.

**RP:** Yeah! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Even though her cabins were gone. Well, I guess they didn't care about cabins.

**RP:** No, no! [Laughs]

**GTR:** I suppose, I didn't think about that.

**RP:** She might have had, at times, there might have been twenty or thirty ducks that were on there.

**GTR:** All sorts?

**RP:** Mallards. Yeah, pretty much mallards.

**GTR:** Yeah, that was a lot of work to get that corn up there.

**RP:** Oh! Yeah, and Rosette, he would tell me, "Yeah, in the wintertime, they'd throw that stuff on the sleds." And away they go. Dorothy Molter day! You know, and people would pack up stuff and help her cut ice and bring supplies up and he drug a refrigerator up there one winter on a sled for her. He was always fixing something and talk about a wiz when it came to motors. So, if she had a boat motor there she was having problems with, John could get her fixed, no doubt about it. Snowmobile, or whatever, but he was a wiz at that stuff.

**GTR:** Why do you think he was so adamant about saving, or just a good friend, or just why?

**RP:** Oh, saving the cabins?

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** Oh, he just, wisdom, yeah, good old friend, been going up there for many years. Knowing that she was the last. His heart, big hearted. It was a project, John liked projects! [Laughs] It was a combination of a lot of things.

**GTR:** That's great. What would be the most important thing for future generations to know or remember about Dorothy or that place? Any idea? What would you want kids to know about that place?

**RP:** Yeah. Well, the solitude, that's one thing. Oh, it's so peaceful up there. In the winter, it's just quiet.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** Well, there are birds in the winter, of course, she fed them. The pine trees are just gorgeous, straight up and down, reaching the sky on that island. Yeah. Nestled in there.

**GTR:** They're still there.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Have you been there since?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. Some of them have fallen. They've had storms up there. One, I think, dropped right where her bedroom was. [Laughs] Just wham! Um, I guess, how the layout of the islands and how she was so protected in the wintertime from the north and that little bay there, that cute little cove or bay comes right around the cabin, she was protected on all three sides. So, it was cozy.

**GTR:** A cozy little spot.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** So, it can be really cozy and comfortable in the wilderness.

**RP:** Yeah, right? Right? The bridges from one island to the other. Oh, gosh.

**GTR:** How deep was the water? I can't quite picture bridges.

**RP:** Yeah, right. Well, you could wade it, if you wanted to. Yeah, it was rocky. You could see bottom, but what they did was, they built cribs, what they call a crib.

**GTR:** Oh, okay, yeah.

**RP:** And the logs, criss-cross the logs, and then fill it full of rocks to sink it and then they'd put the bridge from one crib to the next crib to get across.

**GTR:** Did the Forest Service take those out, too?

**RP:** Oh, yes.

**GTR:** They were trying to get rid of all traces.

**RP:** Yes, they took everything. There were a couple of logs left in there for a few years; you could see them in there. They're pretty well gone now.

**GTR:** Sounds like there might still be a dump somewhere though, still.

**RP:** A dump?

**GTR:** Yeah, maybe.

**RP:** Oh, I found them!

**GTR:** Back in the brush.

**RP:** I found them, but not on the islands.

**GTR:** Back on the mainland, yeah.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** So, the Forest Service, couldn't, didn't clean all that out.

**RP:** Well, this was when Dorothy was still alive.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**RP:** So, I suppose, over the years, maybe not Dorothy, maybe her dad, or Berglund, or who knows could have had an old burnt out stove that was no good and took it out. But at least they didn't dump it in the lake.

**GTR:** Right, yeah.

**0:55:14.5**

**GTR:** That's what everyone says, "I've got an old dump on my land." Throw it out in the woods.

**RP:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** But I even wondered when the Forest Service was cleaning everything up just kind of buried some stuff.

**RP:** Oh, no! I don't think this time they did.

**GTR:** They took everything out?

**RP:** No, I think they took everything out. They kind of got in trouble, I was told by one of the Forest Service, that when Benny Ambrose, up the lake farther, when he passed away, they went in and cleaned things up and oh gosh, "Get rid of it, get rid of it." Right in the lake it went. And somebody, either spotted it or a supervisor came up there and those guys got in trouble, "You get it out of there!"

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** They left like a chimney there or rock or something?

**RP:** Yeah, I guess so, for Benny's, yeah. I think John Rosette told me that they had left a chimney that he built, of course. But then for liability, or for safety reasons, I think they blew it. I think they put a stick of dynamite in it so somebody wouldn't get hurt.

**GTR:** It was just rocks or something.

**RP:** Yeah. Because there are people who are going to want to take a rock and, "Oh, this one's loose, I'm going to take this one home with me." Pretty soon it's falling down.

**GTR:** I always wondered about the gardens there, like the story that he brought in dirt?

**RP:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** And so there's still be pretty good dirt there.

**RP:** Probably!

**GTR:** I wonder if there're still flowers? Perennials? That'd be kind of cool.

**RP:** I head he brought dirt in from Iowa. [Laughs]

**GTR:** That's some commitment.

**RP:** Oh, boy, is it.

**GTR:** Anything about how you hope Dorothy will be remembered? People say, "Root Beer Lady, that doesn't encompass everything that she did." Or is there a certain way that you hope people would remember her?

**RP:** Yeah, well, I guess, just, you can see videos of her. And her voice, just her soft spoken, yeah, it was just fun to listen to her talk.

**GTR:** So, she was the same with everyone? She was just very relaxed?

**RP:** Yes.

**GTR:** One person said she would just hold out her hands and just greet people and talk with her hands.

**RP:** Yeah, she did that. And she liked to sit over by her woodpile, I mean, we're talking her summer island, you know. Summer cabin, and that was just a tent, a double walled tent, just pole frame, wood pole frame. She had bunk beds in there, a bunk bed. But she would sit outside there, close to her woodpile and she, I don't know if it was a stump or a barrel or a pale or something

that she would sit on, but she liked to sit on that and sometimes cross her leg and visit with people.

**GTR:** It would be an interesting life to have lots of people and then no people, that combination of time.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** So, why did you always go back to that area? What was the draw for you?

**RP:** Well, Dorothy was the main draw. Just to go back and see her. And I always just loved the route. I loved the scenery. It was a little bit different than Sawbill. I don't know, Sawbill, to me seemed to be more, just barren or rocky, more exposed rock, where I think over there around Knife, there're more trees. I don't know.

**GTR:** Yeah, I know there are some very different areas. I've never actually been up Knife, I don't think, but I've been up to lots of areas, but not that one. Yeah, that's a great spot. In the winter, your winter visit was a little different than you expected, right? You expected real quiet, kind of a pilgrimage to her place.

**RP:** Yeah, yeah. It ended up being very busy. [Laughs] But it was fine. It sure turned out good.

**GTR:** Yeah. Later connections... That's great.

**RP:** Went up many years later snowmobiling with John Rosette, not up there, not up to the Boundary Waters, of course, but after getting to know him, I got to know the people around there, Art Kanuti and many others. A good bunch of people.

**GTR:** I don't know when he passed away, do you know what year that would have been?

**RP:** Oh, wow, maybe 1995, maybe?

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**RP:** I'm guessing. I'd say ten years.

**1:00:14.8**

**GTR:** Peg still gives tours at the museum.

**RP:** Yeah, oh.

**GTR:** She's fun. It was fun to talk to her. Definitely. I always wondered, or other people, too, if they almost thought of Dorothy as like an aunt or grandma or something. Just loved to visit that place and then couldn't imagine it being burned or something, you know, because you just have



this attachment to this place. That just felt like an honor thing. I wonder if that was part of some people's feeling.

**RP:** Yeah, that could be.

**GTR:** She was a good friend. I know I wouldn't want someone to burn my grandma's house.

**RP:** No, I know. But you know, everybody knew it. They knew any kind of history there, that she got to stay there as long as she wanted to and after that, that was part of the agreement, it's the Forest Service. And they did that with everybody else, too, if they didn't move the resorts out, they burned them.

**GTR:** Yeah, Park Service, too.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Well, anything else that I didn't ask? I don't think I asked your year of birth, usually they have that in oral history interviews.

**RP:** Mine?

**GTR:** Yes.

**RP:** 2-2-'53.

**GTR:** Okay.

**RP:** Groundhog's Day.

**GTR:** Oh, yes. '53. So, you were twenty when you met her, about? College? You said college age or so, when you first met Dorothy?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, right.

**GTR:** It's so interesting that you were going to be bringing root beer, or you were going to try, you didn't have any root beer concentrate when you heard that she passed away.

**RP:** No.

**GTR:** Because you couldn't find it?

**RP:** Not the Hire's.

**GTR:** Okay, so she wanted Hire's specifically, not any other brand.

**RP:** She wanted the Hire's. I've got a bottle of my mother's Hire's. Still in the bottle. It's like Jell-o. It's all dried up.

**GTR:** I've heard different stories from people, that she got something from A & W [restaurant] even?

**RP:** Oh.

**GTR:** Or there were different places.

**RP:** Yeah, she told me that she even tried, being from Chicago, she even tried down in Chicago, poking around and stuff, couldn't find it.

**GTR:** Wow. Just lake water, I wonder if that gave it that special flavor.

**RP:** That's the main, that's the key, that's the secret ingredient. No doubt about it, Knife Lake water! [Laughs]

**GTR:** And it wasn't boiled or anything, either, was it? It was just in there.

**RP:** No, yeah.

**GTR:** I think they have a bottle in the Forest Service office in Ely. And I wonder if it was, I don't know how, because there would have been some left when she passed away.

**RP:** Oh, yeah, sure. Somebody might have gotten one.

**GTR:** It had a little sticker on it, though, that looked like it was computer printed, not a formal one, but like a home computer printed.

**RP:** Okay.

**GTR:** You don't remember labels or anything?

**RP:** No. No. Her pop bottles could have been any kind of bottle. It could have been a Coca-Cola bottle, could have been a Crush orange, or you know, it just all varied. And like I said, my mom used to make root beer when I was a kid and I used to cap it and, yeah.

**GTR:** And the yeast.

**RP:** Yeah. And have the Red Wing crock.

**GTR:** It would brew in the crock rather than in the bottles?

**RP:** No, you pretty much mix it all up and there was probably a little ritual of it, you know, you put all your ingredients and you stirred it. I remember stirring it, stirring it. Maybe you had to let it sit for an hour or two so that everything gets together. But you put it in, cap it and then you let it age for a couple weeks, is ideal. And that's when the yeast and the (bubbles), yeah.

**GTR:** Someone said sometimes people wouldn't want to wait in the summer, how she'd be keeping up...

**RP:** Oh, I'm sure it was hard for her. [Laughs]

**GTR:** She'd not have long enough to age.

**RP:** Right.

**GTR:** Well, it would have been great to see. I'm sure that the, something cold and sweet in the summer would have been good. Did she sell candy bars?

**RP:** Oh, yeah. She sold candy bars in her little tent there.

**GTR:** People went into the tent to buy it? It always seems interesting to me.

**RP:** Yeah, she would let you come in. Some people were a little bashful. It wasn't like a store, you know. She just had a few boxes of maybe Snickers and Butterfinger, Hershey Bars, that stuff. And she, I don't think she was into chips and, that's too bulky of stuff.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** But she had a few camping supplies. Maybe spatulas, and mantels for a Coleman lantern, or something like that, she had a few things that maybe people would, "Gosh, forgot that. Or lost it."

**GTR:** That's nice. I didn't know she did that. So, that still would have been the "donation" at that point, because she wasn't supposed to be officially selling things?

**RP:** Oh, yeah, I suppose. [Both laugh]

**1:05:22.1**

**GTR:** That would work. That's cool. Yeah, it does seem interesting to me that she wouldn't have something set up somewhere (else), that it was actually in her tent where she was staying. That people would go in there.

**RP:** Hmmm-hmmm.

**GTR:** It seems like she didn't have the privacy thing, it was just was of her island, and "Everyone come on in."

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Did you ever get mailings, at all? People talk about her Christmas letters?

**RP:** No, no I didn't. No.

**GTR:** They have those, those are collected in the book, too, if you want to see those. They are fun, written from the perspective of animals and birds.

**RP:** Oh, yeah, yeah, I've read some of them.

**GTR:** Those are fun.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Why do you think she stayed so long? That's one question I didn't get to.

**RP:** Oh, yeah. She just, I suppose, she got to love the area up there, she just lost interest in Chicago or whatever, and just got to like the area more and more all the time and, "Why would I want to leave?" [Laughs]

**GTR:** Home.

**RP:** It's home, yeah. But she would, you know, go for a little bit in the wintertime, maybe go to Chicago and visit family and stuff. So, she would get away a little.

**GTR:** Yeah, I was surprised. It sounds like she got around in the winter. She got to Arizona; she visited someone in Arizona.

**RP:** Really? Okay.

**GTR:** Bob Cotton, I think, maybe. Somebody that she'd known who would visit in the winter and then he was in Arizona, so she went to Arizona.

**RP:** Oh, okay. Bob, I got to know him a little bit. Met him up there canoeing. Yeah, real nice guy.

**GTR:** Yeah, he's around, for sure.

**RP:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Still up there. Don Beland, I interviewed, too.

**RP:** Is Bob Cotton still around?

**GTR:** Yes.

**RP:** He is!? He's got to be getting up there, too.

**GTR:** Everyone, pretty much everyone, except for you, was born in about 1933, 1934.

**RP:** Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** So, they're all about that age now. Bob has a cabin up there, I guess, not in the summer, he's still in Illinois in the winter.

**RP:** Oh, okay, yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah, he's getting around and Don is getting around.

**RP:** He's up in his eighties, then. Yeah, boy. I remember one time I was coming out of there on one of the portages I was heading toward the landing and we could hear something, out of site, but we could hear canoes bumping and thumping and some voices and pretty soon, up over the bank comes the canoe and a couple of guys and here it was Bob Cotton. And here they didn't portage, they'd ford the river. A lot easier!

**GTR:** [Laughs] I suppose.

**RP:** After I saw that and visited with him and stuff, there were maybe only one or two portages you have to portage, and otherwise, you can just drag your canoe up. That's what I do now.

**GTR:** That's because of the water levels, right?

**RP:** Oh, absolutely, yeah.

**GTR:** It's kind of low right now. We were just up and went to Lake One with the kids and it was pretty low.

**RP:** Yeah, really? Well, we're short on rain.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**RP:** And if you've had a lot of rain, it's too swift. [Laughs]

**GTR:** So, great. This has been a fun project for me to remember being in the Boundary Waters, I used to spend more time there.

**RP:** Hmmm, yeah.

**GTR:** Well, I'll stop this. Thank you!

**1:08:47.4**



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrator:**

John Pierce (b. 1963) - **JP**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes - **GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

Recorded July 28, 2015  
Duluth, MN

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing John Pierce on July 28, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History Project.... Can we start by you saying your name and when you first came to know Dorothy?

**JP:** Okay, this is John Pierce and as I mentioned as a YMCA Camp Widjiwagan camper in 1977, our little group stopped by at the Isle of Pines for, most likely, just root beer. I was impressed with all the paddles and the pretty rock and stuff like that.

**GTR:** How old were you?

**JP:** Fourteen.

**GTR:** You were born in what year?

**JP:** '63.

**GTR:** We need that for oral history. What do you remember? You said the paddles. Did you talk to her or have any interaction?

**JP:** Not really, no. I think I was just with that little group of kids and the counselor and we got there and that was a big highlight in the middle of the ten-day trip just to get some root beer.

**GTR:** Something sweet.

**JP:** Yep, some cold root beer and I guess I didn't even understand what was going on, I didn't know how she cooled the root beer or anything else, but anyway, I got the impression that it was just a stopover for a lot of people.

**GTR:** Did your leader say, "Wow, we're going to go to this really cool place!"

**JP:** Oh, yeah, he got us fired up about it, yeah.

**GTR:** I suppose they had gone fairly often. The leaders would...

**JP:** Probably, when they were in that neck of the woods, yep.

**GTR:** So, then how else? When did you next encounter [Dorothy]?

**JP:** So, that would have been working for the Voyager Outward Bound School in about 1985. Actually, it would have been, let's see, she passed away in March of '86, or when did she pass away?

**GTR:** It was late '86, I believe, because it was in the fall.

**JP:** Late '86, it was in the fall. So, actually, it was in the fall of '86. We were there to, we were doing a service project, this Outward Bound group, and I was one of the Outward Bound leaders and so we went and visited with Dorothy, and we then would take off and go to other parts of the forest to just cut up a bunch of downed trees and haul them back to her place and just getting winter wood put up for her, is what we did. And that was really nice, because we were the only ones there. It was September. It was September. So, it had to have been '85. I'm missing, uh, yeah, well anyway.

**GTR:** Well, it could have been '86? Not because you weren't there.

**JP:** Well, if it was '86...

**GTR:** She passed away, it was like, December.

**JP:** It was '86. Yeah, it was '86, for sure. And, anyway, beautiful fall days. Our group were the only people there so we got to just hang out with her and B.S. with her and she'd make us coffee and she was real casual. I remember that she mentioned that all summer, she felt like a tape recording, in that what she would do is that she would answer the three basic questions, which were, "Where are the bears?" because that's what everyone wanted to know. And, "What's the weather going to do?" and "How far is it to Ely? Or Moose Lake?" And so that was, she said she felt like a tape recorder all summer long.

**GTR:** I suppose she'd have the same conversation.

**JP:** Yeah, yeah. But that was fun. It was casual and she was in good spirits and it was nice to just hang out there in the beautiful fall.

**GTR:** Did you end up staying there?

**JP:** Yes, we stayed, let's see. I think we camped near by. Yes, I'm pretty sure we just took a campsite near by. We didn't stay in one of the cabins.

**GTR:** Okay. Your group would have been big for those cabins, maybe?



**JP:** Well, yes, there's probably a total of eight of us or something.

**GTR:** So, you were splitting wood, putting wood up for her. Anything else that you were doing around the place?

**JP:** No, not that time. That was it.

**GTR:** Not root beer that time?

**JP:** Nope. So, nothing with root beer. There was, uh, I can't remember what she had going on with that. Whether the ice and saw dust had already given out for the year, or whatever. I can't remember if she was still selling it or doing anything with it at that time of year, in September.

**GTR:** Nothing cold.

**0:05:10.7**

**JP:** Kind of late September.

**GTR:** Yeah, that's true.

**JP:** It was a great trip though; we had a lot of nice people, a couple of moose, in two different campsites. Running moose, kind of ran us off our campsites, so it was an exciting trip.  
[Laughter]

**GTR:** I was just explaining one of those to my kids. I had to. We had one once. Fun. So, with Outward Bound, if you go back to then, you said you had a service project. Was there a formal, what was the relationship with Outward Bound and Dorothy? Was that a common thing that they would do projects?

**JP:** I think so. I don't know when it started. It's kind of like, for Outward Bound, to incorporate service projects, at least in all of their longer trips. But, let's see, in the winter of '84 I was with some people that skied from Moose Lake to Kekakabec and we went through Knife [Lake] and I remember following, the only tracks out there were these dog sled tracks. And then they would go off of the route, or at least the route that the summer people would take. So, this was one of my first winter camping trips and didn't really understand that there were winter routes. So, I put it together later and so, of course, there's really good winter routes up to Dorothy's, probably has been for some time and the person doing that was a guy named Dave Oleson, who also, for a while worked for Outward Bound and got the sled dog program started there. And so, he would, I believe, associated with Outward Bound, or maybe just on his own, would run supplies up to Dorothy in the winter. And so, I didn't really understand any of that at the time, but that was another route, where I went through that way and I'd finally realize what was going on later. So, it was kind of neat.

**GTR:** I've seen a formal, the "Dorothy Molter Plan", or something that was a Forest Service thing, like, how she's going to be supplied, how we're going to deal with this... Written sometime in the mid '80s.

**JP:** Hmmm.

**GTR:** So, they just felt this was something they could do and a connection with her.

**JP:** With Outward Bound, yes, it worked out perfect for them, especially once they... So, I imagine Dave might have been the first person to do it, associated with Outward Bound, since he started the dog program there, but then, and then, of course, it only went on a few more years until she passed away. But that's just something that Dorothy's was a perfect thing for Outward Bound to do resupplies. And I imagine, I mean, once it became non-mechanized. Because I think the snowmobiles, I think, were allowed on Knife [Lake] until '82. So, the Wilderness Act was '78 and for some reason snowmobiles could still continue on Knife until '82 and my guess is that she always got resupplied by all her friends using snowmobiles but then it went non-motorized and the dogs picked it up there for a while.

**GTR:** So, that would have been a huge change, I can imagine. I interviewed people who were snowmobile visitors, and suddenly they couldn't. I'm sure she had... What was she like at that age, would she have had a different relationship with snowmobilers versus dog sledgers or, would she have, or was she just happy to talk to whomever?

**JP:** Well, my guess, is that the people who had been using snowmobiles up until that time, and a lot of them, just because I've talked to them, had really great relationships with her and just loved going there. Of course, they were probably going there to fish a lot, but I'm sure stopping in there was routine and whether they rented a cabin or she just let them stay there, that was just part of what they were able to do and so they, of course, have very fond memories of that.

**GTR:** So, you didn't do the winter ones? You just did that fall one?

**JP:** Well, up until when she passed away and then we went up and I was with that crew that pulled out one of the cabins by dog team.

**GTR:** Yeah. Tell me about that. It sounds like quite a process.

**JP:** Well, that whole thing was my first winter working Outward Bound with the dogs, and so, really, at that time, Outward Bound has a real, you know, using dogs and having students and all this, and I think having a dog program, in hindsight, I don't think they understood, or they didn't fully embrace the capabilities of dog teams. So, typically our biggest dog teams were, like, six dog teams, which, maybe we bumped it up to eight for hauling out those cabin logs. And also we didn't really have sleds designed for that kind of work. So, it was slow going, but it was great because there were a couple local guys up there, maybe three. There was a, I think, a Haapala and John Rosette. And they were taking the cabins apart and then there were a couple of Forest Service people up there hanging out. That was Pete Wickman and Trudy, um, I don't remember

what her last name was. And then our Outward Bound crew, so, it was fun. There were still cabins up and so, everybody was staying in a cabin and then one cabin was coming down and we would just, of course, make those round trip runs to Moose Lake.

**0:11:00.8**

**JP:** I remember one night, there had been a really big snow storm, which, of course, then drifts in your trail and makes it a lot harder to do that work, especially by dogs and, you know, I think in the middle of the night we heard something, and we went out the next morning and there were fresh snowmobile tracks and I think a couple bottles of whiskey or something? So, people were keeping us going.

**GTR:** Near Dorothy's?

**JP:** Oh, well, they just came out from Moose Lake, on the winter route, that we were using, but it was all drifted in after this big snow, and they just buzzed around the island and went back and provided that trail, and uh, so, I don't remember how many of us there were, somewhere between six and eight, and it was March, so I think by then most of the Outward Bound courses slowed down so there was staff available. And so, it was a big effort and as far as I know, we got most of one cabin out.

**GTR:** Which one were you focused on at that point? There was the Winter Cabin and there was the...

**JP:** Good question. So, if you were on the east side of the island and where the main landing was...

**GTR:** There's a map here, somewhere if you want.

**JP:** Let's see. I don't remember if it was the first cabin on the right or the first cabin on the left.

**GTR:** So, it was just one of them, none that you were staying in.

**JP:** I'm sure they have it somewhere, chronicled on which one came out first.

**GTR:** Yeah. There might be pictures here of dog sleds, actually, if you want to see.

**JP:** When was that one published?

**GTR:** Let's see, this is fairly recent.

**JP:** Is it?

**GTR:** Yes.

**JP:** Okay. Anyway.

**GTR:** There's the picture.

**JP:** Yeah, that's the one. Yes. So, I don't know if it says, yeah, there's Rosette and Haapala, and there he is. Outward Bound crew... [Reading] So, we stayed in the Trapper's Cabin and we dismantled and took out... It doesn't say. I'm not sure.

**GTR:** Are you in there?

**JP:** Yeah, yeah, right there.

**GTR:** Okay.

**JP:** Yeah. And gal was from Europe. He had been to the North Pole with [Will] Steger the year before.

**GTR:** [unclear] and Bob.

**JP:** Yeah. Bob (unclear, Mantell?

**GTR:** He looks like Andy to me, but it's not.

**JP:** No, it's not Andy. [Laughs] Anyway, that was a great time. Oh, let's see the dogs, see if those are the ones. Yeah. So, anyway, we...

**GTR:** You know those dogs?

**JP:** Um, I couldn't name them now. Between now and then, there's been many other dogs, but you can see... Well, no, there's still a line going, so maybe we had eight dogs, but since working there at Outward Bound, I ended up working for Will Steger for four years after that and learned that the capabilities of dogs are a lot more than we knew of at the time we were hauling that cabin out. [Laughs] So, that was fun.

**GTR:** You just have little, well, that's probably not the sled. Just little regular sleds?

**JP:** Yeah, and then, I think one large one was built, but the whole design was wrong for what we were doing is what I realized later. But then, of course, this part was pretty exciting, too, and I don't know what... I was just talking about that today with my friends a work and we were trying to figure out...

**GTR:** This is the weather, yeah, March 8<sup>th</sup>, it got warm.

**JP:** And then, but what I was wondering, what authorized, there it is, approvals granted.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah.

**JP:** So, that was approved, and I wondered at what level of approval it was. Um, to let all that, all the ATVs and snowmobiles go up in the winter. I wondered if it had to be like a Congressional approval. All right, it just says Forest Service granted approval. Which is pretty slick. Because, you know, the Wilderness Act of '78 is pretty strict on what can and cannot occur and that's an act of Congress, so, to allow the rest of those cabins to come out, by ATV and snowmobile, because it looks like, yeah, the pictures are all during break up in March or April. And, so there was hardly any snow left, but they got it all out. So, that's awesome.

**0:15:47.9**

**GTR:** They got it out. Yeah. So, you were there when you were trying to use the dog sleds. Do you remember having to just give up or how did that work?

**JP:** Yeah. I don't recall if Outward Bound called out because they had other things to do, or if they just realized it wasn't going to get done or if they realized that the snow was leaving. [Laughs] And they couldn't do anymore with dogs. So.

**GTR:** So, actually, you remember staying in the cabins and what they were like at that point?

**JP:** Well, I recall that it was, at least when we were there, it, even though it was March, it did definitely feel like winter, so when the sun went down it was dark and it was, you know, the cabin was small and dark but we, being a bunch of Outward Bound instructors that either just slept in the snow all winter or just under a little tarp or maybe in a wall tent with a wood stove, it was luxury. So, whenever you're, if you're out a lot in winter and you're in some kind of more primitive shelter, especially if it has something to sit on and, you know, maybe some kind of stove and you know, a place to put things, dry things out, it's a pretty big deal, so we were plenty happy. And we also, some of us, of course, sleds would take off and some people would stay back and so there was plenty of fishing going on, too. So, we had lake trout to eat, quite often.

**GTR:** Sounds good. It sounds like there was good fishing there. And were you cooking it in the cabins?

**JP:** Oh, yeah. Probably in the cabin.

**GTR:** How did that feel, that Dorothy wasn't there and you were in the place, but you were dismantling the place. Do you remember how...?

**JP:** Well, I guess I was into the whole spirit of it, mainly because her friends, these local guys were there, and you know, the Forest Service representatives were there and we were there, and we knew we were all just part of that big effort, so, yeah, it felt like we were part of a good, big effort to, I guess, help with Dorothy's legacy. At that time, I didn't really have any big picture view of it, like what was going to happen, or, you know, I was always aware that Dorothy was there, but, you know, it seemed like a great thing to do. And we had a great group doing it. So, it

was fun to be part of. But I think at that time, well, I consider myself relatively young then, maybe twenty-three or twenty-four and I was just on to the next adventure. That's all it was at the time.

**GTR:** Do you remember people packing stuff up or, you know, like her dishes, you know, all her stuff was probably still there, right? Who would have been doing that?

**JP:** I don't recall the cabin being extremely furnished. I think, I was just happy there was a wood stove.

**GTR:** Yeah.

**JP:** I guess one of the funny things I remember is that John Rosette had a chain saw that he used for part of taking the cabin apart and he was cutting something and he ran into a big spike, or more than a big one, I think he constantly ran into spikes. And there'd be sparks flying from his chain saw and he'd just keep going. He said, "Well, that's what chain saws are for." [Laughs] That kind of made an impression on me. Ever since then, when I've cut through a spike with my chain saw and then tried to use my chain saw, it hasn't worked, but I don't know, somehow he was able to keep it going.

**GTR:** Typical guy, who could just do it. [Laughs]

**JP:** Yeah, right, right.

**GTR:** He had been... I interviewed his wife, Peg, yeah, right there. Because I don't think they knew what they were going to do with it exactly, they just wanted to save it. And I think stuff sat in storage for a couple years, or a few years. But, okay, if you were younger, that's great!

**JP:** [Laughs]

**GTR:** I don't know if Peg was there?

**JP:** I don't think so, no. I think it was just two guys.

**GTR:** Just guys. I wonder if the women would be like, "Oh, we've got to put the clothes here and the dishes here."

**JP:** Yeah, I really don't know. Maybe her family came up and did some of that, too, you know?

**GTR:** Okay. So, no family there at that point.

**JP:** Not at that time.

**0:20:14.0**

**GTR:** Cool.

**JP:** [Looking at photos] Oh, there she is.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah, there. So, you were there, just moving stuff around, so Outward Bound, at that point, was just running their own dog stuff and you said later, was Will Steger, I can't remember, I have read his stuff, but did he, was he part of Outward Bound and then kind of went off?

**JP:** He did. I think he was part of Outward Bound in the '60s.

**GTR:** Okay, so then he just learned more and kind of started doing more serious...

**JP:** Well, I think, in the '60s, of course, they didn't have dogs, so it was mainly paddling, probably. So, he was just a young guy in Ely at that point, probably looking for a job and then he went off on his own. And I think his first outdoor related business was called Lynx Track Adventures, where he would bring people on trips, but anyway. Yeah, and so Outward Bound had a nice, that would have been, I'm trying to remember, let's see, maybe a fiftieth reunion recently and there were lots of people there from the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s. That was a lot of fun.

**GTR:** It sounds like a good adventure up there. And so, you stayed in Ely clearly?

**JP:** Yeah, stayed in Ely and fun to see the Dorothy Molter museum go up and, I guess, I recall early in its development there was a wooden statue of Dorothy. Do you remember what happened to that?

**GTR:** No, I think there still is one.

**JP:** There probably is still one, but I recall that it's head went missing.

**GTR:** Oh, no.

**JP:** That was a big issue for a while, but they found it. And anyway, since then, just knowing Sarah (Guy-Levar), I've sure been impressed with her efforts on behalf of the museum and she's just a great personality. Rah-rah kind of person and very organized and I have, I went to the museum a couple of years ago because Sarah said I should just go in and see, I guess, my picture on the wall or something, and it was fun, because all the people she has working there are obviously really into it and really interested and it's a great interpretive museum or whatever you call it.

**GTR:** I remember asking people, I mean, it sounds like you didn't know Dorothy herself, but why do you think she stayed and what people were kind of learning from her?

**JP:** While she was there?

**GTR:** Yeah, or why do you think she wanted to stay so much?

**JP:** Well, that's a good question and I guess I don't, I'm guessing it's in these books. But, you know, the only sketchy story I have is that she, now, I could be totally wrong here, I'm just going to tell you this story that I learned. So, she was up there to be a nurse for a guy who's involved in the whole lumber industry up there. And then for whatever reason, this guy settled on the Isle of Pines, which apparently weren't harvested and then when he left or passed away, I don't know if he gave it to her, or if she just stayed on or what, but she just stayed on and, of course, the other, I guess all the other history I have is just all the images I've seen of her, whether she was, you know, thirty years old, forty years old, fifty years old, whether its holding a big fish or driving the first snowmobile, or whatever, you know, those big old snowmobiles that just had one ski, or hauling an outboard motor across the Knife Lake portage, or you know, whatever she did to keep existing up there. And then, the stories about her often responding to all sorts of inquiries she'd get, with nice letters, so she would respond to her and people would send her a bunch of stuff at Christmas, and she'd respond and she maybe even made a bunch of stuff for people and sent that away.

**GTR:** There are letters, they reprinted them in here. [Tapping on book]

**JP:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** She'd write letters from the perspective of animals on the island.

**JP:** So, anyway, a person obviously really dedicated to that way of life and then she was set up to be some kind of, I don't know what the official status was with the Forest Service, but she had a radio, and, of course, she had this nursing background so she was able to stay and help people that may be in distress. Yes, probably just a glorified volunteer, and so she was able to carry on up there, you know, even after the Wilderness Act was signed, so that was really nice. Her, and actually a couple other people, too. And then I guess the great part is just so many people who got to travel on Knife one way or the other, were her friends. And those people really respected her. And she just had a reputation, of course, of being really tough. But my guess is that she just had it all figured out and it was all just routine for her.

**0:25:49.8**

**GTR:** Right. It was out there. So, what do you think, why should people know about Dorothy today? Was there any message for today's kids or anything that you yourself have been up in that area, so if you have someone visiting from out of town, what would you hope they would learn about Dorothy or the Boundary Waters?

**JP:** Well, she symbolizes somebody who probably really loved that area to the point of wanting to be immersed in it and make a living out of just being there. And then, let's see, I think she symbolizes someone that just basically, you can make your choices and follow your dream and make the best of it and thrive. So, because what she did was rather unique, she must have had a desire to do it and she was able to do it real successfully. So, as far as, maybe the thing to pass on is that anybody can do anything. Because she definitely broke the mold; there weren't very many



people, particularly women doing what she did in the years that she was up there. So, I guess, you can go your own way, you can be independent, but yet you can still have a lot of friends and really enjoy what you're doing.

**GTR:** It's been fun to hear about it, too. There was a story written about her in the '60s about the 'Loneliest Woman in America'...

**JP:** Right.

**GTR:** People said, "No, that's ridiculous!" You know? She had so many friends and visitors.

**JP:** [Laughs] Right.

**GTR:** At least some times of the year. And the Wilderness Act and the idea of "Do people belong here or not?" Did you have any perspective from working for Outward Bound up there? Just the idea of, "Well, it's a shame people couldn't be here". Or, having sort of seen someone who lived there, do you have any thoughts or reflections about, or even your memories of those days of how you thought about the wilderness?

**JP:** Yeah, well, for the few people, like Dorothy, that the US government was able to make compensations for, or let them stay on, whether it was someone who, and there weren't very many, most people got bought out. And so, I moved to Ely as a college student in '81 and my orientation to that area before that was just being involved in this YMCA camp and doing this wilderness tripping stuff. And so, I thought that was great, of course, I took to that and really enjoyed it. But then, being there in the '80s and listening to a lot of local people, it kind of like, in a way it didn't make sense to me that so much was occurring in that area prior to '78 and then all of a sudden it [wasn't] and, of course, there were a lot of hard feelings and so I always try to look at it from that perspective, too. So, whether it was yourself that started a business, or your family before you, or whatever, and you had that business up there, and that was your livelihood and then you just couldn't do it anymore, you know, I don't know if it could have been done differently, it sounded like it was just, in one regard, just a lot of messy politics to make it what it is. It's obviously a really special area. And so, how you enjoy it is, that ended up being dictated, I guess. And so, I often wonder if the compromise could have been, you know, if you had a place there, whether you were Dorothy or a resort owner, maybe you could have stayed on until you couldn't manage it any more. I've often wondered if that would have made it an easier transition than just the Wilderness Act.

**GTR:** I'm not as familiar if they did life leases or not, like the Park Service has done on Isle Royale. Which, of course, is not easy either.

**0:30:45.9**

**JP:** Well, I think a lot of people just weren't given the option there and so there were just settlements of one kind or another. So, there're a few properties, and those people are still alive, where they do have a property and they have a cabin, but they don't necessarily live there like

Dorothy did. But those people are getting really old, too. So, anyway, I'm not going to wade into that too much, but as far as, obviously, my guess is that for a lot of the local people Dorothy represents, kind of, the way it was. Especially the ones that would go up there and visit her a lot.

**GTR:** The people element. It was social. They would talk about going there and having a drink, it wasn't, let's go out and listen to the peaceful wilderness, it was, "Let's go out and enjoy our friends in the wilderness."

**JP:** Yep, go carouse and whatever. And you can still do that, I mean, I've been able to do that through all these other means, but, you know, that's not for everybody. Either way, either way it's a special place.

**GTR:** Right. Quiet recreation, getting out there. So, you've been able to still, obviously, been able to enjoy that, but not everybody has that same access.

**JP:** Right.

**GTR:** So, you've obviously stayed. Why do you stay in the canoe country?

**JP:** Good question. Well, let's see, luckily, I've figured out how to make a living there. Before having a family, I was content to just live out of the back of a vehicle. You know, I'd come back from trips and I'd come back with nothing and somehow, through some connection on the streets of Ely I'd find a job and that would be fine. And so, being an independent rabble rouser, Ely was a great place to be and then Ely is just also full of lots of adventurous people, too, and I'd hook up with them and go on adventures, but for some reason, I'd always come back to Ely. It always felt like home, so that's kind of the way I look at it. And now, luckily, both myself and my wife are able to have decent jobs and so, you know, it's a great place to raise kids just because it's a small town, we have gotten our kids out into the wilderness a lot and I recall one trip where we were camped right across from Robin's Island and the Isle of Pines on the south shore in May and you could just throw in a minnow and have a lake trout in five minutes. So, it was our family with a couple kids and another family with a kid and so putting the kids on fish was sure easy. And then, so of course, we mention that Dorothy lived there and we paddled over there and kind of saw the site. But it sure is different now because, of course, all those openings where the cabins were seems to be grown in with raspberry bushes and stuff so it's really hard to get around and, I think, the '99 blow down affected it quite a bit, so trees went down. So, it's not really a place where you can just amble around and have great memories of what it was like, because it's pretty hard to get around on that island right now.

**GTR:** I suppose. Sarah said she took a trip up there recently, but she didn't say. It makes sense though, a wilderness, plants reclaim.

**JP:** Right. Yeah, it's definitely being reclaimed. So, anyway, it's a great place to be. Kind of the whole end of the road, jumping off kind of place.

**GTR:** Yeah. I used to go there more in college age, as well, and haven't been back for a long time and realized, "Yeah, this was a good place. I liked going there". It was a good reminder, back in the day. I never met Dorothy, but I started going to the Boundary Waters probably in the '80s, with my family, too. So, it's a good spot. Well, anything else?

**0:35:01.1**

**GTR:** There are different questions for everyone, because of what their experiences were. What would you say your most lasting memory of Dorothy would be?

**JP:** It's actually a photo that I did give to Sarah, and it's when we were resupplying that wood, doing the Outward Bound service project. Someone took a photo and it's just, me and Dorothy and it's the fall so we both got big sweaters on and we both just look really casual and we got a cup of coffee and we're just having a conversation and the sun's out and it's a beautiful fall day and so, that's my, and, you know, her summer tent was still up on the little island where she sold the root beer and that's where we were hanging out. So, that's my best memory of Dorothy. She was just really pleasant and happy we were there and you could tell, you know, the busyness of the summer was gone, so we were just getting ready for winter.

**GTR:** And relax.

**JP:** Yep.

**GTR:** And someone said she seemed the same with everyone? She would just be really relaxed and kind of talk the same.

**JP:** Yep. I imagine the only time it was a little different was, she had ten different Scout and YMCA and Outward Bound groups show up at once and they all wanted root beer, maybe it got a little busy then, but... [Laughs]

**GTR:** Right. Stay behaved. Did it seem like she was slowing down a little bit in '86?

**JP:** Well, she definitely appeared to be a, you know, I imagine she had arthritis, and she was hunched over quite a bit, but I think she had a real special stoicism, where any discomfort she certainly wouldn't show. She'd go out of her way to be nice and smile, so, that definitely made a big impression on me. Because she didn't always look real comfortable at that point, but she sure put on a great effort, because she just made it seem like another great day.

**GTR:** That's great. She got around. Was she German? My great grandmother was 104 when she died and she was like that, just get it done.

**JP:** Yeah, yeah. Obviously, very capable. Dorothy was very capable of whatever, whatever she was doing.

**GTR:** It sounds like it. She sounds like an impressive person. Her own museum!

**JP:** Yeah, right.

**GTR:** There was a picture of... Paul had a photo that he said, "Oh, it could have been one of the last photos taken of her." Because it was, I think, like, October or something, that fall. Yeah, that could. But he was just traveling through and then decided to stay for a few days and help her out a little bit more, because he said it kind of seemed like she was slowing down. But he gave Sarah that photo, too, and said it could be one of the last ones.

**JP:** Nice, nice.

**GTR:** Yeah, people are fond of her. And you definitely remember root beer. I know, Don Beland, he was kind of like, "I don't know, she really made her beer herself? And she wasn't just a root beer lady, she was more than root beer!"

**JP:** Yes, right.

**GTR:** But you could see how it's a good angle, you make root beer, sell root beer.

**JP:** Yeah. And even that little product they sell, the Dorothy Molter Root Beer that they sell now, it's fun, because it is good memories.

**GTR:** And you remember the root beer, so that's good.

**JP:** Yep, yep.

**GTR:** Well, anything else?

**JP:** Nope, that's it. I appreciate the opportunity.

**GTR:** Thank you. Thank you so much for coming over, finding Duluth, or finding UMD [University of Minnesota Duluth].

**JP:** Yep.

**0:39:13.1**



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrator:**

Peggy Rosett (b. 1935) - **PR**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes -**GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

**Recorded June 22, 2015**

Ely, MN

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Peggy Rosette on June 22, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History Project. We can just start out by saying when you first came to this area yourself?

**PR:** I came to this area in 1966 from Farmington, Michigan.

**GTR:** When did you first meet Dorothy?

**PR:** My husband had gone up there fishing, probably about 1967. And I was [at] his brother's and they got done fishing and they had a limit and so they said, 'well, okay, we're going to take you out for coffee now'. So he was thinking, 'okay, we're going to go to another fishing spot and we're going to have coffee out of a thermos'. But low and behold, they took him to meet Dorothy Molter on Knife Lake. And now they'd become fast friends, ever since, almost twenty years. Yes.

**GTR:** '67, wow. When did you first go up there then?

**PR:** I had a baby in '66 so it was, I think it was '68 before I got up there.

**GTR:** Okay. Did you bring the baby, too?

**PR:** No, no. [Laughter] I was lucky enough to have my mother-in-law living with me so she baby-sat all five kids.

**GTR:** Oh, wow.

[Laughter]

**GTR:** What year were you born?

**PR:** 1935.

**GTR:** Same as my last narrator, Paul Smith.

**PR:** Oh.

**GTR:** So, what was Dorothy like? What was the relationship like?

**PR:** She was a very gracious, kind, caring person. I say that would be how I would describe Dorothy Molter. She accepted everyone the way they were. So, it didn't matter whether they were young or older, if they had things, maybe she didn't like, she still accepted them. And she was just special. Yes.

**GTR:** Did you ever see her doing nursing kinds of things when she had that skill?

**PR:** I personally didn't, but I have pictures... Oh, no, I did, too, some friends of ours from upper Michigan. He got a fishhook in his hand and I have pictures of her taking that fishhook out of his hand. And I'm sure she did many of those! [Laughs]

**GTR:** Were you there at the island or did they travel to get...

**PR:** At the island.

**GTR:** Okay. So, then did you stay over night there sometimes?

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** Which cabins?

**PR:** Oh, I stayed at all of them at various times. But my husband's birthday was February 14<sup>th</sup> and she would always reserve that cabin right next to hers and we would stay there for his birthday every year.

**GTR:** Was that a quieter time there or were there others out there?

**PR:** Oh, yes, it was quieter. In summer time, she would get six to seven thousand visitors for the year. And so winter was much quieter than summer.

**GTR:** And you would get there by snowmobile?

**PR:** Yes, by snowmobile.

**GTR:** That would have been through the '70s and...

**PR:** Started in the '50s, snowmobiles started in the '50s. And went on then, like I say in the '60s when we were going out there.

**GTR:** And your times of doing that February trip, that was the '70s into the '80s? Let's see, snowmobiles were done in '84?

**PR:** Yes. We couldn't go up there anymore after '84. Yes. But, you know, in '67, '68, when we first went up; we went by snowmobile and continued until we couldn't any more.

**GTR:** What was that like?

**PR:** Not very good. Not because we were selfish that we wanted it for ourselves, but we just thought that it was unfair to a lot of people who now could no longer go up there. They were too old or they were handicap some way so they could not travel, so we just thought it was... You know, we were conservationists, too. I mean, we took care of—we carried something in, we carried it out. And that's what you're supposed to do, is to take care of those things. That's what we did.

**0:05:00.3**

**GTR:** Did you have a last visit with her out there back before the snowmobiles were done? Or did you see her again? Did she ever come back in after the snowmobile ban?

**PR:** Yes. The Forest Service would pick her up and—after the ban, now—and they would take her to the airport in Ely, here, outside Ely and we were about a quarter of a mile, something like that, from the airport, so we'd pick her up. And then she'd stay overnight with us. I'd wash and set her hair, and we'd play canasta, because I'd have a whole kitchen full of people because they'd all want to come and say hi to Dorothy and that was a game we could all play easily. And she helped with the dishes and she'd help prepare, if I needed help with something, well, she did that, too. But it was always such a fun time to have her with us.

**GTR:** Was she kind of like a celebrity?

**PR:** Yes, she was. Yes. Well, years ago, when I understand—and that was before I got up here—but she used to snowshoe Knife Lake down to Moose [Lake]. She had friends there that would take her into town. And then she'd probably have her hair done and she said that she could hardly get her shopping done because she'd go and somebody was visiting and she'd go another block and here was somebody else, and visit some more. But then, she would pick up her supplies, go back to Moose Lake and then when the weather was good, so she could travel by snowshoe again, then she would go back with a toboggan behind her and supplies and snowshoe. And that took seven to ten hours.

**GTR:** Wow. Sounds crazy.

**PR:** [Laughs] It does, yes.

**GTR:** Would she bring snacks, did she have certain foods that she really liked?

**PR:** She loved chocolate cake. I would bring her a nine by thirteen chocolate cake, chocolate icing on it and she'd cut it in such big pieces and I'd say, "Dorothy, those are way too big pieces!" And she said, "No, I love chocolate cake!". I said, "Okay!". [Laughs]

**GTR:** She probably burned off the calories. [Laughs]

**PR:** She had a lot of work to do.

**GTR:** Did she seem really strong? I've seen pictures.

**PR:** Oh, yes. Yes. She had a lot of hard work to do. One of the many things she had to do was carry all her water, two buckets of water from the lake up to her cabin. I don't know how far that was, but it wasn't a short distance.

**GTR:** Up hill? I haven't been to the island myself.

**PR:** Yes, it was up the hill.

**GTR:** Were they metal buckets she'd just keep on the counter?

**PR:** Metal buckets, yes. We used to call them wash pans years ago. They had a pan, so you washed your hands and next to it would be a pail of water and so then she had other pails also, so we'd go down and get her water. And she'd have a hole in the ice and she'd have a board over it with a canvas and that would keep it from freezing. You could just lift that up and you could dip water anytime you wanted to for her.

**GTR:** That's a handy thing.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** Would she chop it out when she first made it?

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** With an auger or something?

**PR:** I think probably an ice chisel would be what she'd use. I know she had one sitting by the hole.

**GTR:** Did you ever see or help with the ice, putting up ice?

**PR:** Yes, I did.

**GTR:** How did that go? Did you use big saws or?



**PR:** Well, years ago, when they first started, why then, I think her dad was helping her. That was the huge saws, one-man saws. I think they'd drill a hole first to start and then they'd saw, back and forth, and cut these... Later years it was done by chain saw. When I was there, it was done by chain saw.

**GTR:** You could help with that?

**PR:** Yes. And then they'd be down on the lake and then they'd haul up the ice, kind of a chute like, I guess that's what I'd call it, and then they'd use snowmobiles to pull the chunks of ice up and then put them in the ice house. They were always wrapped in moss and saw dust. They kept all summer long. I kind of had my doubts about that. So, Dorothy's birthday was the sixth of May and so I'd go up there in the summer time, because the sixth of May wasn't always a good time to go up there, it was awfully cold sometimes, and even the ice wasn't sometimes off. So, we'd go in the middle of the summer, a whole bunch of us and bring her birthday cake. And then I'd have to always check that icehouse, because, I thought, "How can it be ninety degrees and this ice is going to keep in here?" And it did! Yes, it was just as nice as they had put it in there!

**0:10:36.7**

**GTR:** That's amazing, yes. And then, did you have root beer?

**PR:** Oh, yes. We had root beer, yes.

**GTR:** It was kept cold with that ice?

**PR:** With that ice, yes. And she had a Coca-Cola cooler, which she put that ice in. She also needed the ice for her icebox, they called it, before a refrigerator. They called them iceboxes. So, everyday, a big chunk of ice went in that icebox.

**GTR:** Did she have a gas refrigerator, too? I thought I saw a picture.

**PR:** Yes, in later years, she had a gas refrigerator. This was early on.

**GTR:** Okay, the icehouse. I wondered about the arrangement of how to ice the root beer, but it was an upright cooler that you'd put the ice in and then the bottles in?

**PR:** Yes. Well, it wasn't upright, it was about like this, and then you could lift the lid and you'd pick out your pop.

**GTR:** Okay, so the ice would be down in there.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** And then there was a box for donations?

**PR:** Yes. Well, when the government was buying everybody out, Dorothy was selling her root beer and her candy bars and they said that since nobody else could have a business up there, she could not either. And so, then, somebody had the bright idea of saying, ‘Dorothy, why don’t you go on a donation basis?’ And that worked out much better for her. I think the good Lord was watching over her. [Laughs]

**GTR:** And people would pay?

**PR:** Yes, yes. For sure. They’d probably instead of a dollar bill, they’d put five or ten, you know, so, she made out much better.

**GTR:** Did you help her make the root beer ever?

**PR:** Nope. Never helped her make it. We would haul the root beer syrup up in the wintertime. We’d get the root beer syrup from the A&W here in town, where we had a restaurant at one time. And so, free, they’d give the root beer to her, syrup. And we’d haul it up to her. So, when float planes used to go up there years ago, and so, if they didn’t have a whole load of people to go up there to various resorts at one time, that would be probably previous to 1950 or ’52, because then the government said planes could not land under 4,000 feet. And if they had room in these float planes, well, then they’d haul some of Dorothy’s supplies. But she could never depend on it because they were depending on the payload, you know. Anyway, I don’t remember what year and what year it really started, but it was after this time that local fellows in the area, Babbitt, Tower, all over, Ely here, and they decided they’d have what they called, Dorothy Molter Day.

So, early February of every year, the fellows would load up their snowmobiles and their trucks and come up to, then it was... It’s Ely Northland Market now, but years ago it was another name. So, they would come to this store, and she would have a list of thousands of dollars worth of supplies and they would go all around town, picking up the propane, the wood, the stovepipe, all that kind of thing, come back to the store, pick up all her groceries, which was a ton of stuff and they would bring that up to Moose Lake by truck. And from there, we would go, by snowmobile, up to Dorothy’s. So, my husband always carried 200 pound cylinders of propane and they would be clanging together behind him and I really didn’t like that, so I told him, “Okay, John, I think I’m going up ahead of you and I know the way anyway.”

I had the most important load anyway, and that was the toilet paper and so I said, ‘I’ll go up to Dorothy’. And he said, ‘all right’. So, I went up there and she had made a big kettle of soup and it was just the most delicious vegetable beef soup. She had a little stove that she’d tell the guys to put it out—a barrel stove—put it out on the lake. Because, there would be maybe fifty to sixty of us, too many to go in her little cabin. And so, she’d put that out on the lake, she’d put her soup on there after the guys build the fire in the stove. And there was a little table with bowls and cups and crackers and then the local bakery in town, they would send all kinds of good baked goods to have with our coffee. So, we would then, as we were doing our work, we’d have our lunch and visit outside. That was her extra dining room! [Laughs]

**GTR:** On the lake.

**0:16:04.0**

**PR:** Yes. And those same days then, when they were finished putting things away, they'd ask Dorothy if there was anything more they could do for her and like any lady of the house, she had a 'Honey Do' list. Yes. And so, they would take care of many of the things that she needed doing. That was always a fun day.

**GTR:** That was always early February?

**PR:** Yes, early February of every year.

**GTR:** How nice. When did that start do you think? What years?

**PR:** I don't know how long it had been going on before I got here. And I imagine, John probably, when he found out they were doing this, probably in '67 or so, he probably joined the bandwagon there. But I'm sure it had been going on, probably in the late '50s, I'd say, somewhere in there.

**GTR:** And did that go on until 1984?

**PR:** Yes, yes.

**GTR:** Was there a big last one?

**PR:** A last ride?

**GTR:** Yes.

**PR:** Oh, yes.

**GTR:** Well, after she passed away?

**PR:** No.

**GTR:** Oh, before 1984?

**PR:** Yes. Before January 1<sup>st</sup> then, of '84. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, probably. [Laughs] The vary last day you could go out there, there were lots of people going up there. Yes.

**GTR:** Bringing stuff, too, that last day?

**PR:** No.

**GTR:** Or just visiting?

**PR:** Yes. Just kind of knowing that this was the last one we can take.

**GTR:** Was there Forest Service enforcement right after that?

**PR:** Right after that, yes.

**GTR:** How would they patrol? They couldn't be on snowmobiles if they were patrolling.

**PR:** They were allowed to be on snowmobile, though.

**GTR:** Oh, really? Okay. Interesting. But by '84, Dorothy knew that she could stay, right? She was a volunteer, right?

**PR:** Yes, yes. Volunteer in service.

**GTR:** How did she feel about that change?

**PR:** She didn't like it. She felt it was very unfair. Many of her family couldn't even come up there anymore, so.

**GTR:** Do you remember the change in '75 when she thought she might have to leave and then they decided that she could be a volunteer? Do you remember that time?

**PR:** I don't remember exactly what went on there. I was probably too busy raising kids.  
[Laughs]

**GTR:** What was her attitude? Do you remember the earlier time, though? Was it a discussion point in the late '60s or '70s when people would visit, would people talk about it, like, 'oh, where are you going to...'

**PR:** I didn't notice it, when I went up to visit. No.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PR:** Maybe certain people in the crowd, the discussion would come up, but not when I visited up there.

**GTR:** How long would you stay, like on the February visits?

**PR:** Oh, on the February visit, that was mostly, most of the day. Because by the time they unloaded and helped her with other things, why, it took most of the day.

**GTR:** But your husband's birthday, how long would you stay?

**PR:** We'd go up Friday night and stay Friday and Saturday night and come home Sunday.

**0:20:01.9**

**GTR:** Nice.

**PR:** And we stayed in the Trapper Cabin, mostly. That was right in back of Dorothy's.

**GTR:** Is that one at the museum or not?

**PR:** Nope. That had to be burned.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PR:** It's kind of ironic, because when they built the cabin—when Bill Berglund built those cabins—I guess the fellow stayed in that one. It was the very first one built up there and then when the cabins had to be taken down again—not that same crew—but another crew stayed in that cabin again, when they took them down.

**GTR:** Interesting.

**PR:** Interesting, yes. And then they had to burn that cabin because it was too far gone.

**GTR:** Oh, okay. Were you involved with any of the taking of the buildings back out?

**PR:** No. My husband was very much involved in it. And many, many volunteers, many. I was mostly on the phone—messages for him or they just left it that I could take messages for if anything was needed or special equipment and things like that.

**GTR:** That would have been '87 or was it the winter of '86?

**PR:** '87, nope. Yes. They had to get everything off, over the ice in the spring of '87. The Forest Service flew the fellows up there and they took the cabins down, log-by-log, three of the cabins. They numbered each and every piece and that's how they put them back together again.

**GTR:** Wow.

**PR:** Yes. And we started the museum on May 6<sup>th</sup> of 1993. So, it took quite a while.

**GTR:** Yes. Where was all this stuff in the meantime?

**PR:** It was held in the Miner's Building across from the Grand Ely Lodge here in town.

**GTR:** Okay. And how about all the stuff, the wall hangings and all of that? Were you involved with helping to put it back?

**PR:** I was. The night before we opened the museum, I worked until five o'clock in the morning because I think I was the only one that remembered where things were up there. I'm sure I wasn't the only one, but the only one available. And so, I fixed up the two rooms in her winter cabin the very best I could by remembering where things were. Then I worked until five o'clock in the morning and then I had to go to work at the Chamber of Commerce by nine. [Laughs]

**GTR:** That's tiring! Were there some pictures to help remember, or this was all just in your head?

**PR:** Pretty much what I remembered when I went up there. There were some pictures, but I don't think I went much by them.

[Brief overtalking]

**GTR:** ...before they took things apart, they didn't take pictures or anything?

**PR:** No. Just pictures that had been taken when we'd go visiting her. You know, you'd always take pictures of this group and that group and there was always a different parts of her winter cabin, so you'd pretty much know then from those where things were, too. And I had all kinds of those pictures.

**GTR:** That's good.

**PR:** Now the museum has them.

**GTR:** That's good. I interviewed a woman a couple weeks ago, Carolyn McCain, and her parents had been good friends with Dorothy and she said when she walked into the cabins she just started crying because it felt so right and then she said, "And this little wall hanging with the nails, my mom made for Dorothy". She had a picture, she showed me a picture that was right there.

**PR:** With the colored nails?

**GTR:** Yes.

**PR:** Yes, yes. I think she was at the museum not too long ago. Was she?

**GTR:** Yes, I think that's how Sarah then met her and referred her to me and we met in her RV actually.

**PR:** In her RV, oh.

**GTR:** ...through Duluth on their way home. I guess her dad made a bird feeder.

**PR:** Yes, yes. I gave her the tour.

**GTR:** Oh, good. You do that now that you work there?

**PR:** Yes. Every Wednesday.

**GTR:** Oh, okay. I haven't been. I'm going to run over there after this. It's been a while since I... I was coming to Ely in the '90s probably, but it's been a while. That's great. So, how did that feel to be putting all of those things back after years of sitting in storage?

**PR:** It felt very good.

**GTR:** Yes?

**0:24.58.7**

**PR:** Yes. They started putting the cabins together by the Chamber [of Commerce], in front of the Chamber, they had one almost, not completed, but the structure of it was in front there, and nobody liked it there, because it was right by a highway. And he said, 'Dorothy was not by a highway'. [Laughs] And so then they had to find a new place and now we have the perfect location for those cabins. It is so much like her... When you go there, and you notice those tall pine trees and her cabin nestled in there—that's the way it was.

**GTR:** Is that right?

**PR:** Yes. Yes. Of course, in the summer time she'd move, in the spring, she'd move from her winter cabin to her tent on another island. She had three islands. So, that was a big undertaking. By boat, she would move everything over to her tent. She'd make root beer there.

**GTR:** In her tent, on that island?

**PR:** Yes. On that island. And outside, in the open. And she'd stir it, I heard, with a special kind of a stick, like a maple wood, or something like that, stick, she would stir her root beer with. And she would then make eleven to twelve thousand bottles by hand.

**GTR:** Wow.

**PR:** That is a lot of root beer.

**GTR:** And just taking the water from the lake? Not boiling it, probably?

**PR:** Nope. And you couldn't take the bottles off the island. That way, she could recycle them. She'd wash them in soapy water and put a little bleach in the rinse water, I'm sure, in order to sanitize them, and then they were ready to use over again.

**GTR:** Did you ever bring caps in for her? Because she would have to...

**PR:** A&W would send caps for her to cap her root beer. It was Allen White who owned the... and he did a lot of, you know, sending the things that she'd need for her root beer.

**GTR:** Oh, wow. He owned A&W?

**PR:** Yes. He did.

**GTR:** Oh, that's nice. It wasn't competition? [Laughs]

**PR:** No.

**GTR:** That was nice. He donated it. I hadn't heard that.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** But it had a certain flavor maybe, from the lake and the stick. [Laughs] I wonder.

**PR:** Yes. Yes. Dorothy, one time, she was canning blueberries. And generally, you don't can fruit in a pressure canner. I don't know why she did that this time. And of course, she got busy and forgot about the canner. And it exploded inside her tent.

**GTR:** Oh, no!

**PR:** Can you imagine blueberries all over everything? [Laughs]

**GTR:** Yikes!

**PR:** That would not be good.

**GTR:** No, did it get stained?

**PR:** Yes. Yes. So, she sold candy bars and pop when she was there, when she could sell it.

**GTR:** Any particular candy bars that you remember, that she liked?

**PR:** I think popular ones, Hershey's, Butterfingers, you know, things that kids like. Yes.

**GTR:** That's great. Why do you think, she obviously wanted to stay, did she ever talk about why, or why do you think she really...?

**PR:** She just loved it up there. Yes. That was home to her. Yes. In 1930, when she made her first trip up there, her dad said that he found this great fishing lake, Knife Lake, and they caught really nice trout. And so, she liked to fish, even though she was a city bred girl, she liked the



outdoors. And the very first trip up there, she met Bill Berglund, and, but it was, she had no doubts about going back again. And then when he asked her to work for him, why, that even opened the door even more for her to enjoy the wilderness.

**GTR:** That's great. Did she ever talk about why she stayed or did people ever say, 'are you ever going to get married or go back to town?' Did she ever talk about that about why she was staying or why...?

**PR:** Not to my... I never heard her say anything. I just know that she loved it. She loved that life up there, even though it was very difficult. You know, a lot of hard work.

**GTR:** It doesn't sound very lonely though. [Laughs] She wasn't a hermit.

**PR:** No. In fact she rather enjoyed the quiet time in the winter so she could get caught up with her letter writing and her reading the Echo. [Laughs] They would kind of pile up on her.

**0:30:20.4**

**GTR:** Would people bring them in on snowmobile?

**PR:** Yes, we'd bring mail to her.

**GTR:** Did she have a P.O. [post office] box in town or where did the mail wait?

**PR:** Yes. She had a post office box. And she had Bernie Erikson, he always had the mail for us, so we'd just call him and see if he had any mail for Dorothy and then we'd pick it up and take it out there.

**GTR:** Okay, so he had the key and he'd get the stuff and bring it up?

**PR:** Yes. Yes.

**GTR:** Somebody said she had a lot of books left in the cabin, like if you stayed in the cabin in the summer, there were books.

**PR:** Yes. Always.

**GTR:** What did she read mostly? Did she have any particular favorites?

**PR:** I think she had a lot of adventure books. And then in her bedroom she had medical books. Also, the Reader's Digest was all over in all the cabins, periodicals like that. I don't know if she subscribed to them or if they were maybe given to her. Just so people had something to read when they were up there. There was no TV! And radio, not much of that either. Unless, I don't know. We never brought music with us or anything.

**GTR:** She didn't listen to music, like on a...?

**PR:** A radio, I guess. Yes. She had a radio. And she had a two-wave radio that the Forest Service gave her. You know about that? Okay.

**GTR:** Yes. Did you ever hear her use that just checking in?

**PR:** Just on the DVD that we'd play. She's asking Jerry Jussila if he could bring up batteries for her.

**GTR:** I just talked to Paul Smith and he mentioned Jerry.

**PR:** Yes. He was one of them that found her (after she passed away).

**GTR:** Yes. Did you ever talk to him about that or about the final ride?

**PR:** No, I haven't. I haven't talked to him. He's kind of a busy guy.

**GTR:** I suppose. Did you do that snowmobile ride after then, that people all...?

**PR:** The memorial ride? Yes. I understand that there were 700 to 1,000 people that came up for that.

**GTR:** Did they have to get some special permission for that?

**PR:** Yes, because by this time there was the motor ban.

**GTR:** Yes.

**PR:** The same way when they started hauling the logs out for the cabins. They started with dog sled, but the weather got too mild. So, the dogs couldn't pull the heavy loads. So, then they had to go back to the government and ask permission again, so that they could use motors. And so finally, I think they were tired of listening to them and they said, 'Just do it. Whatever it takes'. So, there were four wheelers and snowmobiles and whatever could haul, hauled. And then they had Beaver planes that hauled out the windows and breakable items of Dorothy's and many other things, but mainly things that would have to take special care, rather than having them behind snowmobiles. And there were seventeen loads of them.

**GTR:** Wow.

**PR:** And I guess these—I don't think I've ever seen one—they were huge planes. Yes.

**GTR:** Did she ever say what she wanted done with her stuff?

**PR:** Not to me, she didn't.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PR:** I'll I've head is hearsay and I don't know.

**GTR:** Someone said she had some, that she would make Christmas ornaments, and gave him one of those. Did you ever see those or did she do a Christmas tree?

**PR:** Yes. Yes. She did. She had a Christmas tree. And I never saw it lit, but they say that she used to use candles on the... But I never saw that. I would think it would be a little dangerous. But you know. She did decorate the tree. I know I'd be up there at Christmas time and it was decorated. Um, there was a thought I had here.

**GTR:** That was a German tradition, right?

**PR:** Yes. Yes. Hmmm, it escaped me now. Maybe I'll think of it. Do you edit this tape when you go?

**GTR:** A little bit.

**PR:** Take out some things? [Laughs]

**0:35:01.1**

**GTR:** The idea with official oral history transcripts is just to just kind of transcribe it all, and then if someone really stumbles or starts talking about something totally different we can obviously smooth it out, but sometimes people don't know what might really be interesting fifty years from now, so sometimes they just say put it all in there. As long as it's not offensive or something that someone really wants taken out. And I've heard of stories of that, of interviews that were done for one purpose a long time ago and then now they're really appreciating them for totally different reasons now, so it's good that they didn't edit them out too much.

**PR:** Sure.

**GTR:** So, why do you think people should know about Dorothy today?

**PR:** I think that young women, today, I doubt very much that they could live like Dorothy did. Maybe a few could. But for the majority, I don't think they'd have the tenacity to do what she did and live alone up there. She enjoyed it, you know, that was her life up there. But, I for one, I was satisfied just to visit. I guess, I was too much of a, talking something of myself, too, I was more, you know, I liked the conveniences of home.

**GTR:** It's nice to take a shower. [Laughs]

**PR:** Yes. Yes.

**GTR:** Did she have a washtub, probably?

**PR:** She had an outside wash machine for summer time. And then in the winter, I know there'd be two washtubs in the kitchen and so she must have just washed her clothes and just hung them up inside.

**GTR:** And take a bath in the washtub?

**PR:** Well, she said that it was very hard to take a bath up there, you know, with snowmobilers, you know, the motors were still on? Because she said she never knew when somebody was going to pop in because there were all times of the night even. You know, they were going up there and coming back.

**GTR:** I see.

**PR:** So, she said it was pretty hard to take a bath. [Both laugh]

**GTR:** I suppose. It's so funny because people think of her being really isolated, but really, it was people popping in all the time. That's funny.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** What's probably your most lasting memory of Dorothy?

**PR:** I just enjoyed her company. She was just very unique. And we would play cards up there, UNO, she liked to play, UNO.

**GTR:** Yes, someone else mentioned that she liked that a lot.

**PR:** Yes. And so, just being with her was just an inspiration. Yes.

**GTR:** Did she keep up with events? What would she talk about? What was the common... Or talking about nature? I've heard of her Christmas letters with the animals.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** Was that what she ended up talking about? Animals? Or would it be something else?

**PR:** Um, yes, she would talk about animals. She had all kinds of animals, like martins and all that, around her buildings and even her window was so that you could see some of those, her kitchen window, her dining area, by her table, and anyway, they'd be crawling up poles where she had bird feeders and all that type of thing. Current events, and that sort, I don't know, we didn't really talk about stuff like that. It was, just, she wanted to know how things were going in Ely. And so, her life was kind of isolated a little bit there, you know. And so, then we could tell

her, so and so and this business is starting up in Ely now and she'd say, 'oh, that sounds great'. And stuff like that. Yes. But as far as, yes, that was probably what mostly, she'd wanted to know what the outside world was doing.

**GTR:** Was she pretty positive?

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** I suppose you'd have to stay kind of positive out there, too, to not get run down by all the work.

**0:40:00.2**

**PR:** Yes. And she said that her idea of church was communing out in the trails when she was walking and could hear the birds and could enjoy the sun and just the wildlife that she saw around, and the stars at night, those kinds of things. Yes. So, she knew there was a Maker. Yes.

**GTR:** She was out there, in it.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** That's great.

**PR:** I do much of the same at my house. I walk the trails and I take my eight-month-old puppy out on walks.

**GTR:** So some of that same, draw you back up here, you stayed up here a long time.

**PR:** Yes, yes.

**GTR:** That's great. What do you hope future generations remember about her when they tour the museum? What do you hope they'll take away?

**PR:** Oh, it's hard to describe. That she was able to get an education and still be able to live out in the wilderness like that, and use her education. And I think that would be an inspiration to young people. That you need to have education, even though you're going to live in the wilderness. You need that, even there.

**GTR:** That's great. And it sounds like she was pretty happy where she was. Kind of settled in.

**PR:** Yes, she was. We'd come in and my husband would always stomp his feet out on the porch, get the snow off his boots, you know, and she'd say, "Come on in, Rosette". [Laughs] She didn't even see who it was. But she said, "I could always tell his stomp". [Both laugh] And so we'd come in and she'd have the coffee pot on the barrel stove and we'd go and get a cup from the

cupboard and pour ourselves a cup of coffee and if I'd brought up that chocolate cake, why, we'd have chocolate cake and coffee and we'd visit. Have good visits.

**GTR:** So, definitely coffee, not tea.

**PR:** No, not tea. She did have tea. So, I imagine if someone wanted tea, they could have tea.

**GTR:** That's nice. What was your husband's name?

**PR:** John.

**GTR:** And he's passed away?

**PR:** Yes. 2003.

**GTR:** I'm sorry to hear that. He was a snowmobiler?

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** Did he keep going other places then, even though he couldn't go out to her?

**PR:** We'd go up to Dorothy's and not only on the weekends that we stayed there, but we made many, many trips up to see her. And we'd go up to Dorothy's and then we'd have coffee with her and then we'd go on a little bit further and that was Benny Ambrose.

**GTR:** Oh, yes.

**PR:** He was a different kind of character. He wasn't exactly friendly like Dorothy was. But I remember the first time, we, John and I were going—he lived on kind of a cliff-like—and we were going down below with our snowmobiles passing through and Benny and Jake, the game warden, was standing up there and Benny had a gun—he was holding a gun—and so John says, he pointed up, and I said, 'I think we should just continue on, John'.

So, then Jake, the game warden, said, "Aw, come on up here", he said. And at that point, Benny, he kind of turned his back, '[grunt]', he said and he walked down the hill. And John said, "Oh, we're invited," he says, "so we'll go up there". And from that time on, John and him were best friends and we'd bring him a loaf of bread. I made homemade bread. So, we'd bring bread up to him and John and Benny would talk for a long time and I'd have to drink that horrible coffee he made. It was on the barrel stove, I think, and it just kept boiling and he'd add more water and coffee. But that was enjoyable, too. He slept in this little cabin. He had built a beautiful log cabin for his wife. Do you want to hear this kind of thing?

**0:45:05.7**

**GTR:** Oh, yes. Paul told me a little bit about Benny, too. Because he was definitely up there, too, and part of that whole story.

**PR:** Okay. Yes. So, he had built this beautiful log cabin for his wife and it had a blue bathroom in there—no running water—just a blue bathroom, so she'd feel better about that. I don't believe it was completely finished, but he worked at it for years. But he lived in that little shack. It was just a one-room shack. There was a bedroom in the one side of the cabin and above his bed he had a money bag that hung in the corner and when we'd continue on to a store at the very end of our trip and they had butter and bread and things like that, so he'd give us, he'd give John money, and he'd say, "Pick me up this at this little store." And sure, he said, we'd do that. And so I told him, I said, "Benny", I said, "it looks like that bag is full of money!" And I said, "Aren't you afraid, up here?" He said, "Nope. I have a 45 under my pillow." [Laughs] I said, "Okay, Benny!" And then going back to this cabin, then, when this all came down, when they had to leave, I don't know what happened to that cabin, that new cabin.

**GTR:** The new cabin.

**PR:** Yes. I never heard what happened, but I hope it would have been taken down and hauled away. But he planted a beautiful garden.

**GTR:** Yes.

**PR:** And he hauled his dirt from Iowa. I don't know if you were told that.

**GTR:** I heard that. That's amazing!

**PR:** In a canoe!

**GTR:** I know! I can't imagine! That would be a lot of trips.

**PR:** End of the Gunflint Trail and then he'd load his canoe and bring it up to his place. And I have pictures of his garden. Flowers and vegetables.

**GTR:** Yes. Did you eat some of the vegetables? Did he share?

**PR:** He would bring it up to Dorothy and she would have soup and we'd have soup up there.

**GTR:** Nice. I can imagine that Dorothy might not have had much fresh stuff, because she didn't grow a garden?

**PR:** No, she didn't grow garden. She liked flowers, but not gardens.

**GTR:** So, he'd bring some for her and trade or something?

**PR:** Yes. Yes.

**GTR:** That's great.

**PR:** Then we'd leave there and, I believe the name of the place was Chippewa Inn, and that was on the Canadian side, a little bit further than Benny's.

**GTR:** He was on Otter Track but that would have been...

**PR:** That was on the, oh...

[Looking at map]

**GTR:** I don't think the map goes quite that far on this one. We could probably check the page... Chippewa...

**PR:** I think it was Chippewa Inn.

**GTR:** So, you brought the food in and back to him?

**PR:** That was the end of the Gunflint where we got the food.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PR:** Gosh, what was that name, that lake? I forgot.

[Looking at maps]

**GTR:** Page 109. [Rustling pages] 108.

**PR:** Saganaga. There's the monument, there. I know I remember that monument. And then somewhere in here, there was this resort up here. Along the Kimisuit. They were on Canada. And we'd have to park down on the lake, because otherwise we were illegal. Yes. And then we'd go on to the Gunflint. Here's the Gunflint Trail. Probably to the end of the Trail, so maybe, this looks like the end of the road there. That's where we'd go and gas up. And they had all kinds of, you know, pop and crackers and soup and all that kind of thing.

**GTR:** That's a big trek.

**PR:** Yes, it is. It was, I believe it was eighty-two miles round trip or something like that. Yes.

**GTR:** Did you keep snowmobiling after '84? Other places?

**PR:** Oh, yes. We snowmobiled. We snowmobiled up to the western part of the state where we're from, Thief River Falls area. We made a couple trips up there and around here, too, yes. It wasn't the same. Because it was, going those lakes up there was just super.



**0:50:04.3**

**GTR:** It's pretty. Did you ever get up canoeing then later or it just was a long ways?

**PR:** I was not much into canoeing. [Laughs] We'd take that one trip in the summertime a bunch and then we'd camp out one night, one or two nights, maybe. And that'd be right across from Dorothy's tent island, we'd camp.

**GTR:** So, did you get up there after '84 then, via canoe?

**PR:** No. We didn't go up there. The only trip I took was with Sarah (Guy-Levar) and her husband. They took me up by dog sled.

**GTR:** Oh, wow.

**PR:** I think that was in 2010, I think it was. And so, and they have the most well-behaved dogs I've ever heard of. [Laughs] Oh, they were nice dogs. So, it was hard to go up there and see where Dorothy used to live.

**GTR:** Yeah, strange. Do you feel, when you go into the cabins, do you kind of feel her presence?

**PR:** Yes, yes. I can almost hear her saying certain things. When she was going to cuss, why, she didn't cuss, but she'd say, "Excuse my French!" [Laughs]

**GTR:** That sound like Carolyn McCain, she talked about her mother, once swore in front of Dorothy and she said... [Laughs] That was not okay.

**PR:** Yes. And a lot of when I'm giving tours, why, so many people figure that there was, you know, Bill Berglund and her had something going. And, I mean, he was thirty-three years older than her. And so, she didn't care for the cussing, and the drinking and the gambling and so, yeah. So, when he, I guess, it's in the book, anyway, when they were going to start playing cards and so on, why, he'd tell Dorothy that she probably should go to her cabin. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Her ears were too sensitive for that? [Laughs]

**PR:** Yes, yes,

**GTR:** But she never met any interesting guys up there that she was interested in?

**PR:** Nope. She said that if she could find one that could carry a forty-five pound backpack on his back and another one on the front, to balance, of course, and could fish and chop wood, she said she'd consider it. [Laughs]

**GTR:** But she did okay obviously!

**PR:** Yes, right, she did! [Laughs]

**GTR:** So, she didn't need any of that.

**PR:** Yes.

**GTR:** That's great. Well, thank you. Anything else? Let's see, if you think of anything.

**PR:** When we, well, we'd come back from this trip then, to the end of the Gunflint, where we'd stop then, we'd stop each place. We'd stop at the Chippewa Inn again, and we'd have coffee with them or something, and visit a little bit and then we'd go to Benny's and bring his stuff to him and then, it was probably about two o'clock in the morning and we'd come around this bend and we'd see if the lights were on at Dorothy's and most of the time they were, and so we'd ask her, 'were you staying up just to wait for us to come back?' and she'd say, 'no'. But she was a night owl.

**GTR:** Really?

**PR:** Yes, she liked to stay up at night.

**GTR:** With kerosene lanterns or how would she light?

**PR:** Yes. It was kerosene lanterns. Yes.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PR:** And then, of course, lamps. Yes.

**GTR:** Interesting to be a night owl out there without electricity.

**PR:** Yes. Yes.

**GTR:** They say people used to go to bed earlier because it would be dark, but not Dorothy.

**PR:** Yep, no, she liked to stay up late. And, of course, you know, she didn't have indoor facilities, so you had to go outside to that little old house! [Laughs] That wasn't always comfortable! [Laughs]

**GTR:** They didn't save that one? That's not at the museum?

**PR:** No, that's a replica at the museum. Her brother, Bud, was a great sign maker, so and you know the signs that you see in there that are misspelled and that, when you go visit? That was his deal.

**GTR:** ‘Quit your belly achin’ thing (spelled “Kwitcherbeliakin)? That was him?

**PR:** Yes. ‘Quit your belly achin (Kwitcherbeliakin)’ Yes, it sure was.

[Laughter]

**GTR:** It sounds like that makes her sound like she’s a curmudgeon or something, but you say, she was very accepting?

**PR:** Yes. As far as I’m concerned. You know, I wasn’t with her 100% of the time, so I don’t know, but as far as I’m concerned. Yes.

**GTR:** Great. Thank you. Can I get a picture of you?

**PR:** Take my coat off, for a little bit. I’m even chilly with just my...

**0:55:07.0**

**GTR:** I know! It’s chilly down here. It felt okay this morning. I’ll have to get more layers out of my car.

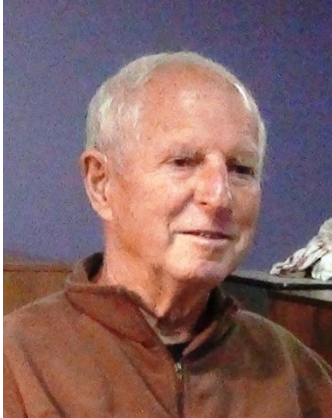
[Conversation while taking photo and giving a gift of chocolate]

**PR:** Oh, how nice. This looks like a Dorothy thing. [About the gift of chocolate]

**GTR:** Do you think?

**PR:** Yes, it does. Thank you.

**0:56:23.8**



## **Dorothy Molter Oral History Project**

### **Narrator:**

Paul Smith (b. 1935) - **PS**

### **Interviewer:**

Gina Temple-Rhodes - **GTR**  
Cedar Story Services

**Recorded June 22, 2015**

Ely, MN

*(recording starts with pre-interview conversation)*

**PS:** ...just have a good visit. And it was that trip. The first evening we were walking around and she slipped down by the ice house and kind of, went down, so I just sat down with her and we chatted for twenty minutes or so and when I got done with the trip I told folks I used to work with at the Forest Service that were kind of keeping track of her, that 'you may want to ask her if she wants to come out before it freezes up'. Otherwise she would come out around Christmas. But there's a month in there that the ice is forming. I said, 'she's just getting a little, you know, iffy'. Well, they went up and, nope, she wanted to stay there. And I'm glad she did because then she died there. Or she might have been down in Chicago or who knows where.

**GTR:** Right. It was before Christmas that she died?

**PS:** She died the eighteenth, if I remember right, of December. Yeah. And normally, she'd come out about then and go visit some relatives and whatever, for a couple weeks and the Forest Service was flying her in and out at that point.

**GTR:** I wondered about that.

**PS:** Yeah.

**GTR:** So, they could still do the floatplanes.

**PS:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Was that kind of a special exception, the planes up there?

**PS:** Uh, yeah, yeah. Just keeping track of her. She had the radio contact with the Forest Service and so that was her main communication was either going up there, because at that point, the snowmobiles were not allowed anymore, so that was her supply route, by airplane.

**GTR:** And she was considered a volunteer at that point?

**PS:** Right.

**GTR:** Which is why they could justify helping her?

**PS:** Right. Her and Ben both were placed under volunteer status. Their leases ran out in 1975 and so it became, what do we do with them? Because it was going to be a big PR [public relations] problem. And back, somewhere, about '73 or so, I was with a trip going up there, Forest Service, from Duluth, little bit of local, the regional office in Milwaukee, and I think some state people. Anyway, one night, we had stopped by Dorothy's and one night we were sitting around and, well, 'what do we do with Dorothy?' And I just threw out to them, 'hey, if we made them volunteers, it would eliminate a problem for the Forest Service, and you know, PR problem, and give them a little extended time'. Which, Benny was in '82 then and she was in '86. So, she got another eleven years out of it and Benny got seven. And it seemed to work out pretty well.

**GTR:** So, that was your idea?

**PS:** Well, I threw it out. I'm sure others must have thought about it. But I threw it out to that group that night and just threw it out and let it sit and, anyway, it happened.

**GTR:** Who had to approve that?

**PS:** I'm not sure if that was just in the supervisor's office, or if it had to go to the regional office. I don't know.

**GTR:** I can imagine. I used to work for the National Park Service and I can imagine, there was paperwork there!

**PS:** Well, I'm sure they were just covering their tails.

**GTR:** Did she have any official duties or something that was on paper as a volunteer?

**PS:** Probably, but not that I can remember. Maybe it was recorded somewhere.

**GTR:** It might be.

**PS:** I'm sure that she had to fill out a volunteer form of some kind and again, that gave her a radio, so she had contact for any emergencies and stuff like that.

INTRO

**GTR:** That's great. Can we back up just a little bit?

**PS:** Sure, all right.

**0:05:02.4**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Paul Smith on June 22, 2015 for the Dorothy Molter Oral History Project. If you wouldn't mind starting out saying when you first came to this area and how you got here?

**PS:** I first did a canoe trip in 1953. And we'd gone up the Knife Lake, three of us, and stopped by Dorothy's one evening and ended up buying a beer from her, a Rex cone top beer can, and opened it before I asked the price and, 1953 now, and it was a dollar.

**GTR:** Ooo.

**PS:** So, I didn't get a second one.

**GTR:** Did you have a dollar with you?

**PS:** I did happen to have a dollar, yeah. So, that was the first time I ever met her. And then, I worked in the area in 1958 and was up in Knife Lake for part of my summer and got to meet her again then.

**GTR:** For the Forest Service?

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** Could you tell me your year of birth? For my records, what year were you born?

**PS:** 1935.

**GTR:** So, you would have been pretty young in '53.

**PS:** Yes. Shouldn't have been drinking beer. But up there, it just sounded good.

**GTR:** And she had beer then. She could use motors then, up until?

**PS:** Motors and snow machines.

**GTR:** Did motors at that point go right to her door?

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** Or would you have to stop?

**PS:** No, they were good on Knife Lake until '78, and the same with the snowmobiles. That's how she would get supplied.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PS:** She used to go down earlier, before they had snowmobiles and stuff, and would haul canoe loads full of stuff. Which was quite a chore.

**GTR:** Yes, a lot of work! How did you interact with her when you were a worker?

**PS:** Okay. Well, in '61 I was here, but I never got up there. But then in '65 I came back here on a permanent basis and this whole area was part of my duties, so she became part of my duties through the folks that worked with me. Jerry Jussila, would have been the one that had most contact with her.

**GTR:** What was that name?

**PS:** Jerry Jussila.

**GTR:** How do you spell that last name?

**PS:** J-u-s-s-i-l-a. And he's going to have a lot of information on Dorothy.

**GTR:** Is he still around here?

**PS:** He was up there many summers, working.

**GTR:** What was your role at that point, with the Forest Service?

**PS:** I had all the Boundary Waters crews and the trail crews and the visitor center, all that kind of stuff.

**GTR:** District ranger, what was the title?

**PS:** No, no, no, below that by a couple of notches. I guess a Forestry Technician, a supervisor.

**GTR:** What did Jerry do?

**PS:** That was part of his area, the whole Knife Lake, Kekekabic, up where Benny was, all that kind of stuff. Cleaning campsites, constructing camp sites, law enforcement, what trails were in the area, things like that.

**GTR:** He was the one that was out and about with various crews.

**PS:** Right. And he'd have a different person most every year with him.

**GTR:** Sounds like fun jobs.

**PS:** Well, it could be a tough job.

**GTR:** Hard work, paddling. Did you get out to see her often, or would it be Jerry?

**PS:** Jerry would be the main one. I'd get to see her once, maybe twice a year, but Jerry would have been the main one who would have seen her.

**0:10:10.07**

**PS:** I forget just when Jerry would have started. It must have been about, and you'd have to ask Jerry when you see him. I'm guessing about 1970.

**GTR:** Would you just get out in the summers, yourself, paddling out there or did you visit in the winter?

**PS:** Yeah, yeah. And at that time we could use motors, so if I was going alone, I could either paddle or use a motor, both ways.

**GTR:** That's nice. So, when you would visit, get out there, would you stay?

**PS:** Stay there? No. Didn't stay there until, oh, one night, I'd been way up in the east end, paddled down and didn't get in there until eleven at night or so, because there was a storm and I had to pull off for a while. But that's the only time I stayed there other than the two nights we stayed there, then.

**GTR:** And you went up there intending to stay there?

**PS:** I didn't intend to, no, we were going to go on. And this gal with me knew nothing about Dorothy, and she was kind of disappointed that we didn't go on. But as it came out, she's really happy that we sat down and played Uno with Dorothy both nights and Dorothy and her got along really well. The second night Dorothy got out her Christmas ornaments that she and Ruth used to sit there and make out of Styrofoam balls and pins and whatever, so she brought out a box full and had each of us take one. Yeah, so it was a good memento, which I still hang on the tree every year.

**GTR:** Nice. And Ruth was Dorothy's sister?

**PS:** I can't remember if Ruth had died already? Jerry would be able to tell you that. I just can't recollect that.

**GTR:** You said, her and Ruth making them, Ruth was her sister?

**PS:** Yes, yes. And she'd come up for periods of time, not the whole summer. And as well as Dorothy's dad, earlier would be up there. And then his ashes were there on the island. And when



she died, she had, well, before she died, she had his ashes taken off, because, I'd gone up, oh, two or three years before to her and well, must have been before that, because Benny died in '82. I must have been up there in earlier '82. So, about four years before she died, anyway, talked to her about, 'okay, Dorothy, who do we contact when you die?' I always assumed she wanted to have her ashes there. But for some reason, and I don't know if I was the first one she told that or if other people knew it, but she wanted to be buried out in Pennsylvania with her mother, who she hadn't seen since she was six years old. So, I'm not sure what the psychological connection was there, but she wanted to be buried by her mom.

**GTR:** Did she tell you why?

**PS:** No.

**GTR:** She just said she did?

**PS:** I just let it go. I was kind of in shock. And so, anyway, then she realized that hey, she's going to be gone, so she had her dad, evidently, his ashes must have been in a container, not just distributed on the land. She had his ashes taken out and, I think, shipped out there to Pennsylvania, too. And what the connection was between her dad and her mom, I don't know.

**GTR:** She was so young when her mom passed away.

**PS:** Yes, you know, that was, she was not quite eighty, so seventy-five years, roughly, that she hadn't seen her mom. So, I don't know why this strong connection.

**GTR:** Some genetic or mother-thing. Interesting.

**PS:** And maybe some of her relatives would know. Jerry might know, but I don't think Jerry knew that she wanted to go to Pennsylvania, I don't think.

**0:15:11.6**

**GTR:** So, you were asking in an official capacity at that point, that you needed to know?

**PS:** Yes. And I had gone to see Benny, too, to determine what he wanted, who to notify and all that kind of stuff.

**GTR:** Did he have family around?

**PS:** He had family. One daughter was up in Alaska and I think one on the west coast. Both well educated people and Benny was, and Benny's ex-wife was quite well educated. She, as I remember, sang in opera down in Duluth.

**GTR:** Oh, wow.

**PS:** I think she worked up on the Gunflint and that's how he met her and then she lived up there and they had the kids, and finally she said, 'hey, enough of this kind of life'. You know, he'd go off and go trapping, or he was known for his prospecting. I remember one story where it got so cold, that she took the kids down in the root cellar, which would be roughly fifty degrees, but better than forty or fifty below [zero]. That's, I think, when she decided, 'hey, enough of this'. And got her and the kids out of there.

**GTR:** What lake was he on again?

**PS:** He was up on Otter Track.

[Looking at a map together]

**PS:** Yes. His place was right up in here.

**GTR:** Okay. Yes, that's a ways.

**PS:** I know the Forest Service, and I've got that record, of Benny's. Two of them went up, district rangers, the two adjoining districts, and big thick interview with Benny.

**GTR:** Oh, great.

**PS:** Yes. And when I got out, as records tend to get destroyed, so I hung on to those. So, I still have those.

**GTR:** Do you have a copy of that? Just an interview just asking all sorts of questions?

**PS:** Yes. I'd have to go... I haven't looked at it in years. I'd have to go see just what they were asking.

**GTR:** I wonder if there'd be a copy in an archive somewhere, or if it'd be relevant for the...

**PS:** I would have to think so. I just made a copy of the whole thing. Though somewhere, there would be a copy of Ben's stuff.

**GTR:** Great. Do you think the Forest Service did that for Dorothy? That kind of interviewing?

**PS:** I don't know. No, I don't think so. Now, why they did Ben, I'm not sure.

**GTR:** That's interesting.

**PS:** Other than Ben was, I don't want to say secretive, but just, you know, a little more removed, where Dorothy, everybody had all kinds of stories about whatever. Where Ben was just not as well known.

**GTR:** Was his ever a resort, or was it just where he lived?

**PS:** That's where he lived.

**GTR:** So, it wasn't ever a public place?

**PS:** No, no.

**GTR:** Dorothy would have been used to people coming.

**PS:** She had a few cabins. Because in the summer, she would move over to her tent, which then left another cabin down... There were three islands, one on the second island, and then her winter cabin was available and then the Point Cabin. So, different people would come stay. I think it was all under the table, any money she got from it.

**GTR:** Later on, once the Forest Service... If you were there in '53, did you actually stay or you were just canoeing through?

**PS:** No, we were just working in the area. Yeah.

**GTR:** But people were staying, just as friends and things, into the '80s.

**PS:** Yeah, ever since. She went up with her father, fishing trip, I imagine. The islands were owned by a lumberman that had worked the area, but he didn't do anything to these islands, because they were big pine, yet. And so he got those, actually he got some down on Snowbank Lake, too, that were part of her estate. But then, she'd go up there and being a nurse, and I can't remember the fellow's name...

**GTR:** Bill? Berglund?

**PS:** That rings a bell.

**0:20:36.5**

**PS:** But she'd take care of him and eventually, when he died, she got his islands. And I'm not sure the date of that, but I'm sure that's all recorded up there.

**GTR:** Yes, they've recorded that pretty well. I haven't been to the islands myself. So, there's still big pines?

**PS:** A lot of big pines on her winter island, not the summer island. Those were a little more rocky. But the winter island has some big pines.

**GTR:** And that's where her bigger cabin was? Her winter cabin?

**PS:** Right, her winter cabin.

**GTR:** Which one did you stay in for that visit?

[Looking at photograph]



**PS:** This is part of her winter cabin, right there. And then down to the right, oh, at the other end of the island, was what they called the Point Cabin, and that was where we stayed. Her winter cabin is out here and I'm not sure about the Point Cabin. I think that probably came down, too.

**GTR:** Okay. I'm not sure either. Were you involved with helping to get them out?

**PS:** No. Because when I had gone up there, we talked about, 'what do we do with all your stuff?' and she said, 'well, the canoe paddles (on the fence), and maybe you can get them back to the different groups'. And she had no plans on anything like this happening.

**GTR:** Right. Did she think they would just burn it?

**PS:** Probably.

**GTR:** She wasn't thinking about... although, it sounds like she gave you Christmas ornaments. Do you think she was doing that because she felt like she might not be there much longer?

**PS:** Well, I think she just enjoyed playing the cards those two nights and just out of the goodness of her heart, and she knew she was getting older, too. I can't remember, she just brought out one box, maybe she had more, I don't know, but we could pick whatever one we wanted and she just seemed real pleased and like I said, got along with this other gal just very well. So, it was a good experience.

**GTR:** What was her name?

**PS:** Her name is Mora, now it's Nelson, I can't remember. Yes, I wrote it down, Mora Cashman at the time. But now she's married and she and her husband have a cabin right on the same road that I'm on.

**GTR:** So, what were the cabins feeling like at that point?

**PS:** You know, they had been there a while, so they were getting a little worn. And I think it was Outward Bound, mainly, that went up there and I don't remember, Jerry would know, if they took them out log by log by snow machine, which would have been illegal at that point, or dog team. I think dog team, but I'm not sure.

**GTR:** It's written up somewhere. And I think it was dog team for a while but then they hit bad weather and it got too soft and they had to get them out quick so maybe they got some special permission? You weren't there at that point?

**PS:** I was retired by then.

**GTR:** Okay. When did you retire with the Forest Service?

**PS:** In May of '85. April of '85, I'm sorry.

**GTR:** Okay. So, you were retired by this point.

**PS:** Yes, I was. That was a year and a half after.

**GTR:** So, then you were just visiting her as a friend and it wasn't any official Forest Service...

**PS:** Other than when I came back I told Jerry and Jim Heinz, who knew her and were in charge of her coordination of getting her in and out and all that kind of stuff and just said, 'hey, she seemed a little wobbly and you might want to see if she wants to come out'. Because, you know, when it starts freezing, sometime early November, then the plane can't get in there until it's frozen good. But she didn't want to come out. And it's a good thing. You know, as it came out.

**0:25:48.7**

**GTR:** Had she moved into the winter cabin by that point?

**PS:** Oh, yes. Yes. She'd do that in the fall.

**GTR:** What did you do for her on that visit?

**PS:** Oh, just odds and ends things that needed... Smoke stacks, doing some shoveling in the icehouse and just, looking around, I thought, 'holy smokes, there's a lot that needs doing'. So, just odds and ends, I can't really remember. But we worked that day, and I told her, I said, 'okay, the next day we're going to go up and paddle and we'll be back by about noon or so and then work the rest of the day'. And then the next day we had to leave again, because she was a teacher, this other gal and this was just during MEA [Minnesota Education Association] time so she just had the three days off.

**GTR:** Did you guys have pie or coffee or what did...?

**PS:** Probably coffee and I don't remember eating anything else with her. We had our own meals down at the Point Cabin. But then came up and played UNO, which was her favorite game to play.

**GTR:** Did you play other card games at all?

**PS:** I've never seen her play anything else?

**GTR:** Was she a big coffee drinker?

**PS:** She usually had a pot of coffee on. I'm not a big coffee drinker. I don't remember that evening whether we had anything or not.

**GTR:** But she would have had supplies ready for that winter.

**PS:** Oh, yes. Yes. They would have been bringing stuff in already. So, she was set to go.

**GTR:** Did the Forest Service provide food then, as a volunteer?

**PS:** No. They got it in there, but no they didn't buy it for her. I don't think.

**GTR:** So, before you retired, you weren't officially the contact with her, it was Jerry?

**PS:** Jerry would have been the main one, just because he knew her so much better.

**GTR:** And you wouldn't have radio contact with her?

**PS:** Oh, once in a while, yes. Just because we would call, even on the weekends. So, yes, just called in and just, 'Knife Lake, this is Ely' and she'd answer back, 'Knife Lake, everything is fine'. Okay, that's usually all it was.

**GTR:** A radio check.

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** Not usually social on the radio.

**PS:** No, no.

**GTR:** I worked out in the Apostle Islands and had radio. I remember the weather round up.

**PS:** One of our local fellows, Jim Vickery, worked on the Apostle Islands.

**GTR:** Oh, I knew him. I crossed over with him a couple years. That's too bad, I heard he passed away a couple years ago, was it?

**PS:** Jim would have been. Yes, a couple years already. Time flies.

**GTR:** I was sorry to hear that.

**PS:** Yes. Yes. It probably was two years. I'm finding myself, I have to add on time. When I, 'well, this happened five years ago' and it was really seven or eight years ago, or whatever.

**GTR:** Yes. It happens. It happens for me, too. [Laughs]

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** Did you know anything about her root beer business?

**PS:** Other than that it was Hires extract, just like you buy in the store and that's what her basis for the root beer was and the lake water, of course. And she had a lot of bottles that she would wash out. You know, root beer wasn't anything fantastic, but when you're out there and you haven't had anything, it tastes good.

**GTR:** And ice.

**PS:** And ice cold.

**0:30:22.4**

**GTR:** Was she cutting ice that last year? It wasn't frozen yet, I guess, when you were there.

**PS:** There would have been still ice. I know I went up one or two years and helped cut ice, but different people would go up and help cut ice and get in the shed with all the saw dust over to help her. But there would have still been ice when this happened.

**GTR:** In the summer, from the previous year.

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** Wow, that's amazing.

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** I imagine that would be part of the appeal, of the root beer, just being cold.

**PS:** Well, just being cold. Right.

**GTR:** She wouldn't actually do ice in the root beer, right? It would just be...

**PS:** It would just be cold.

**GTR:** Coolers? Did she have? Coolers, and she'd put ice in it, with water? A little bit in a cooler? Just trying to think how that'd work.

**PS:** I can't remember what she kept it in. Jerry, again, would be able to tell you.

**GTR:** Did she have candy bars?

**PS:** Oh, yes. She had a lot of candy bars and various kinds, probably four or five, half dozen different kinds.

**GTR:** Were there any certain favorite, or one that she had the most of?

**PS:** Not that I can remember, no. You know, particularly, kids would get into the candy bars. The root beer was kind of the whole spectrum of people. The latter years, she didn't have beer or anything like that; it was just strictly root beer.

**GTR:** When would she have quit the beer? Was that Forest Service years?

**PS:** I'm not sure. All I can remember is her dump down the lake only had the cone top cans in it. So, I think it was, I'll just say 1960 or so. And it, that may be off, but in that they were just cone top cans, I'm suspecting that it was somewhere in that time span.

**GTR:** In the dump? That's interesting. Did the Forest Service take that out?

**PS:** I don't know whatever happened to that.

**GTR:** What island would it have been on?

**PS:** It was on the mainland.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**PS:** Out, I would say, a half mile away or so, back up in the woods.

**GTR:** The mainland of...

**PS:** Of Knife Lake. [Looking at the map] So, her cabin was squared away right in there and it would have been down in that bay there.

**GTR:** Okay.



**PS:** So, I don't know. Again, this is something that Jerry, being in on the dismantling of the islands, would probably know about. Whether that dump got covered up. I would imagine. It was a big dump. And usually, they went in and blasted and covered them with dirt. But I don't know for sure with hers.

**GTR:** I suppose it would be easier than taking it all out. It's not going to burn.

**PS:** Nope. It's either, you have to take them all out or bury them. And generally they got buried, the bigger ones anyway.

**GTR:** Yes.

**PS:** You know, if it was a smaller place, well, half a dozen bags or something, but at that point, in '58 when I worked there, wherever we were, we had a square stern canoe and some of the sites we were taking out two, three full canoe loads full of cans and bottles.

**GTR:** You had to take them out.

**PS:** Yes. I can remember going in '53 and being new to the area, and camp just to the east of her and well, we got done with supper, making supper, and well, 'what do we do with the cans?' No thought about ever taking them out again. And well, there was a big pile of trash back there, and well, our can went on there. And ironically, five years later, I cleaned that pile up.

[Both laugh]

**0:35:02.3**

**GTR:** A different idea. When you started with the Forest Service were you removing some of the other resorts or cabins?

**PS:** Oh, yeah. A lot of them were on Basswood, of course. Let's see, I think that's about the only place, well, Basswood and Crooked Lake, and then when we get down in Horse and Four Town, some of those in that area, worked on. But nothing up that way, other than Ben Ambrose's, I worked on that.

**GTR:** Taking that out?

**PS:** No, we just burned it down. And he had a rock fireplace and we just took all those rocks and made a big rock cairn out of them. Which should still be there.

**GTR:** What was that like? How did that feel to be erasing some of these things?

**PS:** The history? Well, it would be nice, in a way, to leave some of that, but then you've got people going up there and using it and, you know, it gets abused and not taken care of, and it's better off to just let the land reclaim itself. Which happened on Dorothy's island and at Ben's.

**GTR:** Is there still a sign on the island, of Dorothy's?

**PS:** Is there what?

**GTR:** Is there still a sign there?

**PS:** Boy, I don't know.

**GTR:** When have you been there recently?

**PS:** I haven't been there... Well, I guess I was there a couple of times, but I can't remember. Ben's, they put a, maybe the Canadian's did it, because they put on the Canadian side a brass plaque on one of the rock things. But, Jerry, again, would be able to tell you about Dorothy's. I'm not sure.

**GTR:** I know Sarah, from the museum, was just up there last week. I can ask her.

**PS:** Oh yeah, okay.

**GTR:** But I was wondering when you had last been there, how it feels to be there with no cabins.

**PS:** With everything gone. Yeah.

**GTR:** Does that seem weird?

**GTR:** Well, you know, if you knew nothing about it, you'd just think it's another island. And it's the same with Basswood. There were so many resorts and cabins there. I know one fellow that taught college, and I forget just where, but he would take groups of students up and if they camped on a site with—and he had all the old records and photographs of the resort—and he'd have his students go around and, 'well, see what you can find' and not tell them about it. And well, 'we found this or that'. And then he'd bring out the pictures of the resort and they were just dumbfounded that, 'wow, that was here?'.

And there was a lot of cabins and resorts on Basswood. And yet, if you didn't know it, you would think that was always nothing. So, and I often think about the whole resort/cabin buy-out—and this happened in the '50s and '60s—nowadays we couldn't afford to do it. Because some of those resorts and stuff went really cheap. I don't know if you've been up Basswood, going Newton to Pipestone, but one of the first ones to go was Paul and Edna Summers at Pipestone Portage. They had their resort there. And they just got \$50,000. This was back, early '50s. And later on, some of them were getting up to a million dollars. And, like I say, nowadays, there's just no way that we could afford to do it.

**GTR:** I suppose, yes.

**PS:** So, it was depending on your point of view, it happened at a good time. Interesting era.

**GTR:** How did Dorothy feel about it all, do you think?

**PS:** Well, most places, people got lifetime reservations, if they wanted them. And as I remember, I'll just throw out a figure, if you got \$100,000 in 1960, for every year you stayed, I think it was four percent of that. So, after ten years, you'd lose forty percent and she and Ben both felt that they were going to win in the court and not have to leave. Well, as it came out, they both lost. And so, their buyout time was 1975.

**GTR:** Okay.

**0:40:39.4**

**PS:** And that's where we have the dilemma of, 'okay, now what do we do with them?'

**GTR:** So, they would have been, they would have gotten money at that point still, or had they overstayed there...

**PS:** Yeah, they got money, because again, she had some islands down on Snowbank Lake. So, she got some money, how much, you'd have to go to the records on that. And I know, what's the name of the place down, oh, the museum, down in the Chisholm area.

**GTR:** Iron World?

**PS:** Iron World. They've got all kinds of records down there. This guy that I said took the students out, he got records from down there. And I think that's where a lot of the Forest Service records went.

**GTR:** Hmmm, interesting.

**PS:** So, they'd be available. Pictures of resorts and just all kinds of history there.

**GTR:** That may be where we want to put these interviews, might end up there, too. Do you know where that professor was from? Which college?

**PS:** I want to say it was out in Oregon.

**GTR:** Oh, really?

**PS:** But I think he had ties back here. Somewhere I must have his name. I just can't recall it. I haven't been in contact with him in thirty years, probably.

**GTR:** I was just curious if it was local. It sounds interesting.

**PS:** Yeah, I'm sure he was somewhat local, which is why he had an interest in the area. But, the last I remember he was teaching out there, William Clark College or something? I can't quite remember.

**GTR:** It is such an interesting time to think about. The wilderness versus resorts and you say there was the court battle.

**PS:** The transition.

**GTR:** And then in '75 when she was considered a volunteer, how do you think Dorothy felt about that? Did she just roll her eyes that we had to do that?

**PS:** I think at that point, she accepted that, yeah, they all lost and anything she could get would be good.

**GTR:** So, was her relationship with the Forest Service then, when she had the radio and they were helping her, was that pretty good?

**PS:** I think it was pretty amiable, yeah.

**GTR:** Was she surprised by that volunteer thing? Were they thinking if they lost in '75 they were out and then surprised?

**PS:** I'm not sure.

**GTR:** But you remember having that volunteer conversation yourself?

**PS:** But it happened and I guess at that point she was probably just, 'well, yeah, I'm glad to have anything then'. But that's just speculation on my part.

**GTR:** So, she definitely didn't want to leave, it sounds like.

**PS:** No, no. And Jerry and Jim, well it must have been on the 18<sup>th</sup>, they had no radio contact in December and flew up there. And I'm not sure, I never asked Jerry, I've been meaning to, just where they found her. I'm speculating, that she had gone down to the lake to get water and carrying that back and maybe died somewhere between the lake and the cabin, I don't really know. Jerry can tell you.

**GTR:** I think someone did interview, so I think it's in the book. I should bring that book in, it's in my car. I think it said in there that she was in the cabin, that maybe had just gotten some water or done something, but she was inside.

**0:45:06.1**

**PS:** And I'm not sure if that's all true or not.

**GTR:** Oh, okay.

**PS:** You know, there may have been extenuating circumstances, that's why I thought, well, someday I'll just sit down with Jim and Jerry and ask them.

**GTR:** So, when they could fly in, and then did they fly her body out then?

**PS:** Well, they had to get the coroner in. Trying to think of his name; he's a doctor down in Babbitt. But he had to fly in to certify that she wasn't shot or whatever, that she was dead and... Reiker, Dr. Reiker, I think was his name. [unfolding of paper] Uh, Rayer, Tony Rayer.

**GTR:** How do you spell that?

**PS:** R-a-y-e-r.

**GTR:** R-a-y-e-r. Okay.

**PS:** And he was in the Babbitt clinic at that time.

**GTR:** So, they flew in. And would they have enough weight to carry her body out in the plane.

**PS:** Oh, yeah, in the plane, yeah, yeah. Just, I imagine, put her in a body bag and took her out.

**GTR:** And then the family, just getting all the arrangements done, to get her back.

**PS:** To get her back. She says, burial, cremation, or removal, and it says 'removal to Union Cemetery, New Kensington, Moreland, Pennsylvania'. And I would assume, that she got cremated, because her father had been cremated, but I'm not sure of that. And the Kerntz Funeral Home handled it. And it says, 'date of burial, cremation or removal', so it doesn't really say, but I'm suspecting that she was cremated.

**GTR:** Were you around for the snowmobile ride back in?

**PS:** No, for some reason I was gone then. And the same with Benny Ambrose. I had interviewed him and two weeks later I was out backpacking. I visited friends and they said, 'geez, there was just an article on the internet or something about an old fellow and came out of his bed that died' and they had the services up there and they did allow, that would have been the summer time, they did allow motors to go in.

And kind of the irony with Ben, you know, I had gone up there, and both daughters were there and the husband, and the one daughter said, 'well, I want to take and put a big wood fire out on

the lake and burn him out there'. And her husband said, 'you can't do that'. Finally, Ben says to me, 'come on, let's go down on the point and talk about what we need to'. Because they were, her daughter and her husband were in kind of an argument about it.

The irony was, that when he died, he had evidently been down to the lake, in his boat, and he had to go up the hill to his cabin, and the summer tent where he cooked, and he must have seen smoke, that his wood fire got carried away, because he evidently just jumped out of the boat, didn't tie it up, because they found it down the lake, and he ran to the top of the hill and must have had a heart attack. And when one of the fellows that worked for us, working that area at the time, he's now dead, too, so you can't talk to him. But it took him a little while to realize that that was Ben lying next to the big woodpile, all burned up. So, it was kind of an irony, in a way, that he did get burned up there, but not completely, like the daughter had wanted.

**0:50:04.9**

**GTR:** Interesting.

**PS:** And I think they cremated him and spread his ashes up there. Ben came from Iowa originally and when he came back, he'd bring back sacks full of good Iowa dirt. And he had some beautiful gardens up there.

**GTR:** Oh, yeah, I saw some pictures somewhere. So, what happened when the cabin was taken out there then?

**PS:** Well, it was burned.

**GTR:** Right, or yeah, it was burned. Is the dirt still there?

**PS:** Yes.

**GTR:** Do things grow? Are there flowers that still come back?

**PS:** Yeah, I haven't been there for... it's been a while, probably twenty-five years. But eventually it just starts filling in with natural stuff.

**GTR:** I suppose. There are some flowers that are pretty persistent though, it depends.

**PS:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** That's crazy to think about though, portaging up dirt. [Laughs]

**PS:** Yeah, yeah. He had some nice gardens. He'd grow vegetables, etcetera.

**GTR:** Did Dorothy have any gardens or, not vegetables, but...

**PS:** I think she had some little flowers around, but nothing vegetable wise, that I can remember anyway.

**GTR:** I wonder, for the diet, it was not very varied at that point, or fresh stuff or anything.

**PS:** Whatever anybody would bring up. Yeah.

**GTR:** She would get some from Benny maybe? If he had extra veggies or something would he bring them over?

**PS:** He'd drop them off at her... I know I talked to some folk's from Widjiwagan that, at the end of their trip, if they had any food left, they would give it to her. Not every trip, some trips we didn't have anything left, but they would drop off. So, I'm sure a lot of people did that.

**GTR:** Probably not a lot fresh, though.

**PS:** Probably not a lot fresh, unless people were going up just to stay at her place and visit with her, they might bring up, you know, some fresh vegetables. I'm sure she got plenty of that, at least in the earlier years anyway.

**GTR:** People coming up there.

**PS:** Yeah.

**GTR:** So, why do you think we should keep sharing the story of Dorothy and her life? What's important?

**PS:** Well, it's an interesting story and certainly an interesting woman, and fairly well known because of people stopping there for candy bars and root beer and whatever. And that's where I bring up Ben Ambrose, because I think he was... He fit into the area more than she did. She was a little more bizarre, where he just lived up there, did his trapping, prospecting, growing his food, whatever, and just... They were both characters in their own way. Just always felt that he fit into the area better.

**GTR:** Would he travel out to visit people? It sounds like she used to do that quite a bit.

**PS:** Ah, she did in the winter to go visit friends down in Indiana or Illinois or whatever. And I'm not sure about Ben. I know, I think his wife lived in Duluth. Got remarried. And I know when she died, that Ben tied a good drink on. That really kind of shook him. But that was not very many years before he died.

**GTR:** Would he get down to Duluth or other places?

**PS:** I'm not sure. I know he'd get out, but whether he would just go to Grand Marais, I don't know, and again, Jerry might be able to help you with that one a little more.

**GTR:** And even Dorothy, when she would go out, she didn't own a car anywhere, right?

**PS:** She had plenty of friends to get her around.

**GTR:** Give her a ride to the, train would she take out to get down there at that point?

**PS:** Probably originally, trains were still running.

**GTR:** But then how would she get out, like in the '80s, how would she get to Illinois?

**PS:** Well, somebody would take her down to Duluth. And even in the '80s, they still had bus service to Ely.

**0:55:00.5**

**PS:** But I would guess that she flew, but I don't know for sure.

**GTR:** When you read more about her, she does sound pretty worldly and getting around, going places. Not a hermit.

**PS:** Oh, yeah. Not a hermit, like Ben was. Yeah. Like I say, if he didn't know you, he'd go hide in the woods until you left. He used to always, if we were going up there, he loved, I'm trying to figure out what they are, they're date filled, you fold them up, I can't think of the name, but he loved those. So, we'd take up a couple dozen of those. He'd kind of hoard those.

**GTR:** I can't think of what they'd be either. There was the Fig Newton.

**PS:** Well, it was kind of like a Fig Newton. They were square, you put the filling in them, and then when you fold them corner-to-corner, they came out triangular shape.

**GTR:** Kolaches? Kolaches or some...

**PS:** I can't remember.

**GTR:** Well, you'd bring his favorites. That's great.

**PS:** But he loved them anyway.

**GTR:** So, you had just met him when you were paddling and working for the Forest Service, too.

**PS:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yes, he does sound like a character.



**PS:** Yeah, yeah.

**GTR:** Would people try to stop by or visit or bug him or something?

**PS:** Some would. But a lot of people, he was a little more isolated than Dorothy. So, a lot of people just didn't even know he was there, and not being written up like she was.

**GTR:** She was pretty famous.

**PS:** Yeah, yeah, she got a lot of publicity. You know, and it was because of her bizarreness, I guess.

**GTR:** She was unique.

**PS:** Yeah, yeah, very unique.

**GTR:** What's your most lasting memory or what do you think of when you think of her?

**PS:** I guess, at the end, she just mellowed out more. You know, once she got to be a volunteer and knew that she was getting older and she knew that her time was coming, too and she just seemed just much mellower.

**GTR:** Would she be kind of strident about the Forest Service before that?

**PS:** Kind of, not real bad, but I suppose when her cohorts would come up with their snow mobiles and stuff, that they'd get talking and I'm sure if you were a mouse in a corner, you'd hear all kinds of things.

**GTR:** I suppose you worked for the Forest Service, right, so she might not...

**PS:** Yeah, right.

**GTR:** Interesting, okay.

**PS:** But, she and Jerry got along really well.

**GTR:** Yeah, I'll have to talk to Sarah, if he's on the list.

**PS:** Oh, yeah, I'm sure he's on the list.

**GTR:** Not this trip, I'm up here tomorrow, too, but not on the list right now, I don't think.

**PS:** Now Jerry, you might have to line up a little bit ahead of time, because he does have a cabin in Canada he spends a lot of time at.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PS:** But he would be a, with the Forest Service, the main source of information.

**GTR:** Great.

**PS:** Okay?

**GTR:** Yeah, I think so.

**PS:** All right.

**GTR:** Anything else?

**PS:** Can't think of anything.

**GTR:** Let's see, we have to sign the forms. Can I take your picture?

**PS:** Yeah, you can have the picture. And pertinent data.

**GTR:** Oh, take your picture; just take a picture of you. I'm sure Sarah can make a copy.

**PS:** I had a couple made.

**GTR:** You have copies, okay.

**PS:** I gave one to the gal, because that was, twenty-nine years ago already.

**GTR:** I do that. [Looking at photo] I see you have desks behind your head there.

**PS:** Pretty interesting with the phone cameras and everything nowadays and how anything, you have to be careful of. Particularly, the police are starting to realize, 'boy, I can't be screwing up here, because somebody's going to be taking my picture'.

**GTR:** I know, it's true. I wonder, I haven't been in the Boundary Waters since people carried these around that much. Unfortunately, too long for me.

**PS:** Well, yeah, and can call home.

**GTR:** I'm old enough that I remember these. I had plenty of trips into the Boundary Waters and we didn't have anything (like phones).

**PS:** It's a good safety thing, but at the same time, you know, why are you out there?

**1:00:17.7**

**GTR:** It's different. Why did you end up here? Why did you end up staying in the wilderness?

**PS:** Well, I guess that summer of '58 kind of hooked me. So, I came back and '61 worked on timber inventory of the whole forest and ended up going out west for the Park Service to Crater Lake and decided, my wife had taught here three years, and really missed in and we decided to come back and went to Two Harbors for about eight months and got up here and just said, 'okay, let's just stay here'. That gave me some good background, having worked here in the summer.

**GTR:** Was this written up, just notes?

**PS:** That's mainly just action plan that talks about some of the stuff that I told you about.

**GTR:** Forest Service action plan?

**PS:** Yeah.

**GTR:** I'm sure they have that somewhere, too. What else, Sarah has in the archives; I'm just trying to supplement what she has in the archives here.

[Looking through papers]

**PS:** Tells of supplies that come in by Beaver aircraft. It doesn't tell you anything more than what we talked about. It's just our action plan.

**GTR:** A Forest Service document.

**PS:** No, it's just something I typed up.

**GTR:** For after she passed away?

**PS:** Just, what to do with the buildings, checking for archeological significance, who to contact, things like that.

**GTR:** She didn't really have much of an opinion on stuff, like who should get what or anything like that?

**PS:** Other than, like I said, she talked about, giving all the canoe paddles... Let's see if I have it now. [Ruffling through papers] It says, 'close the three islands to camping and remove the buildings'. That was about it. So, and then, who to contact. Things like that.

**GTR:** So, you had done it before you retired?

**PS:** Yeah, that would have been, probably about '84 or something like that.

**GTR:** Do you think Sarah at the museum would have that, or if they would be willing to share a copy with them?

**PS:** If she wanted a copy, she could do that, yeah.

**GTR:** She might, yeah.

**PS:** I could give it to you and you could give it back to me. I'd like that.

**GTR:** She could give it back to you. I'm not going to be here.

**PS:** Okay.

**GTR:** Oh yeah. So, what was the ornament of?

**PS:** Just a round Styrofoam balls and then she'd have these pins she'd put in them with little beads on them and some kind of embroidery stuff that she might glue around them. Kind of schmaltzy, but... Sarah must have some up there.

**1:05:03.6**

**GTR:** Yeah, probably.

**PS:** I would guess she would anyway.

**GTR:** Probably so. We can get Sarah's help. I would leave it with Sarah maybe if she... We have your address here... all right, good. She can get that back to you, unless you want me to call her. My phone doesn't work right now. I could go upstairs.

**PS:** Not from down here, though.

**GTR:** Oh, she said it wouldn't but it kind of looks like it does. I know she can get it back to you. It's just, if she already has it, I don't want to make you guys go through the mailing process.

**PS:** I doubt that she probably has it.

**GTR:** Okay, we can definitely get that back to you then. But yeah, that'd be really interesting.

**PS:** Because that, I typed up for my files.

**GTR:** Okay. That would be good information, if you don't mind.

**PS:** Okay? Again, I don't know but maybe the last photo taken. There's still another three weeks maybe another month that people could have gotten up there. Now, whether anyone took a picture, I don't know. That's just speculation on my part.

**GTR:** It was definitely right at that time.

**PS:** Yeah, it was close to the end anyway.

**GTR:** But, you have copies of this, so you don't need another one. But I can definitely get that back to you.

**PS:** That's for her.

**GTR:** Okay.

**PS:** Okay?

**GTR:** I have to get a hold of Sarah. I like to give people a little treat.

**PS:** Oh, good grief!

**GTR:** It's not really root beer, and then that's my information if you have any questions.

**PS:** Oh, okay.

**GTR:** Thank you!

**1:07:28.4**