

INTERVIEW OF MARY FRANCES DE HART  
INTERVIEWERS ARE KAREN BREWSTER AND BARBARA CELLARIUS  
SEPTEMBER 1, 2016  
IN SLANA, ALASKA

BARBARA CELLARIUS: This is Barbara Cellarius from Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve and I am here with Mary Frances DeHart at Hart D Ranch in Slana, Alaska and Karen Brewster from the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, Alaska Oral History Program is also here. It is the morning of September 1, 2016 and we are going to be talking today about Mary Frances how she came to Alaska and some of the experiences she has had here in Slana and in the general area. So, if we could start just with where and when you were born and where you grew up and talk a little bit about yourself.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, I was born in Ohio, Harrisburg, Ohio. Grew up on a large farm there and graduated from Ohio State University with a degree in Home Economics and I got my teaching certificate in both home economics and art high school.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And then when did you come to Alaska?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, I first came to Alaska in 1961. Of course, my parents were here many years before that, but I was left on the farm to feed the livestock.

KAREN BREWSTER: So why did your parents come up?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, they came up -- they were friends of Don, which was my husband who passed away in 1977 and they helped with the hunting here. At Slana we hunted here. This is where why it was established here at Slana his guiding and outfitting headquarters.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And how did they get to know him? Do you know how your parents knew Don?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, yes. Don lectured in the winter throughout the US on Alaska and set up all over the United States and showed at that time it was 16 millimeter films and narrated films. So he used our home as headquarters when he was lecturing on the East Coast. New York area, Pennsylvania, New York and then a lot in North, South Carolina, Florida. So that is how -- that is how I first -- first knew Don and, of course, both my parents were avid hunters.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what were your parents' names?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Glen and Frances Pew -- P-E-W.

KAREN BREWSTER: I think we should say that some of the background anyways is Yukon, the parrot and you have two little dogs also that might --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, I had a couple, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Add a few little comments in here as well.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So you said you came up for the first time in 1961. Is that --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: In 1961 I was still in college so I couldn't stay, yeah.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So just for a visit.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, all summer. So I took the first summer I think that was my freshman year in college. Took the summer off to spend the summer here -- working here and then the -- I went straight through college the summers the rest so I could get out early.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so you came to work for Don?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Don here, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And his guiding?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: What did you do for him?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh mainly I was working at the -- at that time we were across the road at the -- he was leasing the DeWitt and trying to purchase the DeWitt estate. And also helped take care -- we usually had between 20 to 25 head of horses.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so were you here during the hunting season that first summer?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No, I had returned to Ohio to school and Don was 18 years older than I. So I knew him from the time I was in really elementary school. But, I don't know, my parents usually were here every year in the summer to help -- to help with the camps. In the area here we generally had three main camps and we used solely horses and we took not only -- it was not only hunting trips, but photography trips as well and float trips on the Yukon River.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So when did you move up to Alaska more permanently?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Probably early seventies I started moving. And from that time on mother lived here from that time too. So it was mother and Don and I and then Don (dogs barking) passed away with Lou Gehrig's in 1977.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And when Don was -- would go to the Lower 48 and do the presentations was that intended to be like advertising for his guiding business?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: It was some advertising as well as advertising Alaska. So it is a lot of -- and I have a lot of the early filming here of when there were thousands of caribou like crossing the -- wading across the Copper River from years ago, so.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And what kinds of things when you were here more permanently, how -- what was your involvement in running the business?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: A part of everything. Yeah, setting out the camp -- putting out the camps, camp trip, helping an assistant guide and Don's illness was very short. He lived less than a year with Lou Gehrig's, but he was the longest patient at the hospital. At that time it was a hospital -- Faith Hospital in Glennallen. So he was hospitalized there ten and a half months. So mother and I took 24 hour around the clock -- had to take around the clock care of him.

KAREN BREWSTER: And during that time you continued to run the guiding business?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I continued -- well, when he ended up in the hospital, it was just at the close of the season. We hunted not only in the area here, but we guided here as well as Kodiak and the Alaska Peninsula. So it was when we finished the hunt in October in Kodiak that -- in fact he diagnosed himself, you know, what he had because he didn't realize there was a problem until we got back into the town of Kodiak and he was on -- so I was thankful to have that ten and a half months because that time then I studied and got my registered guide license so it would be the number five woman registered guide in the state.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you were the fifth registered guide in the state?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Or fifth woman registered guide, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow! Do you know who the first four were?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I don't -- yeah, I can't list them at this time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Elizabeth Hickler (phonetic) was she one of them?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes, she was one, yes.

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KAREN BREWSTER: And did Don also guide polar bear hunting on the North Slope?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes, he did.

KAREN BREWSTER: He did. So what was --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: That was the earlier years before polar bear was closed and he used dog team guiding up there. I was never involved with -- at the time I was at school, but my father was involved with that and helped with the dog team polar bear hunting.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did they hire local Native men to help with the dog teams?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes. Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: In what Point Hope?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Point Hope. Uh-huh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Interesting.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And how about here? Did you hire local people to help with the different activities with the guiding here at this position?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes. Were hired as assistant guides here.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And how did Don -- do you know how Don actually ended up here in the Slana area?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, yeah, I know he was, you know, familiar with the state. Of course, he came to Alaska with the work -- for a short time with the Alaska Railroad and then he was head of BLM in Anchorage for a short time and -- but was put into an office job which he didn't care for as his BLM. So started guiding in the area first around Lake Louise and then up here.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And the property that you have here was it --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: He homesteaded.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: He homesteaded.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: The property.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Okay.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: In fact, he had filed on -- in fact, where the Visitor's Center is now, all the surrounding 160 acres here was laid out by Don, but because he was lecturing and traveling in the Lower 48 in the wintertime did not have the time, you know, to really clear the property, the requirement.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Right. To prove it up.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Get proved up on the complete homestead so he let a woman employee that was a cook prove up on the surrounding property so it has since been divided. I have been trying to put together some of the property. I purchased like a couple years the -- it was divided up into separate plots like the 10 acre in behind me here as a hotel property because that was the final phase of development here would be the hotel and the restaurant.

KAREN BREWSTER: So I am interested in hearing a little bit about your experiences actually out guiding and what that was like?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: It was fun. Well, as I said, we used horses strictly. We did not have a plane so backpacked in with horses and also set up three main camps in the Copper area, Little Tok area, Mentasta area and probably the major -- main camp was in Copper area.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And when you say Copper area, you mean up the headwaters of Copper Lake.

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Copper Lake would be say for the horses it was a two night trip in so a little over 30 miles in. We used the Copper Lake area as the -- our first night up in the sheep country. So it was too far for the horses for a one day trip.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you would bring the clients from here. They would go those two days with you?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right. Oh, yes, from here.

KAREN BREWSTER: You didn't go set up camp ahead of time?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Main camp was set up so we had big cook, you know.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So the cook at the main --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: We always had a cook for each of the camps full time, full-time cook. So they were set up ahead of time, but the hunters would come in to here, possibly stay a night or two here, usually were flown into here when we could land like either and taxi in where the post office is now. Land on the road here. And I think at that time one of the air services I believe was Wilbur flying at that time. Usually flying a 180 with passengers that would bring the hunters here. Sometimes they would rent a car and drive out.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then how many hunters, people, would be in a group that would go out to hunt?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, our hunts -- the minimum hunt was 10 days, usually 15 to 21 day and just one hunter or usually one to two.

KAREN BREWSTER: One to two hunters you say. So you would take one guy out on the 21 day trip?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Each hunter had their own guide. There was no groups.

KAREN BREWSTER: Unless they went out together.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Unless it was a man and wife couple maybe there might be, they might be together. Basically each hunter had their own assistant guide.

KAREN BREWSTER: But then --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: From the main camp we would set out what we call spike camps.

KAREN BREWSTER: Can you describe what a spike camp is for people who don't know?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, maybe up in sheep country say where they get out too far to really come back to the main camp at night so they might just take supplies, backpack supplies for a night or two to stay out before they come back to main camp.

KAREN BREWSTER: So a tent --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Just in order they could be farther away. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: When you said each hunter had their own assistant guide, but back at those camps you would have more than one person? You would have --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: There might be say four hunters, you know, at the same time, but each would have their assistant guide. They would have their sleeping tents set up there as well as the large cook tent and there would be a full-time cook at the main camp.

KAREN BREWSTER: And how many employees did Don and you have?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: (Dog barking) Mikki -- depending upon the number -- the number of hunters. You know, there might be I'd say usually maybe 10 to 12 people around most of the time at one time.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did certain people just guide and certain people just wrangled (dog barking)?

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: We would have a horse wrangler (phone ringing/dogs barking) usually.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So we were talking about the -- somebody you had hired who was just a horse wrangler.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, there usually has to be just a horse wrangler taking care of the horses, getting ready, keeping them shod and yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was that person often a local person or somebody --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No. Usually, no, there really were very few people living in the area and it possibly could be some years, you know, that would change. For several years we had people come up like from Oklahoma, North and South Dakota, Montana that, you know, were qualified and, of course, could do these things, yeah, yeah, and would spend the summer here and they would come up. They would usually be here in the spring because horses were wintered. When Don was living usually we wintered our horses down at Fort Saint John in Canadian -- on Canadian pasture.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, okay.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: And then until I was taking care, of course, being here was just mother and I running the business so I did not have the time. Couldn't leave, you know, to make the long trip down the Alaska Highway to Fort Saint John so I did the recent wintering was at Delta Junction with Dana Screen (phonetic). And that was when -- and I had -- Don had BLM lease and it was a 50 -- 65,000 acre grazing lease that was within the Park in the Copper area and then when he passed away and I had my registered guide license I was able to get the grazing lease for the horses. I still had the horses, but that lease was closed one winter just overnight. I think it was like January or February by the Park Service because it ended up taking precedence over the Federal BLM lease. So I had no place to bring the horses back in the spring which was usually in May that we bring the horses back. I would keep one horse here at the ranch, possibly two, so that I could ride as well as if any of the horses, of course, usually once or twice during the summer the leader would decide to come back to the ranch. So I would be notified maybe that your horses are walking down the road. They would come out the Twelve Mile Trail and just walk down the Nabesna Road and at that time we always had a gate closed here just so the horses would wander off gate, yeah. And, of course, then you had to have some way to take them back in. Of course, they were looking for a handout, but, of course, they had good grass and on the grazing lease so no point because if they were fed just for one night or anything, they are going to stay here.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how come you didn't winter the horses here?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: It was too harsh a winter to winter here. You can't keep water for 20 head of horses or feed. There is no -- really most of the feed we bought the hay from Fort St. John, bought hay in Canada and trucked in.

KAREN BREWSTER: I heard that some people left their horses up at Horsfeld and just let them roam.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: (Noise). The cat fell down. Oh, that opened the window that's why. It was because of the smell.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: I wanted to ask what kind of -- how did the clients accept you as a woman guide?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Really, no problem. Most of my clients, you know, before they booked they knew me. I met most of the clients. In fact, we would usually be at their

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homes, you know, and booking for -- possibly, in fact, we had clients booked two to three years in advance. They were always booked. I say they were always booked at least a year in advance, most of them two and three years in advance.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you had repeat clients. These people came back.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, some of them were repeats, but most of them we met them at their homes.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So you knew them before they came?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Before they even came.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Before they arrived in Alaska so they weren't surprised.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. So how did you learn to hunt?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I didn't. I grew up hunting.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So when you were living back in Ohio?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes. On the farm. So I grew up hunting groundhogs, keeping them out of the hayfields, yeah. Squirrel and rabbits.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Were there things that you had to learn when you came up here to be a hunting guide that were different from the hunting that you had done growing up?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, yeah, certainly.

KAREN BREWSTER: Such as?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, of course, hunting this was just hunting from you know your home where you lived there just going out, you know, one day hunting, you know, for small varmint and he was usually keeping the varmint down you know on the farm because of the broken axles and flat tires that they would cause to the equipment. So here it was, you know, a whole different story learning to cook on a Coleman stove or with a little wood stove and learning to well a different kind of -- different -- completely different type of hunting and not and learning how to pack, you know, carry a backpack and using horses as pack horses. Yeah, I always I've had a horse since I was three years old, but -- and did a lot of riding in Ohio, but never did any packing. And a lot of that was learned through some of the clients that we had, such as Joe Back. He had made numerous trips, was a very good friend and he is well known for as being the authority in the US on back -- on packing, horse packing. He has had numerous books out. Of course, he has been deceased a number of years, but like Horses, Hitches and Rocky Trails, the Moose's Tooth, but he hunted a number of times with us.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then did Don teach you things as well?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, certainly.

KAREN BREWSTER: I was wondering about tracking the animals and how you would know where to go find the animals.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right. It was, yeah, just learning via Don. He was sort of an expert in that, yes. And we did some -- some trapping in the winter as well.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So did he live here year round?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: He lived here year round.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Except when he was outside doing the promotions?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And once you moved up here and you married, did you go out and do those lectures with him?

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah. I didn't do any of the lecturing. In fact, when I was at school -- in fact, we went to many of them. I helped set up and so on. He would travel to many of the -- travel along with my mother and father, yeah, was a part of it.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And were there other -- go ahead. I was going to ask if there was other guides in the area and what were the -- did the guides help each other?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Really we didn't have any close con -- there was no one I mean we didn't live close, operated completely separate, really the only other guide that was in this area was Bud Conkle, but he operated a different type -- they were different, completely different type outfit than the way we operated. He used an airplane, had a few horses, but it was mainly flying. So operated completely different.

KAREN BREWSTER: What about Cleo McMahan? Was he guiding at that time?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: He wasn't -- he wasn't guiding in the area here, no.

KAREN BREWSTER: And Urban --

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Urban is on the other side.

KAREN BREWSTER: Urban Raho is on the other side.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, yeah, so. No, there was really no one around.

KAREN BREWSTER: And the Ellis' weren't?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: They were using plane and another completely, you know, different area. Lee Hancock was the only guide that was say and he worked for us a good part of the time. Taylor's did some guiding, Grizzly Lake, and they also came to Alaska working for us. So we did employ other registered guides depending upon the number of clients we had.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And usually how many clients?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Like Wilson Justin was an employee some, worked some. Calvin Justin, Lena Charley.

KAREN BREWSTER: Part of this whole story here the guiding and that the Ahtna people worked as guides. I had not known that at all until I started this project and I think it is fascinating.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah and several, several of our employ -- as assistant guides and they were employed just per hunt, for a specific client, not for the whole season or anything like employed for 10 days at a time, 15 days at a time. Many were from Mentasta and such as Housty Sanford, Jenny Sanford.

KAREN BREWSTER: So as the guide what you say you would take one hunter out. As the guide, did you also butcher the animal and carry it back to camp?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: You got to do all that.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: All meat was brought back. Of course, if we had the horse, it was packed on horses and yeah. And our main hunting was for sheep and bear. You know, if a caribou or moose, you know, that was secondary and we did quite a bit of fishing in between if the weather were bad or something like that. Most of the fishing was Copper Lake. We usually kept a large boat at Copper Lake.

KAREN BREWSTER: So we were talking before about the experience of being a woman in this business what that was like and did you interact with other women guides or did --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No, there wasn't anybody. Well, other than the assistant. I worked with Jenny and with Lena were the two women that we had.

KAREN BREWSTER: But what was it like being a woman in that man's world of hunting?

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Uh-uh. No problem.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: You said your mom was a hunter, too.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yes. Yeah, she hunted. But usually mom didn't go out guiding. She was cooking.

KAREN BREWSTER: She was here at base camp?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, in fact, she did a lot of cooking because we had to provide when the people were here, the employees, the assistant guides, or people like if had people from Outside like the horse wrangler and so on, Cat driver. Now we did use -- we had two small Cats and we used those to set up the main -- to carry the heavy gear and usually what we called Blazo boxes we would pack, the wooden gas boxes, and pack them on the trailers and take them into the main camp. That would only be like the main camp and the Little Tok camp or just as far, you know, as Copper to set up the main camp because it was so much, you know, in the way of groceries that the -- too much for the horses to pack in.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you do that when there was still snow on the ground, it was frozen or -- ?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No, this was done usually the first part of August getting camp set up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. So sheep hunting is August, September?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, we get set up so you are starting August 10<sup>th</sup>.

KAREN BREWSTER: And I assume you were using canvas wall tents.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Canvas, yes. The big white canvas wall tents and a stove in every tent and the same way the wall tents for sleeping of the clients and they each had their own tents and a wood stove and, of course, we would usually -- we would always start their -- before they got up, you know, that would be part of the duty of the guides or the horse wranglers and so on go in and start their -- the fire for -- in their tent in the morning and take them coffee. And then they would come over to the main camp where there would be table and it was set up like a regular kitchen. Uh-huh.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Go ahead.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No, I was going to say like any of the other guides like I mentioned a couple in the area here I don't know of anybody else that set up main. I don't know of anyone that had main camps set up and cook tents and a hired cook. I don't know of any other, any other outfitters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I don't know, the Conkles were at Wolf Lake, but I don't know --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: They didn't --

KAREN BREWSTER: That time period.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, and they were down I mean time period when I know they well, they flew in there, but they were over here at Cobb. They were over here at Cobb Lake.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: And they flew over there, but still it was plane.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, by that point, yeah.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: They had a few horses, but, yeah, when we were hunting, it was basically an old para plane.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I think Wilson talked about that they -- Lee Hancock that Wilson and Calvin continued to use horses later than other people.

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, they had some horses. They didn't do a lot of outfitting in the area here on their own. Mainly when Wilson or when Calvin worked, he -- they went, in fact, really I would say -- I can't even think of any hunts in the area here where they were, you know, that we employed, then that they were working here, but we have taken Calvin and Wilson like to the peninsula and to Kodiak.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Yeah, I talked to them about going to Kodiak. Calvin was telling me some stories.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: And then peninsula, yeah, Calvin or I was going to say you all going to Kodiak, of course, that is in the spring so you might be hunting on snowshoes there. You take snowshoes cause there could be snow yet, probably is. The peninsula was, you know, in the fall and it was always a fly-in you hired so we would fly in to the main camp there. Usually how we took things both to Kodiak and to the peninsula we had a large stock truck, an F-600 Ford that, you know, could haul at least eight horses. We would take that on the ferry to Kodiak and we had our boat, load that. Load the boat and load it with gear so we had our boat that we could hunt Kodiak and take everything, but flew the hunters across in the camp. We didn't take any of them in the boat because it is sort of dangerous crossing. You never know the weather and the same way with the Alaska Peninsula. I said I remember it was a different experience out there because again, you know, here it is a little hard to get lost. You know, you have got your mountains to guide you. You know basically where you're heading. You can see, but it is easy to get lost on the Alaska Peninsula. There aren't any trees where we're hunting and it is pretty much raining a good part of the time and wind blowing so one nob looks like the next. And then you aren't going to have other food like say if we were hunting in the area here if the caribou season or moose season, we would have the game meat then to eat and might even, you know, bear too so we would have plenty of meat. So usually we grew -- in fact, mom had a huge garden here and grew most of our vegetables and packed that and take into camp. So, but on the peninsula because -- because of the weather you never know when you can get out, you know. And that was always a challenge. You're having other hunters because they hunters have a strict -- they seem to have a strict time schedule. Well, I have got to be home by such and such time. Well, one says, you know, maybe it isn't going to happen. You don't have to be any place at any certain time. And I had to watch -- I had a separate cook tent, but usually I slept with a lot of the food because maybe they would stay up late at night telling stories or whatever, playing cards and so on. Well, they're looking for snacks, but I -- that was one challenge as a cook which usually I was the cook there on the peninsula and you had to manage your food allotment and at least have enough for oh, maybe a week because it may be a week longer than you intended to be there and maybe the plane could get maybe part of you out and he may not be able to come back to get the rest of you out. So you are going to have to have food and keep enough on hand. So I would be sleeping with a candy bars and bread and everything else so the clients didn't eat it or the guides eat the food. So we had enough to make do.

KAREN BREWSTER: A lot of planning goes into organizing hunting trips?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Uh-huh. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: For sure.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: I wanted to ask after Don passed away you continued with the business.

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Can you talk a little bit about that running it on your own.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right. Well, basically after I got my guide license, of course, I knew, you know, what I was doing. I then had to hire more help and registered guides, but set out the same camps and we had -- like I had hunters booked three years ahead of time. And, of course, after -- and the expense of medical expense with Don I was strapped with a tremendous amount of expense. And I had no, you know, what do you do? I had really no choice but what to continue the business as we had so much invested in the property here. So it has been and I am still struggling, you know, with the financial burden of everything. So the only choice I had was to redesign everything so that I could in some form so that I can make a living here and because, you know, being self-employed all your life in this area. Again that wasn't easy and Don helped me get started. Of course, I am an artist and but I hadn't done bronze until really Don insisted here. He was friends with a lot of the Western sculptors, the Western US sculptors, and, you know, in our travels and meeting with possible clients, he introduced me to a lot of the sculptors. And we researched foundries in the West as well and he basically -- the reason I hadn't really pursued bronze, except, you know, it was at his insistence was because of the expense involved. And you have just got such a tremendous expense in the making of a piece. For instance, a mold is going to cost usually a minimum of \$2,000 in the first place. So you have got to come up with several -- quite a bit of to get the pieces cast and to make into molds and so on. And again I was facing another challenge of how do you do this in Alaska. Then I could maybe do the original but how. There is no foundries in Alaska. How are you going to get the original to the foundry? So I decided on a foundry in Arizona as being the most convenient and there were some good foundries there. I started in Prescott, Arizona, but then found it was too hard to get in and out of Prescott and it was much easier Phoenix -- Phoenix was much easier with direct flights. So that is why I started and that helped.

So it took a lot of different things to help supplement the income. It was not only the guiding and the outfitting, but then it was the post office that supplemented too, helped. So when they decided to put a post office in the area here that was in 1977. Of course, there was the original post office was over at the Slana Roadhouse which is across and at that time when I was first here that was where Hart D Ranch was located. And we would have, you know, continued there, however, was not able to come to agreement with the DeWitt that was at that time owned by four -- the family, the brothers and the sisters as old man DeWitt had disappeared. And didn't know whether he had left. It never was, you know, you don't know whether he died in the river or whether he left or what happened, but anyway the -- it was just tied up as part of the estate and couldn't come to an agreement so at that time then we started building here.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what year was that you started building the current place?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I guess say '50, '59, '58, '59, '61 we were clearing the land here and that was the year to clearing it, yeah.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: So when you first came up here?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: They were clearing, started to clear the land.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right. I was still over at the DeWitt's.

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KAREN BREWSTER: And when did you start having clients staying here at this Hart D Ranch and Lodge?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I guess -- I don't know what year it was. I am going in '65. Let's see by the time I got up here, of course, this was just the main house and I have added just this part right here. I have added on all the rest of it, yeah. I was going to say the early, the late '60's, '68, something like that, yeah.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And you talked a little bit about at the beginning about how your business had been impacted by the Park. Could you talk a little bit about that?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Repeat that again how.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: You talked at the beginning you talked a little bit about how -- what -- when the Park was established how it affected your -- the business.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, yeah. It basically took the business. I lost everything. I had to sell the horses which I didn't have an opportunity to get, you know, the price that I should have for the horses because basically I didn't see the horses after I took them up for wintering say the first of October and they were at Delta at the time so where I was wintering. I just ended up selling them where they were at the area there. So I had nothing it helped so then I started -- I did get the contract for the post office, but I had to build a building. They let me temporarily use the -- what we used as the summer bunkhouse. So I used that temporarily one room over there as a post office. Of course, it was pretty cold. It isn't insulated for winter use so it was pretty cold in the wintertime, but -- which, of course, the post office at that time was open Tuesday and Thursday. And mother she operated the post office. She solely operated the post office and then it took me, I don't know, two and a half years say to build the building because I physically myself pulled in all the logs with my Cat, a little Case 310, so from across. I brought them, you know, from over by the Copper River and in behind here. So I cut and pulled in all the logs and got up all the walls. I did have to have -- I had some friends of my family come up to help get the ridge up and to do the roof and so on. But most of the logs and, in fact, we had a log peeling contest and the people from the hospital where Don was so it was summer missionaries came up and we had a fish fry and I said, okay, how are we going to get all these logs peeled. So we took a weekend and got the logs peeled with about thirty people.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: That's fabulous.

KAREN BREWSTER: So it is my understanding that there is hunting still in the Preserve, correct?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I -- yes, there is some.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how is it that the Park coming in --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: We did not hunt on that side. We hunted on the --

BARBARA CELLARIUS: The area where they were hunting would have been --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Our part and where the grazing lease area was.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was within the Park boundaries?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right, it was in the Park --

KAREN BREWSTER: I just wanted clarification.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: The Copper area and the grazing lease went for about three miles across the Copper River as well.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so you had an exclusive guide area?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: At that time, yes.

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KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember when that --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Came in and how --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I guess my question is the change from just being able to go anywhere to having your exclusive area what that meant?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Probably the exclusive area. It was I think it was before Don died. I was going to say '75, '76.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you remember how that felt for the business and did it change the way you guys did things?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Uh-uh. No, except it limited. You could only have three exclusive guide areas and so I had a guide area in Units 11, 12, and 13 here, plus Kodiak and the Alaska Peninsula and so I gave up basically -- they wanted me to keep -- I kept Kodiak. I hunted Kodiak, but I didn't go back myself to the peninsula after Don died. We did continue. I had hunters booked for Kodiak. We used horses there as well. I leased horses from either the -- there were a couple ranchers that had horses on Kodiak and leased horses there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I was just wondering if the change to exclusive areas was as big an impact as the Park was?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No. No. I was granted the same exclusive areas and here so that didn't have an impact. No, it was the Park that put me completely out of business because we had to have all three camps together. Like the Little Tok camp was some sheep hunting, but it was mainly -- we moved them like from Copper to Little Tok say if they were hunting moose so it might be better in the Little Tok or Mentasta area for moose. Sheep was more the Copper and some in the Little Tok area.

KAREN BREWSTER: And all of that got encompassed by the Park boundary?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right. So basically, you know, put me out of business completely and then you don't have when that is your only, you know, your full-time business so you don't have the money to do anything else either. And, of course, all the time that I was here, you know, was completely self-sufficient. There weren't services or anything. It was on generator. We did have a generator, but ran generator 24/7. The other biggest impact here has been the incoming of power to my disadvantage.

KAREN BREWSTER: How so?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, it has doubled my expense.

KAREN BREWSTER: So nothing -- power brought in is more expensive than using a generator?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Certainly for me, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow!

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Because I heated with my generator. It wouldn't have been had they had the power that they were bringing into the area had they done what the original plan was to connect it to Tok, but now we are paying over double what Glennallen pays and it averages right at 26 cents a kilowatt more than what Tok pays cause somehow this highway -- they managed to call it a village. And right now it is just, you know, strictly diesel and the thing is I heated with my generators. I lost my heat source when they were -- so that has been a big impact when they were burnt.

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KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And, you know, all these challenges with Don dying and you taking over the business and trying to find all these ways to make money what motivated you to stay here? Why didn't you just pick up and go back to Ohio or someplace else?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I had no family in Ohio. So right now I have no living relatives. I have no one and, you know, your life is invested here so you got to have something. How are you going -- where are you going to move? You got to have something to live on. This was the only place that I had of making enough, you know, to pay the monthly of what I could do myself to make a self-employed living when you are self-employed so you have no retirement.

KAREN BREWSTER: Why did you want to continue to be self-employed and move out here?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: How can you change anything, you know, at 60 years old say?

KAREN BREWSTER: I was thinking in the time when Don passed away and you chose to continue to live here.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, still you didn't have the funds, you know. You didn't have any funds to go anyplace. I have lost the horses. You lost the business. So the only thing I could do was you had the property here was to figure out okay how can you make a living with the property that is here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: So I was taking a chance that hopefully okay with the Park because I knew that there is a few people coming now with motorhomes. That had just become the in-thing I guess to have campers and motorhomes. Well, they were wanting a place to park. Okay, so and I have had a few to park here and then there is some of the construction wanting a place to park. So I thought with that so it just takes a little bit of everything. My artwork, so it took my art in order to make a living, but, of course, basically with the death of Don that took my art and with the death because well I did remarry and was remarried for 11 years to Ed Buren (phonetically), but he died in 1999 at the same just within a few months of my mother and neither one of them were sick. Both died quite suddenly. Mother was still working. Ed was. So I lost everything there.

KAREN BREWSTER: You had to start over once again.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah and I had no way. I was still doing my artwork because in order to do the sculpture which I had become quite successful. I showed in galleries in Scottsdale and some galleries in Texas and about three different places in the US. I didn't show it in any galleries here in Alaska because I was having more success right here. So I had my own gallery right here and basically made most of my sales from right here or, you know, taking them into Anchorage through business contacts that I knew. But, and I was able because I had to be able to travel to the foundry. What I did I would make my first mold for my -- it is lost wax casting so I would make the first mold here because I tried sending one original to the foundry. It was destroyed. It didn't get there so that there is no way of doing this. So I have to make the molds here. So I learned to make the molds so I would pour my hollow waxes here, make the silicone mold and make the plaster mold and where the hollow wax which is identical to the bronze and then with the hollow wax poured by building large wooden boxes and encasing them in foam I was able to ship them via Alaska Airlines. They would send refrigerated that I could hold the wax, but I would have to then either drive down or fly down and be there. It might be two weeks or three weeks whatever time it took to do -- to help with the casting and to help on the metal chasing to get the pieces because the foundry has never seen the piece and I

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had to help to assemble and get them back together. And so, you know, I'd be going down to Phoenix, but as long as mother, there has -- had to be somebody here 24/7 so mother and Ed was here. So all of our traveling, you know, I have been used to, you know, traveling back and forth to Anchorage and so on for supplies and this has always been, you know, one at a time because people have to -- somebody has to be here all the time at all times. So even to Phoenix I would always go alone. I made several trips driving in order to bring pieces back. But I haven't been able to do any casting since Ed and mom died because I can't leave. It has been over a year since I have been to town which is Anchorage.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Why have you chosen not to hire people to help you?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: There is no one here to hire that I can leave and care to take care of things. There isn't anyone. I have temporary help, but that, you know, she on rare occasions will take -- can do the post office, but she has to stay here and with people having their own family. Otherwise, you know, there just isn't people in the area.

KAREN BREWSTER: Speaking of people in the area sort of a segway a little bit, we have been just talking about the difficulties and challenges. What is positive about living here? What makes this a nice place to live?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Well, I guess I -- you think it is remote, but I don't know how many hundreds of people I have had here this summer. I do meet a lot of people. Of course, they are just passersby. I will probably never see them again. Well, some of them I do, but some of them are -- yeah, this year I did get a number of return customers.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Do you have rooms that people can stay in now?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I have (inaudible) rooms and I have the 43 RV spaces and I am concentrating yeah more on the rooms. It is easier for me to take care of.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, but so the whole time, you know, since the 60's when you started coming up here to now, have there been changes in this area?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, major.

KAREN BREWSTER: Such as?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I think probably I have touched on most of these, but it is the -- well, it is like the changes with the number of people. I just can't believe the amount of traffic that is on this road now. And it was like, you know, I ran dogs for many years, had dog team and, of course, with the coming of the Park really didn't have anything to do with that, but it was more when they opened the homestead area. So that brought people in so it brought traffic and I had no way, of course, I'm not going to, you know, I kept around twenty dogs and I did sprint racing and that was the dog lot you know out here. Well, now, you know, you never -- there is dogs running around all the time. I won't even let my two little dogs loose at all outside and I am very cautious even when I take them on a leash. They go with me to the post office, but I am very cautious because there is a lot of loose dogs around. And I have the dogs that I -- from the sled dogs I had to -- I sold my team because there was just too much traffic. One of the last scary ins -- was when I ended up -- well, in order to get a trail and I said more traffic here, in order to get five mile -- a five mile trail I had to go well where the Park Service is now, the road I had a trail there that would go down around the Copper River, then I would cross the road and come on back. There wasn't anyone living around here and I could get five miles locally here or I could get my twelve miles in by starting out here, but I had to stay on the road until I got across the Slana River then I had a trail off to the right of the river, but the

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river doesn't freeze and it is just too dangerous. You might be able to get across it one day and you might not the next. So basically I would have to be on the road, but one of the days when I came back, just coming out of what goes up to the ranger station now crossing the road and, of course, on a hard surface a snow hook you aren't going to hold a dog team. It isn't going to do any good. So I am turning, you know, to come in here, well here's an airplane. I ended up going under the wing of the plane landing. The plane had just landed and was taxiing in to the Park Service there. Luckily, I had a good leader because he was trained. He would go on the right and come back, you know, so he would go with the traffic. So we just kept going.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow! Yeah, that would be a little bit scary.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: In talking about hunting, I am wondering if in those, you know, the time period, the 60's to when you stopped guiding.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Early 80's I guess, what year was, I don't know, around 1980.

KAREN BREWSTER: Around 1980, did you notice changes in the sheep populations and the other animals?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, I don't know the sheep. Say there were some very large sheep and when more hunters started going in and the fact that I think the Park opened and maybe it is still open, open for ewe season, open season on any size sheep or anything like that, yes. Because what we did, you know, was very limited as far as the sheep, you know, to keep up the population, to keep up the size. I said the size has dwindled considerably. Of course, it has been years since I've been up there now.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, but so what do you mean you did things to limit, what do you mean by that?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: We took very, you know, the sheep hunter it was very limited.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: You only had a few clients.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Few clients, the number that we took, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. What about the moose and caribou and things like that?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: That wasn't the main hunting or anything like that anyway and, of course, caribou you never -- I don't know how the population is there. Of course, you never know where they are going to be.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. I was wondering you mentioned about how the clients would come for a certain amount of time and they had so many days and they wanted to get that animal in those days.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: We like to encourage here, we encourage 21 day hunts. I should say hunts or, you know, it was more the wilderness experience too. Like I said, a lot of photography. There was a lot of fishing and it wasn't just hunting. But where clients were more anxious to go I mean where you end up with the problems is like well particularly the Alaska Peninsula where you had to fly in and we have to get out. Well, a lot of times well a doctor I have got to be back. Too bad, you aren't going to be back because of the weather.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And so on the longer hunt you had more opportunity.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: To get the game.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Oh, sure, sure.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you always come home successful for your clients?

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Usually, yeah. So there have been several, several stories written and Don has a couple books there. Of course, out of print now, the Oh, For the Life of a Guide.

KAREN BREWSTER: I've read that one, yeah.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: All about bear and the other is a Log of the Yukon River. Of course, I'm sure that isn't any good now because of the, you know, the sandbars, everything changing continually. It was more for a guide for, you know, canoers and so on that were traveling on the river. Well, I said the work around here in order to make a living was not only the guiding and the outfitting I had the art gallery. I have a couple of coloring books out. It used to be a regular bus stop when there was, what was it, Alaska Yukon made regular trips. This was their bus stop. They would always come to the gallery and usually in the summer maybe I would be giving demonstrations on filleting salmon or smoking salmon. I usually had a fishwheel in. Of course, I was getting salmon at that time for my dog team as well, yeah.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: What did you use the team for -- mostly for the sprint racing?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Spring racing, fun.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Not for utility?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: No, fun.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Fun. That's always --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Exercise.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Good to have fun.

KAREN BREWSTER: Something fun to do when you need to.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Anything to get you outside in the winter is really important.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was wondering about Slana as a community. I don't know, did you call it a community?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: I wouldn't call it a community. They try now I guess to call it a community, but I never thought of it as a community in years past because it really, you know, it wasn't.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, in the wintertime how many people would stay living in this area back in the 70's?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Pretty much. I don't know whether there is anybody besides here, you know. A lot of the people -- most of the people are here year round and I am set up, you know, and have no other home to go to and, you know, it was year round and if you are going to be open in the sum -- you need to be here in the winter to keep things operating. You can't just -- just leave. Things that have helped to really change, the Internet, I said is one of the big things that has changed things because I guess you say it has helped me because not being able to leave or to get supplies, not only supplies, groceries or anything like that that's difficult, but one of the hardest thing is getting parts, maintenance things that I need. But I do most of it on the Internet now.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's great.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: And thankful for Amazon because most of the other companies you cannot deal. It is a waste of time because they think Alaska is -- we can't ship to Alaska, so I --

KAREN BREWSTER: Or they charge you twice as much to ship to Alaska.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: And shipping will cost more than the part.

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MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, Mary Frances, it sounds like you are a very hard worker, determined woman with great perseverance to have lived out here by yourself for so long and a woman guiding it couldn't have been easy. It is like a pretty amazing life.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah and I guess it wasn't easy, but, you know, with the guiding I did have a lot of the and running the equipment, of course, I did -- I usually ran the Cat into camp. I usually drove the tractor in, but I had experience with it, you know. Growing up, of course, I drove the truck and the tractor on the farm before I ever had a driver's license. How did this come up because somebody asked me yesterday and yeah, what age did you have a driver's license? As soon as the day I turned 16, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: But you had been driving before that obviously.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah, it sounds like the --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: So, you know, I had experience on the farm with and with the horses and everything so I had quite a bit of experience and 4-H gave me a lot of experience and I showed cattle for many years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it sounds like it was a lifestyle that you enjoyed?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah, certainly did, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hard work?

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah. And it has changed like here now my work is making which I would like to get back like I said to my artwork which is basically swiftly impossible right now. I have had a number of pieces started, but I can't finish because I can't get to the foundry and so it is just doing. I did do on with the Internet. I built my own computer and I have been doing some design there that I have custom pillows and totes and throws custom woven, but again this summer has been so busy I can't even get the things out. Like this is one of my and I, you know, do the custom designs and have them woven, but I don't, you know. People have been ordering and I said I haven't even had time to get them packaged.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow, speaking of time, it has been very nice.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Yes, thank you very much.

KAREN BREWSTER: Spending so much time with us. I know this time of year is very busy, especially extra busy with the change of seasons.

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Unless there is anything else you wanted to say about living here and guiding.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: We can wrap it up and --

KAREN BREWSTER: We can wrap it up and --

MARY FRANCES DE HART: Sounds good.

BARBARA CELLARIUS: Thank you very much.

KAREN BREWSTER: Thank you very much.