

INTERVIEW OF GARY GREEN  
INTERVIEWER IS KAREN BREWSTER  
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IN MC CARTHY, ALASKA  
PART 2

KAREN BREWSTER: With some of the changes, technology and the electricity and all that was probably not here in 1974.

GARY GREEN: When I arrived here there was no -- there was really no communication if you didn't have a single side band radio and private individuals didn't. The lodge didn't have one then. The first one in town I think was probably Ron Anderson when he moved in and he communicated by single side band. When he did then you could go borrow or use theirs on occasion, pay two or three dollars I think, but there was -- I didn't have a generator or electricity for quite a number of years probably the first 10, 15. I don't know, somewhere in there. And I think that has changed the quality of life out here a lot is everybody has a Honda generator of some sort or another and we have Internet. And I think the entertainment level that can be derived from that probably keeps some people from having cabin fever or going stir crazy. I was never a victim of that myself, but others are and I think that people that winter here now probably have more entertainment than we used to have and so I think it is easier for them to stay.

KAREN BREWSTER: But does it mean they social -- people socialized with their neighbors less?

GARY GREEN: I don't think so. I think that they just have one more form of entertainment and if you're in your, I think say 20's and 30's, you are running around socializing. That is just the nature of growing up. I think you socialize more and then once you get more established and more comfortable you have built your home and gets better and better. You probably run around a little bit less, but like I say there is enough people here now that you can't help but socialize on mail day is quite the event.

KAREN BREWSTER: Still?

GARY GREEN: Was too busy for me so I wait until after mail to go check my mail. It turns out there is quite a number of people that do that. So you hit the second wave of mail goes when you are trying to avoid them there is a second congregation of people that go late.

KAREN BREWSTER: So now you have to go later than late.

GARY GREEN: And it is honestly I think become there is a third wave starting.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it is interesting that even nowadays with the Internet mail day still is an event?

GARY GREEN: Well, with the Internet there is also Amazon.com where you can order anything you want and it comes within a week or two and mail day has changed. It requires more airplanes than it used to because they are not delivering mail. They are delivering Amazon boxes in bulk and it is so busy up there now when I go there -- when I am expecting a box and excited so I go early there is so many boxes there I can't sort through them. I wait -- I go away and hope that everybody cleans them out so I can find mine.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you guys have a postmaster or anything or you just?

GARY GREEN: McCarthy doesn't have a post office. It is a little bit of a free for all which is getting out of control.

KAREN BREWSTER: All those Amazon boxes makes me think of the old days with Blazo boxes. So now it is going to be Amazon boxes in peoples' houses.

GARY GREEN: Blazo boxes were wood.

KAREN BREWSTER: I know. They are very handy.

GARY GREEN: They were -- we -- cabins were furnished in early Blazo. Before Blazo it was out-gas boxes and the Amazon boxes they are good fire starter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But it would be interesting if you start seeing them around peoples' houses as little book shelves and things.

GARY GREEN: Yeah, I have not seen that yet, but I'll be watching for it.

KAREN BREWSTER: That is funny. Well speaking of mail day brings up the 1983 massacre that I know affected this community. I don't know if it is something you could talk about it how it affected the community?

GARY GREEN: Well, it essentially we lost half our population in one day and it definitely a huge impact and a trauma for everyone. But I also think that it was something that we all had to deal with so intensely for a period of time that we got over it and moved on which is probably the best thing that you could do. It is a very sad occasion and all that, but it happened and it was over with and people are resilient and they recover and move on. I know it had the effect of making me view people differently than I used to cause I'm rather trusting and don't expect the worst out of somebody, but for some time after that I would look for when I would meet somebody new, I would definitely look for personality traits that I never used to.

KAREN BREWSTER: Cause it was somebody you did welcome into the community in some form when he arrived.

GARY GREEN: Yeah, I mean anybody is welcome and everybody is different. I would say that he was more different than normal and that is what I -- what kept me alive during that occasion was I saw him. He got to the airstrip that day before me and I saw him walking to mail and I recognized him from a thousand feet away and I decided not to go to mail because I knew exactly what Flo Heglund would put us in two folding chairs sitting side by side and serve us a cup of tea and I didn't want to sit there like a bump on a log next to him because we had nothing in common -- we wouldn't have a conversation and I already knew this and so I didn't go to mail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Lucky.

GARY GREEN: Yeah. So he was welcomed into the community, but I definitely considered him somebody -- I didn't associate with him.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, but it does --

GARY GREEN: But I didn't think anything bad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, but it does lead to a question of, you know, what makes a community or, you know, you have been here so long and then there is all these people who come in, how does somebody become part of the community?

GARY GREEN: If you arrive here and stay you become part of the community. I don't know if there is any pattern.

KAREN BREWSTER: There are no standards?

GARY GREEN: If you're a friendly person, you treat everybody in a good manner respectfully. If you don't step on everybody's toes immediately, that's -- that would be something that is a turnoff not welcome you in. In my opinion, I told you I was friends with everybody in the country, but one individual and that would be Ron Anderson. And when he came to town, when I arrived here the streets were just two ruts with flowers growing in the middle, wildflowers and stuff. It was a quiet town and it was rustic, beautiful ghost town. He came to town with equipment and the first thing he did was blade every road in town, wiped out all the flowers and rearranged things, made lots of noise right in this quiet little community and I don't think anybody appreciated him that much. I didn't. I worked for him a little bit, but I didn't for very long because it just didn't agree with me. He felt he could do whatever he wanted and nobody could stop him and he didn't last that many -- he was here about four years and then he was gone.

KAREN BREWSTER: People decided to stop him somehow?

GARY GREEN: No, I just don't think that he ever created enough of a quality home life here for him. You need to get along with your neighbors. Having enemies isn't a good thing. Having friends is.

KAREN BREWSTER: How did the building of the church and sort of the Christian community here affect -- did it affect McCarthy, change it at all?

GARY GREEN: I don't think it affected it that much. I haven't participated in it personally and I think it was -- it is recent enough in my opinion that the town had grown some. I've never yet gone to a service so I -- it hasn't affected me.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was something new to me. It is not something I had known about McCarthy or expected when walking up here.

GARY GREEN: Well, from my understanding back in the old days there was never a church here and so that is our first one and it -- some people went, some didn't, but it didn't seem like it changed anything to me, not noticeable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, we talked about trapping. You said you did some trapping. Can you talk about that a little bit?

GARY GREEN: Yeah, I have always been interested in that sort of thing so I ran a trapline in several directions back in the 70's, late 70's and after Les Heglund was killed, I ended up inheriting or taking over all of his traplines. So that meant from McCarthy every direction that you could travel, up McCarthy Creek, down the Kennicott, back down to McCarthy Road which had no one living on it, up the glacier, out the Nizina. They were all my traplines and it was a fun activity. Again, it is like hunting or prospecting. It makes you go out on days that you wouldn't normally go out on or go further than you normally would go and you are out there. When you are out in the backcountry, you are on an adventure and you never know what you will run into or what kind of excitement you will have that day, but trapping is exciting and fun and I was making part of my living off doing that. And now I sit here and think every direction that I went in I can't go now because it is too active. Well, it is not because it is a Park, but there is all these trails. When I would travel them, it would be seldom that someone else would be on my trail before me. Some never were traveled, but now every one of those routes would have activity on it and if you are a trapper, you need to travel a trail first. After fresh snows you want to travel it first so that you see what animal tracks are crossing the trail or going down the trail and when it is too busy, you can't see all that stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what were you trapping for?

GARY GREEN: What I caught the most of would be marten and after that it would be lynx, wolverine, wolf, coyote, fox. I did a little bit of beaver trapping, but I didn't end up doing that much of that. Never was a muskrat trapper, but marten and lynx were good money and I didn't catch that many wolverine, but they are good money and caught a few wolves too.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow! So there was a market for those species at the time?

GARY GREEN: Oh, yeah. The price for furs it varies. It fluctuates quite a lot, but during some of the years I was trapping it was quite high.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what years were you trapping?

GARY GREEN: The late 70's through probably until I started the air taxi, so about a ten year period, '78 through '88.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so the animals were around too?

GARY GREEN: Well, this is not overly dense country. To be a trapper in Alaska you got to cover a lot of miles. I think places in farmlands in the Lower 48 you will catch more game in a few square miles than you do up here, but it is never densely populated with anything here.

KAREN BREWSTER: So long was -- how far was one of your trapline trails?

GARY GREEN: Well, I went in so many different directions, but I don't think I ever went even 20 miles in any direction.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that is pretty short.

GARY GREEN: Probably, well, if you are traveling in the winter in all kinds of weather if you go 15 miles out and 15 miles back, 30 miles of backcountry travel in a day that is enough for a day. By the time you get back to the cabin that warm fire and something hot to drink sounds pretty good.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah and you were traveling by snowmachine?

GARY GREEN: I was traveling in -- by snowmachine, airplane, skiing, snowshoeing, and a little bit by dog team. I never owned my own dog team so I didn't trap much with them, but I would fly out with the Super Cub to -- so I actually had some -- my trap -- but the trapline I would fly out and land in a different valley and then either put on snowshoes and snowshoe a couple miles and set traps or cross-country ski trapping. So I did all those methods and again, that is part of the interest of being in the backcountry is I got to cover a lot of country.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah and you were setting leg hold traps those kinds of things or snares or?

GARY GREEN: Mostly leg hold traps. I did a little bit of snaring, but I wasn't -- I was mostly leg hold traps.

KAREN BREWSTER: All right. Something else I was just going to -- oh, the access to those places. This was -- before the Park you could go and do this anywhere?

GARY GREEN: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did the Park change that?

GARY GREEN: I forget because some of it the when I was trapping by plane I stopped doing that after a few years because it was just more work and costly. I guess you can't fly out and land in the Park -- hard park and go trapping now and I did have a couple spots maybe several.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it sounds like you already stopped anyway?

GARY GREEN: I had -- yeah, I was -- it didn't affect me because, like I say, yeah, I was trying to quit that anyway. I got in enough flying and activities. The trapping was the fun activity in itself and I didn't need to use a Super Cub to do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh. But so those trails where you went by snowmachine from around here are those places now within the Park or the Preserve?

GARY GREEN: Well, I think they are probably all -- well, no, it is a little bit of everything. But I followed most existing routes, either a road, an old mining road or the river courses. I would trap up the Kennicott Glacier on the west side and that was a snowshoe route because it wasn't even good skiing for the most part through the woods and up hills.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what were you trapping up there?

GARY GREEN: Marten and wolverine mostly and I caught a few other things, but mostly marten and wolverine.

KAREN BREWSTER: And the rivers all freeze over enough that you can get around up those valleys by snowmachine?

GARY GREEN: Well they -- you can in the later season. At the beginning of season, we are not having near as cold of winters these days as we used to. In the 70's, one of my stories is that it hit 40 below for Halloween one year and that is my record day. That is what I am saying. But it was -- we had a lot of cold conditions and the rivers would freeze up. You could cross the Nizina River every year by Thanksgiving. Nowadays it doesn't seem to necessarily be crossable until the first of the year and it varies from year to year, but there is a lot of years it is late.

KAREN BREWSTER: And are there still open spots you have to be careful about or?

GARY GREEN: Well, there is always open channels on the rivers when you are traveling that you got to watch for, but if you're experienced at all, you don't travel too fast. You can see them coming and usually you can find a way around them. It is when you can't find a way around them that that is how far you go that day and you come back. One of my activities that I always enjoyed was going and checking like either McCarthy Creek or the Nizina River to see when it was frozen up enough to where I could be the first one across for the season. And sometimes I would have to drive 10 miles or snowmachine out 10 miles to the Nizina River four or five times just watching it freeze to and the next time go all the way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it is always the question of who is going to be the first guy across to test it out.

GARY GREEN: Well, there is never -- I mean it was -- there was not many people doing this. If somebody was on the -- at May Creek. Gagnon lived over there and he would sometimes be wanting to get to McCarthy and so he might would beat me and it wasn't a competition, but it was -- there wasn't like hordes of people doing this. It was --

KAREN BREWSTER: No, but it is that who is going, you know, not drop their snowmachine in the river.

GARY GREEN: Well, with a little bit of experience the ice almost always collapses behind you and then you got to find your way back, but it doesn't cave in in front of you and that is you can't take that to the bank, but I mean it is the rule of thumb.

KAREN BREWSTER: No. So you never want to be the second guy?

GARY GREEN: Right. If someone is crossing treacherous ice, you don't take two machines tailgating each other to do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. I was going to say -- that got me to thinking about something else in crossing the rivers and oh, if you have ever sunk a snowmachine?

GARY GREEN: I have never sunk a snowmachine. I have a four-wheeler. I put a four-wheeler completely submerged by the ice breaking. Four-wheelers don't cross ice as well as snowmachine and it is the speed, runners or the skis, all that. But I have, yeah, four-wheelers when they sink, the one I did, I mean they got big enough tires there is quite a bit of floatation in the tires so they like to bob right there on the surface. Like if you push on them they go under water, you bounce them up and down they rise up, but I did put my four-wheeler under water.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what happened? Why did that happen?

GARY GREEN: I was trying to cross ice before it was ready and the thing that most of the river can be frozen good, but if you drive on an edge where there is springs coming out of the sides coming into it, they can be much warmer than the river water and they go -- and they keep the area near the edge thinner ice. And it all looks like good ice, but you can be driving along a good ice and then all of a sudden it is thinner and weak and just plop in and you weren't expecting it. But again with a little bit of experience that was a learning situation. I did it a long time ago. I haven't done that since, but it is something you got to watch out for.

KAREN BREWSTER: It definitely sounds like, yeah, living here it is a lot of trial and error and the longer you live here the more you know.

GARY GREEN: I think we all go through life hopefully getting smarter as each day goes by.

KAREN BREWSTER: So did you learn from some of those old timers?

GARY GREEN: I grew up in Alaska so and I grew up right when snowmobiling got started. I was like the first time I drove a snowmachine it had a steering wheel in '64 and then I was driving a '65 snowmachines and stuff. So I got in on the ground floor of that stuff and that was all around Anchorage, but we drove snowmachines all over town when they first started and then. I don't think I learned that much about wilderness travel from old timers because I think by the time I got here I was already fairly experienced.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, just the risk, you know, survival and life out here.

GARY GREEN: I think most people have -- are born with a little bit of common sense. We see some that we don't think have any, but if you have common sense, you're likely to make a few mistakes but hopefully they are small ones and you just -- most of us make it, some don't.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I was going to say is learning from your -- neighbors have to get -- teach the young newcomers.

GARY GREEN: Yes, I think so and what I have I think I experienced now is that there is young people when they come here now at -- young people are looking for some place to -- they are out on an adventure, but they are also kind of huntin' for their place in life. And a lot of them that arrive here might be coming out of the suburbs from the Lower 48 where life is much different than living in the wilderness of Alaska. I came out here from being in Alaska in 1960 which was pretty rustic and you learned that. People that come from the suburbs now might never have driven a four-wheeler or a snowmachine and they have just a limited experience with what we consider every day activities. And so they might

take to it right away because it is new and exciting, but you can see the inexperience when they are first starting. And take the same age group, a kid that grew up in McCarthy, shoot they are an old hand at it by the time they are 20 years old.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right. Well, I really appreciate your time today. I know your time is valuable so is there anything else that has come to your mind or some stories about life here that you want to make sure gets told?

GARY GREEN: I am sure I got many, but I can't think of any at this moment.

KAREN BREWSTER: Have I asked all the right questions?

GARY GREEN: Well, I don't know if you have asked all of them, but you asked good questions, yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay, that we sort of covered the --

GARY GREEN: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: The (inaudible). I guess the last one is sort of about what makes McCarthy special or what makes it McCarthy? Or what is special about the people who live here?

GARY GREEN: The people that live here are diverse people that love adventure, excitement. More happens here than most anywhere. There is different types of activities and levels of excitement here than most places and having wilderness at your door which is always important to me. Waking up to a bear pawing at your window and stuff like that is a little bit threatening, but it is also exciting and it gives you something to talk about that day. And I would hate to live somewhere where there is nothing ever happens. McCarthy is happening.

KAREN BREWSTER: All right. And you plan to stay?

GARY GREEN: Like I say, I haven't found any place better.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. All right. Well, Gary, thank you so much for your time.

GARY GREEN: You're welcome.

End of Part 2