



CAROLYN ELDER, LYNNE JENSEN, FRED HOWE

Interviewer: Regina Kong

Others Present: N/A

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“We were wanting to go back to the land and be more connected to the land. Live off the land, build our own houses...Drop out of the rat race...Counterculture. We usually had long hair, wore nonconventional clothing...freedom was a big theme.”

-Carolyn Elder: first arrived in 1968 to work at Glacier Bay Lodge

-Fred Howe: first arrived 1966 for grand opening of Lodge, commercial fishing at HH

-Lynne Jensen: bought land in Gustavus in 1970s, built cabin there, taught at school and worked at park, spent on year fishing with Fred at HH 1974

-[4:30] Connection between the three. Carolyn became first acquainted with Doris then rest of the Howe family. Fred met Lynne at University of Alaska Fairbanks 1967/68. Lynne and Fred “were in the wildlife club together.” Somehow Fred needed a puller at the HH so Lynne came down and fished.

-[7:20] Carolyn's first visit to HH was June 1973. “I remember how excited you all were about that. You (Fred) invited me to go on your sailboat. So I think I was possibly your first visitor to the Hobbit Hole after you bought it.”

-[9:56] LJ: “There were a bunch of us hippies building our cabins out in the 70s.” Lynne built hers mostly by herself.

-all three have been friends for a while

-[10:31] first impressions. CE: “I thought Lynne was awesome because she was building a cabin, milling her logs with a chain saw. You milled three sides of the log and the outside stayed round. Yeah, that was incredible.” LJ: “Fred and I were in wildlife club together, that's all I remember. The club would go on adventures,, out canoeing, whatever, and there were quite a few people like Allen that we're still friends with. We were a group of friends that kind of bonded for that club...The wildlife club, we worked for different businesses in town. The money we earned we donated to saving the crane, habitat refuge.” FH: “I don't remember any of that. I do remember going to Kramer's field...checking out all the birds that were migrating and stuff.”

-[13:27] What HH was like in 70s. FH: “Everything was a lot smaller people-wise, especially in Gustavus here. I think there were only about a dozen cars. I remember when we were getting ready to transfer up here, Chuck and Carol Yonda were already here. Chuck Yonda'd worked for my dad in Blue Ridge Parkway so he started sending these charts of Glacier Bay down with all these little notes. I remember when Carol had some kind of accident on the road and she said, ‘I don't know how it could have happened with only a dozen cars in the whole place.’ As far as around the Hobbit Hole was concerned, in those days there were not that many float planes. The float planes only came once or twice a week for mail. There were no sport fishing lodges, no charter boats. The only other boats you saw were commercial fishermen. And like I said, Gustavus was really small and about the only thing going on here was the original homesteaders that were doing whatever they were doing.

And I didn't spend much time in Gustavus those days, it was mostly over at the park. In those days, pretty much the whole personnel—everyone from the park—lived over there. Trailers for the seasonals and permanent housing for the permanents. It's expanded greatly since." LJ: "The summer I fished with Fred was in '74. There were a lot of hippies. We were trollers so we met quite a few people...who would come to the Hobbit Hole...We were called the Hippy Fleet because we were all hippies then."

-[17:00] Defining hippy. LJ: "We were wanting to go back to the land and be more connected to the land. Live off the land, build our own houses." CE: "Drop out of the rat race." LJ: "Counterculture. We usually had long hair, wore nonconventional clothing." FH: "I would say that freedom was a big theme and that's been my theme most of my life. To be my own boss." LJ: "I think, too, the reason we were called the Hippy Fleet that year was because we were all new to commercial fishing and then there were the old people...traditional fishermen." FH: "People at the Cove. Because at that time and before that time, Elfin Cove was strictly a fishing village with support staff like laundry and a little store and the inn." LJ: "Because we were all new, young people coming in for the first time and the old trollers had been doing this traditionally for a long time. I think they couldn't quite" FH: "They couldn't quite grasp us. But they liked us, I think. We were a conversation piece, to put it that way. As I remember it, what the fisherman used to call the Hobbit Hole was—Pothole comes to mind most easily. And of course the locals turned it into Habit Hole. It used to be the Hobbit Hole was a place where the tenders would come. Most of the troll fish were going into Juneau Cold Storage. The Cold Storage would send out a tender—a big boat with a big load of ice—and everybody would rendezvous at the Hobbit Hole, sell their fish, get another load of ice and go fishing again. A lot of it was actually inside. But remember we lost two feet of water due to isotactic rebounds since we got there...There must have been a lot more water in those days." For indigenous people it was a calm sheltered place to pull canoe out of the water.

-[22:21] Origins of Inian Islands uncertain.

-[22:30] More on where Hobbit Hole name came from. FH: "The pothole was the first one and after all the hippies started showing up and started growing pot the locals started calling it the Habit Hole. Eventually it turned into the Hobbit Hole." LJ: "They should've stuck with pothole because they were growing pot!" FH: pothole was "mariner's name for tiny anchorage." LJ: "Some people called it the teacup." Carolyn credited with Hobbit Hole: "It must've been in the only time I visited there in the early days, 1973 after they first bought it. Then I didn't go back for quite a few years. Well we went back in '77/'78 when I fished with you. It must've been June '73 and I remember I was reading Tolkien at the time. Somehow you (Fred) remember going for a walk in the elfin woods, in the muskeg there. I don't have a real strong memory but I guess I was musing about the little elfin creatures that might be inhabiting this place. I guess I threw out the name Hobbit Hole and you said 'eh, I like that.' Whether that's a valid memory, it's a memory." FH: "It makes sense because a lot of people were reading Tolkien. They were sort of standard hippy reading, you could say."

-[27:02] Hobbit hats. FH: "My mom started knitting these. They were modeled after Maltese fishermen's hats. Dark brown wool. They were real itchy. And they had little earflaps with a button so you could button them. And they were real nice for cold weather or when it was pouring rain. And my mom added this three-way tassel thing on the top. That made it an official hobbit hat." LJ: "If you had the tassel you'd been to the Hobbit Hole and spent time there. She'd auctioned them off at the fourth of July but they didn't have the tassels. So those were not official hobbit people. They were hobbit hats but not hobbit people hats." LJ: "So Doris would knit these hats. Anyone who spent time at the hobbit hole got an official hobbit hat with a tassel." CE: "So these had a chin strap." LJ: "Now mine is blue but it has a tassel. I guess she knew that blue was my favorite color. But it is itchy so I can't wear it very often. I have it right here in Gustavus."

-[29:56]: FH: "I remember the first time my mom came out to visit. We had some pot planted into the garden and I was showing her the garden and of course I wasn't mentioning that there was any pot. We assumed our parents didn't know anything about anything like that. But as we were going along, my mom said, 'Oh and there're your pot plants.'" And she said, 'We've got some growing at the institute of northern forestry,' where she was a librarian." I just got such a kick out of it."

-[31:23] Doris' cake. LJ: "Doris would make this chocolate cake with chocolate-mint frosting and she'd send it out to the Hobbit Hole for the boys." FH: "Anytime somebody came in they always came back with a cake." LJ: "And she would always contribute it to the fourth of July auction here. When she passed away. Because I had the recipe for that cake, the obligation for making that cake for the fourth of July auction fell to me." CE: "It brings in a lot of money." LJ: "This year it sold for \$125. But it's gone for over \$200. In the older days the people who remembered Doris would bid high for that cake in her memory. And now fewer and fewer people remember who Doris is. The original recipe it's called All Fools' Cake...But I remember hauling that cake out to the Hobbit Hole a few times, a big sheet pan. It's good cake. It's really good cake." FH: "It's a real thick, heavy cake. And the other thing that used to come with the cake often would be a bottle of rhubarb sauce because I really like rhubarb sauce."

-[35:22] Memories of Doris Howe. CE: "Doris was wonderful. She was just a very sweet lady who doted on her family. She volunteered at the library and she was always just so good-hearted to everybody in the community." LJ: "She helped start the public library here because she did the park library long ago...We used to get our library books by mail from the state library...We were all readers and they said you need to have your own library. Doris helped because she was the only real librarian...It wouldn't have happened without Doris because we had no idea how to catalogue or do anything. I remember her as very soft-spoken, very sweet. I felt very close to her. I was here when she died. She died in this house here. There were several of us that were with her around the clock as she was dying. She's very quiet, but a very strong presence in the community. Big heart. She'd do anything for you. And I learned a lot from her, how to cook, can, preserve and everything. She knew a lot of things about how to live and she was a mentor to many of us women in this community...She was our library mother. I used to call her my Alaska mom because my mom's in the Midwest and I saw her like once a year. She was just an amazing woman." FH: "Mom graduated from the University of Minnesota library school in Rochester. I remember her saying maybe not often but occasionally, 'It's all I ever wanted to be, was a librarian. And then I met Bob Howe and my tongue's been hanging out ever since.'" CE: "Where did they meet?" FH: "They met at I think it was a summer course in botany. It's a part of the University of Minnesota." LJ: "I know, Doris talked a lot about all the different parks she'd lived in, went with your dad...I remember her describing giving birth and she somehow was thinking she was rowing a boat and she was like, 'Pull, pull.' She said she felt like she was rowing this boat. I don't know if it was you or Greg. I think it must've been you. It must've been a difficult birth because you both have big heads. I think that was one of the reasons I decided not to have children was because of that description." FH: "I appreciate that testimony from both of you about my mom. Because my dad, I used to think when we were coming over to Gustavus, 'Gosh, I feel like I'm always in Bob Howe's shadow.' Then we reviewed it a few years ago and realized that there's hardly anybody left in Gustavus who remembers who he was, except the old-timers." LJ: "But they remember Doris...She really had a lasting impact here in Gustavus than your dad for sure. There is a legacy though, is Howe hour. Bob would always have happy hour every night. 5 o'clock come over. What was his favorite drink? Bourbon. And popcorn. Every night. And when he passed away, Mary Herwin inherited it and she called it Howe happy. But only Friday night. Then Carolyn took it over when Mary moved. Now it's come full circle back to Greg."

-[45:09] FH: “The reason a lot of this stuff is kind of new to me is because once I started fishing out at the Hobbit Hole I kind of let my life be taken over by fishing. Because I really liked it. I feel like I kind of missed out on a lot of stuff. I didn’t come over here very often...Greg...has more roots here than I do.”

-[46:30] FH story about getting groceries at Hobbit Hole: “It was pretty disorganized at first but then we got to the point where we hired a cook-gardener for the summer. And in the winter. I decided fairly soon that I didn’t want to spend the whole winter out there so I decided to go down south. I’d buy a huge pile of groceries down at Costco in Silverdale and just about every winter somebody would be down there with a boat so we’d take all the groceries to my house, rebox them, and reload them on whoever’s boat...Greg and I mostly financed the groceries and at the end of the summer Greg would divvy up the salary for the cook-gardener and all the groceries and everyone’d get a bill. And that’s how it worked. We had six or eight boats there at one time, fishing. We finally got a shower up on the hill at the hot tub...” Talks about original buildings on the property and how they changed. “Those were the good old days...We had people just show up, hang out a week or two, work in the garden or whatever, and move on.”

-[51:13] Favorite things to do at the Hobbit Hole. LJ: “I was only there the one summer but I loved going hiking and going out like that one evening in the laundry. There were porpoises and the sun was setting. Just the whole place was magical. Fishing out there. Being out in that beautiful country. Fishing wasn’t always so much fun. It was okay. It depended on the weather and the pouring rain. You’d tie yourself to the trolling pole, gutting fish. It was a wonderful time with the hippy fleet. Selling fish in Elfin Cove.” FH: “And we used to have our fourth of July. In the old days the fishing season used to open a lot earlier...In those days we had a huge get-together on fourth of July. I remember one year when the fourth of July was coming up, there used to be a lot of crabs in the Hobbit Hole, Dungeness. So I set out four pots and then somebody showed up with forty game hens. So we didn’t even pull up the crab pots. We just cooked up the game hens. And the next day I pulled up the crab pots and they were all just stuffed, like 40 crabs in each one. Now there’s none...” Story about a guy’s crab pots. LJ: Story about people taking a crab from someone’s crab pots and replacing with a bottle of booze as payment. FH: “That was sort of accepted...We used to trawl for shrimp...packed full of shrimp and crab.” CE: “I spent my 50th birthday out there, which was in 1999. That was a great time. I just loved that walk over to Magic Beach and Eagle Beach. Kayaking and just watching the amazing wildlife show that’s always going on around there, hiking up to the top around there. It’s just beautiful. Everyone used the word magical and it is. It’s just a magical place. And something happens when you’re there with a group of people. You just bond or something. Sharing that place. Everybody’s doing something. Conversation is really easy because you’re just out there with no distractions of modern technology, just there with your group and nature. It’s wonderful. A retreat, I guess. A retreat from the civilized world. A very special place.”

-[1:01:10] When Zach first got involved with Hobbit Hole. CE: “We went there when he was young, when he was a kid. We went there a few times. I remember we went there once when he was 10ish or something and we had a picnic on Magic Beach. He and Danny got lost in the woods. I don’t know how they got lost. Anyway, they finally found their way to the beach. He might’ve gone out there with some other friends. Whatever it was, it sure made an impression on him.” FH: “That’s what’s amazing to me about it. Apparently he’s had these feelings for a long time.” FH and CE talk about Zach’s chance encounter with realtor who was selling the Hobbit Hole.

-[1:04:40] Selling Hobbit Hole. FH: “A lot of it had to do with the fact that Elfin Cove was disappearing. Greg and Jane started coming over here more often. Halloween, Christmas. Elfin Cove was at one time a fairly lively little place and it just started evaporating in the wintertime.” LJ: “They had a school.” FH: “When that started happening, that’s when Greg and Jane started to bail out. And as I’ve told several people, if they hadn’t wanted to leave or if they’d just left and not

wanted to sell it, I'd probably still be out there until it fell down around my ears. But I'm glad what happened happened." LJ: "It's a wonderful legacy." FH: "The best possible way of taking care of it. 'Cause we didn't want it to become another lodge." LJ: "That would've been a travesty."
-[1:06:14] thoughts on future of Hobbit Hole. LJ: "It's perfect. The best thing that could've happened...And all that magic will be preserved and not tainted by some lodge that just commercializes it." FH: "And it will be dispersed with every student." CE: "I was just amazed at the energy out there...Everybody was working their butts off, pitching in, gardening and chopping firewood. Everything was going on. The youthful energy was just amazing to see. Okay, it's all yours now you guys. Make it yours. Make it happen. You've got the energy and it's awesome." LJ: "Yeah 'cause we don't have the energy anymore."
-[1:08:30] final thoughts. LJ: "I'm glad we're all here and still friends. I'm really glad that Fred's back here in Gustavus." FH: "One of my favorite parts is how we first ended up out there. Greg and I and Jimmy Mahan hopped in that little sailboat...We left Gustavus here. It was a beautiful day and we were going to circumnavigate Yakobi Island. We knew about the Hobbit Hole. My mom had found it in a real estate ad in the Juneau newspaper and I had seen the location of it...We went out and they had a PR thing for the people of Elfin Cove and when we went by South Pass you could see the pilings...We sort of knew where it was and we said 'We should check it out.' And we did. we sailed right in, tied it up to the dock, went up to the house. Everything was just like the Frieds had packed up, gone to town for the weekend and never came back. There were curtains and dishes in the cupboards. It wasn't the Frieds it was some other people who'd had it for a couple years. The three of us were sort of hanging out, wandering around. We sort of decided that we gotta have this place. So as the story goes, and Greg may have had a different version. We came back to Gustavus and the folks were wondering why we came back so soon...A friend of Greg's father knew the present owner...Him and Greg got together at the Red Dog Saloon as the story goes, wrote out a bill of sale on the back of a napkin and that's what got it all started."