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Interviewee: Kay Rosengren

Interviewers: Beth Hodder and Ann Fagre

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Beth Hodder: I'm Beth Hodder with Kay Rosengren doing an interview with the Northwest Montana Firefighter Lookout Association about Kay's experiences as a lookout. Today's date is August 23, 2018. Ann Fagre is here to help do the interview and add anything on. Just to get started, if you don't mind, just some background questions. Can you tell me about your childhood, where you grew up?

Kay Rosengren: I grew up in Fargo, North Dakota, flat as a pancake, Fargo. So, it was an experience, believe me, coming out here [to Montana].

BH: Did you live on a ranch or right in Fargo?

KR: Right in Fargo, and despite the movie [*Fargo*], a fabulous place to grow up. There were three colleges, so I had opportunities I thought everyone had. I didn't realize they didn't have, because I saw, like, Reubenstein, and all of the really good classical artists, because the colleges brought them in. So, I grew up very spoiled.

BH: How did you get interested in the outdoors?

KR: Well, I guess, coming in the lookout. There's kind of a funny story about that. My husband had a good friend who was going to be aerial observer and he said, "Keith, I think you'd really like a lookout position." So Keith applied and he got it, and when the information came, it said that they hired wives to some of the lookouts. So my husband wrote back and said if I get a wife, would you hire her? Well, about two weeks later he got a letter saying you'd better get that wife, because she has a job. Someone had cancelled, and that's how I got here. So I finished college finals the day before and then we got married and came out.

Ann Fagre: What year was this?

KR: This was in 1958. He had just graduated from college and I had one more year to go; I finished up after that. But I loved it, fortunately. I discovered I wanted to be out of doors.

BH: It's a good thing to love when you're up at a lookout.

KR: Absolutely. It was a fabulous experience. It could have been awful, but it sure was wonderful. I'm the wife he got.

BH: Did you know anyone else who had been a lookout?

KR: No, I wasn't even sure what a lookout was.

BH: He just...I'm sorry, how did he apply for it?

KR: Well, his friend Jim had urged him to, so he got an application from the Park [Glacier National Park] and went ahead and applied, and the rest is history. And he was an outdoorsman, always had been.

BH: Was he from Fargo also?

KR: No, he was from Thief River Falls, Minnesota.

BH: What college or university were you at?

KR: Moorhead State in Moorhead, Minnesota. But that's how we got here.

BH: Where were you a lookout?

KR: The first year we were at Numa Ridge [lookout] up above Bowman Lake in 1958.

We had a lot of contact with the Forest Service lookouts, too, at that time. We communicated with the rest of them up in the North Fork on the Forest Service side. That cooperation—I don't know how long it lasted, but it was wonderful because we did have communication on lightning strikes and all of those things we needed to know. Hornet Lookout was one we communicated often with. I don't know how much longer they did that, where they had that cooperation, but it was wonderful.

BH: Could you reach Cyclone lookout?

KR: Yes, Cyclone and yes, Thoma, and—darn. There again, not being too bright, I didn't keep journals on things like that, and I should have. But I do remember communicating. Cyclone was so close to Polebridge, it was kind of, oh yeah, Cyclone. Not very remote or romantic. But that's one aspect I hadn't thought of for a long time, was that sharing.

BH: I think they still do quite a bit of sharing back and forth because they are still so close. There aren't the same amount of lookouts.

KR: No. I was trying to think, too. Okay, we were on Apgar [Lookout] the second and third summers and the job every night was to check in by radio all of the other lookouts, and I think there were ten. There were a lot anyway in the Park.

BH: Do you remember who your supervisor was at the time?

KR: Actually, the first year—and you'd need a whole history book for this—but it was Adolph Opalka. Adolf, who was legendary, and he was the ranger and, trust me, he ran a fiefdom. It was unreal. They didn't bother him much from headquarters. He did what he did. To give an example, the other lookouts got pack trains every two weeks and had 40 gallons of water brought up. Not with Adolph. We went up ahead of starting in the lookout and had to melt snow and strain out any particulates. There were great big casks, and we filled those. He never brought water up, and we only got one pack train all summer, too, with provisions. So, at one point he said to hike down, and we didn't have a car. He had to get a ride into town to get some groceries so that we could survive.

But you didn't hassle Adolph. I loved him. He was an experience, and his wife, scary lady, I loved her. I thought she was a really tough western lady; she grew up in Chicago. I was just shocked when I discovered that because she was tough. But she adored Keith, so he was my savior, because he could do no wrong as far as she was concerned.

AF: So, she was tough? In what way?

KR: If tourists dared to get on their porch, she would get out there—and she had this really gruff voice, and she'd say, "Get off my porch!" I don't know if this is telling tales out of school, but when we were at Logging [Ranger Station], Ed Hummel [Park Superintendent] would call ahead, and if there were people from Omaha or Washington or whatever, who wanted to go up to the North Fork, he'd say, "Kay, can we stop at your house for coffee because you know we won't get any from Marian." So, I got to meet everybody, but it was fun. It was a really exclusive club.

BH: Did Adolf and his wife come to see you at the lookout?

KR: No, I just saw them when we were down, but he had that wonderful phone system which he maintained, the old windup system. Everybody in the North Fork was in communication; it was wonderful. There was one at Bowman, there was one at Logging, there was one at Polebridge [Ranger Station] and there was one on the lookout, on Numa. He maintained that all those years. So, you heard it first there, and then you might hear it from headquarters.

BH: I'm assuming they had the phone lines going through the woods.

KR: Yes, they had to maintain those, and sometimes it was a big job.

AF: You can still see the insulators when you hike up to Numa.

KR: Can you?

AF: Yeah.

BH: Bob Paul, who was also a legend, was up at Bowman for a number of years and he was maintaining the phone line and fell and shattered his hip, and that was well after Adolph's time. They continued to maintain it because it was really a valuable tool. Bob was in the hospital in Kalispell for weeks. He slipped off a ladder. I don't know how long they maintained that phone line, but I know it was a long time.

BH: They still do that in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

KR: Yes.

BH: I know how hard that is when they have fires and lines are either taken down or trees fall across and they break.

KR: Occasionally they had animals tangle with them pull them down and they had to extricate them. It was quite a job. But, as I say, that whole first year was really an education. It was unique because of Adolph, as much as anything.

BH: Was he the ranger there when you were at Apgar also?

KR: Yes, he was there until '62 or '63 before he retired. But once you were on Apgar you don't have communication with Adolph, per se, it was all Park headquarters, fire cache, who we dealt with on Apgar. That was the head relay, so mostly on Apgar that's what you did, you relayed messages.

BH: Can you describe the two lookouts that you worked at, in terms of, were they towers, did they sit on the ground?

KR: They sat on the ground, two stories. The bottom story was storage and then the top was where you lived and that was glassed in, of course. But not the towers like they have in the Forest Service. A lot less scary.

BH: So, you'd walk up the stairs then to get to the catwalk?

KR: Yes, and they were very similar—well, I think all of the Park lookouts were pretty similar in structure.

BH: Were there other outbuildings at either lookout, besides an outhouse?

KR: The outhouse on Numa was wonderful because the view was fantastic. There was nothing in front of it. Nobody could come and see you.

There was one shed on Apgar. I don't recall that we even used that one, but there was a shed there, because I remember sunbathing on it. But that was it.

We had a downed outhouse on Apgar, and there was a porcupine that unfortunately took a shine to me. I have always talked to animals and that was a mistake, because the porcupine—I was its friend. It would go down and wait while I went to the outhouse and it would chew on the old seat because it had salt. He would chew away, and as soon as I went back up the hill, he'd come with me, and he would be at the bottom of the stairs like a dog would do. So, you would have to be careful leaving or coming because you would have to step over this darn porcupine. Never paid any attention to my husband because he'd never talk to it. So that was one of the funnier things up there.

AF: Did you get a photo of the porcupine?

KR: No, we didn't have a camera at that time. No, we didn't get so many wonderful photographs that we could have got because we didn't have a camera.

AF: And porcupines are not here now. That's very interesting. The wildlife people would like your story.

KR: It was so funny. My husband kept saying, "Don't talk to animals, come on." But the porcupine in there was so stupid looking. He'd huhhh-huhhh [makes waddling sound] behind me just like a dog. That was one whole summer that he was my friend.

AF: Was this Numa or Apgar?

KR: This was Apgar. Numa—we didn't ever see an animal on Numa—nothing that whole summer. I was really disappointed. Keith was charged by a bear on Apgar.

BH: Black? Griz?

KR: Black. If you ever thought Yogi Bear was cute, after that you don't. They're not cute.

BH: How did he get away?

KR: He [Keith] came back up the stairs backward and I could hear his heart thumping. We were scrupulous about garbage. He said "B-b-b-bear."

I said "Nah."

He said "N-n-o, look," and we went to the window and the thing charged the building. Oh, this is not good. The bear circled the building several times and finally retreated. My husband just hated it when I told the story, but as I say, I could hear his heart thumping and the bear started

to repeat, and [Keith] said, "The bastard's mean." That's exactly what he said. He says, "Don't tell that story." But the next day there was a bear trapped below us that had bullets in it. They were almost positive that that's what it was, but then they brought a rifle up. Keith went back to teach, and I finally radioed down. I said, "I do not want this thing up here. I might be tempted to use it, and I could only hope to wound it and be dead myself."

AF: They thought maybe the bear's aggression was due to having been wounded?

KR: They were sure it was the same bear.

AF: That behavior is not typical of a black.

KR: No, he just came out of nowhere. Very sobering, but I did get the gun out of there. I said, "This is stupid. I've never shot a rifle in my life," so I just hiked down and turned it over. That was the most sobering thing that happened to us up there. Not anything you expect, certainly. He [Keith] just walked off the catwalk, and the thing came at him. But as I say, he got back up fast.

BH: Did you have a trap door on the catwalk?

KR: No, but we had booby-trapped the whole thing so if he tried to come up the catwalk, we would certainly hear it. Of course, they didn't get a rifle to us until the next afternoon, so that was again pretty nerve wracking, wondering if he would come back. How serious he—notice I say "he." [laughs] Maybe it was a "she." Certainly, in the three years up there that was the most frightening.

The Park used Keith as a troubleshooter a lot of the time and so I was up there alone. At Apgar you had a phone in addition, and he called me and said, "What are you doing?"

I said, "I'm throwing rocks at a hawk."

He said, "You're what?"

I said, "Well, he's threatening our grouse chicks."

He said, "Kay, he's doing what God intended; now you don't throw rocks." I, "grrr, okay, I never thought of that," well because I really hadn't. That animal—that hawk—was doing what it's supposed to do, you know. It was certainly educational.

BH: You used the lookout itself as your living quarters as well, so you slept in there? Did you have cots?

KR: Two cots and a table in the corner and, of course, the firefinder in the middle. Not a whole

lot of room.

BH: What about a stove?

KR: On both lookouts we had little apartment size gas stoves. Then, I think we had an Airtight, too, on Apgar, because we burned all of our garbage so that there wouldn't be anything to attract animals. But I don't think we had an Airtight on Numa, just that apartment size.

BH: But you did have a gas stove up on Numa as well, vs. just one of the old stoves that people used to use for cooking?

KR: Didn't run into one of those 'til Logging. I said, "I'll never use it," and I grew to love it. I hated to leave it. They're wonderful. But no, up there it was twentieth century.

BH: How did you get your water, then, if you didn't have Adolph bringing it up to you?

KR: He brought it in GI cans, and we got forty gallons every two weeks.

BH: That's at Apgar, though.

KR: At Apgar. The most extravagant thing I've ever done is I snapped one day and threw water at Keith and he threw water at me. [laughs] Made me realize we couldn't do that. We were gonna be in a world of hurt if we didn't stop. Yeah, that having to preserve every valuable drop gets old.

BH: So they only brought it every two weeks but you had 40 gallons to last you. Did it last for two weeks?

KR: Well, yeah, you make it last no matter what.

BH: Because there was no water source up there, is there?

KR: No, no.

BH: Did you have a water source at Numa?

KR: Just when we got there, and the snow banks that we had where we got our snow to melt. Somebody, as a joke, had put a faucet on Apgar. And we actually had people who hiked up who were angry, didn't believe that we didn't have water, because there's a faucet. It was not a funny joke at that point.

And of course, on Numa, talking about visitors, we had just people from—McFarlands were running the dude ranch at the time—and so we had just people from McFarlands. On Apgar, of

course, we had more people. Not a whole lot. In fact, I think the first year we were here, there were something like 220,000 visitors in the Park as opposed to 3.5 million last year. It was like having your own Park. We'd go up top [to Logan Pass] and spend the whole day wandering around, the things we would get arrested for now. We walked on meadows and everything else. Who knew? We never even thought about it.

AF: Well, the impacts wouldn't have been so prevalent, either.

KR: No, no. Not at all.

BH: Right. Were there places then that you could then hike to around either lookout just to get out? You were talking about going to the meadows and stuff.

KR: The meadows were at Logan Pass. Not really. Well, the only place on Numa, you could hike back up behind the lookout, which Keith did. I tell you, I'll be honest—I thought some grizzly'd been given my name, and I did not leave Numa the whole summer except to go down a little bit and pick huckleberries. I really was paranoid, so I just stayed put, but he hiked around the lookout and up behind it. Chicken Little stayed home.

AF: Are there some nice huckleberries around Numa?

KR: Oh yes. Fabulous.

AF: And you baked?

KR: I baked pies. One of the most useful things on that lookout—the Forest Service wives had made a little cookbook, ran it off on a ditto machine, I suppose. It was invaluable because I didn't know how to cook. I knew nothing, and that little book was a godsend. The world's best pie crust recipe's in there, so I baked pies like crazy, because I had this wonderful recipe book.

AF: And that was supplied with the lookout?

KR: Yes, yes.

AF: Do you have a copy of that?

KR: No. I wish I did have. It was very basic for someone who didn't know how to cook anything. The first summer, Keith wanted pea soup. What did I know? I started soaking a whole bag of peas. We ran out of things to put peas in. [Laugh] I didn't know.

I had to bake bread, and the first batch was gray, solid, and it quivered. I mean, it was so terrible it wouldn't have even made a good doorstep. So, of course, again Marian—bless her heart—I got on the phone. I said, "Marian!" And I'd never heard of altitude adjustments. I

didn't know any of that. She walked me through it, and I baked all of our bread up there. Not always willingly, but I did it. But not knowing how to cook was terrible.

BH: Did you bake biscuits?

KR: Occasionally, yes.

BH: Anything else like pies?

KR: Well, I baked a lot of huckleberry pies. With all those wonderful huckleberries close by, I couldn't not do that. But as I say, thanks to that cookbook—

BH: It might be called something like the Lookout Cookbook?

KR: Yes, something very simple, and as I understand it, Forest Service wives. They compiled it, and I think every lookout had one.

BH: Besides baking what did you do for meals, cooking and whatever?

KR: Spam. Yecch!

BH: Get kind of sick of it?

KR: Oh, oh! One thing we could get—I don't know if they're even on the market now—tins of Argentinean beef. That was very good beef. We did a lot with that. Tuna fish, of course, canned salmon. Actually, got a lot of protein, and canned vegetables, of course.

On Apgar we had a motor (?) refrigerator because there was electricity wired up into the lookout. It wasn't very big, but we could actually have something fresh. On Numa, I'm sure it was common to all lookouts, you had a screened-in box hanging from the ceiling downstairs. You could keep bacon and eggs and that kind of thing in that. But the refrigerator at Apgar was sure a luxury. And that was fun, too, because the packer was Ron Sherman. Wonderful man. Loved Ron. I always ordered hamburger, and every two weeks I would make hamburger hot dish for Ron, that was his treat. He had the same routine. I'd have it all ready when he got there, so if he got there I'd go ahead and make it up. He'd eat heartily and then he'd fall down on one of the couches, put his hat over his face, and nap. [Laugh] One time somebody came up with some bigwigs and they were...And I said, "No, it's okay. He does it every two weeks; it's all right." He was snoring away. [Laugh]

AF: What were the ingredients of the hot dish?

KR: Just hamburger, Cremettes—at that time there weren't that many kinds of pasta, you know, elbow macaroni—and tomatoes, and spices.

AF: Sounds very Minnesotan.

KR: Yes, very Minnesota. It's comfort food, and he loved it. He would have been bitterly disappointed if I made anything else because that's what he wanted. He had been a rodeo cowboy and gotten busted up, I guess, so he worked as Park packer. He was fun. It wouldn't matter if the president was there, he'd have his lunch and his nap, and there you are. So, you could count on that.

And of course, one of the lookouts, have you ever heard of Leonard Stutsman? Loneman? He was a legend.

BH: Yes, Loneman Leonard.

AF: So, he has that handle, Loneman Leonard.

KR: Yes, he was great. But anyway, the way he'd read his grocery order on the radio and everybody would listen, it was like, "Oh, it's time for Leonard's grocery order." He would always at the end would say, "and a package of coconut macaroons." Then he'd giggle. I talked to Karen Reeves [lookout for Glacier and the Forest Service] the other day and she, of course had heard about—well, everybody had heard about Leonard.

AF: And she staffed Loneman for several years.

KR: Yes, that's what she told me. So anyway, yeah, Leonard was really a special man. He was half Aleutian Island Indian. He was a very slight man, always very neat, very pressed. He had a long narrow face and aquamarine eyes. But he was just a sweetheart, he was a nice, nice man.

AF: And what was his last name?

KR: Stutsman.

BH: Now, I remember someone mentioning something, and for some reason it seems like it was Leonard, who had a code for if he wanted some whiskey brought up or something, he said, "I'd like a pint of strawberries," or something like that?

KR: I don't think Leonard drank. Wonder who that was. Now, I'm intrigued.

BH: See what you missed?

KR: Yeah, really. No, Leonard? I think—what did he do? Anyway, they called Keith, and they said, "Could you go up to Loneman and get it squared away?" What had happened is he saw the moon coming up, thought he had a fire, and reported it. They said, "Oh my gosh! His

firefinder is backwards." I'm not sure if it was another time or that same time, he called in and he was just terrified. He thought his lookout was going to collapse because there were all these weird noises on the support pole, and he said, "Uh oh. It's porcupines." So, Keith went up and explained to Leonard that the porcupines were just interested in the salt and they were not likely to chew through the pole. He was saved.

But I have always heard the rumor, and don't know if it was true, that the Park actually kept Loneman open longer than they planned because of Leonard—he'd been there so many years. I thought how nice to think they had a heart. That's a good story; I hope it's true, because he was up there and they'd say, "We're going to close Loneman" and then there'd be Leonard.

The other Leonard thing—he asked Jim Thompson in the fire cache, he said, "You know I have an old rifle I'm working on. Could I take that up?"

Whoever that was at the fire cache said, "Yeah, but just don't say anything because you can't have a rifle in the national park.

Said, "Well, it's not usable, I'm just working on it."

"Fine."

Leonard gets on the radio and says, "You know that rifle I'm working on?"

AF: Oh, right. So, it was out that he had a firearm.

KR: Yeah. On the radio. I guess it was Leonard. I guess he got away with it, I don't know. But it's wonderful to have someone like that who kind of was adopted by the whole Park. He was just a neat ingenuous man. He didn't have a duplicitous bone in his body; he was just who he was. So, we all liked him.

AF: Did you ever visit Loneman?

KR: No. It's a trek.

AK: Two river crossings.

KR: Oh, yeah. I don't know that Leonard ever came down for the summer. I don't think he ever did.

BH: Did many people come to see you at either Numa or Apgar?

KR: At Numa, just people from the dude ranch. Probably one of the most wonderful gifts I have ever been given, a young man and his father—I think they were from Argentina—his father was

with an oil company or something, and they hiked up one day. The kid said to me, "What do you miss most up here?"

I said, "A Coca Cola." And the child hiked up with one for me. That's the sweetest gift I've ever gotten. He was about 16, I think, at the time. But they were guests at McFarlands. Then we had some friends who hiked up on their honeymoon, came up and stayed a few days with us. But otherwise, strictly McFarlands.

But Apgar, as I say, a lot more visitors, but again, mostly Park affiliated, not many tourists found us. It was people from West Glacier or up the North Fork; there were some who came up and visited.

BH: So, you didn't have people every day?

KR: No.

BH: That would be a different world.

KR: When you look at the parking lot at Huckleberry [Huckleberry Lookout trailhead] now, that's more than we would get the whole summer in one day.

BH: To reach the lookouts, both of them, did you hike, were given a horse to take up?

KR: No, you hiked. The first time we went up, [pauses] he was one of the founders—one of the men who helped start—Big Mountain ski area. He had been in the 10th Mountain Corps [World War II]. I remember that, and he took us up that first time. I thought I was going to die. I didn't know about altitude and breathing, and he kept saying, "Straighten your leg on each step. That gives you a little break." [laughs] But he was very helpful. Then, of course, the next time I know was fine and didn't puff going up. His name was Karl, started with an H, I think, and he worked as a seasonal ranger.

BH: Is he still alive, do you know?

KR: I doubt it. He would be well into his 90s. He was seasonal ranger at Polebridge.

AF: Wonder if Hans Jungster would have known him.

KR: Oh, yes. Hans knew him, because he was in the 10th.

BH: Wasn't Bob Frauson?

KR: Bob Frauson was also in the 10th Mountain. There were quite a few around then. They were good men—boy—really good men.

BH: What main duties did you have as a lookout?

KR: On Numa we had this little funny thing where we were supposed to figure out the fire index. We'd go out every day and throw this little wheel for the weather and humidity, and the duff—they wanted to know how dry the duff was. Look for fires, of course, and somebody said that must have been tedious. I said no, because, when you're out there, if you had one thing out of place you noticed it immediately. It's not a matter of having to scan all of the time. That was a given. We checked every in morning at 8:00 and then again at 4:00 in the afternoon or 8:00 at night, and whoever was on Apgar, then that was part of that job. Oh, I still laugh about this—we were supposed to report the stages of the clouds. "Oh, we had a stage four cumulus." I imagined all over these lookouts going, "Well, that looks like..." [laugh] Then they would compile it. That was supposed to be our fire weather forecast? Come on. I still look at a cloud and, "Oh, that's a lenticular cloud." But that was also a serious part of what you were supposed to do, was keep track of your clouds, which we dutifully did, ignorant or not.

On Numa, it was comparatively simple, but Apgar, of course, the radio was a 24-7 thing, and a lot more serious, because it was relay much of the time.

BH: Oh. Relaying with trail crews?

KR: All the Park radio transmissions. Very often, you couldn't get from point A to point B without somebody saying, "Okay, well, I'll pass it on."

We had all this radio equipment at Apgar. Dave Gordon was the radio man, and Dave had a terrible scar right below his elbow, and the first thing he told us is you always keep your elbow [in] because sometimes we had to go down and make adjustments so he didn't have to hike up the mountain. That was scary, all of this high-powered equipment and I didn't like that at all. Sometimes you'd be down in the basement with the phone on your shoulder and he'd be saying, "Well, you know, you see this, and you see that? Well, you do this, and you do that." That was scary, but I always thought of that scar and I thought, 'Okay.' I never straightened my arm the whole evening. He said, "You always approach it that way, so if the electricity goes in, it comes out there instead of through your heart." So that was not a fun part of it, but, as I say, we did all the checks of the various lookouts. One time—his name was Hepner—I think he was from Warroad, Minnesota. He got on check and he [gasps], "Can't breathe." It was pretty scary. Of course, you have to realize that at that time, rescue took maybe 24 hours. So, I called Enright—Wayne. I said, "He's in trouble." It turned out he had pleurisy. He was 22 years old and he thought he was dying out there, and it was, boy, maybe 24 hours before anyone got to him up there.

BH: Which lookout?

KR: It was in the southern part of the Park, and I can never think of the name.

AF: Scalplock?

KR: No, it wasn't Scalplock; it was another one that wasn't in use shortly after that.

AF: Any around Two Med [Two Medicine] that they'd taken out?

KR: Not that I can think of.

BH: Garry Lookout's in the [Flathead National] Forest.

KR: I probably have it in my notes somewhere. I mean, I did run off my logs. I have them in Minnesota, where they're not very useful. But, as I say, I remember his name was Hepner and he was terrified, as well he should have been. My gosh! He didn't know if he was having a heart attack or what was happening. Of course, that whole Smitty Parratt thing.

BH: I don't know that story.

KR: Oh, okay. This was a boy—

AF: It's in our book [*Guthrie, C.W., Fagre, Dan, Fagre, Ann. Death and Survival in Glacier National Park. True Tales of Tragedy, Courage, and Misadventure.* Far Country Press, Helena, MT. 2017].

KR: Yeah, it's in their book.

AF: Bear attack.

KR: I had to be on the radio the whole time in case. Of course, they didn't need relay, but when I think of his mother. It was a long time before they got help, and that's the way it was. There weren't choppers accessible to the Park. They went in by foot and got people out that way. But yeah, this was a young boy that was badly mauled.

BH: Was it the lookout who then had to relay to get help?

KR: No, I think they went right to the ranger station, I think.

AF: Yeah, it was at Rising Sun area.

KR: Yeah. If anybody was in trouble up there it took a long, long, long time for help.

AF: So, did you relay during *Night of the Grizzlies*?

KR: I was dispatching at Polebridge. No relay because it was at Polebridge. Oh, god! We knew something was terribly wrong, but they were very circumspect on the radio until the chief ranger got on. He said—

[begins to cry] I'm going to cry.

—“There isn't enough left of this one to bring down in a plastic bag.” I thought, ‘Oh, dear god!’ No one ever anticipated a thing like that. The awful thing too was—the one girl was from Albert Lea, Minnesota, and there was someone from the Minneapolis Tribune on my phone at 8:00 in the morning, wanting to know what I knew. I called headquarters, and of course, I was trained. Most of these rangers’ wives were not. What did they know? They probably, “Oh, yeah.”

So, I called headquarters and I said, “You better call all the ranger stations and make sure people aren't telling the press what they've heard.” But that—the speed of light, I mean, was 8:00 in the morning when I got that first call. But that was an awful night. Oh, gosh. You couldn't write anything like that; you really couldn't.

AF: And you were stationed with your husband [Keith]—

KR: At Polebridge. Ended up, of course, there again, with all the fires I ended up—I had dispatched before. That was kind of funny, too, because one of the young rangers came in and he says, “Well! What are we gonna do? We don't have anyone for the radio.”

I said, “Excuse me. I'm trained.”

Well, he just brushed me off. “Well, I don't think so.”

I said, “Well, you know what? You're stuck with me. I'm it.” That was funny. It ended up to be quite a job; it was several days. There again, they used to go down to skid row and pick up drunks and bring them. I mean, some of those people I checked through on those trucks were drunk and everything else. They just grabbed anybody they could and took them up to the fire line.

One of the funniest, of course this isn't the lookout, this was the ranger station, but they used to drop cigarettes into the firefighters who smoked—I always found just amazing. They called me, and they said, “Kay, we have a crisis. Can you get somebody”—and fortunately, there was a child at the ranger station who would go—“and have him buy all the snoose at Polebridge store, because the snoose chewers are on strike.” [Laugh] Because they didn't get anything airlifted to them. I sent Jimmy over to the store with a note explaining, so we got all the snoose and I sent it up on the next truck. Can you imagine? They were mad! Discriminated against. That was one of the funnier incidents. But yeah, they would drop cigarettes into these people.

BH: Was Keith a smokechaser as well as a lookout? I'm assuming you weren't.

KR: He was hurt in '67 on a fire. The first year he begged to be sent on fire. They radioed up and they said, "Okay, you can go." Well, there is a certain romance with all of this, so he went. When he came back the romance was gone, believe me. I was so angry with him because he had radioed from Bowman Lake Ranger Station saying, "I'm coming up."

I said, "Stay! Don't! It's dark."

"I don't mind." He took off and of course he was exhausted, and I remember finally hearing him saying, "Kay." His flashlight had conked out. But he never begged to go again. He didn't say a word. And then, in '67 he was hurt.

BH: What happened to him?

KR: Well, he threw himself on a ledge, because there was a boulder coming down. They were fighting it [fire] right on the Canadian border. They didn't want it to slop into Canada. Normally, I don't think they would have fought it in that terrain, but somebody yelled, "Boulder!" and he threw himself and managed to get a downed limb right through his hand. It didn't hit anything vital, which was remarkable. About a week later I met some young man and he said, "Oh, you're lucky you're not a widow." He said, "That boulder came so close to your husband, it should have hit him." There were a lot of injuries like that up there. Of course, the awful thing was they get old retired doctors who kind of come reluctantly come on board. He said this guy was just brutal, and here he was with a hole right in his hand, and the guy is just dumping stuff into it, and he said, "We're all just [screams]." Yeah, but '67 was scary.

BH: The fire that he was on, then, you said, was up by the Canadian Border. Was it up by Kintla Lake?

KR: Yes, it was above Kintla. A lot of these are ranger station stories but this one—I was alone in, it must have been about '63, in the ranger station. Again, I was dispatching. No men; everybody's out. All the men are gone. The day before, the men in the station said there are the weirdest guys up at Kintla. Look like thugs, you know, and they're dressed for camping. They got wing tips and suits, and they said it's really strange. So, about 2:30 in the morning I'm alone in the office and these three guys come in, obviously thugs, and, of course, they wanted to know what I knew about the fire, because the FBI, of course, follows up on all of this. We figured from the get-go that this was a fire these guys maybe started, and it got out of control. We don't know.

Their story was one of them had a stomachache. Did I have any Pepto Bismol? This was 2:30 in the morning and 15 miles from Kintla to Polebridge. I said no, I didn't have any Pepto Bismol. I couldn't help them. They kept quizzing me: What did I know? I said, "Well, I really can't tell you anything. You'll have to leave." I got them out of there and I called headquarters and, and I said, "I'm locking my door and not letting anyone else in."

It always puzzled me. Well, one of our friends, a retired highway patrolman, laughed, and he said, "Well, Kay, you know if you're in trouble with the mafia they ship you to Libby." He said, "You know who lives at Eureka?" Yeah.

BH: Luciano.

KR: Lucianos. He said they probably got bored and said, "Let's go camping." He said that would explain that.

I said, "I always wondered. It was so weird."

He said, "No, it doesn't surprise me at all. That's probably who they were. Lucianos are well established at Eureka. In fact, about 15 years ago there was a little snippet in the paper saying that one of the Luciano children had been kidnapped. Never saw it again. There was never another mention, and I thought, 'Oooohhh. Interesting.' But that's probably where these guys came from. My only brush with scary people.

BH: But you didn't get sent to Libby, so that's okay.

KR: No. You know where the FBI puts you if you're in trouble? Butte. Butte's the last outpost for FBI.

AF: If you're in trouble?

KR: No. Well, if you screwed up a lot in the FBI, they send you to Butte.

BH: Okay. Put you in the pit.

KR: Exactly, which I just find that really funny. So, Montana's the last outpost.

AF: I'm interested they would still wear the mafia garb.

BH: Wingtips, for crying out loud?

KR: Yeah, yeah. They were in suits and wingtips.

AF: And they wore that around Eureka, too?

KR: Well, I don't know, but this was what they were camping in in Kintla. Yeah, I look back at it and think that was just ludicrous. And wanting to know, really trying to pressure me to tell them what I knew about the fire. That had to be—I think that was '63, too; '63 was a wild year. But as I say, that wasn't even a lookout. I had all these other memories while I still have my

memory.

But lookouts. Numa was just magic, I mean, just to wake up in the morning to that wonderful air, and the views, and Apgar was much more businesslike, a lot less time to boggle and everything.

BH: Did you have fires while you were up there that you had to call in?

KR: Yes, the first year—again, they tell you in fire school, well, at night—a fire might smolder for two weeks, and I thought, oh yeah, right. Well, our first fire, of course we record all our lightning strikes, and our first fire was two weeks after we had recorded that strike. They brought jumpers in. Well, I swear those planes stopped in the air. I mean, there they are, and it was fascinating. It was close enough so we could watch them being dropped onto the fire. We had a couple of other little ones but that one was a little larger. So that was exciting. We had one summer—it must have been '60—up at Apgar where I think it rained all summer and we didn't have any smokes at all. But that's why you're there.

BH: You mentioned a couple experiences with wildlife, and you mentioned that you had grouse chicks and different things. What all did you see up there and experience with wildlife?

KR: Porcupines, of course, grouse, and a deer with two fawns. There again, at that time you did things like feed them bread and things you would not do now. She [the deer] came every day, and she would kick the bottom stairs to let us know she was there and she was ready. She always had the fawns well away, but he'd constantly said—because I was ignorant about a lot of these things—he said, "You're a mess with her. That hoof could go right through your chest." So he said, "No matter how familiar she is, you don't get off the steps when she's there with her fawns." She came every day.

Probably the funniest—we had, of course, a gazillion ground squirrels—and we would throw them peanuts. Well, we ran out of peanuts and we threw bread. Well, one of the ground squirrels picked up the bread, looked at it, tasted it, threw it on the ground, went over and got a peanut shell and brought it and held it up. "This is what we eat." Who says they're dumb! I mean, come on! Yeah, I mean, he was indignant. He's used to peanuts. [Laugh] That was probably the funniest thing that happened to us up there. Yeah, yeah. He just let us know that this was not a good deal.

Of course, we did not kill our packrats the first year. Adolf he was always at war with packrats, and we were supposed to kill them. Well, we can't kill anything that looks like that or that runs around your windowsill at night and puts its little nose on the glass and looks at you, and we weren't about to kill them. So, we just never said anything. But they used to play in the boxes down in the storage area, and we used to pray when somebody came that they wouldn't be rattling around in the boxes and they'd say, "Oh, what's that?" Those are the packrats we were supposed to kill. But we had them in both lookouts. Certainly didn't bother us particularly, so

they lived, and they look almost like cartoons. We coexisted. Like I say, the one that would run around at night and peer in at us. "What are you doin' in there?" But that was it for wildlife, really.

BH: Did your experiences turn out to be what you thought they would be or did you even have any idea of what—

KR: I was so ignorant I had no expectations. Fortunately, I loved it and it was fun, and there was something new every day. Never once wished I was somewhere else. We would have stayed on lookouts but one of us always had to stay up there, so we didn't get to do anything together. That's when Keith decided to be a summer ranger. It worked out better.

BH: As lookouts, you both were paid to be a lookout up there?

KR: On Apgar we were. And of course, the other lookouts it was five days for the men, two for the women, and on Apgar it was five and five. Somebody young, the other day when I said that, was so shocked. I said, "Well, that's just the way it was. You didn't question it."

BH: What was the most memorable thing that happened to you there?

KR: Listening to that whole Smitty Parrat thing was awful, awful, awful. Hours and hours and hours of reports and getting him out and that kind of thing.

Certainly a lot of the highlights had to be the people we worked with, Adolph and Marian, and certainly the men in the fire cache. We had great bosses in the fire cache. Don Barnum—loved Don—he always called me "False Smoke Rosengren" on the radio, because I turned in a campfire once. But Bob Morris, Jim Thompson, Ed Olmstead, and again, and those in a lot of cases at the tail end of their career. Knew Jean Sullivan; he was a friend.

Got to meet Joe Himes, which was a kick. The first time we met him was at our friend Jim's, who then went on into Park Service, and Jim was at Walton [Ranger Station]. And Joe was visiting him. I'll never forget. Joe had his hands behind his back, and he was teetering back and forth. And, of course, they were trying to get him to retire. He said, "Know what they've got me doin' now "Putin' bear shit on a map." [Laugh]. And that's what they had him doing, pinning all those scats on a map. Oh, and I said something about my mother and he said, "Ah. She rich?" Of course, Joe O'Neil met my mother and said, "Come back next year and bring your purse."

There were so many wonderful characters, and I'm a people person, so it was just endless fun to know all of these wonderful colorful people; they were everywhere. Of course, Frieda, best bartender in the world. She was very much a part of the scene. One man she would quit serving when he went to the bathroom and came back with his fly open. She'd say, "Time to go home." She was again, a Minnesotan from Bemidji. In fact, she'd gone to Bemidji State for two years before she came out here.

But as I say, the highlights were always the people that we got to know. Oh, about ten years ago Dick Smith—he was a Caterpillar operator for the road crew and Anashinaabi from Detroit Lakes and he and wife were friends. His granddaughter was artist in residence for the Park, and she was doing a thing on huckleberries, so she came to the campground and said, “Well, Kay, she’s the huckleberry picker. Talk to her.” And afterwards, she said, “Well, you know, I’m part Anashinaabi.” She said, “My grandparents were from Detroit Lakes.

I said, “Oh. Dick and Marge.”

She said, “Oh, for heaven’s sake.” She was so excited because she grew up in Bozeman and she didn’t really know anyone.

AF: About what year was this?

KR: Oh, I don’t know. Fairly recently. We met at Glacier Campground, and I said a whole group of us went out to dinner all the time and she said, well, who were they? So I told her all the people. You know, Eddie Brewster and his second wife. There was this whole group that we’d get together and go out for dinner on Saturday nights. And again, Eddie was an historical figure in a way and a nice, nice man.

We ended up living on Edwina Nofsinger's ranch for nine months.

BH: And where was the ranch?

KR: Duck Lake. She always called us her kids. And Mary McFarland was a very dear friend. All of these people were just legends in their own way. It was a small enough group too for the camaraderie. Lucky, lucky, lucky to be here when we were.

AF: Rich time.

KR: Absolutely.

BH: When you stopped being a lookout, what was the reason for that?

KR: Because we couldn't hike together or go anywhere together at the same time. Then we were at Logging [Ranger Station] for a summer, which again I loved. Then we were at Polebridge [Ranger Station] for three summers.

BH: Logging must have been '61?

KR: Yes.

BH: So then '62, 3, and 4 you were at [Polebridge]? You were there during the floods [1964].

KR: No. In fact, we came out that summer and camped, and Avery Ferguson—another one of my favorites, he was a real western gentleman; I loved him—he came and got Keith and said, “Would you consider take a gypsy crew in?” because they were just scrambling.

Keith said, “Yes, but what about are we going to do about Kay?”

He said, “I don’t want her.” At that time, we were over on the Forest Service side, and he said, “I don’t want her camping alone. I’d rather she’s in the Park.” Well, the Park said no—two weeks. She can only be there two weeks. So, Keith ended up not...and Avery was really...because they needed experienced hands. But again, oh no, no. Two weeks is the limit. So, in '64 we just camped. But we came back then in '67, and we were going to come in '68. Bob Frauson had requested Keith to work with him on rescue, and he thought about it for a week and he’d been on this awful rescue at Bowman and he said, “You know what? I don’t want to scrape bodies off ledges.” So, he called, and we didn’t come. When we came, we camped but didn't work for the Park. He just decided that was a little too hairy. That was his only rescue, and it was grim, really grim. I’m so glad I found that, because I started to doubt myself, and I was sure I had the text right—July of '63, and the woman’s name was Duvall, and the whole thing. So, I hadn’t made it up.

BH: If you had to do it again, would you?

KR: Oh yes. Despite my ignorance, I mean I really knew nothing, which was maybe part of the fun.

AF: What I love is how precious these memories are, and you convey them so well.

KR: Well, and to still have the memory. Once you turn 80 you start thinking, “Oh boy.” We knew so many vivid personalities.

[End of Transcribed Interview]

Interviewer’s Note: The final nine minutes of the audio have not been transcribed because they are about non-lookout specific topics.