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Association of National Park Rangers Oral History Project, 2012-2016



Karen Reyer  
October 28, 2016

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones  
Transcribed by Teresa Bergen  
Digitized by Casey Oehler

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ANPR Oral History Project

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The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript.

Audiofile: REYER Karen 28 Oct 2016

[START OF TAPE 1]

Lu Ann Jones: There we are. I usually start out just by asking people to give me their full names and date of birth.

Karen Reyer: Okay. Mary Karen Garrison Reyer, 6/14/40, born in Morgan Town, Pennsylvania – well, my dad was stationed at Hopewell. He was head of a CCC camp there in 1940.

Lu Ann Jones: So, let's see how we're recording.

[END OF TRACK 1]

[START OF TRACK 2]

Lu Ann Jones: I'm going to ask you, how do you spell Karen?

Karen Reyer: Just K-a-r-e-n.

Lu Ann Jones: And so where did you fit in the family lineup?

Karen Reyer: I was the youngest.

Lu Ann Jones: Of how many?

Karen Reyer: Three. I had a brother who was born in San Jose while my dad was at Stanford [University]. He was born about the time Dad graduated from Stanford. My dad was Lon Garrison. He had a degree in psychology from Stanford, which is kind of, what do you do with that? And it turns out that it worked beautifully for him, for the Park Service, as a career.

Lu Ann Jones: And then who was your mother?

Karen Reyer: My mother was Inger Wilhelmina Larsen from Juneau, Alaska. She was born in Norway.

Lu Ann Jones: And how had they met?

Karen Reyer: He, my father, had the 1919 flu and had dropped out of school because he'd been so ill for months. And his family suggested that instead of coming back to the farm in Idaho, that he go to Alaska. So he did. He got a job with the Forest Service. In Valdez. And what his job was was to run a hand cart behind the train, which was wood-powered. And there were these stacks of wood along the railroad where the wood cutters worked, and they would stop and load the train with this wood. Anyway, when they would burn the wood, there would be sparks from the smokestack that would start fires along the railroad. His job was to go along and put them out, was to follow the train and put the fires out.

Karen Reyer: Then from there, he got a job that was, I think, a summer job. He got a job teaching school in Haines, Alaska, at Fort Haines. Got acquainted with a number of people in the military there that they stayed friends with forever until they died.

Karen Reyer: My mom was raised in Juneau. She came from Norway in 1913. They moved to Seattle and then my grandfather was a machinist. He came to Juneau to do machining of parts for the gold mine in Juneau. So they moved the family to Juneau. At that point, there were just two kids – Mom and her sister, Cecelia. Then they had two boys in Alaska. Grandfather was, as I said, a machinist for the mine. But he also was a halibut fisherman with a Norwegian friend that we called Uncle Einar. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) I have no idea if that was really his name. I never met him. Anyway, they co-owned a halibut fishing boat.

Karen Reyer: And Gulf Oil, or Shell Oil, I'm not sure which – I have the article about his death from the Juneau newspaper – they hired him to take them up in the Chugach National Forest outside of the Inland Passage there, and go over oil drilling. They wanted to drill for oil along that range there between Haines and Valdez. So he took this group of men and they were hiking through the woods. One of them had heard about the Alaskan brown bears, which were plentiful there. He had bought himself an elephant gun, which was a new thing at that point in time. It was big enough to kill an elephant. He was carrying this gun and tripped and fell down and shot my grandfather in the back.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh!

Karen Reyer: So, they got him back to Juneau alive, but he died very shortly thereafter. And that left Grandmother with four children and no English language. She still spoke only Norwegian. But the kids were speaking English. It was just a terrible time for the family because she didn't know how to earn a living. The Norwegian community supported each other, obviously, as races did in those days. So when Mom was 14, she was parted out as a nanny to Machtetanz. I don't know if I'm saying his name right. He was a painter and a photographer, I believe, in Juneau – mostly a photographer, I guess. Anyway, he took pictures of things in Alaska and then she colored them. He taught her how to color them, using toothpicks and cotton, and these oil paints, to make it a color picture. So, she learned to color pictures as part of her keep.

Karen Reyer: So then when she finished high school – she took care of their kids the whole time – and of course was taking money home to Mom with the three kids at home. They sent her out of Alaska to Cheney, Washington, to go to school for a year so she could become a teacher. So she went to Cheney, Washington, and got her one-year teaching degree and came back to Alaska. Applied for employment, and she was employed in, I can't remember the name of the village. When you look at the map, Haines is right straight up the Inland Passage. Then there's a village off to the east. She taught school in that village. They taught only during spring, summer, and fall, because it was iced in the rest of the year. They were all

wilderness livers, families. So for them to get to school, they had to be able to canoe. So that's why school was just held when the breakup came.

Karen Reyer: The two schools, the first, where Dad was teaching at Haines, and the second, where she was teaching got together to play basketball. The commander of the base, Robbie Roberts, and his wife Myrtle, said, "Ah ha! We need to introduce these two." And they did. They kind of courted by correspondence, I believe. Because she was up there and he was down there. And on her wintertime, she would go to Juneau and help her mother.

Karen Reyer: So, they got married. There was a little cabin out behind the base there, and they had their honeymoon there. They had a giant shivaree, according to history. They got married there. Mother's mother, my grandmother, did not know for months until Mom's school got out. She went back to Juneau, and they were moving to Fresno so he could go back to Stanford. So that's how Grandmother found out.

Karen Reyer: I did find a letter, when we closed their house – Dad was teaching in the parks and recreation department at Texas A&M. I found a letter that said, "Have you told your mother yet," da, da, da, da, da. And then his salutation was, "You can hang your bathrobe in my bathroom anytime." (laughter) And so I thought, okay. Okay, Dad.

Karen Reyer: Anyway, they went to Stanford. And they knew, who's the photographer from Yosemite?

Lu Ann Jones: Ansel Adams.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. They lived next door. That was two years later. Anyway, they kind of lived around Stanford, I think in San Jose. Mom had the youngest brother come live with them to finish high school. Dad went to Stanford, got his degree. They were good friends with Bertha and Marshal Mason, who were teachers in the medical school. He was an ENT [ear, nose, and throat], and she was a child psychiatrist. And then the other couple they met were the Varians.

Lu Ann Jones: How do you spell that?

Karen Reyer: V-a-r-i-a-n. They've been on the stock exchange for a very long time. These brothers invented the cyclotron, which is the original piece of machinery pre-x-ray or sonar or any of those. It's what, the physics of what designed radiology as a field. And they were just really unusual hippie kind of guys, you know. We stayed in touch with them forever, too. And the Doctors.

Karen Reyer: Anyway, Dad finished school and they didn't have any money. So he got a job picking oranges, because it was time to pick oranges. By that time, my brother was born there in San Jose. I think she was probably pregnant when they left Alaska. But he went to pick oranges and he got fired because he's color blind and cannot tell orange from gray from black. So they fired him. (laughter)

Karen Reyer: Somebody said, "Well, go work for the movies up in Sequoia." So he got a job as a night watchman at the movies in Sequoia. They gave him a horse and a car and he paraded around and did all these things. Yeah. When the movies left, they gave him the horse, because they didn't know what to do with it. By that time, he was a seasonal ranger, I believe, he got fired again for taking a gift as a Park Service employee. You can't do that. And somebody, I think it was Hillary Tolson, went to bat for him in Washington, DC. Somebody told, and this whole thing went all the way to Washington and got him reinstated. He gave the horse away, and that settled it. So he was reinstated. So, he got fired twice in a very short period of time.

Karen Reyer: But the Park Service was really what he wanted to do, or Forest Service. He didn't know the difference, really, at that point, I don't believe. So they lived in Sequoia for two or three years. I haven't ever been to Sequoia or Yosemite, so I'm not sure what those haunts in history look like. We have a picture of my brother in a clapboard white house with four windows and a door in the middle, you know, and a window above that. And my brother hanging out the window at age four. So actually I think that was at Chinquapin, which is in Yosemite, I believe. And so, he was a back country ranger briefly there.

Karen Reyer: Then he became a night watchman at Hetch Hetchy, at the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp there, during the building of the dam. Interesting that they lived next door to Ansel Adams and his wife. My brother and Adams's eldest son played together for three years, I think. And so, he lived in Yosemite park at that point in time, Ansel Adams did.

Karen Reyer: Another person that I recall, he was chief ranger at Grand Canyon when I was young – his name was Perry Brown. He was a back country ranger in Yosemite. He came from the movie world. He was raised in Idaho, I believe, on a ranch. And he came from the movies, because there were no more jobs. So he came to ride as a back country ranger. They said, "Go down and pull yourself a horse and a pack horse. And go do these trails." And off he went. He was gone about ten, 14 days, and they never heard from him. So they thought he was dead. You know, here's this guy from Hollywood. (laughs) He got back, put the horse up, put the mule up. Somebody came by and said, "You better get to the chief ranger's office. You're in real trouble." And it was like, Why?" "Just go see the chief ranger."

Karen Reyer: So, he did. And he says, "You didn't call in, you didn't report in while you were doing your ride. To let us know the condition of the trails, you know, what was going on out there."

Karen Reyer: He said, "Oh! Is that why I'm in trouble?" They said yes. And he says, "Okay, I'll take care of that." So his next trip, at every phone he came to, he called to let them know. (laughter) He loved telling us, Eldon and I, this story, when we were in Big Bend. And I had known him in Grand Canyon. Let's see, what's next. Anyway, Yosemite, and then Dad was hired as the director of the CCC camp at Hopewell Village and Iron Furnace place, which is a really nice little place. And

we lived in that old Miller's house there, the old white house. We've got pictures of me sitting on the back step in diapers.

Karen Reyer: He was there for a while. And since he was 4F, he couldn't be drafted during the Second World War. So basically the Interior Department, Park Service had emptied out as everybody was drafted or joined or whatever. So they moved him to Washington as the Chief Information Officer. He was there briefly, I don't remember how many months or years between there and Hopewell. I don't know how old I was when he was transferred to Glacier. I do have vivid memories of stuff in Glacier, like the little one-room school over in, what we called Belton. I don't know if, it's been West Glacier, it's been Belton, I don't know how many different names it's gone under. But it was Belton, Montana, when I was a kid. There was a path along from the superintendent's house, there was a path across the road there. You followed the river across the bridge into Belton, and the school was back up river.

Karen Reyer: Eric and Lars walked that every day. I remember running away from home one time and heading up on the school step all by little self. I don't know how old I was, but I knew the pathway. I was sitting on this step. I didn't knock on the door or anything; I just wanted to go to school. So finally somebody found me sitting there. (laughs) I guess they called out the army to find me.

Karen Reyer: In fact, my brother and I, Eric and I, had at least one other runaway when we took the tricycle. He was pedaling and I was standing on the back step. We were going up to Lake McDonald to catch fish. I had a fishing pole I was holding. We got about halfway there. I guess Mom wasn't paying real close attention. Whatever. (laughter) Anyway, we got about halfway there, and the maintenance man picked us up and brought us home.

Karen Reyer: My brother Lars had a strange happening when he was first starting in Scouts. He's like eight years older than I am, and it was his first campout. He had an army mummy bag, and he was sleeping out in it under the trees outside the house, outside Mom and Dad's bedroom window. The bedroom was on the second story. I had an uncle staying in the other bedroom on that side of the house, and then Eric and I were on the east side of the house. Anyway, they heard Lars screaming, "Bear! Bear! Bear!" So, Mom and Dad got up, ran to the window, of course. And there he was, this mummy bag zipped up. He was trying to get up, and he couldn't get it unzipped. And the bear was ambling towards him. I don't know how close it ever got, but I just remember all the hurrah, and my mom saying, "Don't forget your pillow! Don't forget your pillow!" (laughter) My vision still to this day is him bounding like a bunny rabbit in that mummy bag across the lawn to the back door. And Dad ran out and snatched him at the back door and brought him in. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: It was during Second World War. We bought food in bulk and then shared it in the community. At one point, somebody bought a truckload of live chickens, and so the whole community got together to can them. And it was the job of the kids –

once they chopped the head off, they threw them down on the ground and they would flop around and bleed to death. And then we would put a string around their foot and hang them on the clothesline so they could bleed out. What a gory job! I look back at it, it's like, ew! (laughter) Anyway, then they waxed them there. Then they took them into the boiling water and plucked them. And then they began the canning process in our kitchen.

Karen Reyer: We had a coal stove, I believe it was, in that kitchen. I remember sitting at the dining room table on a chair, listening to the radio – World War Two ended, how profound that was. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: There was one of the employees, Laura Marble who was single. She made the best huckleberry muffins you ever, ever ate your whole life. I would just go and knock on her door sometimes. You know, I'd escape. (laughter) "Got any muffins?"

Lu Ann Jones: Well, how big was that park community there? What was it, at a place like Glacier at that time?

Karen Reyer: I'm trying to think. It must have been maybe 30 employees, at the most. At the most. The superintendent's house was on one lawn. Coming back on the main road. But it wasn't near the road. It was just backed up that direction. Our house was at the end, near the bridge, up over the river. There were two bridges there. I don't even remember what the hell river that is. The other houses down the road were all duplexes, and there were duplex garages across the road, behind them. Then there were little cabins just everywhere. Yeah. But I don't think there were more than 20, 25, 30 employees at all. Yeah. And we had a very active group of people that did entertainment. We had an event monthly or biweekly, I don't even remember. I just remember there was one party that was a bad taste party. It was supposed to be just about bad taste, so they dressed in bad taste. And somebody burnt broccoli in the kitchen. And when you came in the door, it depended on who you were, there was a bucket of water up over the door, and it would fall down on you when you pushed the door open. My father was responsible for maintaining that. Just goofy stuff, you know? And just costume things.

Karen Reyer: My mom learned to play bridge there, I believe, which was a real giving thing in that she played everywhere she went after that. It was just a way for couples to get together. My dad already knew how from Stanford, but she didn't, and somebody there taught her, I believe.

Karen Reyer: Let's see. We moved from there when I was five to Grand Canyon. Yeah. So we traveled to California to see my mother's brother and my dad's sister in the Oakland/San Francisco/San Jose area, and then drove across to Grand Canyon. We lived in one of the three stone houses there at Grand Canyon on that end circle as you come into it from what you would call The Village, it was the first stone house on the left. At that point, Harold Bryant was superintendent, and he lived in the house at the bottom of the El Tovar Hill.



- Karen Reyer: Dad's secretary was Mrs. Ayers. And she was very, very efficient. She kind of looked after us kids, too. I'd just go by the office to see Dad sometimes because I happened to be walking by. But that village, we just kind of ran loose. There was nothing to worry about.
- Karen Reyer: At one point, I remember when I was probably in fifth grade, there was a strange man that was walking about the village. He'd come and stand outside the school and watch us play at recess. I said something to Daddy about this strange man and I asked him his name, and he wouldn't tell me. I said I didn't think that was very nice. He asked about it. I said, "Yeah, he's been coming here a week or so." So the next day, he was gone. So that was a good thing. Yeah. I think that was kind of the closest to predatory I ever, ever came. Yeah.
- Karen Reyer: I was friends with a lot of Hopi kids. I just loved them. The Gastellum family with their five or six kids lived there down the street. Marie and I were in the same grade together. And then we lived next door to them again at Yellowstone; he was the assistant superintendent. And Gloria is the next daughter down. And then Eddie Gastellum, of course, is stationed up at Northern Cascades, the new national park west of Seattle.
- Lu Ann Jones: Oh, Hanford?
- Karen Reyer: What? It goes over into Canada. I'll think of it. It will just pop up. I'm having memory problems. So it will just pop up. Anyway, the third child was Eddie, and he was in the Park Service. And has been stationed, he was at Petrified Forest as superintendent. He married a Binneweis daughter, Carolyn Binneweis. And I never knew the Binneweis kids. We were never stationed with them anywhere. But we've known of each other forever kind of thing, from superintendents' conferences and things.
- Karen Reyer: And then Steven Gastellum was chief of maintenance at Bandelier at one point, and ran into him. I didn't even know he was in the Park Service, and so it was really fun to run into him. And then he was down at Guadalupe Mountains at one point. I don't know where he went after that. Kind of lost track of him. But Marie was in our wedding in Yellowstone years later.
- Karen Reyer: There was no kindergarten in that time, in Glacier or in Grand Canyon. So I started school in first grade in Grand Canyon. And there were, Catherine Daisy, her dad was a ranger. There was a doctor's daughter, Sally Schnur. There just were, Ellen Jean Christiansen, he was the lead naturalist. There just weren't many, there was a family named Bruick, and their kids came into the Park Service. I don't remember their first names because they were little kids, and I was like in fourth or fifth grade, you know. (laughs) You don't pay attention to those little kids.
- Karen Reyer: Anyway, my brother was killed while we lived there. Eric. He was a year and two weeks older than I. He was born in Yosemite before they moved to Morgan

Town, or to Hopewell. And Mother, it was kind of interesting, because there was a new German doctor who wanted her to birth with Lamaze Method. And nobody had ever heard of it, and was terrified. She said, "This sounds great to me, because I'm going to go home the next day." And she did. Yeah. So she said, you know, she was one of the first to use it in Yosemite, anyway. And then when I was born in Pennsylvania, they kept her in the hospital for seven days with her feet up and all. She said, "I just want to go home." It was just a totally different type of mentality. They had not heard of what she had done. It was a new event.

- Karen Reyer: Anyway, Eric was a Boy Scout. And he had taken over a paper route for the *Arizona Republic* from John Cook. Johnny. Have you met him?
- Lu Ann Jones: Then John Cook, he became the regional director?
- Karen Reyer: Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: I've never met him. But I've heard of him.
- Karen Reyer: Yeah. He was our next door neighbor there. He was the paper boy, and he gave up the paper route and my brother took it over. I think there must be six or eight years' difference. Because my brother had increased his salesmanship, they gave him a sweatshirt. Being the frugal kid he was, he bought an extra-extra-large so he could grow into it. He was growing like a weed. My dad was huge. My older brother was huge. So he thought he was going to be huge, too, so he bought this big sweatshirt. (laughs)
- Karen Reyer: Anyway, the Boy Scouts went skiing in Mount Bill Williams down at Flagstaff. Gene Morris – I believe he was a carpenter, I'm not sure; it doesn't make any difference – he had a boy named Mike who was the same age as Eric. Anyway, there were four of them, I think, that went to Mount Bill Williams to ski. They had an old rope tow. This was like late January or early February. You know how if you take a piece of string and you twist one end, it will throw a loop? Well, that's what this rope did. It threw a loop and caught his sweatshirt. And it carried him through all the pulleys. And then through the mother wheel and broke his neck.
- Lu Ann Jones: Oh, my gosh.
- Karen Reyer: Yeah. I was eleven and he was twelve.
- Lu Ann Jones: That must have been terrible.
- Karen Reyer: It was. Because we were very, very close. And everywhere he went, I went. He took care of me. Yeah. There weren't any girls to play with, and the two that I remember, other than the Indian girls, were playing dolls, and I didn't know about dolls. I had no idea, because I had brothers. (laughs) Anyway, I missed him terribly, terribly. Yeah. He's buried there at Grand Canyon. As are my parents, right next to him.

Karen Reyer: So, seventh grade, mid-seventh grade, we moved to Big Bend. The first superintendent at Big Bend was a man named Ross Maxwell, who was a geologist. Big Bend is fascinating geology country, absolutely fascinating. Especially paleontology. He came from one of the universities around here. But he happened to drink a bit much, and he would go to town and go over to the Mexican side of the tracks and get drunk and holler up the town and go through all the whorehouses and rip them up. It was just a bad scene. I believe Hillary Tillotson was the regional director here at Santa Fe at that time. So they managed to get him retired, and told Dad that his job was to mend the fences. Pure and simple. That's what he was to do. And that's what he did.

Karen Reyer: There was a Highway 90 Association; I believe it was Highway 90, that goes from Los Angeles to Atlanta. There were groups in each state that promoted tourism. So he joined that group because it was local businesspeople who were serving those traveling tourists. He joined the chamber of commerce. He was in Rotary. He was doing all these things to mend those fences. And I think he did a really good job. Yeah. There weren't any people there that needed to be – well, there were only three houses at park headquarters at that time. Then there were all the CCC buildings in the basin, and people lived in the CCC buildings. That must have been, oh, I think I could count on one and a half hands how many residents, actually residents there were. Houses within that. And then there was a ranger station at Boquillas. Nobody was stationed at Castalon. And Maverick Ranger Station was eventually put in.

Karen Reyer: My dad got Bureau of Reclamation surveyed, or got rid of some old, they kind of looked like current Air Streams, only they had very slanted fronts and backs. They were more of a dome kind of house trailer. And he bought some of those on survey and placed one Maverick for the ranger station there because that was near Study Butte, which was the back entrance, that was eventually to be paved. When we were there, the paving only went to the top of Todd Hill.

Lu Ann Jones: What was the name of the entrance that you mentioned?

Karen Reyer: Study Butte. It used to be kind of like an outpost, trading post, almost. Yeah. Grocery, post office, etcetera. And the guy that was running it was Clint Henson. He had no teeth. You'd go down to see Clint and visit, and he was kind of wrinkled and old and had a cane. Had white whiskers. He kept his hair combed and cut. Always wore a slouch cowboy hat. Always had a scroungy dog running around behind him. And I was in love with animals; I just loved animals. You know, every day, I think, of my life, I asked Daddy if I could have a dog. And of course in that day and age, you couldn't have dogs in national parks at all. That was it. No question. Anyway, this old cur, he growled at me and chased me away. (laughs) It was like my feelings were so hurt. I wanted to love him.

Karen Reyer: Anyway, while we were there at Maverick, they put that trailer in. Eldon and I lived in it many, many years later. I went to the one-room school there at park headquarters. San Vincente School. It was one room with an accordion curtain

between classrooms. So you close off the two rooms. One of the teachers was Gertrude, and I cannot remember her name. Her husband's name was Shorty, and he was a grader operator. That guy, according to Dad, he could make a grader dance. And he'd just do anything. Of course, there was a lot of grading to do at that point in time. Because down at Dugout Wells, which was going towards Boquillas, the pavement stopped at K-Bar. And then the rest of that was all dirt. And then at Todd Hill on the other side. So, it was miles and miles and miles of gravel roads.

Karen Reyer: The Tornillo Creek would flood with the desert storms. There was no bridge, and so if you went to town and came home and the creek was up, you just waited. You didn't dare try it. Because you're the only ones out there, and there may not be another good car for a day or so. You just didn't do it. So, they had the graders to clean that.

Karen Reyer: And Giant Dagger Flats, they kept that road graded so people could see the giant daggers. Especially at Eastertime, they're a lily family, and they would bloom with these huge plumes. God, they're gorgeous. They're massive. They're really large.

Karen Reyer: Let's see. The Old Ore Road along the Dead Horse Mountains was not really passable. But the park had somehow acquired, I don't know, an army truck, a troop carrier. You see them in the movies where the troops are sitting along the benches on the side with the canvas top. This one didn't have the canvas top. But by that time, I was in the seventh or eighth grade. Somebody had to help me up in there, it was so tall. It had every range of gear anybody would ever want in a truck. So we did the Ore Road a couple of times; we did that with George Sholly and his wife Reese and their son Dan and daughter Debbie. Debbie at one point was a park ranger. And Dan, of course, had his career at the National Park Service clear through into Washington, DC. And then retired and went to Texas State Parks, Director. They found out he was shooting donkeys, and the donkey folks got real upset, and so he lost that job. Last I heard of him, he was living in Big Sky. And he was two grades behind me.

Karen Reyer: Anyway, there were twelve of us in the school. Gertrude was the teacher, was Shorty's wife. The other was a young lady from Alabama who had applied for this job and gotten it. She was a gutsy girl, Miss Eileen Kilgore. Why on earth she would come to Big Bend to teach school, heaven only knows. There was a little efficiency apartment attached to the end of the school building. There was upper grades and lower grades. A lot of classes we taught with Kurt Holden, because the little kids were moving up and we were helping the little kids. You know, it was self-taught, some. And they had us do a lot of singing and dancing. Folk songs and things. (coughs) Excuse me.

Karen Reyer: I just recently found a picture of my graduation ceremony. I had to wear a dress, and I had to wear these shoes that my mother got me. From our house to the school was out the front porch, across the road, down a really steep hill, trail, and

then up the other side of this arroyo and you're in the schoolyard. But these shoes weren't working for me. (laughs) They were not good for that. Anyway, it was just funny. I still remember quarreling because I lived in jeans and western shirts. And Dad rented a horse. Actually, he rented a horse for me, he bought a horse for me at Grand Canyon after my brother was killed. When we were at Grand Canyon, every summer, Harold Bryant, the superintendent and his wife, Harold and Amy, and then Dad and Inger took turns for a month, and there's five, six weeks each, on the North Rim. There was a really lovely log cabin over there that the superintendent or assistant superintendent could live in. And then they traded places during the summer.

Karen Reyer:

So, Dad rented a horse on the North Rim from Jack Church, who was a horse concessioner. It had to be gentle. All the little kids in the neighborhood would ride. And we got to steer, because he was our horse. I mean, we put all six kids from the neighborhood on him. I've got a picture somewhere, way back, of six kids on this horse and we're going to a ballgame. There was a ballgame between, I guess, dorms at the concessioners or something. Anyway, it was all these header canyons came in between where we lived and where the ball field was. So we had to go down through these header canyons and go up the other side and down through these header canyons. It was aspen and ponderosa forest. It was so funny because at one point, I was the smallest one on the horse, and so I got put on the back. Going up the hill, I was falling off. That darn horse lifted its tail to go to the bathroom, and held me on with his tail. (laughter) Or I'd have rolled down the hill. We used to play Cowboys and Indians and racehorse and stagecoach and all kinds of goofy stuff.

Karen Reyer:

Of course, around Kanab at that time, Kanab, Utah, there were a lot of westerns being made. So it was all kind of in that vernacular, yeah. We had a horse one year named Sunday, and he had what's called a Sunday gait, which is a pace. It's real smooth. They just don't move. You can just sit up there and glide. He was fun. Then we had this other one named Silver. We had him two summers. And that's the horse that after Eric was killed, Dad bought for me, and brought him to Grand Canyon. Because I had to have a friend. I just, you know, I didn't know how else to do things. I spent my life with that horse on the bridle trails, and out through the forest.

Karen Reyer:

I was a good geographer. I could go somewhere and always get back. And that's one thing that Park Service brats learned very early is that moving, you learn how to get home again. You may just go that direction once, but you have to remember what it looks like going the other way so that you can get home again.

Lu Ann Jones:

Well, when you say that term "Park Service brat," what does that mean to you?

Karen Reyer:

Well, it's children of Park Service employees. Yeah. Kind of like the term "military brats." Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: When did you realize that your upbringing was somewhat different than many people's upbringing, growing up in national parks?

Karen Reyer: I'm still learning that. Geez! (Lu Ann Jones laughs) This memoir class I'm taking, the things I write about, the other people in the class just sit there and shake their heads, like, really? And it's like, yeah. Isn't that normal? And see, I never looked at the other side, so I never really saw. I mean, I was so ignorant of what real world was. Totally ignorant. They're all into movies, and they make comments about movies. Well, hell, we didn't a television until I was 27. Never seen a television. Then we never lived anywhere near a movie house. Or like here in Santa Fe, we just don't bother to come back to town to do it. So we're totally ignorant of some parts of the real world. Still.

Lu Ann Jones: You were saying that, I think when we talked the other day, that your mother kind of had a system when you were going to pack up and move to a different place.

Karen Reyer: Yes. Mm hmm.

Lu Ann Jones: Can you describe that for me?

Karen Reyer: Well, we had one antique dresser that she had bought while she was at Hopewell. It was a great big three-drawer dresser. It was probably five and a half, six feet tall, and five feet wide. It had four drawers. Each of us was given a drawer to pack our toys. We couldn't take them all. But we had to choose what we were going to put in that drawer. When I left Grand Canyon, there was a gallon jar of marbles, because I was the queen of playing marbles, and taking everybody's marbles. I won them all. I mean, it just was really great. (laughs) Anyway, when she moved from Big Bend, she got rid of it. (laughs) Because by that time, I was away in high school. There was no high school. She would have had to move to town with me. My dad, again, was not well at that point in time, with his lungs. In the mid '40s, in '46 or '47, he went to Stanford and had one and a half lungs removed. So he just was not a strong man with breathing, and he had a lot of allergies. So that's just the way it was. And my brother Lars had gone to Wasatch Academy. And a lot of Park Service kids did, from Yosemite, Sequoia, Glacier, Yellowstone. A lot of park kids who lived out. Dinosaur. Some places like that. And a lot of ranch kids. A lot of BIA kids. And a lot of Forest Service kids went to this Presbyterian National Board of Missions school in Mount Pleasant, Utah, named Wasatch Academy.

Lu Ann Jones: Is it W-a-s-a-t

Karen Reyer: t-c-h. Uh huh. Named after the mountain range. It held about 200 students. Yeah. There was a freshman/sophomore dorm for girls, junior/senior. And same for the boys. Freshman/sophomore, junior/senior. Yeah. And it was run by the Presbyterian National Board of Missions. So a lot of our teachers were missionaries and had traveled the world. So that part was very interesting. Most of our students, not me, were so well-educated they went on to Harvard and Yale,

Stanford and, you know, the really Big Ten type schools. I don't know that they called them the Big Ten back then. But it was very well known academically. And I just got through on the skin of my teeth. (laughter) School was not my thing. Horses. (laughs) Yeah. So, yeah. I went seventh, half of the seventh grade and all of the eighth grade year in Big Bend. And then the other eighth grade graduate in Big Bend, his stepdad was, the kid was named Frankie Boles, B-o-l-e-s. We graduated together. And there was no high school there for him either. His stepdad was Stan Fulcher, and he was the warehouse guy. He was the one that kept all the supplies and ordered and all that stuff. Anyway, Frankie and I went off to Wasatch together. And we stayed, it was kind of like having my brother back for a while. Because you know, plunked in the middle of all these kids who'd been – a lot of us were isolated, but they also lived near enough to towns that they knew what was going on. And there was this guy named Elvis Presley who was on the radio. And they were all swooning and screaming. And it's like, what the hell's going on? (laughter) I had no clue. Just didn't know. Didn't know.

Karen Reyer: I did go to the movies once a week there. In fact, we had movies at Glacier and at Grand Canyon in the community hall, which is down by the old laundry building. There's a rec hall. And every Saturday night, you pay your nickel and you go to the movies. That's where I first saw *Wizard of Oz*, and it scared the peewadden right out of me. Just scared me to death. So I spent – Mom and Dad didn't go to the movies. That was their night off. They dropped us off. And of course, as I said, it was a safe place. All of us kids were raised by other mothers. You get in trouble, your mom knew it before you got home. That's just the way it was. And anyway, it terrified me. And I ended up in this lady's lap with my face buried in her bosom the rest of the movie. I just could not do it. Couldn't do it. Just, oh! It was awful.

Karen Reyer: Let's see. What else? Again, Grand Canyon, they had sing-alongs that the tourists that came on buses at the El Tovar and at the, we called the Bright Angel Lodge the BA in those days. And when a tourist bus would load, all the waitresses, the Harvey girls, would come out and sing the bus away. I don't remember what they were singing. They did it on the North Rim, Zion, Bryce, Grand Canyon, Glacier. It was just a thing. I always thought that was so neat to give music to people to go on their journey. Yeah, that was really cool.

Karen Reyer: My dad loved music. There was an old hotel out on the East Rim Drive at Grand Canyon called the Buglin Hotel. And he was a trapper and a guide. And eventually the hotel fell into disrepair. And my mother would go out, she was a dump monger. She'd go through dumps and find interesting dishes, mainly, which we used. I mean, she had them from Glacier. I don't think she had any from Pennsylvania. But Grand Canyon was a real treasure trove. But the Buglin Hotel was just really – and there was a player piano there. Just rotting. So Dad brought it to the house. It was put on Park Service books as being owned by the park. And then rather than put it in the warehouse, he moved it to our house and had it tuned. It had the player reels. But he also played. He chorded. And we'd sit around,

stand around the piano at night and sing after dinner. That was just kind of how life was then.

Karen Reyer: There was a streetlight outside our house, and the whole town of Grand Canyon played Kick the Can there on Friday and Saturday nights. The whole town. All the kids. The whole school. (laughs) Except possibly the Indian kids, who would go back out to the reservation on weekends.

Lu Ann Jones: When you finished high school, did you think about working for the National Park Service?

Karen Reyer: No. I wanted to be a veterinarian. And I eventually accomplished being a registered veterinary nurse. Because I married young.

Lu Ann Jones: How old were you?

Karen Reyer: Nineteen.

Lu Ann Jones: So how did you and Mr. Reyer meet?

Karen Reyer: He was a fire guard in Yellowstone. I worked in the post office, and he used to come to get his mail from his parents, general delivery. I'd get it out of the box and give it to him. I didn't even recognize him at all the first summer there. Somehow it just didn't strike me. But the second summer it was like, hmm, he's interesting. Mom and Dad encouraged us to – there were about six of us teenage girls who actually had a reunion just the end of June and I missed it. I couldn't go because I broke my back. Anyway, there were six of us who were junior, senior, freshman in college age. And we spent a lot of time doing things with Yellowstone Park Company. Because at that time, it was all young people, also, spending the summer in the park. They had evening programs in their rec hall. After the campfire by the Park Service closed down, then things would move to the rec hall. They were like old vaudeville stage things, and they had all the costumes and all the music. Each unit in the park in Yellowstone had an activity director. And that's what they did at that unit. So, we did the plays and all that stuff.

Karen Reyer: But we also were encouraged by our parents, because the savages were really playing heavily, sexually and otherwise. There were no drugs, I don't think, because it didn't exist then. But our parents really didn't want us with that group of people because it was going to be three months, and then they were gone. But the fire guards and the seasonal maintenance crew and the naturalists and so forth – have you been to Yellowstone?

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm.

Karen Reyer: Do you know where the superintendent's house is?

Lu Ann Jones: I do. Yeah.



- Karen Reyer: Okay. Right behind it is that big, long administrative building? Okay. The east end of that was the dormitory, men's dormitory. That's where all these guys stayed. The girls, I think, were down in the apartment house on down by the old hospital. But not, well, there were female employees, let's put it, there just weren't any seasonal females.
- Karen Reyer: And so, we'd get together for fish fries and things, and go down to Roaring River and Hot Pot. We're the generation that kind of discovered making hot potting into a thing. And so we all, the guys and us girls, our moms would just make something. They'd call each other and say, "Okay, this is what I'm sending." And so we'd take these dinners and we'd feed all these guys. And they'd go fishing and bring the fish.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, what do you mean when you say "hot potting?"
- Karen Reyer: Oh, okay. We went down to the river and the guys would take the boulders and they'd put them in a wall. And there was a hot stream coming into the river side. And then that wall they built brought the cold water in at a lesser level, so it mixed, so it was like a hot pot, only not so hot. We'd all get in our swimming suits and go down there, play in the water. And just play. We weren't drinking, we just played. And one night (laughs) we were to go to a fish fry. And we decided in midafternoon we needed more fish. So three of the guys and one of the other girls and I went off to Slide Lake, which is between Mammoth and Gardner. There's an old road up behind that was the old stagecoach road, that goes up over the hills back there. And Slide Lake is off of that road. It's very steep, and I slid to Slide Lake and broke my arm. But we went fishing. And we caught a bunch more fish. I had to have help climbing out because I was carrying fish and a fishing pole, and my hand wasn't working. So they helped me out and we all got back home. We went right to the hospital while the guys went off, cleaned the fish and stuff. I think they did that at the lake. Anyway, they had, the doctor at the hospital had to call and get permission to treat me. "Don't tell my mom! Don't tell my mom!" It's like, how are you going to keep it from her that your darned arm is broken? (laughter) And she had gotten me a new outfit of tan Bermuda shorts and a blouse. And that's what I was wearing. And she had told me not to wear them fishing, that I would ruin them. And yes, sure enough, I ripped the ass out of them. And she was so—(laughter) "Did you rip your pants?" "Yes." Yes. And I didn't get new clothes a lot. You know, I was never a clothes horse kind of person.
- Karen Reyer: Anyway, so I had a cast. And what do you do? We were going hot potting. And they melt. So I took a plastic bread bag – luckily, there were plastic bread bags at that point in time. So I pulled a bread bag up over it and my dad tied a shoelace around it. And so off we went.
- Karen Reyer: Eldon and I had been kind of talking. So here we were. (laughs) So we finally got into the hot pot, and I just rested it on his head, because it was so heavy. And it was really swelling. And it hurt. (laughter) Didn't dare miss the fish fry. (laughs)

Anyway, then we sat up on the bank. And I don't remember what you call it, but we took everybody's clothes and tied it in knots, and tied this person's shirt to that person's socks. And just were naughty. We were sitting there on a log looking up and my gosh, there was this thing. It was Sputnik, right there. We saw Sputnik. And we had seen, like within a week there had been a picture of it in the paper of these blinking lights on the front page. You know, so we're just like, "My God, there's Sputnik!" (laughs) Anyway, that was kind of a fun date.

Karen Reyer: And we just did a lot of stuff, all of us kids together. And it was a wonderful time. Very non-threatening. Just really wonderful. All the guys that worked for the Park Service were serious, directed towards careers, college guys. Who the savages were not.

Lu Ann Jones: Now who are the savages?

Karen Reyer: Oh, the savages were summer employees at Yellowstone.

Lu Ann Jones: Got you.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. And they named themselves that.

Lu Ann Jones: Now were they working for concessioners? Or—

Karen Reyer: No, all concessions. Hundreds, hundreds, hundreds, hundreds, would take their summer and come to Yellowstone. Mm hmm. And live in the dorms. They hitchhiked everywhere. Nobody had a car. So they hitchhiked from place to place to place to place. To visit, and to see the park. So there were thousands of people hitchhiking in the summer there. It was normal then. I don't think any of them would have necessarily hitchhiked out on the main highway. But in the park, it felt safe. And they weren't like hiking on the roadside and worried about bears. They'd stand at a populated place and hitchhike to the next place. Yeah. That's it. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: And so, we got married in Christmas of '59.

Lu Ann Jones: Where did you get married?

Karen Reyer: In the superintendent, well, in our little chapel there. The little Mammoth Chapel. Which was built by the army, by the way. By the cavalry, when they were owning Yellowstone. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, did you anticipate that you were going to have a Park Service adulthood, as well as a Park Service childhood?

Karen Reyer: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I told my mom and dad when I was very little that I was going to marry a cowboy ranger. That's just the way it was forever, and I met the two in one. I was not necessarily destined for college. As I said, I was not a student. If

anything, I would have been wasting my parents' money. In that day and age, you know, you'd just get married. That's what you did. So we did. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: We went to Greeley, Colorado, where he finished up his – I finished that spring semester there. And then he finished the next December. And we had our first child in November. So that was in 1960. He finished college early December and our child was born prematurely in November, the middle of November. She was hospitalized until about the twentieth of December.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Karen Reyer: She had to grow to be five pounds. He got the job in Big Bend in the meantime, and they needed him. We had an old wooden blue trailer that we bought somewhere. It was kind of like a plywood camping trailer on an axle. Did not have any accoutrements of any kind. It was just a box. He moved all of our stuff to Big Bend and arrived down there, he left the third or fourth of December. I think he graduated one day and he left the next. He took everything except the baby stuff that I would need. And he took the cradle and all that stuff with him, and drove down there. He drove into the park in the late afternoon. And Hal Edwards, I'm not sure he told you Hal Edwards had called him. He had sent resumes out, and Hal knew he could ride a horse and he needed a horse ranger. Because there was some really remote stuff down there in Big Bend.

Karen Reyer: So, he went ahead, and Hal and Vi fed him dinner and said, "Well, your ranger station's down the road." So he went down the road to his trailer, which is the same trailer by father had bought, surveyed, from Bureau of Reclamation all those years before in 1954. We lived in it in 1961. (laughs) That house was a scream. Just plain funny. The old trailers, the kitchen sink, there were two sinks that were about five by nine. They were about two and a half inches deep. They were metal. You couldn't get a dish in one. It didn't fit! So you kind of had to wash one side and then the other and keep turning it and, you know. There was no counter space. There was a three-burner stove, propane. We had a propane heater, one of those with the tall stacks. There was a dinette that could be made into a bed. The table, took the post out of it and lowered it. And then you used cushions to make a bed. There was a couch against one wall in what was the living room, which was like two steps from the dining room. He had put the crib up so that couch was kind of like not available. (laughs) The bathroom was a little bigger than these two chairs put together. What would that be, three and a half by two and a half? The commode was in the shower. Or, no, the sink was kind of in the shower, and the commode was by the door. And it was this situation. They hauled our water to us. We did not have water, running, well, they brought it to us in a tank and it was in a tank outside. But you had to push on this pedal on the floor and it would open a flap down in the toilet. It was metal. The whole toilet was metal. And then you pushed this knob handle to make the water run, and that's how you flushed the toilet. The sink had two faucets. It had a hot and a cold. And it used the same hot water heater that was under the kitchen sink, which was about a gallon and a half, I think. Maybe. (laughter) Anyway, and as I said, it was in the shower. You'd turn

that on and the faucets would turn off. You know, they were on springs. So if you really wanted to wash your hands, you had to stand there and hold the faucet and wash one hand by itself. (laughs)

Lu Ann Jones: Sort of like being in an airline bathroom.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. It is. And Eldon's parents came to visit us. They thought we had driven off, they were Quakers and they were very, very quiet and sedate and less informed than we were. Oh, my God. (laughs) They didn't read any national magazines. They'd never seen a movie. They just did their church work and that was it. His dad was a policeman and she was a stay-at-home mother. But they thought we had driven off the end of the earth, truly. They thought we were going to disappear in the next week if we stayed there, if we kept driving down that dirt road. That's just the way it was. Yeah. His mother was a bit round, and she went through that bathroom door and ended up facing, she went in backwards. Well, what you had to do, you had to go in this bathroom sideways. And that would give you access to the toilet. If you went in frontwards, you couldn't get turned around to sit down. (laughs) So we had to un-wedge her. (laughter) It was crazy. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: Anyway, when my parents came from Yellowstone and picked me up with the baby, we also had my Grandmother Larsen along. She thought it was the end of the earth, also. No, she had lived with us down there in Big Bend when I was a kid. Yeah. So Mom and her brothers and sisters used to kind of trade her around. But she had lived in Big Bend before, so she wasn't alarmed at where we were at all. She would go to Mexico – we used to take to the schools across the river, in Santa Elena, Boquillas and San Vincente. We would take stuff across to the schools. And she would go with us. And the little old ladies would find her and she'd find them. She would speak Norwegian and they would speak Spanish. And they understood each other perfectly. It was really quite marvelous. She just felt like she was home. (laughter) They were so cute, yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Even if you had been there before, it must have been somewhat challenging with a baby that had been born premature and so was small.

Karen Reyer: Yes. She was little. Yeah. Yeah. And I would just go with Eldon on all of his patrols.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, you would?

Karen Reyer: Yeah. I mean, it was so boring to just sit there in a trailer and do nothing, you know?

Lu Ann Jones: Would you ride with him?

Karen Reyer: In the pickup.

Lu Ann Jones: In the pickup.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. I didn't ride the horses with him. But when he'd do his patrols down the river road, or over to, I can't think, Mesa de Angela, or go down and visit at Study Butte. It was just kind of, I went along. His brother and wife had given us a baby buggy that folded up. It had a bed that also folded. And it was a cradle, actually. And so, that had handles on each end so you could lift it out of the baby buggy and carry it. So the handle fit on the dashboard and the back of the seat. And so she was just right there between us. One time we forgot her milk, her formula. But we had packed water and canned milk with that in mind. And so in an old army ammo box behind the seat, we had canned milk and water to make formula. So, we got out our little sterno and heated up the bottle and fed the baby.

Karen Reyer: The first night we got there, Eldon wanted to get up and feed, do all the feeding and diaper changing and everything, because he hadn't really had a chance to even touch her yet. And here she was, three weeks old, plus, maybe. And so yeah, you can do it. And so he put the bassinette next to him. And I got back in the crawl space of this bed. I heard him get up. My mother got up, because she was fussing, my mother got up to come in the bedroom and then he says, "No, I'll do it." So she put the bottle on to warm. And then the next thing I heard was this oath of cussing. And it's like, I sat up real fast. What's the matter? Knocked myself cold on the ceiling because it was so steep. And he was trying to put the diaper pin through the diaper, and he stuck it clear through his nail into his thumb. All the way into the flesh. And you could see it bulging on the other side. (laughs) God, it was awful. But he got to do it. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, did you have any neighbors? I mean, I know you didn't have neighbors there, but anybody to relieve that kind of isolation?

Karen Reyer: No. It was fine. No. Big Bend was just in my heart already. Yeah. And I felt blessed to be there. Of course, when he left Hal and Vi's house that night he got there, he thought he was driving into the depths of the earth like his mother did. Because it was as black as the inside of a cow. You know, there was no moon, no stars, no nothing. He couldn't see a thing. And he'd just follow these two, it was a paved road, but it wasn't very wide. It was very narrow, actually. It had been paved since I lived there as a kid. It had been paved to Maverick Ranger Station and on down to Study Butte. And a road have been paved to Alpine by that time. So there was a clear way to 82 miles, or 85 miles to town that way. When I was a kid, we had to go from park headquarters to Marathon to Alpine. Whenever anybody got a phone call, they would call the grocer in Marathon, when I was a kid, and say, "We have a phone message for." It was usually from Washington, DC. So the storekeeper would just kind of go down to the gas station, say, "You going down to Big Bend? Take this message." And that's how we got messages. Other than, there was a two-way radio with border patrol that was in the office. And it was checked in at eight o'clock in the morning and checked off at five in the afternoon, but was not used during the day. At all. Because neither place had somebody to man it all that time. That border patrol radio was over in Presidio. There was no road along the river to Presidio at that time from whatever that village is, I'll think of it, on the river. Anyway, there was no road along the river.

It was still, if somebody had to go to, if somebody from Santa Elena came in that was injured, we had to send them up to Alpine. They had to drive to Marfa and down to Presidio to Ojinaga to get treatment. That's how it was. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: So, you ended up, I think when we were talking just a couple of days ago, you said, I think you'd moved thirteen times once you'd gotten married, I think? Or thirteen assignments?

Karen Reyer: That's what Eldon says.

Lu Ann Jones: Yes. Several times.

Karen Reyer: The day we were married three years, we moved our 21<sup>st</sup> time. Yeah. College, this apartment, his folks, my folks, college, Yellowstone, you know, that kind of thing. We had to give our apartment up at Christmas, so we had to move everything back to Eldon's folks there in Colorado. And then get another apartment and move back in. We moved. So we kept things pretty slim. Really slim.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, when he was offered positions, new positions, how did you all talk about those decisions about moving and things like that?

Karen Reyer: Oh. He'd just come home and say, "You want to move?" And my answer was always yes. Yes! Because I knew it was career building. And I think he had the potential to be a good park ranger. Yeah. I didn't mind moving. In fact, for years, when we settled here in Santa Fe, finally, I used to have urges in the spring to box rattle, to just get my cardboard boxes out and do something with them. It just was, I should be packing. But there was nothing to pack. We weren't going anywhere kind of thing. (laughter) It was just this horrible urge that we really need to move. But he really got stuck in Washington when they changed into the administrative thing from the ranger series. That really did stick him. He never realized it. And somebody did it arbitrarily down in the personnel office. Until he went to Russ Dickinson and said, "I'm retiring. I'm quitting."

Karen Reyer: So, and see, Russ Dickinson, as a director, his wife, Maxine, was my Girl Scout leader at Grand Canyon. We were supposed to do an overnight camp. She was an ex-Marine. I don't know if you knew her. Tough gal. And she even had the Marine sergeant voice. (laughs) Anyway, I came home, told Mama that I had to have these certain things. One of the things I had to have was a fart sack. Well I had no idea what a fart sack was. I had no – you know, and her being from the Marines, that's what a sleeping bag was. All the mothers were up in arms! (laughs) At this Girl Scout leader telling the kids they needed a fart sack. (laughter) Maxine was wonderful. She was kind, she was sweet. She was a good leader. She took us to Girl Scout camp at Lees Canyon over, somewhere in Nevada mountains, somewhere near Lake Mead, with mountains there. Three different seasons. Yeah. And she came back for more.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, when you did move to Washington, that's when you had horses.

- Karen Reyer: Uh huh.
- Lu Ann Jones: And I think Mr. Reyer said that at that point you went to college. Is that right?
- Karen Reyer: That's when I finally got a chance to go to vet tech school. Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: And where was that?
- Karen Reyer: Northern Virginia Community College. Loudon campus. We lived in Sterling, which was Loudon campus. So that was very advantageous. I got a job with a vet out in Purcellville when we first got there, to kind of make ends meet, because we were shocked by stickers, yeah. The veterinarian I worked for was on the board to create this curriculum at Loudon campus. So he helped me be one of the first students in the, and I was in the first graduating class. They had a state board that year, it was the first state board exam, nursing exam, for veterinary technicians. And then it became a national board about six years later that everybody took. I went right to work when I finished for the college, teaching in the curriculum.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, what were you teaching?
- Karen Reyer: Veterinary technology. I taught parasitology, hematology, surgical procedures, animal behavior, you know, office management. Everything that you – our field was kind of like the nurse in the '30s. One person did everything. Instead of having you go over there for x-rays, or over there for lab work, you do it all in-office. It just makes more sense. So, we had to have all these different skills.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, did the vets divide their practices in large animal and small animal at that point?
- Karen Reyer: Yeah. They had already kind of divided the small; I worked in a dairy practice for the first two years there. One of the biggest dairy practices in the nation, actually. And loved the cows. Well, I'd worked on ranches, you know, a lot before that. In Canyonlands and then in Montana there was a ranch I worked on quite a bit. And I just liked working with livestock. It just feels good to be on a horse and just do all the gentle movement stuff. It was wonderful.
- Karen Reyer: Canyonlands, we were only there 11 months. But I think we had more fun there than we had in a lot of the other parks. It was just different. We were all new staff. One of the other couples, Don and Vergene Follows, he was an interpreter. And she had worked at Haynes Studio in, at Canyon, in Yellowstone. So she would come over to get her mail. And we got acquainted. It was just interesting. We just hit it off. She was a farm girl from (in North Dakota accent) North Dakota. Don was working in the post office at Old Faithful, and they met and married. Then they were at Canyonlands with us, and they were just a blast. We'd put the guys out the door with their lunchboxes at eight. Eldon and I bought an old jeep we called the copper kettle. And she and I would jump in that with our lunches. And we had Kareen. She was pregnant with her eldest, Deedee. And we would go out through that Canyonlands country, all day, long enough, just to slide back in and

act like we'd been home all day working. (laughter) But we jeeped that country. I mean, we were really four wheel-driving it. And being a farm girl, she knew all the right gears, too. In this jeep, we could do anything but climb trees. We could put that thing anywhere! It was really fun.

Lu Ann Jones: Were you following established paths at that point?

Karen Reyer: There were old uranium roads from the exploration for uranium. One of the things they had to do was bulldoze a road to their thing, their claim. And so there were all these roads that went nowhere. And the claim papers would be in a Prince Albert's tobacco can under a rock somewhere at the end of the road. So we'd get those out and we'd read who it was. And then we'd put it back. Go on another road, find another one. I mean, we just had a ball. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: I worked for Mac and Alice McKinney there. He, Mac McKinney was the park custodian, what are they called? Before when there were park monuments, Chaco and Casa Grande and all those groups, they all had an overseer. I don't remember, they weren't superintendents, they weren't rangers. Anyway, it was a single person who lived far out there and saw to taking care of that park. Mac had been in Chaco many, many, many years before. He was working for BLM at that point. He had three kids and his wife died birthing the third child out there at Chaco. And so he hired a Navajo woman who came and took care of the other two children. Eventually he just had to leave. And I don't know if you're ever heard, there are some documents in Globe or Tucson that are monthly reports from these little outlier parks. Mr. White was the superintendent of the whole thing. Anyway, each of these places had to write a monthly report about what they were doing. Mac was there at Chaco. And there was this massive rock that was sloughed off and was falling over. There were places where you could see the Indians had gone in and put mud against the bottom. They were trying to hold it up. But it was as big as the end of this building. I mean, it was huge. Every month, he would go and put his tripod in the same place and would angle the camera the same, and take a picture of this rock. It was called Threatening Rock. He took pictures, I don't know how many years. And then all of a sudden, the monthly report, Threatening Rock: No Threat. And the rock had fallen on the pueblo and crushed it. Not that the Park Service would have been able to do anything because it was so massive. And to get anything out there on those mud roads would have been impossible in the '40s.

Karen Reyer: Anyway, Mac and Alice were ranching right next to the Island in the Sky there in Canyonlands. And they had cattle. They had a little ranch there. In the wintertime, they were hired by BLM to go into the southern part of the park, and between the park and natural bridges, and map ruins. This was their winter employment. And they would go through all these canyons. They had horses and they'd ride all these canyons, and they mapped all these ruins for BLM. They had an old bus that they had rebuilt to live in. and so in the winter months, I guess maybe November, December, January, February, part of March, they'd be down there mapping. And the rest of the time, they were up at Island in the Sky. Because their cattle were



down on the river and they were fine all by themselves down there, taking care of themselves. But twice a year they had to move their cattle back up on top from the Green River there. And then the next part of the year, they had to move them back down. And then spread them along the river in various catch pens. And so I rode all those canyons in there with her. And it was wonderful. Just wonderful. Yeah.

Karen Reyer: It was a funky little old stone house. They had a natural spring. They had planted some fruit trees. The old bus was parked there. There was an old grader parked there. He bought an old school duplex somewhere and put that on the property as the bunk house. So Marge and Dick Knowlen from Hot Springs and Glen Canyon, they used to go up there with us. Don and Jeanie Follows used to go up there with us, and we'd work this ranch with Alice. Mac, the week after we went to Alaska, Mac was trying to load a wild cow, and he was standing on the hood of his truck, which was icy. He got a rope around the cow and was pulling her towards the hood. And she jumped in, and then the rope went slack and he fell off and broke his back in six places.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh, my God.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. So Alice, she was a little spindly thing. She's tall, but she was spindly. She went inside the house and got the divan. Do you know what a divan? It's a form of couch—

Lu Ann Jones: Yeah, yeah.

Karen Reyer: —that folds out. But you have to lift the back and drop it down. They had one. Those suckers were heavy. She carried that, she drug that thing out of the house through three rooms, rock floors, through four doors, out the gate, and put it over him, upside down, to cover him, so she could go get help. Meanwhile, this cow was trying to jump out. It was still aiming at her. I mean, it wanted, she wanted a human. That's all there was to it. She was a mad cow. Anyway, she put that thing over him to protect him. And then was driving to town and finally met a neighboring person and said, "Go get help." She went back and stayed with Mac. And the whole town showed up. They were well-liked. They really were. He was in Salt Lake that night. And they didn't think he'd live because he had a horrible head injury. He was bleeding from the nose and the ears. He did have, he lived as a TBI [traumatic brain injury] victim forever. And it was just so sad. It really was. She was running the ranch by herself, so we girls would go help.

Karen Reyer: And Bates Wilson's second wife, Robin, was also a rider. She was from the east coast. She was an English rider. And she'd come out and help Alice when the rest of us weren't available. Mac would babysit the babies, Jeanie and, well, we all had little kids. Knowlens, Follows, and us. And by that time, we'd had our second child in Alaska. And Mac would babysit while we'd go do the work. He'd just take their diapers off, just let them go, because he couldn't walk. He used his wheelchair as a wheelbarrow to move things around the ranch. And he worked on

stuff, you know, but he couldn't walk without support. So he pushed this wheelbarrow of tools around all the time. (laughter)

Karen Reyer: We were putting in a calf chute one time, he had to go mechanical instead of doing the manual roping and tying and stuff. They got what's called a calf cradle. And the calf walks into the chute and then you turn it on its side. And then you open up one part of it and you can go ahead and brand them and vaccinate them and ear tag them and all that stuff, and then turn it back right side up and turn it loose. So he was putting the posts in to do that, and Maureen was crawling around in the sand and Mac was digging post holes. Or no, Alice and I, he had dug the post holes. That's something he could do from his wheelchair. So we set the posts with his help. And then we were putting the boards on to keep the calves from coming out in his corral. And we just kept hearing him saying, "Hey, girls, how about a lift? How about a lift?"

Karen Reyer: Finally, Kareen screamed, "Mommy!" And I knew something was wrong. And we turn around and look, and there was Mac upside down on his back in his wheelchair. Just like a June bug. Alice and I took one look at him, dropped our hammers and ran. And when we found him, he was okay, says, "Just get me out of here!" (laughter) He was so mad. He was fine. We just needed to help him up. "How about a lift?" That's not what I would have thought it meant. (laughter) Upside down.

Karen Reyer: One time he went out to the storm cellar to get us a jar of meat for dinner. She used to can meat. He tripped over the step up into the root cellar. And it twisted him, and he fell. And it was layered flagstone rock. He grabbed a rock and it broke off and it twisted him. And he fell butt-first in a pickle crock, and bruised himself so badly he had to see the doctor. (laughs) He got stuck in the bathtub one time. He decided to have a bath. But that he didn't realize that with his injuries, he couldn't get out. So he was in this cold bath all day. And was a prune. Because their hot water heater, you had to do something over here to the hot water heater, and do something with the toilet, and then do something with the kitchen sink, and then come back and then you'd get hot water. (laughs) That's just the way it was.

Lu Ann Jones: So, these are the folks that you met at Canyonlands.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. Follows and Knowlens. Mm hmm. Yeah. They were fun people. And Mac and Alice were just delightful. And we had huge sourdough pancake breakfasts every day with beans and slabs of ham that they raised, their pigs. God, they fed us well. Yeah. And at branding time, they invited all the neighbors, which included the Park Service people. And when we left, Alice had taken us over to Paonia, Colorado, to pick cherries. We have a deep freeze that has this long history, from Yellowstone all the way to our present ranch. Anyway, I had a deep freeze, which was in the maintenance department, because we were in a little trailer house there at Canyonlands, too, right next to Bates Wilson's house, and there was no room for a freezer. So I put all these cherries frozen in there. So gave

them to Alice. She made two dozen cherry pies for our going away party to Alaska. (laughter) We had that same freezer in Alaska. When we ordered every three months. And we'd put it on our porch. A lot of the winter we could just have it open. Because it was colder outside than it was in the freezer. And the park also had a walk-in freezer for everyone. When our freezer hadn't come yet, and I went down to put something in that walk-in freezer and got frightened that everything was going to thaw because it was so warm in there.

Karen Reyer: And so, I went up to the office and said, "You know, the freezer's really warm."

Karen Reyer: They said, "Well, did you read the thermometer?" No. "Well, it's right by the door. Go read the thermometer." It was ten degree in there. But it was ten below outside. (laughter) So you had to just kind of, oh, okay. That's the way it was, yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Where were you daughters like their high school years and junior high school years?

Karen Reyer: Let's see. They did elementary in Page and Crow Agency. And then they were junior high, let's see, Kareen was junior high when we went to Virginia. And then went through her junior year there. Because we stayed there eight years. Too long. And then little Maureen finished grade school and was in junior high when we moved to Santa Fe. Yeah. And Kareen finally graduated in Santa Fe. She was a sickly kid. She had horrible, horrible asthma. And, poor kid. In Virginia, she was allergic to air molds. We'd never heard of such a thing. But the minute we got there, she just turned blue. And it didn't get better. Never got better. And Eldon kept putting in for transfers and couldn't get out, and couldn't get out, and couldn't get out. And we needed to move her back west. Anyway, her senior year she did in Santa Fe. She was never in school more than three days out of five in Virginia. The whole eight years, you know. It was just awful. And she had a learning deficit anyway. So, and those weren't even recognized at that point in time. We knew there was something wrong. We had gone to doctor after doctor and they couldn't diagnose. It was dyslexia. That's just what it was. She still, she's a fourth grade teacher now and she really understands the complex for these little kids. Because she's been there. But she'll still reverse a letter every now and then.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, my husband's dyslexic, too, so I'm familiar with that.

Karen Reyer: Yeah. Every now and then. But she's probably the smartest person I know. Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I hate to – we're just about getting towards the end of the time. I'm anticipating somebody else before too long.

Karen Reyer: Okay.

- Lu Ann Jones: So, I know we could go on and on. But I guess I was thinking about when you think about the National Park Service, I think there was some phrase you used, like, "We were Park Service all the way." So, what does that mean to you?
- Karen Reyer: Well, see, when Eldon retired, I lost my identity. Totally. Because I never knew anything else. I was still Park Service, and now he wasn't. I had my own career, but, and you know, I was on the state board of examiners, I was doing all this great stuff. But I was still Park Service in my heart. I just wept for months! It just tore my heart out not to be Park Service. So I looked into going to work myself, but I didn't have the right degree. You know, that's the way it was. So I started taking courses again. (laughs) And then we moved. So, you know, moves just interrupt a lot of things. But we were so ready to move. And we love Santa Fe. With the multiple cultures and the good music and, you know, astute people.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, you both went on to work for the, is it the Boys and Girls Ranch?
- Karen Reyer: New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches.
- Lu Ann Jones: Right. Yeah.
- Karen Reyer: Which is a private foundation. We took in children from troubled environments. We didn't take in troubled children; the children were fine. They came from troubled environments and just had never had a chance. And we loved doing it. He was a farm boy. He built all my pens and lifted feed and stacked hay. And all that kind of stuff. Kept my tools sharp. And I did the 4H leadership. And we did that for 14 years.
- Lu Ann Jones: So, was that in a separate, I mean, it was a place, right?
- Karen Reyer: Yes. The Girls Ranch is right down here in Lamy. In fact, where we live now, we got to go further out of town to go to work, which we liked. Because people were starting to move in around us. When we moved to the end of the road, there was not a house in sight. And then that first year, we watched 35 new house starts. And it was like – (gasps) So we did get to go further away. And it's (Girl's Ranch) just a little 125-acre plot of land. Donated by Amfac. And they came in and built cottages. Held ten girls each. There was a three-bedroom apartment for the house parents. They had a school on the ranch, because when these kids are damaged, education stops. It just does. If you have to worry about where you're going to sleep, eat, or if you're going to be attacked, it makes a difference. So it was a safe place. It kept the kids out of contact with kids like they used to be and didn't want to be anymore. And it is a Christian fellowship. Down deep, drive you nuts kind of Christianity. But just believe in doing good, you know? So we did. And that was fun.
- Lu Ann Jones: Yeah. I mean, that sounds like a pretty good second act. Or next act.
- Karen Reyer: Yeah, it was. Yeah. I'm still in touch on Facebook with a number of the girls. And every July, they start getting in touch. Because our county fair was always in

August. They always had to show a large animal and a small animal – being a rabbit or a chicken or a hog, a lamb, a goat or a cow. They had to earn the privilege to show a cow. But they had to learn how to manage something, and how to feed it twice a day. And how to clean up behind it. And we did that, in our 4H Club, we do the baby thing that they do in school now. You know, the baby cries, you have to attend to it. And there's a little key, you turn it off. I ran that program. I ran a program for gaining employment. And we did mock interviews in town with businesses so they could learn how to do that. The school we had had a computer program that they were using to educate the kids with. It goes from kindergarten to senior in high school and it includes five languages. So the girls could learn at their own pace. Most of these 14, 15, 16 year-olds came in with a fourth grade reading level, if that. They could catch up in six months, eight months, ten months, depending on how they learned. And this system, it was up to them to do it. And it worked pretty well. Because the teachers were so, it was the most positive schoolroom you ever walked in. I'd walk in and say, "Who wants to balance the ration for this animal?" Every hand went up, every time. Even though none of them had a clue what we were going to do. They wanted to try it. And because they weren't hindered by having boys in the same classroom, it worked beautifully.

Karen Reyer:

It was a working ranch. They did work. They did all the kitchen work, they helped cook. They cleaned their dorms, all that. And then they did all the barn work. And we usually had a herd of, let's see, three, six, nine, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, about sixteen head of horses. They were assigned a pen that they had to muck every evening. They had to feed twice a day. They had to check the animals over every day. They rode two or three times a week, to learn how to do that part of it. And it just built their hearts.

Karen Reyer:

We had one little destructive girl who I still remember to this day. I just get tears in my eyes thinking about her. She was on heavy-duty anti-anxiety drugs. And it would calm her down to where she was manageable. Otherwise she was just like this constant propeller of arms and legs. And she had to be given a pill at noon. Well, her house parent had forgotten. And she came down to ride at two o'clock in the afternoon. And I put her up on this horse – it was only her second ride – and I put her up on this horse and it was like putting a basket full of monkeys up there. This one kid! It was like three or four monkeys up there. You know, her feet were on one side, then the other. She was right-side up, she was upside down. She couldn't figure out what to do with the reins. I swear to God, it was the worst accident I ever saw waiting to happen. But luckily, the horse was just standing there. (laughter) I had a gift, a particular horse. And it turns out they hadn't given her her medicine. Finally I got the horse moving and she calmed down a little bit. That rocking of the horse's walk feeds that need for rocking. For babies. It's that same thing. And it's very, very important in their brains to get that rocking going so you can work with them.

Karen Reyer:

Finally, I said, "Your turn's up. Time for somebody else." And she says, "I don't want to get off. I want to stay up here." "No. You have to get off."

- Karen Reyer: “No. I don’t want to get off. This is the best place I’ve ever been.” That simple statement, and that horse that somebody gave us because he was too old and decrepit for what they did. And he had the most solid, sensible brain you’d ever care to meet in a horse. Just put those two together and it was like magic happened. It was really cool. Yeah. And every day when we worked with the animals, it was that kind of an experience. I just would go to work every day and they would fulfill me. I didn’t really feel like it was a job. I had to really consider and work on things, but because of all their different difficulties and abilities, or inabilities. But it just was amazing that those animals made such an incredible difference.
- Karen Reyer: So, every July I’d start getting phone calls. “Do you remember Bunny Foo Foo,” or what their rabbit’s name was. “Do you remember my chicken, Miranda? Do you remember my lamb, named after my auntie,” well, I couldn’t remember her auntie’s name. You know, I only went through 200 animals in that 14 years. (laughter) But they still, and I always took pictures. That was my donation to the ranch over the years. Hundreds of pictures. Because these kids came with no photo memory. None. And so they all left with two or three hundred pictures of themselves at the ranch, in the ranch environment. And so, they, in July they start going through them and remembering.
- Karen Reyer: And it’s fascinating. Because the last email I read, there were two young ladies, pregnant young ladies, who are now in their late twenties, discussing swaddling on Facebook. And you’d never thought they would have gotten there. But they did. They did. And it’s just because we put them in a place in those teenage years to be safe. Yeah. It was cool.
- Lu Ann Jones: That’s nice.
- Karen Reyer: Mm hmm. It was fun. Yeah.
- Lu Ann Jones: Well, I’m sorry to have to end here, but I think we—
- Karen Reyer: Okay. I’ll surrender your thing here.
- Lu Ann Jones: Okay. I’ve got your address and everything, so if you wanted to print your name and then your signature, that would be great.
- Karen Reyer: This conference is fun.
- Lu Ann Jones: Did you hear any speeches this morning?
- Karen Reyer: Yeah. The one about the world conference was good. And I heard Mr. [Mike] Reynolds [then deputy director for operations] speak. And he’s just kind of like, okay, here we are, folks. Oh, okay. Do I need this? Oh, okay. Two-eight-eight.

[END OF TRACK 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]