

White Grass Heritage Project “Sharing the Legacy”

INTERVIEWEES: Cynthia Galey Peck (Frank Galey’s daughter); Tamara Galey Densmore (Cynthia’s daughter); David James Kinker (Cynthia’s son).

INTERVIEWER: Matthew Heiss, Volunteer for Grand Teton National Park White Grass Heritage Project

LOCATION: White Grass Ranch, Moose, Wyoming

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Transcribed by Julie Greene in 2021

Note: This transcript has undergone minor edits, e.g., false starts and some text were removed to make it more “reader friendly”. Cynthia, Tamara and David’s complete interview transcript is below:

M: (0:43) The focus of our conversation is going to be your experiences at White Grass. You are third and fourth generation White Grassers. We will start with David, since you are the oldest, tell us who you are and where you were born and raised, college, military and what you are doing now.

D: I was born in Logan, Utah while my dad was going to the university there. I was always jealous not to have been born in Jackson, like everyone else.

M: I know you moved around a lot because mom and dad were doing the gypsy thing for a long time.

D: My early years were going to school. After my parents got divorced, I came up to work at the ranch and I did a lot of travel in between. My mom and dad picked up some family friends who invited me to go to a vocational/technical school in Maryland. After that, I went to school in Arizona, and then in Colorado. I ended up attending 13 different schools from 6<sup>th</sup> grade through high school. I traveled a lot and had many different experiences during these years.

M: I like to be rooted in a place and I find security in that sort of thing. What is it like to go to so many high schools?

D: I don’t have that consistency of friends from my youth. I think that kept me open to a lot of different experiences. I have seen so many cultures and different types of people in various parts of the US. I am very adaptable because of that. Because of my lack of consistency in my youth, I strive for it now. I stay married, I stay in one place, I stick with my careers forever.

M: What year did you graduate from high school and did all this moving around put you a year or two behind?

D: I fell a year behind in first grade as I was held back. I was in Tuscon, Arizona in elementary school and had a really great teacher. She taught our class for two grades and kept me in special education after discovering that I have a specific type of dyslexia. Once I learned how to process information differently than they were applying it, I was on. I had to learn how to take that information and re-access it for my own processing.

M: (5:17) What year did you graduate?

D: I graduated in 1982 in Denver, Colorado. After high school, I went to Phoenix Institute for Technology for Architectural Rendering and Production.

M: Did you want to be an architect?

D: I was interested in architecture. I started my schooling in Phoenix and lived in a 13-foot trailer in downtown Mesa. There was a pizza place in front of the trailer park. Mamma Joanne owned it and she became my surrogate mother. I delivered pizzas for her on my motorcycle and enjoyed the simple life. That didn't last forever. I did a lot of construction work with my friend, Wayne. I also had a midnight job where I was doing some painting. He would live in the trailer at night, and I would live in it during the day. We were living on close to nothing.

(8:50) After that, I lived on my motorcycle in the desert and would come into town to do some work making parking curbs for \$4.25/hr.

M: What did you do for showers?

D: Mama Joanne and her ex-husband were helpful and I took showers at their place. Wayne and I were close friends and would go out into the desert and collect dead cactuses and trees to make fires to keep warm at night.

M: When did the military happen?

D: Wayne was killed while we were riding our motorcycles. I was distraught and was in the hospital when I learned that he had died in the airlift. I went back to Mamma Joanne's and talked to her ex-husband, Al. I was in shock.

I called mom and had not talked to her in a year. I was brought up to be so independent that I was not supposed to touch home until it was absolutely necessary. I was in a position where I had lost my wheels, didn't have a place to live, and was emotionally drained. Mom came down and helped me out.

I ended up moving to San Antonio, Texas with a friend, Mike Ericson. He moved with his mom to Alaska soon afterwards, so I was then left alone with a broken down truck. I got a job with an architectural firm in downtown San Antonio. I really wanted to live this experience, but it was temporary and the job ended after a couple of weeks. I found another job that would train me in drafting, however I went into a recruiting office and 4 days later found myself in boot camp. I got a job in the Navy doing sound analysis from 1984 to 1989. I had a really great experience.

M: What happened when you came out of the Navy?

D: (17:21) I went to Arizona to see Beth Wooden, a White Grass person, and then traveled. I started out at Central Oregon Community College, where I unfortunately had a professor who was often absent and gave the entire class low grades which ended up affecting our student loans. I left Oregon with a friend from that particular class and we headed to Washington and started going to school at Northwest College of Art in Poulsbo. I graduated in 1994. I happened to take an elective course on white water rafting, which I continue to do to this day.

M: Is that your day or night job?

D: My summer job is rafting.

M: You got married along the way.

D: (22:11) Not until I was 32 yrs. old and it didn't work out. Actually, I did not technically marry because we never signed any papers. I was on my own for about a year and then I met another lady and she ended up being my wife.

M:(29:17) Tamara, tell me about your life's course.

T: I was born in Jackson Hole at St. John's Hospital and grew up here. My parents divorced when I was around 7 yrs. old. I moved to Tuscon and then Mesa and then Young, Arizona. I went to school there. My first grade there was 8<sup>th</sup> grade and it had 3 grades in one class. I graduated from there as valedictorian, which wasn't too hard. About a month before I graduated, I was in an accident and it damaged the nerves to my left shoulder so I don't have use of my arm. I can't lift my arm.

C: My husband and I were the medical team called to the site.

T: That set me back with getting along with my life. I went to Northern Arizona University. After the first year, I went home to Young and worked in my mother's restaurant. She fired me. I met my first husband there and ended up adventuring

with him in Mexico and then camped and trapped coyote, bobcat and fox in the desert. He was a hot shot (fire fighter)for the forest service. We would play during the winter season and trap.

M: Was he trapping for the federal government or for pelts?

T: (35:07) At that time, there was not as much pressure by the animal lovers and conservation groups. There were a lot of people in Young that would trap during winter. There was a place in Mesa that you could take the hides to and they would buy them. A bobcat would be about \$75 per hide; coyotes were only about \$30. It was a neat experience because you would get up before dawn and hit the trap line and get back just before sunset.

C: They would eat off the land. They did not go into town to buy meat. It was inexpensive living and I kept telling Tami that it really wasn't ostentatious to have hot and cold running water.

T: I did learn that washing laundry in a cold spring really wasn't much fun.

M: What time period was this?

T: Mid 80s. I graduated in 1984 and from the time I was 7 or 8 until I graduated from high school, I had gone somewhere during the summers. Sometimes it would be to my stepsister who would invite me. I went to Santa Fe and stayed with Mary Peck, who did photography and then to my godmother's ranch. They were taking dudes.

M: Your godmother is?

T: Mimi Crenshaw

M: Is there a White Grass connection?

T: Yes. I was an errand girl there for 3 summers. Then, I got summer jobs and ended up working at Triangle X Ranch in Jackson Hole.

M: Did you have a connection because you were a Galey?

T: Yes, Mimi and Jack were very good friends of Inge and Frank Galey.

M: Let's go through the chronology and then we will talk about White Grass.

T: (39:05) My first husband and I moved around 13 times in 2 years. In the

summer, he would do the hot shot job. By the second summer we were married, I suffered from the “hot shot widow” and we started having issues. That marriage didn’t last very long. He committed suicide and that was very difficult. I ended up going back to school in Mesa and taking night classes. I finished my associates science degree down there and passed up my full scholarship. I ended up getting a job with the federal government in their agriculture marketing service under their cotton program. I worked for the USDA cotton program for 15 years, including working in field offices in Phoenix, Birmingham, Mesa, Texas and other areas.

I think because I was raised in the west, I missed the west. I chose to come back west and came back to the cotton field office and helped with my great aunt for her last few years. The cotton division consolidated and I got a job in the billing division and was there for 7 years. I remarried in 2004 and my husband was a general contractor. One of the first trips we took was to Jackson Hole for our honeymoon.

M: Are you still married to Densmore?

T: Yes.

M: Let’s talk about your memories of Inga Galey, your grandmother.

T: Some of my first memories at age 3 or 4 was when she was building her house in Skyline. We would go visit her occasionally and search for salamanders in her crawl space.

C: One of my first memories with mother and Tami (and it is the reason that Tami is the way she is) is that she told her that she was so cute and you are going to be just like your mother.

M: What kind of grandmother was Inga?

D: She was a strong woman who carried herself with authority.

C: Mother’s mother was dying at that time.

M: Did Opa (Cindy’s grandfather from Germany) die first?

C: He died before Tami and David were born. Mother said he would have been thrilled to have a boy in the family.

M: Do you remember grandma Inga ever talking about White Grass, Jackson, the elk, mountains, etc?

D: They also owned Golden Rock and she was part of that. As I understand, there was a hostile takeover by the Board to take over her part of it and that is how she ended up living with her sister in Connerville, Indiana.

T: She seemed like she was broken hearted and had given up.

M: What about memories of Frank Galey?

T: (50:12) I only have one strong memory of him and it was when I was very young. He was married to Nona at the time and we came out in the winter for an event. My grandfather had a small Canada goose in the house and it would walk around. He would pick up the droppings and I remember the smell of the house. It smelled like Navajo's, earth and cowhide. The smell was unique.

M: What were you invited back for?

C: It was the end of winter thing and I think Dad just invited everybody back up because he hadn't had a party. The ironic thing unbeknownst to him, is that it was on my birthday. As we were leaving, Cookie came out to say goodbye and I said it was the best birthday party I ever had. Cookie went straight to tell Dad. Dad came out all apologetic.

I would like to interject another piece about that party. Glenn Exum, the famous mountain climber, and dad decided to take a cross country ski trip. The kids had been cross country skiing before so I decided we would go as far as we could. The kids were out front and we couldn't keep up with them.

M: It sounds like Frank would have spontaneous fun. David, you came back and worked at White Grass.

D: I know the family wasn't invited to the ranch for many years due to Nona. I don't know what broke that. I was invited to work at the ranch when I was 14 yrs. old around 1977. I was often invited to do the cocktail party at the main cabin but felt insecure and didn't feel that was the place for me. I was hesitant to be around Nona.

M: Did they give you an alcoholic beverage or did they have a coke for you?

D: (55:14) It could have gone either way. The junior wranglers' cabin was actually an old army surplus tent. It had a pot belly stove and burned aspen.

M: What were you hired to do that summer?

D: I was a junior wrangler. We worked from 4:30 am to 5 pm. Some parents would pay Frank to have their kids come out here to work. They had it pretty cush and would go out on trips with the wranglers and the kids. I was salaried and working 72 hours per week with the wranglers. We made round corrals, did fencing, cut wood, etc. I was a hardworking boy and got no special treatment. Curley had bias in him towards me, given the way he treated me. Maybe he felt I was a threat to his job since I was Frank's grandson?

M: The role of alcohol at White Grass seemed to increase during the Nona era. Is that true?

C: Dad and I went to Moose and we came back to Dornans. I was 14 yrs. old and we went into the bar. Jack Dornan told Dad he couldn't bring his daughter in here and Dad asked him if he thought he would bring his own daughter in there if she wasn't of age.

M: What was your relationship with Nona?

D: I worked 2 ½ summers here. I didn't have a relationship with Nona and did not spend much time with them. One of my jobs was to pick up cigarette butts and one morning I caught Frank out there shaking like crazy with DT's. In the evenings, he always had a drink in his hand. He was charismatic and loved people and everyone loved him. There was always a poker party going on.

M: Was it a positive experience for you?

D: (1:05:54) Overall absolutely. I think the hardships mom had growing up without having people as friends, but animals instead, helped me connect to nature. That is one of the most valuable things I could have.

M: Your mom talked about how significant horses were to her. Did you also develop that relationship?

D: After the first year, I knew the names of all 75 horses. I knew which horses were great and those that weren't so great.

M: Tami, talk about what your experience was like here. You worked at Triangle X and Dornans.

T: This is the place (Jackson Hole) to go for summer jobs. My early years, at age 16, I was a cabin and kitchen girl at Triangle X in 1981. I helped the cook prepare and get the dishes out for meals. In between kitchen duties, there were rooms in the

main lodge that we would make up. We worked 6 days a week from 4:30 am until after dinner.

M: Is there a reason you didn't come to White Grass?

C: YES! Moral behavior was very loose at White Grass and it was tighter at Triangle X. You worry about girls. Especially, after David's experience where he was seriously abused. He was being verbally abused by Curly. All the wranglers were very physical and there was no kindness there.

What we call abuse today was the norm; a right of passage, you were just kicked around. I think there is a slight western theme. When I first started working for the forest department, I was seriously hazed. Hazing proves if a person can handle themselves in hard situations.

D: The cowboy mentality of fighting and kicking everyone in the ass didn't go well with me so I went the other way....hippie and grew my hair out.

M: (1:14:23) Did you fight at Triangle X?

T: We did fight. We kept busy. Worked hard during the day and partied at night. There was a lot of traffic between bunk houses.

M: At Dornans, were you behind a cash register or stocking shelves, etc?

T: Yea, it was more low key. I was in the gift shop and cashiered and would occasionally fill in as a cocktail waitress in the lounge.

C: Trish Dornan, Richard's wife, saw real potential in Tami and pulled her up from the beginners.

M: Did you ever come up to White Grass to say hi to grandpa when you were working here those summers?

T: No.

M: Any thought of coming over?

T: No.

M: Do you know why?

T: (1:16:29) I think as a young person I perceived mother's struggles at the ranch



and I just felt we were not part of that.

C: I don't know how much Tami perceived the verbal abuse, mostly over the phone, and in person, that we received from Nona.

M: Were you aware of that?

T: I knew David was having a hard time there. I recall issues with Curly and knew it wasn't good. I didn't know details.

D: The wranglers would set you up for an adventure. I remember one time they wouldn't let me take a better horse and they set me up with Bad Girl, who loved to bloat and who was famous for running to the barn. He decided he was going to run me through the trees with the rest of the horses, and he debloated so the saddle went to the side and I went up on his neck and I stopped that little horse.

M: What feelings did you have when Frank died and the ranch closed?

D: I don't remember any in particular but now realize it was an end of an era.

T: For me, he had symbolically passed away when he and my grandmother passed because for me it was a shut door. Nona was real touchy about being around so for me it was the final page as far as White Grass was concerned.

M: Cindy, did you want to take over the ranch in 1984 or was that even a possibility?

C: It probably was not a possibility. I remember that Beth Wooden and Fran Fox, my cousin, and I got together and talked about what could be done because mother was still on life estate. Fran tried to be like my father and did a pretty good job at it. Beth Wooden, who has a double masters degree and active in conservation in Arizona, and puny me. We threw out possibilities of how we could team and do this and I realized I could not work with my cousin. End of deal. We decided it wouldn't work.

In the research that Beth did, somewhere during the separation of my mom and dad, mom was given a stack of papers and she signed them because she was so beaten down. One of those was signing away her life estate here. The Park did not turn it over to Nona because she was younger. So, it would have never been a possibility anyway. It was a good thing we didn't try. Later on in Young, I started a restaurant and my husband then was going to be active in that, but we discovered he could not do that. Here, it would have been essential that he would have been active, particularly as a host. But that would not have worked either.

M: What happened to Nona?

C: Fran Fox had the last communication from here that I am aware of. I have heard through other people that she moved back to Canada and married a high school friend. Her last contact with Fran was to give him the H Quarter Circle B brand so Cynthia didn't get her hands on it. Apparently, it is not a usable brand in Wyoming anymore, but he has it along with the dog of mine that my father gave away.

M: Has Nona passed away?

C: I don't know if she has passed away.

M: (1:24:14) Did either of you come back to White Grass before the government started to rehabilitate? What was that experience like?

D: In our family, death is not a big deal and is not the end of anything. You keep moving on. Other than feeling a little bit robbed of not being able to be a part of this, it was just watching a natural cycle. It is really nice though seeing it brought back to life.

C: I am a cancer survivor and during that I never felt fear of death and I am on to a new adventure. It is a continuous cycle.

M: Tami, did you come back when it was abandoned and falling apart?

T: I did. I walked around. There was an irrigation ditch and everything was falling apart. I opened up the ditch so it would drain and it made me feel good.

M: There are a couple of themes that came out from the interviews. When I talk about a gypsy lifestyle, it is not a condescending word but just that you have an ability to survive moving from place to place. There is an attachment to the wilderness. Seems that this came from the White Grass experience that your mom had and she passed it on.

T: We were always outside hiking and camping.

D: It was almost to a fault. Completely independent and to be on your own.

C: I am probably still that because I never felt like I had a background and if they were going to do well, they needed to do it on their own.

D: I find now community to be so important and that it is more important than

independence for me. You can't be completely by yourself. You have to have community and that is where the heart and soul is.

C: I admire you for that.

T: I came full circle. Back in the day, you had to be independent but you had the neighbors.

M: The spirit of this place is very strong for your mom.

D: One of the reasons that this place endures is that there is not another ranch that has such a powerful living spirit. It is still going on. People who were surrounded by this were moved in their lives. This is powerful and I am carrying it forward in the way I live my life. Community is the same energy that was here.

T: I have grown up with the love of nature and feel more at home camping out on the ground and cooking outside than I do inside. That connection with nature is strong here. It is beautiful here.

D: This meadow is a unique thing in its self.

M: Thank you, all three of you. It has been wonderful having 2 generations here talking about this awesome place. Thank you very much.