

# River Writings

**Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze**

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By moving to the Salmon River in California in 1985, I became part of a very small, close community. After initial introductions, I was readily accepted as Bob-O's mail-order mate (see *HP22*). Everyone had heard of me. They all wanted to meet me to form an opinion, which would then be eagerly discussed with everyone else.

## *On the River*

Bob-O lived at the Starveout Mine, halfway between Forks of Salmon and Cecilville on the South Fork of the Salmon River. Not too far from our mailbox was the 25 mile marker of the river road. To get to our cabin, you had to go across a small suspension bridge, three planks wide and ninety feet (27.5 m) long, that Bob-O had built. It was like San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, only smaller.

My first week at Starveout, it snowed. After I crossed over the river the first time, a foot of snow fell on the bridge. I would not cross back until the snow was gone, shoveled off by Bob-O. The bridge would sway and bounce with each person's passage. At first, whenever I did cross, I made everyone else go first so that I was the only one on the bridge. I would cross very slowly, hanging onto the waist-high suspension lines the whole way.

I became used to the bridge very quickly. Soon I could carry a full trashcan while Allen, Bob-O's young son, ran across in front of me. It's all a matter of rhythm.

## *Forks*

Eight miles down river from Starveout was Forks of Salmon, where the north and south forks of the Salmon River combine. Located there was the post office, arguably the smallest in the U.S.; the Forks store; the Forks school; the Forest Service compound; a small, lovely, old graveyard,

**The suspension bridge over the Salmon River, with Kathleen and Bob-O's cabin in the background.**



which is still used; and the Community Hall (the old school) with a teacherage attached. In the days of the old school, the teacher's living quarters were attached to the school. The teacherage consisted of a small bedroom, a tiny bathroom, and a living room/kitchen. Now the school board rents it out.

The postmaster of Forks was Gladys. She was born in Sawyers Bar on the North Fork and had been postmaster since the year I was born, 1953. She was very curious to meet me because she had a hand in my romance with Bob-O by processing our letters for mailing and delivery. We became good friends and always shared a new joke or two whenever I was in Forks.

The Forks store held equal importance with the Postie, as the post office was called. You always went into the store to see people and talk about the latest news, even if you didn't buy anything. In the winter, there was a woodstove you could back up to for warmth before you hit the river road again.

In the summer, the Forks store had an unofficial extension at the Beer Tree. The Beer Tree was about 30 feet (9 m) high and spread its branches over a one-piece wooden picnic table and benches. The Beer Tree was across the road from the Postie and the store, at the edge of a small meadow.

In early spring, this same meadow would bloom with thousands of sun yellow daffodils. When the weather was fine, you could always find a group of locals there drinking beer or pop, or eating ice cream bars, while exchanging gossip, political opinions, gardening and automotive advice, or recipes. There was always lively conversation under the Beer Tree.

## *Forks School*

While the Community Hall, or old school, had only one room, the new school had two. Grades K through 8 were divided between the two rooms. Kindergarten through 4th grade students were in one room, and were known as the Youngers; 5th through 8th grade students were in the other, and were known as the Olders.

The school was the heart of the Forks community. Any doings at the school became community social events, not to be missed by anybody, whether or not they had children. Halloween fairs, Christmas plays, bingo nights, music recitals, and sports events all brought the locals together. At the Halloween fairs, I was known as Madam Yarschka, gypsy fortuneteller—"Knows all. Sees all. Tells a little."

Before each school event, there would be the de rigueur bake sale. The women of the community would bring pies, cakes, breads, cookies, and such to the school where Betty Ann and Bobbie would have the difficult task of figuring



**Kathleen in front of the Forks of Salmon Post Office.**

out what prices to charge. This pricing dilemma was not made easier by the bachelor miners. They would be milling close to the bake sale tables so as not to miss any opportunity. As soon as the sale started, these lone men would move in and buy whole pies, whole cakes, and all the loaves of bread. Not having a woman to bake for them and not possessing the knowledge or inclination to bake for themselves, they would make the most of local talent whenever they could.

All the money from bake sales and bingo went towards the kids' annual field trips. The Youngers usually went out to the coast for the day. The Olders would travel farther and spend a day or two off the river and out in the big world.

### *Graduation*

The Forks school graduation night was huge in terms of our social life. Anywhere from one to four Olders would graduate from eighth grade. The celebration was always held in the Community Hall, which had a small stage that the ceremony could be held on. It really was a coming of age for Forks kids. The community members had known most of these kids since they were born.

Once the kids graduated from eighth grade in Forks, they would have to leave the river and live somewhere else to go to high school. Some people had relatives out in Scott Valley or on the coast where the kids could live for their high school years. Sometimes the whole family would move off the river to keep their family intact. Sometimes they returned; sometimes they didn't. It was wrenching to everyone, in any case.

### *Wedding Party*

When Bob-O and I got married, it was in the Forks Community Hall. Everyone from Forks, Cecilville, and Sawyers Bar came. There were even people from Somes Bar.

It was a big potluck, down-home celebration. Some of our friends put on a little play, akin to a three-penny opera. Bob-O's band, the Hills Brothers, played dance music, with Petey stepping in to play bass for Bob-O. Petey, whose CB name was Ragamuffin, was a talented local musician who jammed with the band on occasion. The kids from the school sang "Watching the River Run" to us, accompanied by their teacher, Suzanne, on guitar.

I had two wedding cakes, one chocolate and the other made by my little sister, Tamra. My favorite picture of our wedding is of Edna, peeking into the door of the community hall. Edna was a buddy of Bob-O's from the old ENT tree planting co-operative (they told me it stood for "extra nice trees"), who now teaches grade school in Somes Bar. In the wedding photo, it just looks to me like she is seeing wonderful things, like Howard Carter peering into King Tut's tomb.

Our friends and family from the river are treasures beyond value.

### *Access*

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is recovering from colon cancer at her home in Northernmost California. Her advice:

"Get a colonoscopy." c/o *Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR •

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