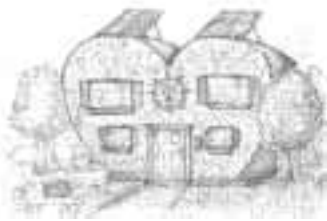


Home & Heart



Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

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After moving to the wilds of Northernmost California, I began to view roads differently. They were not merely paved routes to get from one place to another. I came to see distinct personalities in the roads I traveled, with quirks, moods, and senses of humor that changed as quickly as the weather.

On the Salmon River in California, we lived on the river road at the 25 mile marker. This one lane, paved road followed the South Fork of the Salmon down to where it met the North Fork at (where else?) Forks of Salmon. From the 11 mile marker on the Main Fork to the 31 mile marker on the South Fork, the road was all one lane. Blind corners were *de rigueur*. Turnouts were located all along the road because many places were so narrow that two cars could not pass by each other.

Road Etiquette

They had a saying on the river, "On one side of a mountain road is a mountain." What this means is that on the other side of the road is the steep descent to the river. Sometimes in the winter, a part of the outside edge of the road would start to deteriorate. That's when some kind soul would put up a "Salmon River guard rail," which consisted of three or four cantaloupe-sized rocks, spray painted fluorescent orange and set in orderly fashion along said edge. This was your clue to hug the mountain side of the road.

Everyone had two CB radios—one in the cabin and one in the vehicle. No matter what kind of vehicle you drove, it was generically called a "rig," unless it was a four-door pickup truck. Then it was called a "crummy," and it usually was. The road channel was 18, and this was where we all kept our radios, both home and rig, tuned. When you were in your rig traveling the road, you would call the mile markers that you passed. This would alert other drivers of your position, and you would be able to pull into a turnout before meeting them head on.

A typical road conversation would go something like this: "Mile marker eighteen coming up the South Fork."

"Mile marker twenty-three and a half coming down."

"Nineteen coming up."

"Twenty-one heading down."

"Come on by; I got a wide one."

"Be right there."

A minute or two of silence, then, "Mile marker twenty coming down the South fork."

"And one rig coming up."

Sometimes you would hear, "Mile marker twenty-four coming up; there's a rig headed down, but they got no ears." This meant it was a tourist or somebody else who didn't have a CB radio and couldn't call the markers.

Soon after moving to the river, I became aware of another point of road etiquette. I had been calling the mile markers and knew a log truck was approaching. When we were about a half mile apart, I used a turnout and told him to come on by. I was surprised when the driver flashed me a peace sign, two fingers held up in a "V." Wow, I thought, people here are really friendly and cool.

I started to pull out onto the road when two more log trucks passed me in quick succession. So *that* was it. It was polite and safe to indicate how many rigs were coming behind you. It would be too noisy and confusing for every rig to call its mile markers. A log truck driver once held up both hands, all fingers spread emphatically. Sure enough, ten more log trucks passed in review as I kept my place on the turnout.

Radio Etiquette

Since there were only a few phones on the river, and those were within a mile or two of Forks of Salmon, most people used their CBs for communication. Every home had a CB name, as did most of the river people. Home names included Main House, Starveout, Rainbow, Godfrey Ranch, Blue Ridge, Matthews Creek, Indian Creek, and Plummer Creek, to name a few. They were usually the name of a mining claim or a nearby geographical feature.

People's CB names usually were of their own choosing, although a few were awarded without consent but stuck anyway. I always felt that being given a CB name was a sign of affection, like a nickname. There was Donkey Puncher, Spider, Herr Rise and Shine, Bassman, Harpo, Malfunction Junction, Jawbone, Magpie, Manzanita, etc.

I never did get a CB nickname. For the duration of my life on the river, I remained Kathleen. Well, except Herr

Rise and Shine did call me Starveout Sweet Potato, to which I would always answer back on the radio, "Here I yam."

Since everybody listened to channel 18, it was the contact channel, as well as the road channel. It was considered the height of rudeness to carry on a long conversation on the road channel. After all, people were calling mile markers as a real matter of safety. So, as correct river radio etiquette would have it, you would make swift contact and move off the road channel to talk. It would happen something like this.

"Godfrey Ranch, Magpie. Magpie, are you around the radio?"

"I got you, Starveout. Let's go up."

"Let's go up," meant the two of you would both turn the CB to channel 23. Since the highest channel older model CBs could go to was 23, that was the accepted place to meet. Of course, everyone who didn't need to stay on the road channel would also "go up." So, no conversation was private.

You could work out with your closest friend that by saying "let's go up," you really meant to meet on, say, channel 32. But then, when the listening public found you were not on 23, they would just scan the channels till they found your conversation in progress. In a community without phones, television, or regular radio, any entertainment is pursued.

The Bus Run

A school bus ran every weekday from Cecilville to the Forks school, where grades K through 8 were taught. Norma the bus driver made the run in all weather and all road conditions. The bus had a CB, and the mile markers were called.

Since we were halfway between Cecilville and Forks, we were often called upon to relay messages. The mountainous terrain that we lived in would not allow the radio signals to go very far. A general rule was that the higher up on a mountain you were, the farther your radio signal could be heard. In the wintertime, a relayed message from Norma to the county road crew was common. That's when either a snowplow or the "rock knocker," as it was known, would come to the rescue of the school bus.

It was in the winter, with its rain, snow, freezes, and thaws that the mountains would contribute their parts to the road. Although the rocks-in-the-road phenomenon could happen anywhere along the river road, a particularly treacherous area was known as the Samsonite Cliffs. It was named this because the rocks that fell into the road resembled sets of luggage in

shape and size. A common rock slide would deposit everything from a steamer trunk to a small, squarish, makeup case, all composed completely of granite.

If the slide and the rocks were small enough, Norma would stop the bus, and she and the older boys would move the rocks out of the road enough for the small bus to get by. If the slide was bigger than that, she would call for the rock knocker.

Sometimes the slide was so big that even the rock knocker couldn't clear it in time for school. Then the second small school bus, driven by Creek, would be called by radio relay to come to the downriver side of the slide. Norma and Creek would run the kids across the slide as fast as possible from one bus to the other, and their journey to school would continue.

Once, a single rock the size of a Volkswagen bus tumbled and fully blocked the main fork road. It had to be dynamited. Another time, Betty Ann was driving to a potluck with a plate of brownies on the seat beside her when a rock bounded off the mountainside through her window and landed in the brownies. Yet another time, some kayakers were driving along the river road when rocks started to fall on the road around them. They tried to keep driving, but the slide got worse. Their car was blocked in, so they got out and ran for their lives.

They arrived safely out of the slide area, but their station wagon, with kayaks atop, was covered by the slide, taken over the embankment, and buried in such a way that it could not be seen or found. They had a heck of a time getting the insurance company to pay their claim. The really funny part of this story is that almost ten years later, after we had moved from the river, another slide uncovered their station wagon and kayaks, rather worse for wear.

Up the Creek

We live in a different part of Siskiyou County now. We have 1.8 miles of dirt road for a driveway. Although it has had its share of plagues, flooding, toads, and tourists, it's not that bad. Bob-O and our neighbor Stan work on it when the timing is right-when the right amount of moisture in the adobe clay makes adding rock and gravel effective.

It used to be a much worse road. In one particular place, every time I drove our pickup, no matter how slow I tried to take it, I would be bounced so hard and high that my head would hit the ceiling of the truck. That was one of the first places to be fixed.

It's still a dirt road, though. In the winter, it becomes mud and is prone to new ruts and holes. If the rain lasts for very long, the ruts get so deep that they grab my tires and roll me along their route like the rails of a roller

coaster. It is not the kind of road where you would want to pick your nose or apply lipstick. But for the most part, it is a nice, calm, gentle road, and the rocks that bound into my path are no bigger than an overnight valise.

Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is planning her garden and preparing for bees at her home in Northernmost California. *c/o Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520
kathleen.jarschke-schultze@homepower.com

