

# Post Impressions

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We moved a lot when I was a kid. By the time I graduated from high school, I had lived at fifteen different addresses. Some I remember; some I don't. We used to collect misspellings of our name (Jarschke). "Parselike" was our favorite. Mail happened, but I took it for granted.

## *Mail to Male*

I met Bob-O through the mail. I moved far away from my family and friends to be with him. For the first couple of years, we had no phone. That is when mail took on a whole new importance in my life. First, it introduced me to my husband. Second, it kept me in touch with my family. I wrote many letters home. I took to writing very long letters. Then I would photocopy them down at the Forks school and do a multiple mailing. It is very hard to write ten separate newsy little letters.

I met Glady, the Forks of Salmon postmaster, when I first came to the river to meet Bob-O. She had been posting our letters to each other and felt that she had a hand in our romance. We thought so too.

## *Forks Postmaster*

Glady was born in Sawyers Bar on the North Fork of the Salmon. Her father owned the hotel there. Esther Schwartz, who lived in a beautiful river rock home at the Forks, once told me this story about how she and her husband had decided to move to the area.

One fine day, Esther and her husband Phil had gone for a long trip in their Model A, to see the backcountry. They pulled into the Sawyers Bar Hotel and a five-year-old Glady was sitting on the front steps. They stopped and talked to her. She was such a sweet and charming little girl that the Schwartzes decided then and there to move to the Salmon River.

Glady had been postmaster since 1953. She presided over her rugged postal territory from the smallest post office in the U.S. The Posty at 96031 was teeny; it was a remodeled goat shed. It had a cramped foyer with 30, small-windowed, brass mailboxes in the wall. To one side was a small window for the clerk, where transactions were made. If more than two good friends were getting their mail at the same time, it was crowded. In the wintertime, Glady always had the woodstove going in the back. In good weather, after the official business had been completed, she would come out from the Posty and stand in the sunshine with patrons to trade jokes.

## *A Penchant for Jokes*

Glady liked nothing better than a bawdy joke. She and I would always try to have a new one when we saw each other. One joke drove us crazy for weeks because we only knew the first part of it.

In the dark hours of the night, Bob-O and I were awakened by our CB radio. We always left it on in case of emergency. This night though, it was two log truck drivers trying to keep each other awake by chatting. They were headed up to Callahan Summit. The higher they got, the louder and clearer the transmission became.

One driver started telling a joke, but just before he delivered the punch line, the radio went silent. They had crested the mountain pass and were going down the other side. This was dark territory for our radio.

The next time I saw Glady, I told her what I knew of the joke. Neither of us could guess the last part. For absolutely weeks, we both asked everyone we saw if they knew the answer. No one did.

Finally, I was up at Cecilville one day, talking to one of the old-timers there. I told him the joke as far as I knew it. "Do you know the answer?" I asked, not really thinking he would. He finished the joke, and I couldn't wait to tell Glady. I can't tell that off-color joke here, but if you send me an e-mail or letter, I'll pass it along.

## *Service with a Smile*

If you live off-grid, you will likely have a rural mail service. Rural postal service differs greatly from the bureaucracy and impersonal service in urban areas. When you get your mail from a rural post office, you get a higher standard of service because the postmaster knows you personally—which can create some interesting trade-offs.

**Shortstop.** Back on the river, Bob-O used to subscribe to *Playboy* magazine. He came to realize that he received his issue a couple days later than his friends. A well-timed trip to the Posty found Glady, with her feet propped up by the woodstove, reading that month's tardy issue. "I read it for the jokes," she explained. After that, the magazine was still always a day or two late, but Bob-O didn't mind.

**Fish mail.** My sister Mary sent me a letter mailed inside a plastic fish. It was fluorescent pink with my address and the postage stuck right on the outside. It tickled Glady to have it come through the Posty. "We should be mailing those from here," she commented. She talked about the fish mail for quite a while.



**Kathleen with fresh mail.**

**Postal mysteries.** Misspellings and bad addresses do not flummox the rural postmaster. The occasional postal mystery is merely a challenge—not a dead-end letter. Bob-O actually received letters at the Forks mailed to “Bob-O, 96031.”

Once I sent some film away for developing. It came back with the negatives, two pictures, and a slit in the envelope at one end. Gladly meanwhile got a small package from the postmaster in Castella, California. It was a handful of pictures he had found in the bottom of his mailbag. One of the snapshots was of the old Forks Store, so he sent them to Gladly. She looked through the snaps and saw Bob-O and me. I received the pictures in the next day’s post.

**Mail watch.** One birthday after moving to Hornbrook, my sister bought me a Swiss Army watch. I’m wearing it as I write this. She ordered it through the mail and had the watch drop shipped. The label had been printed with my last name first, and my first name last. Then in transit, the label was torn. All that was left on the label was:

een  
eek Rd.  
96044

Because there was still a zip code on the label, it was sent to Elden, our postmaster here in Hornbrook. We had lived here less than a year by then. I got the package in the next day’s mail run. You see, Elden knew that I was the only “een” on “eek Rd.” in Hornbrook. You just cannot beat service like that.

### Access

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