

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

LANIE LACEY FLEISCHER, CTT 49-50, STAFF 53, 55-59, 61-63

BY SUSIE LOCALIO

CTT 55-56, 58-59, Staff 65-80, 89-94

Lanie (Lacey) Fleischer remembers her first months in Anchorage in the winter of 1971 this way. “When I first got to Anchorage, I made a complete nuisance of myself. I pictured Anchorage as something like Treetops, a city nestled in the mountains with trails connecting one part to the other. I was shocked. There were no shoulders on the roads and few sidewalks. The only way to get around was by car. You had to drive to the parks. ‘This town needs a trail system,’ I kept repeating. ‘Great idea,’ people replied. ‘Why don’t you do something about it?’” Lanie answered, “Me? I just got here!”

But spurred on by memories of the great bike paths in Washington, DC’s Rock Creek Park, where she and her husband Hugh lived before moving to Anchorage, and by the fact that with one car, Hugh was commuting by bicycle on those shoulderless roads and she was terrified he would be killed, Lanie acted. With the help of a lawyer colleague of Hugh’s, Lanie organized the first Anchorage Bike-In. The term came to her naturally. Hugh had worked in the Justice Department in DC in the Civil Rights Division. The Bike-In was organized with a parade permit. The call went out. A few blocks were shut off from traffic, and hundreds of people and their bicycles showed up. People pedaled around and around the car-free zone to show their

support. Members of the City Council admitted they had no idea there were that many bicycles in Anchorage.

The event came to be called Bike Day. After three years of successful and ever growing Bike Days, it worked. Residents of Anchorage passed a bond issue to build the first paved bike trail connecting the Westchester Lagoon to Goose Lake Park. Little by little the Bike Day Committee realized its goals: to build a multi-purpose trail system so that every child in Anchorage could be connected to parks and schools. Today Anchorage has an extensive system of trails used by bikers, in-line skaters, walkers and in winter skiers and the occasional skier (Lanie among



Photos: Lanie on Start in 1958, with Hugh in 2009



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them) connecting vast parts of the city. Parks are linked to each other. Winter commuters with studded tires on their bikes ride lighted paths to and from work. And that first trail is now called the Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail in honor of the woman who got the whole thing going.

In March of 2011, Lanie was inducted into the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame. Her accomplishments fill a long paragraph: everything from being president of the Parks and Recreation Council of Anchorage to founder of the downtown Anchorage Saturday market to serving on the Board of Directors of the ACLU. She was appointed by Governor

Hammond to serve on the State Growth Policy Council and the State Investment Advisory Board (which drew up the legislation creating the Permanent Fund). Governor Knowles appointed her to be a member of the TRAAK (Trails and Recreation Access for Alaska) Board. In her professional life she was executive director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Anchorage from 1990-2005. Throughout all this she raised three kids of her own.

In interviews she maintains that like the turtle on the fencepost, she didn't get to the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame on her own. "I did not do this by myself. It takes a cast of thousands." She also insists that she happened to come along at a perfect

time when the city was on the verge of a huge planning and zoning push. And Hugh held down the fort when she had evening meetings.

Her humility is humbling.

Treetops shaped my life more than any other thing." Lanie told me. "The values I learned there, all the wisdom of Treetops starting with Helen and Uncle Doug, and Leo and Walter—the experience of the outdoors, the commitment to being an environmentalist and to organic gardening. Treetops is a complete way of life."

Lanie is Helen (Lacey) Haskell's niece, the daughter of Helen's younger brother Bill who was born seven years after the last of the five girls: Mary, Agnes, Helen, Leo, and Vida. At Helen's invitation, Lanie attended Treetops at age 11 as a First Year girl. Helen's secretary spelled her name Laney, and that spelling stuck at Treetops. She returned as a 12 year old, but her Super year was not to be. In those days the Super year was alternated between boys and girls, and the year Lanie was 13, it was the boys' turn. But she returned at 15 as a junior counselor whose primary task was kitchen duty, especially as a dishwasher for Lucy, the cook. "What a great education that was!" Lanie said. She also helped Joyce Fuller with her tent group so that Joyce could attend to her added duties as Camp nurse. "Helen was wonderful to me," Lanie said, "but she held me (as she did everyone else) to high standards."

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Susie Localio lives with Daniel Brodkowitz in Port Townsend, WA. She was a counselor and program director at Treetops. She is the twin sister of Bill Localio who still works at Treetops. Their nephew Donald Localio was a junior camper this past summer.



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known. (I once ran into him while I was lifeguarding on the Jersey shore during a med school summer.) He also had developed his remarkable horse skills when living in a small Arizona town just a few miles south of Tucson, where I have lived since 1964.

We are now fortunate to have a cabin at 8,000 feet in Arizona's White Mountains, in a small valley that strongly reminds me of the topography of the CTT area. The ambient temperatures here are also similar to the camp area (often 40 degrees F below those of Tucson or Phoenix.)

Hope the rambling recollections of a geezer have not bored you.

Peter Crowe 



The Chugach Mountains reminded her of the Adirondacks, and she made Anchorage her home.

Now at 73 Lanie remembers her childhood and young adulthood at Treetops and the things she learned there. She remembers Walter showing her the wonders of the compost pile, digging his hand in deep to pull forth sweet smelling stuff that would be spread on the garden. Thanks to Walter's protests, the planes that routinely sprayed DDT over the Adirondacks stopped their spraying as they flew over Treetops. This was several years before the publication of *Silent Spring*. When Carson's book appeared, it was the subject of a long discussion at a weekly staff meeting.

She thinks often of the advice Helen, having retired from Treetops and at the time quite old, gave her. "It was after her stroke. Kaye (Clark) Hoins and I were taking turns helping her. One day I looked over the New York skyline from her Gramercy Park apartment and complained about some change and Helen said to me, 'Now, my dear, if you cannot accept change, you will have a very unhappy old age.'" Words to live by.

Lanie and I ended our long phone conversation talking about horses. The ones we remembered from 1958. Start, her favorite. Pepper, who would just as soon bite as look at you. Teddy the pony, and Geppy who only the most skilled were allowed to ride. Horses long gone but such a connection across the years to when Lanie was 20 and I was 12 as though it were yesterday.

We all hope to make a difference in our stay on Earth. Few of us can claim to have made such a lasting impression as has Lanie Lacey Fleischer—a system of trails like a web throughout the largest city in Alaska. She will say it wasn't her. It was many others. The time was ripe. But I suspect otherwise. In a letter written to the *Anchorage Daily News* in February of 2010, she advocates for a new 20-year Bicycle Plan. She never gives up. 

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Lanie remembers those early years fondly. The barn and horses meant the most to her, and she freely admits to being horse crazy. She even chose to go to Mt. Holyoke College because of its riding program. Her favorite horse was the pinto Start, whom she remembers as the best lead horse at Camp. Walter offered to let her take Start to college, but she could not afford to get him there let alone the boarding fee the college required. Instead she taught town kids from South Hadley at the Mt. Holyoke stables and in return got free riding lessons from an Austrian riding master who was somewhat of a terror.

Lanie worked at Treetops from 1955 to 1959. In 1960 she married Hugh Fleischer and unwilling to bring him back to Treetops "cold," the two of them worked at Cheley Colorado Camps in Estes Park. With one year of being a counselor under his belt, Hugh must have seemed fit enough to be introduced to Treetops, so together they worked the summers of 1961-1963.

Lanie's other love at Treetops was the mountains, and she often accompanied Roger Loud as second counselor on hiking trips. She stopped her pursuit of 46er status at 23, figuring that was an easy number to remember. Her favorite mountain was Colden, with Pitchoff a close second, both still dear after so many years away.

Although her children never went to Treetops, Lanie felt their lives in Anchorage were Treetops-like. They got a Shetland pony and kept it in the backyard. They hiked and backpacked and although they always thought they would return to the Adirondacks, in Lanie's words, "This is the next best thing."

