

On December 7, 2018, Bonnie was in the KPCW studios, Park City, Utah. Read the transcript from her conversation with show host Randy Barton on “The Local View.”

Randy: What inspired to you to write a book, Bonnie Park?

Bonnie: Shortly after my parents passed, I found a box of family letters in the back of their closet. They dated to the late 1930’s through the war years. I began transcribing with the intention of sharing them with my siblings, my own kids, and my nieces and nephews. My grandparents lived in South America and they were trying to raise my mother and her siblings by letter. The story jumps around geographically from Chile to the northeast where their three children were in school, out to Montana. It’s quite a dance around the country. My parents first met in St. Petersburg Florida over Christmas break in 1939.

Randy: Your title is plural - not just one Bride?

Bonnie: It happens that there was quite a rush to get married before the U.S. entered WWII. In speaking with others who have asked about the title, most pause to reflect on when their own parents married. It is generally 1940, ’41, ’42 and some in ’43 then skips to ’45, ’46, ’47 - before and after the war. In this story it is revealed my mother married in June 1941, the same week she graduated from Smith College. On the very same day, in South America her sister married a fellow from Montana.

Randy: Two girls done at once, huh?

Bonnie: I throw a few other brides in, because it’s fun to hear them exclaim things like, “Isn’t June a wonderful month!” It’s the way they said things back then.

Randy: This tells a true story that you were able to glean from letters that were written. Did you also have somebody to interview?

Bonnie: I had no one to interview because pretty much everyone was gone, other than my brother and sister. I did a lot of research. What I really found out about my mother is that she was quite a party girl - loved her music - called out Glenn Miller’s “In the Mood” as a pagan love song. I don’t know how she came up with that. But then I tie my own life into it - a first game of spin the bottle in the basement listening to Tommy James and the Shondelles. It’s fun to jump from her generation to mine and, being a Baby Boomer, there is a lot of reflection about my growing up, and even my arrival in Park City in the late ’70s - it was a different town back then.

Randy: A little sleepy dirty mining town at the time, right?

Bonnie: With no traffic lights. You remember it.

Randy: How did your grandparents get to South America? That’s got to be a major tale.

Bonnie: My grandfather was a mining engineer for the Braden Copper Company - we’d recognize it as Kennecott Copper today. My grandmother was actually a doctor. She went to the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, but in South America she ran herself ragged as a property manager and a school teacher. Through the letters I learned a lot about her life and, as she wrote to her daughter, I could hear a mother’s voice. May I read you a clip?

Randy: Sure.

Bonnie: It’s from my mother’s freshman year at Smith. She’s not doing very well in school... “I don’t know when you are going to wake up to the fact that there are serious things in life -

and not all good times and fun. Now perk up - don't get discouraged, dig in and show everybody that you can make the grade. It needs a stiff upper lip but you've got to do it... Shut that radio off, and don't turn it on again before June!" Of course, my mother told me to turn down the music when I was supposed to be studying. It's maybe a little bit of a universal theme and like mother, like daughter. But I didn't know her story. It was fun to hear my grandmother giving similar lectures.

Randy: Every new form, like we tell the kids to turn their tablets off now - 1941 was of course the beginning of that tragic war but it was also the golden era of radio.

Bonnie: And movies - 1939 was a huge year in Hollywood. People didn't have the television to plop down in front of. My mother's diary reads like a full movie review, naming the names, the stars, her thoughts. She also did a lot of things in New York, on Broadway. Louisiana Purchase came out in 1940. There is an Irving Berlin song called "It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow" that lifted spirits like an anthem while the London Blitz was going on.

Randy: This kind of teaches a lesson that even though you don't think their important, don't throw things away. You found these in the back of a closet. They weren't given to you?

Bonnie: They weren't given to me. But my husband is collector of WWII memorabilia. As I was shipping my dad's military uniform and my mother's Red Cross motor pool uniform home, I also sent the letters not having any idea what was in them.

Randy: That time was all about letters. That was there only means. Think what's lost in this day with all those phones.

Bonnie: I even talk a little bit about how kids lost out in the educational debate over writing script. How they won't be able to read the Constitution past the "We the People" part or sign their name on an election ballot.

Randy: Were your mother and her sister together as children or did all this happen when they were booted out at age seventeen or eighteen.

Bonnie: They were together as children. There were three of them, my mother, her sister and a brother. My mother was born in the United States in May of 1919, right at the time of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. In my first manuscript I talk about the fact her life was bookended by the women's right to vote and who I thought would be our first woman president. Then I had to re-write it.

Randy: Yep, change that chapter.

Bonnie: Yes, I had to change the chapter.

Randy: Did this sneak up on you? When did the idea click to turn it into something for other people to read?

Bonnie: I had an interest in personal histories. I just didn't know it was going to be my personal history and my family's that I would write about. You know, we can't be apologetic for who we are, but there were times when I sat and thought how did the world ever get this messy. But what you realize it was pretty messy back then, too.

Randy: Yes, people were all over. That was odd for them, was it just the mining that took your grandfather away? The copper mines in South America?

Bonnie: Yes, it was a job. Like I said, my mother was born in the states and my grandmother returned to Chile with her at age five months for summer in South America - opposite seasons. My aunt and uncle were both born there. They moved back to the states in 1925, and it was in 1934 when the children were abandoned - parsed out to different schools and relatives. It was tough for my grandparents to say goodbye.

Randy: That's the depression. A tough time to leave kids behind but a lot of people did it I'd imagine - "take good care of them, don't write for money."

Bonnie: And my mother did write a lot for money, I have to say. I have a chapter called Taboo Talk. You can imagine what that's about.

Randy: Is this now available everywhere? And how did you do this? Did you just do it, like you do? Or did you have people guide you.

Bonnie: We have such a wonderful community here. Stacy Dymalski is a name you know. She was my editor and I had taken some of her seminars. Katie Mullaly, who publishes children's' book, also does interior design for people who want to self-publish, so I used her for the interior design. Another local, Michelle Rayner, has a firm called Cosmic Design, who did the cover for the book - beautiful.

Randy: Real Park City home grown.

Bonnie: Yes, in fact, the bouquet on the front was made by Mary Holly of Mountain Flora and Walsh Photography took the picture of the bouquet, so it was a little bit of running around Park City which is a lot easier than L.A. or New York.

Randy: Oh man, and a lot less work, too. Thank you, Bonnie Park. It's called The Brides of 1941.