

A book about how one man's determination to provide for his family became a small-town legacy where people help people, new friendships are formed, and where God's light shines every day in the small things ...

*Bucky's: Stories and Recollections from 50 Years in Business* tells the tough and awe-inspiring history of a small-town business with roots that are deep and far-reaching. When Bucky and Lucy Neely started Bucky's Repair in Pinedale, Wyoming, in 1961, they worked on almost anything with small engines just to net an income. Their son, Gary Neely, worked for them as they sold hides and furs to try to make ends meet. Gary and his wife, Ruth, bought the business in 1980, and now, half a century after its meager beginnings, Bucky's is recognized as one of the top Polaris snowmobile and ATV dealers in the nation.

The stories in this book are contributed by friends, family members, customers and employees past and present. You will read about harrowing rescues and experiences where lives were nearly lost. You will discover a place of warm humor and practical jokes, the very brand of humor that has colored the culture of Bucky's for decades. Here is the rich history of a small business with national appeal, where relationships with people are the very core. Come along with us. Listen to the old cowbell ring as you step inside the showroom. And pass the smile on.



**About the Editor:** Kate Neely Meadows, M.F.A. is a nonfiction writer and editor and the only child of Gary and Ruth Neely. She is the author of an essay collection, *Tough Love: A Wyoming Childhood*, published by Pronghorn Press. Her writing has also appeared in such publica-

tions as *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *Writer's Digest*. She lives in California with her husband and two sons. [www.katemeadows.com](http://www.katemeadows.com).

BUCKY'S: Stories and Recollections from 50 Years in Business

KATE NEELY MEADOWS

# BUCKY'S

## Stories and Recollections from 50 Years in Business

A collection of memories and tributes from the customers, friends and family who shaped a small business' identity



COMPILED AND EDITED BY

# KATE NEELY MEADOWS

# BUCKY'S

Stories and Recollections  
from 50 Years in Business



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**KATE NEELY MEADOWS**

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Designed and produced by:  
Life Sentences Publishing  
424 Kentucky Avenue  
Tipton, Indiana 46072  
(765) 437-0149

LifeSentencesPub@aol.com

Printed in the U.S.A.

## Acknowledgments

This book would not be possible without the countless contributions I received from and conversations I encountered with the many customers, friends and family members who have in some way been touched by Bucky's. When my grandfather started his truck and tractor repair shop in 1961, I'm sure he had no idea what a tremendous success the business would grow into in the years and decades to come. Thank you to everyone who contributed stories, memories and photos for this book. Thank you for doing your part to leave an important legacy.

Special thanks to my parents, Gary and Ruth Neely, for their tireless work at all stages in this project; to my mother-in-law, Jan Meadows, for such thorough proof-reading; and to Janis Thornton, my former editor, for her work on the book's design.

## Bucky's: The Making of a Legacy

*An introduction by Kate Neely Meadows*

I was never good at seeing the uniqueness of a mountain, the way notches and rises and patches of snow distinguish one peak from another.

“See that mountain over there?” my dad, Gary Neely, would ask, pointing to the rugged string of the mountain range that spread before us from the windshield of our white GMC pickup. He’d had our truck custom-painted with purple detail, to reflect the color of the brand new Rocky Mountain King snowmobile, a machine he was instrumental in helping design. The license plate on the truck read “RMK.”

“No.” Always, I drew a blank face, unable to distinguish “that” mountain from “that other” mountain, or “this” tree from “that” tree. Dad saw the landscape so clearly, understood it so deeply; he took for granted that not everyone could read the country in which he grew up like he could.

Like my dad, I grew up in Sublette County, WY. But Pinedale, the town he has always known as home, was not the same Pinedale in which I grew up. Likewise, the Pinedale of today is not the same Pinedale I know from my childhood.

Times have changed. Scant snow whistles in the sagebrush where bright orange extensions on delineator posts were once needed for drivers to make their way down snow-packed roads. Wildlife signs don the highways where locals once took for fact that wildlife existed there. Out-of-town roads that were once all bumps and gravel are now paved and smooth and marked with speed limit signs.

Pinedale’s population sign has changed, too. As one contributor to this book, Rich Poll, recalls, the white sign that marked the city limits read “Population 1,181” forever. When a huge natural gas field was tapped into south of town, Pinedale’s population rose – and with it, the needs of the community started to shift. Bucky’s, which began as a small truck and tractor repair shop in the back of a filling station in 1961, now caters to the needs of that changing community. Truck and tractor repair has become a thing of the past. So, too, has supplementing a meager income by trapping and selling hides and fur.

Now, Bucky’s services ATVs and snowmobiles for ranchers, sportsmen and hunters – the same population the business has catered to for decades. But more recently, Bucky’s list of customers includes gas field workers who have moved to Sublette County from across the country with their families. Bucky’s serves this diverse population while maintaining a solid reputation with its number-one brand, Polaris, and continuing its tradition of providing top-notch sales and service on Toro lawnmowers, Stihl chainsaws, Polaris products and more.

Times have changed. But the spirit at Bucky’s Outdoors hasn’t.

It is this spirit, a spirit of genuine customer service and interest in humanity, that is celebrated in the pages of Bucky’s: Stories and Recollections from 50 Years in Business.

In this book you will read about harrowing rescues and experiences where lives were nearly lost. You will discover a place of warm humor and practical jokes, the very brand of humor that has colored the culture of Bucky’s for

decades. You will have your fill of crazy wildlife stories, like the time a group of four guys, including Gary and his good friend, Dave Lankford, discovered a bear den in the winter while exploring the head of the Hoback River. The bear was obviously hibernating there; steam from its breath surrounded the den of the hole. When Dave crept up to the hole to see if he could see the animal, Gary snuck up behind him and snorted. Dave knocked him over backward.

And finally, you will meet people with one thing in common: a deep respect for the customer service and people skills necessary to successfully keep a small-town business not only thrumming, but full of joy.

When I began to solicit stories for this book, I had no idea what to expect. Would people be willing to contribute memories to help stitch the history of a place like Bucky’s together? I didn’t know. I nabbed a customer list from the front office computer and went to work writing letters to the very people who had kept Bucky’s in business for 50 years.

Then, stories started to come in. I received submissions from Colorado, Oregon, Utah, Minnesota, Indiana, Florida, California, Texas, Oklahoma and, of course, Wyoming. The book further generated interested from people in Washington, Idaho and Arizona. Some of the stories I received were humorous. Some were serious. Some were adventurous and some were tame. Some were emailed. Others arrived in my mailbox, typed or handwritten. I received one submission that had been composed on a typewriter.

I received clips from magazines and newspapers, published stories detailing particular successes of Bucky’s, wild rescues, telling profiles. I received a clipping from the *Pinedale Roundup* from when that newspaper cost 25 cents.

The complete story of Bucky’s involves a wide cast of true and genuine customers and friends. I still remember Bud Davison pulling up in his pickup in front of the shop, always with a bin of Tootsie Pops. Seeing his truck outside meant I was always guaranteed a treat. I remember Bud and many other customers pulling into our own driveway two blocks southeast of the shop with coolers full of fish they had caught that day. We always accepted them gratefully. Either one of my parents could cook a mean fish, and we always ate the goodies that were, out of total kindness, delivered to us.

The stories you will read here are brief and digestible. Some build on each other; others stand alone as fond memories. Interspersed among the many stories of customers, friends and family members are Gary and Ruth’s own recollections. My dad, who is not a writer, wrote his heart out for this book.

Turns out he has a pretty awesome story to tell.

“I think what you find repeated over time in our lives is starting a business, trying it out,” my dad told me. “Sometimes we tried a business and it failed. Sometimes we’d get into a business and find it good and stay in it.”

The spirit of Bucky’s Outdoors hasn’t changed. Neither has the raw, breathtaking beauty of the mountains that so stately surround Pinedale. The Saw Toths still rise steep and blinding white on a clear day. That gaping notch of Gunsight Pass that breaks up the horizon of the Wyoming Range will always be there.

My dad is better now about pointing out landmarks in the mountains. “See the two pine trees out in that meadow, and the willows between them?” he says. Then from there, he directs me to what he really wants me to notice:

“See the remnants of a building against that hill?”

I nod, sure this time I see the landscape the way he does: country that has been shaped by hard-nosed fascination and back-breaking work. The history and beauty come together to tell a story of a place quite unlike anywhere else on earth.

Bucky's – its business, its passion, its vision – fits neatly into this place. Here is a history of a family with fierce passion and a clear sense of community, going to great ends to make life in the rural mountain west work. Gary Neely knows how to skin a beaver. He isn't afraid to look into the gaping hole of a bear's den. He has grown up drawing maps with sticks in the mountain dirt and snow for wayward travelers. He and now his successor, Sandy, have answered calls to many snowmobile rescues and come to the aid of stranded outdoor adventurers in the nick of time.

From truck and tractor repair to hide and fur to, eventually, snowmobiles and ATVs, Bucky's has cemented its reputation as one of the top Polaris dealers in the nation. Along the way, it hasn't lost sight of what matters most in life and in day-to-day business: relationships with people.

Cheers to Bucky's and its crew, past and present, for their contributions in creating a legacy. Cheers to the customers and friends who for so many years have kept the business alive and vibrant. And cheers to my grandparents, Bucky and Lucy Neely, and to my mom and dad, Ruth and Gary, for carving a truly phenomenal path.

*Kate Neely Meadows, 2012*

# BUCKY'S THROUGH THE YEARS

ASSEMBLED BY RUTH NEELY AND KATE NEELY MEADOWS

- 1961** Charles “Bucky” and Lucy Neely open Bucky's Repair Service next to their home at 146 S. Lincoln Ave., in Pinedale, WY. They fix anything with an engine: trucks, tractors, ranch machinery, etc. Gary Neely is in 4th grade. He helps his dad in the shop for \$1 a day.
- 1964** Lucy Neely starts Lucy's Upholstery business, operating out of Bucky's Repair, to earn extra income for the struggling family. Big projects include couches, truck seats, and the entire inventory of chairs and stools for Pinedale's Patio Grill restaurant. Vehicles can be brought in for a “Tune-up Special” and get a tune-up and seat upholstery all done at the same place on the same day.
- 1975** Bucky's repair acquires a Polaris snowmobile dealership. Neely Family Enterprises operates in conjunction with Pinedale Hide and Fur to keep the family business going. The motto, “You Ketch 'Em, We Stretch 'Em,” begins to appear in local advertising. Bucky's favorite character, Wile E. Coyote, becomes the official mascot for the business. Gary Neely graduates from the University of Wyoming with a degree in electrical engineering and begins working full time at Bucky's Repair/Pinedale Hide and Fur.
- 1977** Gary Neely, mechanic, hunter and trapper, marries Minnesota school teacher Ruth Lund. Ruth's mother, fearing the worst for her youngest daughter in the Wild West, asks, “Will you have indoor or outdoor plumbing?” Gary's first paycheck as a married man is \$300.
- 1979** Ruth Neely starts working for the local newspaper, The Pinedale Roundup. Snowmobile photos and race articles begin to appear in print in great number. The picture taking continues through the years.
- 1980** Bucky and Lucy Neely's house, built in 1953, is wrenched from its original foundation on Lincoln Avenue and moved on a truck across town, to the hill east of Pinedale. Gary and Ruth sell their share of Pinedale Hide and Fur to Bucky and Lucy, and the Hide and Fur business moves up the hill with the house. Bucky's Repair remains on Lincoln Avenue.
- 1984** Bucky and Lucy Neely sell Bucky's Repair to Gary and Ruth Neely.

- 1986** Gary Neely shatters his leg in a horrific snowmobile accident at a drag race in Alpine, WY, when his snowmobile plows into a snow and ice barrier at high speed at the end of the drag strip. Gary is confined to traction in a hospital bed, set up in the dining room of his home, for six months. Bucky's Bunch drag racing team sets a World Championship speed record in ModStock 5: 108 mph on a 707 Mod in a Polaris chassis.
- 1990** Bucky's race team competes in the World Championship Drag Races, held for the first and only time in Wyoming. The team takes home 2 first places and 2 second places.
- 1993** The Pinedale Snow Explorers host first hill climb in Pinedale, at White Pine Ski Area. Dave Lankford serves as race director.
- 1994** Polaris celebrates its 40th anniversary. Gary and his family travel to Roseau, MN, for the big celebration. There, Gary introduces Ruth and his daughter, Katie, to some famous names in the Polaris industry, including racing star Bob Eastman and Polaris founder David Johnson.
- 1995** Bucky's Repair is officially re-named "Bucky's Outdoors, LLC." Bucky's receives a letter from Time Warner, informing the business that its use of Wile E. Coyote infringes on copyright laws. Bucky's is forced to say goodbye to Wile E. Coyote as its mascot. Gary saves the letter for good measure. In Wile E's place, "Bucky Coyote" is born, thanks to Sublette County artist Terry Quinn.
- 1996** Polaris Rocky Mountain King (RMK), developed with the help of Gary Neely's expertise, is named Snowmobile of the Year by SnoWest Magazine. Bucky's business undergoes an extensive remodel, boasting a new showroom floor plan and an exterior facelift.
- 2004** Polaris celebrates its 50th anniversary in its home city, Roseau, MN. Bucky's supporters – including Gary and his daughter; Bucky's assistant manager Sandy Sletten, his wife, Amy and their infant son, Noah; drag racers and loyal customers Don and Carole Lain; and longtime Oregon customers and friends Don and Betty Dennis and John and Emilee Boyd – meet in Minnesota for the event. Ruth Neely and bookkeeper Ruth Lanning stay behind to keep the doors at Bucky's open.
- 2006** Bucky's Outdoors becomes the fifth dealership world-wide to be inducted into the Polaris Hall of Fame. The entire Bucky's staff flies to Orlando, FL, to accept the award, days after Gary's daughter is married.
- 2011** Bucky's celebrates its 50th year in business with dedicated customers, friends and family. The business pulls off a phenomenal open house with vendors and prizes, and closes off a block of Lincoln Avenue for the celebration. More than 1,000 people attend the event – half of Pinedale's population. A special salute goes to Bucky's devoted employees: Ruth Lanning (1996), Sandy Sletten (1997), Debbie Miller (2001), Tyler Pierce (2008) and Phil Loftus (2010). After an overwhelmingly successful open house, Gary and Ruth Neely sell Bucky's Outdoors, LLC, to Sandy and Amy Sletten.

**AND THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT**

## PRE-1960: BUCKY AND FAMILY

"LOTSA GOOD MEMORIES!" –FAYE TRAVERS

## Second-Hands

*By Faye Neely Travers, sister of Bucky Neely (Littleton, CO)*

**B**ucky Neely was the last child born to Jim and Annie Miller. He was child No. 10, and so it was inevitable that hand-me-downs were a part of life.

We were in the middle of the Depression in Oklahoma, but our family was self-sufficient. We fared better than our neighbors. We never went hungry, but we saw hunger in our neighbors. Mama was good at twisting a cottontail out of a culvert and so we had rabbit and gravy for many meals.

Bucky was told not to tell anyone we were eating possum. So, he went to Sunday school and told Miss Lulu, 'Guess what we're having for dinner? Possum and sweet taters.' Of course, she had to tell Mama about it. But it was a delicious meal – and a memorable one. Our bellies were full.

We had no “real” toys, so we had to make our own entertainment and games. We had to use our imagination. We loved to chase lightning bugs at night. We played hard. We played games with the neighbor kids until bedtime. Then it was home for a bath with homemade soap and into bed.

One of the things we loved to do was find pieces and parts from the nearby junkyard and figure out what the things were and how they worked. These were the “toys” we played with. We would pull something out, examine whatever problem might exist on it, figure out how it worked, and find a way to get it in top shape again. With the whole junk yard to explore, we could almost always find some spare parts that would make the thing work again. It didn't take long to get our “toys” fixed, good as new.

We took pride in fixing many contraptions: sometimes it was a pickle-gitter, sometimes it was a chicken catcher. Everything had a name that somehow described its usefulness, at least in the minds of us kids. We were young and ambitious and proud of it.

Another free toy was shack matches. We knew them as the small wooden matches you used in old cabins and shacks. We lit fires every day, so they were no novelty. They were our Lincoln Logs of the day. We would dump the matches out on the table and build houses and corrals and barns. When we were through, they went back in the box, to be used for their real purpose.

One time we made a swing. It was a gunney sack filled about a third full of hay. We tied it with a strong rope to the branch of a huge elm tree near the back door of our house. We called it a bag swing. You could hop up on the sack and make a little seat in the hay and have somebody push you. We loved it.

Mama fed every hobo that came to our back door. I remember plates heaped with fried potatoes, corn bread and pinto beans. The hobos were looking for work and seemed to know where to come for a meal. They were always polite and thanked Mama for the meals she gave them.

We didn't have many personal things, but we had security and a good bed, fun times and all we could eat. I never once heard anyone say, 'I don't like that.' We ate what was on the table. Mama was a good cook. And when you play hard, you get hungry. It seemed like whatever was on the table was always just what we wanted.

## Trapping Lessons

*By Gary Neely*

My great Uncle Buck Baker homesteaded on South Beaver Creek, north of Merna, WY, in about 1916. He was the first of his family to leave Oklahoma. The story goes that he and his cousin were paid by a gang of outlaws to kill all the dogs in the town of Wagner, OK, so that the outlaws could steal the horses and not get caught by the dogs barking. Uncle Buck allegedly did the work, and then fled the state. His brother had visited Yellowstone several years earlier, so Uncle Buck knew Wyoming was a land of wide open space and beautiful country. He hopped trains like a hobo from Oklahoma to Opal, WY, and then headed north from there. He ended up settling along South Beaver Creek.

In those days, you could claim a piece of land just by moving there, building some fence and taking care of it. A homestead was 640 acres. The government gave you those acres for free if you “proved up” – if you proved you had moved there, built the fence and did the work.

When the Depression hit in the early 1930s, Dad’s family needed a place to go. Dad belonged to a large family – he was the youngest of 10. Some of the family, including his parents, moved to California. Dad, along with a few of his brothers and sisters, came to Wyoming to live with Uncle Buck.

Thanks to Uncle Buck, trapping and hunting has always been in my family. Uncle Buck became a government trapper to help supplement his income. The government paid him by the month, on a points-based system: you had to earn so many points a month in order to get paid. Bear was worth more points than coyote, and so forth. Uncle Buck trapped as many bears as he could, because a single bear earned him one month’s government check. He trapped other animals, as well.

As a young man, my dad lived with Uncle Buck and thus learned how to trap. Consequently, I also grew up learning how to trap. For me, the lessons began with a muskrat trap line on Duck Creek west of Pinedale. I was in grade school. Mom would take me out each morning before school so I could check my traps. I would remove whatever catch had made its way into the traps. Then I would reset them. After school I would skin what I had and prepare them for market.

I continued to trap beaver and muskrat all through high school. This practice for me was the beginning of my knowledge about the western Wyoming mountains, its wildlife and the country. In trapping I was also helping to boost the family income.

## Pig Tits and Pork

*By Pat and Ben Pearson, longtime family friends (Pinedale, WY)*

Eventually, Buck Baker earned enough money trapping to buy a ranch south of his homestead, on what is now the county road that leads from the Daniel Junction to Merna. My husband, Benny, and I now live on that place.

One day many years ago, we were visiting Buck, and Bucky was out back. He was just a little boy then. Buck

said he had better go check on him. Apparently, Bucky was not a little boy to be trusted. Sure enough, Buck went out and checked, and there was Bucky in the pig pen, with the old sow pig. He had a stick and he was beating all the little pigs off the sow. He himself wanted a taste of that sow’s milk, and so he chased all the little pigs away so he could suck on the hind tit.

When Buck appeared, Bucky looked up at him and grinned. “Dod, oh Dod, is that good,” he exclaimed.

Some years later, when Bucky was a teenager, he wrecked his pickup on a ranch near our place. Benny saw the truck, saw it was upside-down, and saw Bucky still inside. He thought Bucky might be dead. Benny went over to him and shook him. Bucky responded: “Pig’s ass is still pork.” And Benny knew Bucky was alright.

## Fish Hungry

*By Dona Rae Morss, longtime family friend (Pinedale, WY)*

One evening in the fall many years ago, Bucky and a couple of his friends decided they were fish hungry. They found another friend of theirs who was willing to drive them out west of town to the second bridge. The friend dropped them off, and promised to return at some appointed time to pick them up. Bucky and his buddies headed under the bridge with their fishing gear. Fishing under the bridge was illegal, so they were trying to be discreet.

They tromped under the bridge and into the water, and they started catching fish galore. A short time later, they heard a truck pull up. Of course they didn’t know who it was. Bucky said, “We will just have to drown him.”

Unbeknownst to the boys, the driver of the truck was Bucky’s brother, Joe Neely, who was the police chief of Pinedale. He had set some mink traps under the bridge, which was also illegal. He had pulled in to check on them, but when he heard voices under the bridge he was sure he would be caught, so he turned around and backed out in a hurry.

The boys had had a scare – they’d almost gotten caught – but they continued to fish happily until their ride arrived. All of the boys piled into the truck, their catch lying on the floor in the back of the truck. They couldn’t believe how lucky they had been.

They all drove back to town and fried their fish and ate. After a good fish fry, the boys all returned home.

The next day, Joe paid Bucky a visit and told his story. He’d had no idea it was Bucky and his friends who were down under that bridge when he’d shown up to check his traps. He just wanted to tell Bucky how close he came to getting caught having those illegal traps under the bridge. He was sure the voices he heard belonged to the Game and Fish, that they had gotten wise to him and were down there waiting.

Bucky laughed and told his brother he didn’t know how close he came to being drowned.

## Bucky and Lucy Neely: The Early Story

By Gary Neely

Like my dad, my mom grew up on a ranch on the Beaver creeks. They lived about two miles from one another. They married on Jan. 26, 1950, and worked on the Boyd Kelly Ranch (where the present-day Steve James ranch is) for about a year, before moving to the Daniel Junction. They rented a house from a woman named Mrs. Clodius, and Dad went to Pinedale looking for work.

He got a job at Gene Isaac Trucking, where he learned the mechanic profession from Monte Wight. He later worked at Johnson Trucking, and then at Anderson-Penton Chevrolet. This work over the years led up to him starting his own business.

In 1953, Dad's father, James Neely, helped Mom and Dad build a house, and they moved to town. The house was where present-day Bucky's is.

Mom went to work at the Pinedale Locker Plant (a meat processing plant on Main Street), which was owned by Wilma Newsom. She worked in the fall while we kids were in school.

# 1960s



“WE MAKE ANYTHING RUN. MECHANIC WORK IS OUR BUSINESS. BUCKY'S REPAIR”  
– ADVERTISING SIGN ON BUCKY'S 1953 RED DODGE

“IN 1969, TWO BUSINESS PARTNERS, RAY BREDTHAUER AND MARK WEIDENBOCK, BOUGHT A HOMELITE CHAINSAW FROM BUCKY FOR \$60.” – DIXIE BREDTHAUER

“I APPRECIATED DOING BUSINESS AT BUCKY'S REPAIR, BECAUSE BUCKY DID GOOD WORK AT A FAIR PRICE.” – JIM STRALEY

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## The No-Go Yamaha

*As told to Kate Neely Meadows by Dave Lankford, Sublette County Sheriff,  
former co-owner of Bucky's Rentals and longtime customer and friend (Pinedale, WY)*

One time, a tour group that was snowmobiling across the Rocky Mountains through Utah, Wyoming and Idaho showed up in Pinedale. We led them on a ride down through Chair Creek, in the Wyoming Range. But the group had a Yamaha that couldn't make it up the Chair Creek drainage. So Gary and I formed a plan.

I was going to pull the Yamaha behind my machine while Gary steered it. We hooked the sled up by one ski and tried towing it up the hill that way. But the machine flipped over, with Gary still on it. Gary tried to hang on, pushing on the handlebars to see if he could get it turned back upright. But he couldn't. So we stopped, went to the bottom of the hill, and tried again.

The second time, we managed to get the machine up and over the top of the hill. I can't remember if it flipped again or not, but we had at least succeeded in keeping that old sled with the group it belonged to. People were impressed by that – both by our rag-tag methods and the fact that we cared about it.

## Chassis Magic ... The Birth of the RMK

*By Gary Neely*

In 1991, I was invited for the first time to be on the Polaris Dealer Council. We worked on rear suspensions and discussed ideas for development of future sleds. I wanted a dedicated mountain sled, but I was the only dealer on the council who represented a mountain region; everyone else was from some place beside the mountains. What's more, the Rocky Mountains only made up two percent of total sales for Polaris. So what we got was a name: RMK, or Rocky Mountain King.

Polaris built these XLTs with the RMK model designation. They were the same flat-land sleds, with slightly longer tracks. They represented a small improvement over what we had, but they were still nothing like what I envisioned a mountain sled to be.

For the 1996 season, Polaris came out with the Ultra RMK. It was a great name, but the machine itself was very heavy. Despite the name, the Ultras were killing the mountain snowmobile business.

I and other mountain dealers complained a lot. I must have complained the loudest, because in January of 1996, Polaris sent out a team of engineers to pacify me. They brought with them their new 1997 700 twin.

Here it was again, a new snowmobile with the same old chassis. As luck would have it, I had just finished building a chassis especially for the mountains. We mountain snowmobilers had to build our own chassis if we wanted a good mountain sled. Many skilled riders were doing this, and a lot of what we did was the result of all the tuning we did at the hill climb competitions.

The other very lucky thing was that the mountains in Sublette County got about four feet of fresh powder just as these Polaris engineers showed up. So off we went to the David Ranch to tune. I was riding a 600 triple that I had built into a 650 triple. It was the best engine I could make at the time. On my machine I had mounted my mountain chassis.

The Polaris guys showed up with these brand new 700 twins, still with the same flat-land chassis, straight from the Polaris factory. We unloaded the sleds and headed up country. The Ultra from the year before could not be moved beyond the snowmobile trailer. It was helpless in four feet of fresh powder.

I took off, zooming through the powder. The Polaris guys followed on their 700s, but they quickly found they had to stay in my track if they wanted to make any headway. These engineers were getting stuck a lot as we went along. They were cursing why they had to be there in the first place. But then they started to look at my chassis. They asked if they could dissect it.

We worked hard, tuning and riding and discussing the mechanics behind the chassis I had built. Thirteen days later, Polaris had a new chassis. According to Polaris engineer Keith Peppel, who had come to Wyoming, 156 changes had been made to turn the old chassis into the mountain chassis that resembled my design. Keith was responsible for selling this new chassis idea back to Polaris management and getting the new chassis in production for the 1997 model year. He succeeded.

So the 1997 700 Rocky Mountain King was born. And with it came the Mountain Division at Polaris. We now enjoy great mountain sleds designed by dedicated engineers in the mountain division.

## Learning from a Polaris Hall of Famer ... My Dad

*By Kate Neely Meadows*

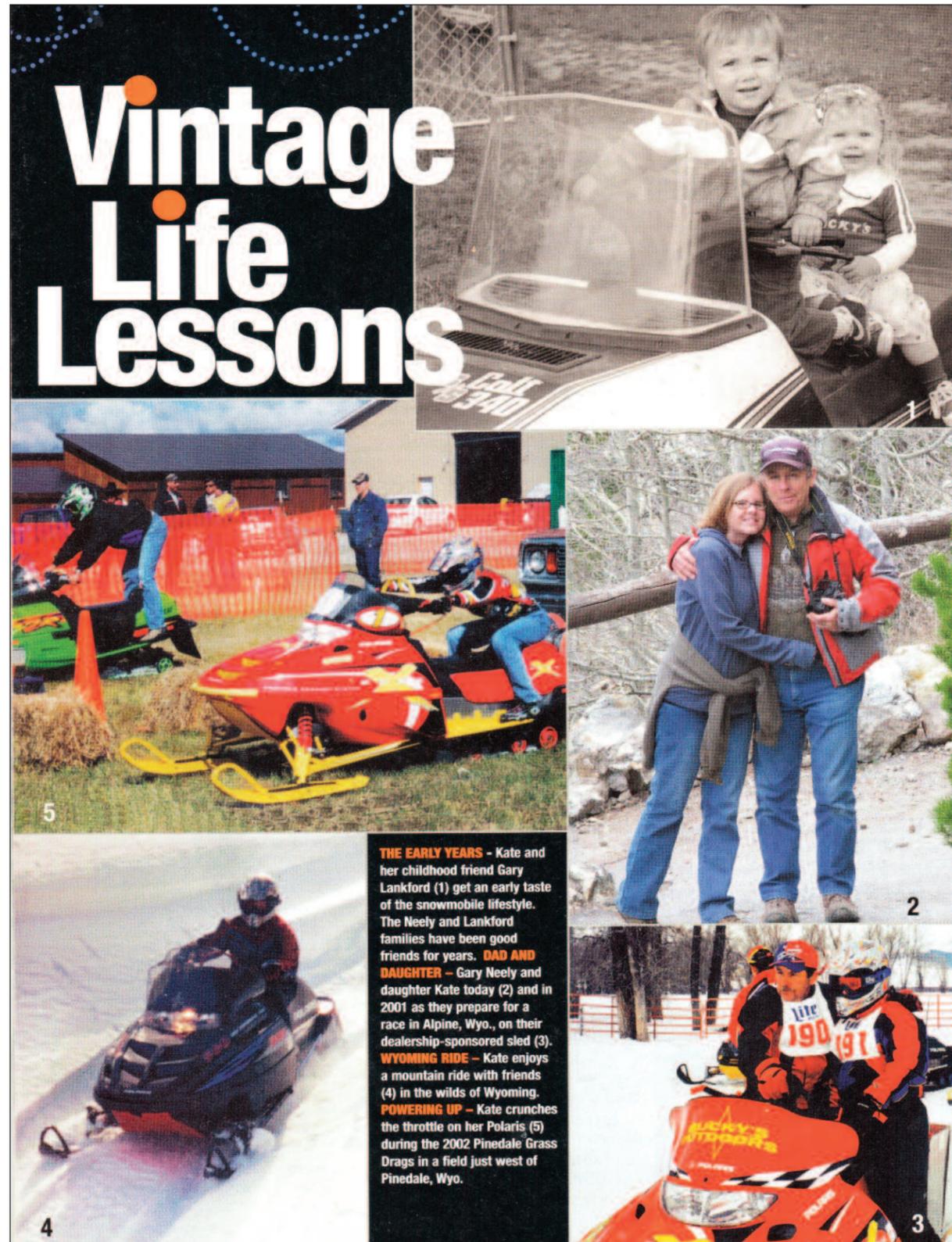
*Originally published in Jan 2010 issue of American Snowmobiler Magazine; reprinted here with permission.*

I grew up a mountain girl, and proud of it. But an insecurity always lingered: that as an only child who was treated like a princess, I wasn't tough enough to uphold that rough-at-the-edges Wyoming girl persona. My dad, Gary Neely, a snowmobile dealer and owner of Bucky's Outdoors in Pinedale, WY, used Polaris snowmobiles to change that.

### **The tough get goin'**

It started on the local drag race track, where Dad packed me around in his arms, a four-year-old sporting bright yellow ear plugs. By the time I was six I was sitting behind Dad on long weeknight trail rides to dinner at an isolated mountain restaurant 26 miles northwest of town.

The memories of those early years are soft and fluffy: dunking under the bath-hot water of Granite Hot Springs every time my hair froze in the winter cold, sitting on a snow bank in a fat snow suit roasting a marshmallow over the camp fire, sledding down a slope on a space blanket Dad dug out of a first aid kit. Rarely was there a difficult moment for me; somehow, Mom and Dad were always there to cushion me against any risk the mountains posed. But I got restless as I grew older. In the safety of Dad's shadow on rides into the Wyoming Range I watched burly



This photo collage appeared with Kate Neely Meadows' 2010 essay, which was published in American Snowmobiler Magazine. Reprinted with permission.

guys swing their sleds in easy ribbons, high-marking each other on the slopes and pulling their sleds through the powder with the grace of fish in water. These guys earned their names on landmarks: Lankford's Hill after Dad's best friend, who rolled his 1986 Trail Indy, snapping a good-sized Quaker tree and ripping off a ski, shock and trailing arm; and Tony's Cornice after a local highway patrolman who flipped a handstand over his 800 Storm after jumping it off a cornice.

I wanted a landmark, too.

But I was intimidated by the mountain slopes and often physically too small to handle the machine I was on, whether it be a 488, a 500 or a 600. Once, I had teetered on the lip of a steep slope called the Powder Bowl, too afraid to nudge my machine forward. Dad sat behind me and coached me to the bottom.

**The man behind the RMK**

To me, Dad was an expert. But to Dad, snowmobiling was just part of the raw hands-on lifestyle in which he was raised. He grew up in Pinedale trapping and hunting on snowmobiles. He responded to Search and Rescue calls, assembling teams of skilled riders to cut through the foreboding mountains in pitch-black night to find riders who had gone missing in the rugged country. Always, save for once when a teammate fell into a creek, his team returned home with the lost party.

Dad had fallen into the snowmobile business naturally, buying Bucky's from his parents, Bucky and Lucy Neely, in the early 1980s. His parents had opened Bucky's in 1961 as a small engine repair shop, selling hides and furs on the side. They launched Polaris and Ski-doo dealerships in 1975. When Dad bought the business from them in the early 1980s, he focused on building a brand as a mountain snowmobile dealer. Bucky's will celebrate 50 years in business this year.

With a near-lifelong knowledge of engines and experience in the mountains, Dad understood the power that mountain riding demanded. The bias in me says he understood it better than anyone else, but his invention of a custom-built chassis for mountain sleds speaks for itself. It was with that chassis that Polaris' Rocky Mountain King was born in 1996.

The chassis rested on four components: moving the cooling system higher, out from under the running board, to create less drag; replacing the stock track with a longer track; moving the drive shaft back and down to alter the track's shape, helping the machine plane out easier; and installing big plastic paddles on the track to allow for better acceleration.

The RMK was named Mountain Sled of the Year in 1997, and the Rocky Mountains, which before had accounted for just two percent of the national snowmobile market, suddenly swept 25 percent of the market. Dad's role in the RMK development, along with his longevity in the business and contributions he's made to the Polaris Dealer Council and snowmobile testing, earned him the fourth slot in the Polaris Hall of Fame in 2006. He accepted the award in Orlando, FL, days after my wedding, which, of course, took place in the Wyoming mountains.

**The tough get tougher**

But let's back up. Even as Dad pecked away at that mountain chassis late into the Wyoming nights, his desire to see his only daughter succeed on a snowmobile never left.

hay bales that marked the lanes of the track, the intoxicatingly satisfied feeling of beating a guy who was bigger, stronger, tougher than little old me.

I remember Jim McClellan's serious stone face as he pointed to each racer on the starting line and waited for the nod that they were ready. His face intimidated me, but not so much that I never showed up to the starting line again.

Dad opened up a whole new world for me with his racing request. He showed me competition was just as much about having fun as it was about winning. He showed me the power in facing something you fear and conquering it. He showed me I didn't have to be afraid of a fast sled; instead, I could get on it and own it.

Dad never asked me to drag race again. He didn't have to. I kept showing up on my own. Nervous at the start of each race, yes, but also filled with a delicious anticipation and enthusiasm for the challenge that awaited.

I never did return to high school sports. I found in drag racing something completely satisfying and challenging and fun. The year we joined the Wyoming circuit, we traveled a lot and saw many miles of breathtaking Wyoming country. I started to wonder what I loved more: the travel – the “getting there” – or the racing itself.

To be able to say I have drag raced snowmobiles – and have conquered my fear of individual competition – that is a far greater gift my dad could have given me than money for new track shoes. He asked me to try something “just once.” I am so glad I did.



John Linn, Dave Lankford and Gary Neely at the Wyoming Peak Fire Lookout. Photo courtesy of John Linn.

## Climbing Triple Peak

By John Linn, former owner of Fencetrak Inc. (Big Piney, WY)

Gary and I had always talked about going on a snowmobile or ATV trip, but we never could get the time or get connected until the spring of 1999. Finally, on a fantastic powder day, we set out to explore a big loop in my end of the Wyoming Range, south of Gary's stomping grounds. Dave Lankford and my nephew, Jake Foster, went with us.

It was one of those unforgettable trips, and we got some great pictures to memorialize it. Eventually on that outing, we climbed the back side of Triple Peak. It was a first experience for all of us. I enjoyed showing these other guys some new country, country that even challenged them a little. We had a blast.

My sons and I have used our snowmobiles to do some fun and sometimes risky things. Our machines have always been so super-dependable that we've never had a second thought about venturing deep into the backcountry.

I'm sure my sons will be doing their business with Bucky's for a long time, just as I have.



Dave Lankford, Gary Neely and John Linn wave from a huge block of snow that fell off of a cornice. Photo courtesy of John Linn.

## Survivors

By Angelina Pryich, longtime customer and breast cancer survivor (Rock Springs, WY)

I first met Bucky Neely during a summer open house at Bucky's. He and I talked for a long time. As I recall it, he actually told a lot of stories, and I just enjoyed listening to them and getting to know him. When we parted ways, he gave me a copy of his book, a compilation of stories he had written called *Stories with Bucky*. I remember reading many of them in the *Sublette County Journal*.

We didn't personally know Gary then, but we had heard of his horrific snowmobile accident at a drag race, and we worried and prayed for him and his family. In 2000, I read Gary's story in the *Sublette County Journal* about the time he spent in a hospital bed in his living room, sharing books and making precious memories with his darling little daughter. I still have a copy of that story. The story endeared Gary to me.

In 1991, our world imploded with my diagnosis of breast cancer. I was 34. After surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, we thought I would miss a season of snowmobiling. But my treatments ended in November of that year; winter had hardly started.

We planned a snowmobile ride for the following February (1992). I was afraid. Would all the vibration and jostling of the machine affect me in a bad way? Would I be able to steer my snowmobile? Could I continue to share this activity with my husband and friends? We visited my doctor following this trip, and everything was just fine.

About a year after my diagnosis, I became involved with the American Cancer Society in our community. I served as a volunteer to help other women who were facing breast cancer. My cancer experience provided me with many opportunities that probably would have not crossed my path had no diagnosis occurred. (For example, we were invited to New York City to talk about our experience on *Good Morning, America*.)

One such opportunity presented itself in 1995, as I was on the committee that brought Relay for Life (an American Cancer Society fundraiser) to Rock Springs. That year we also attended Survivors at the Summit, a fundraiser to open a Cancer Wellness House in Salt Lake City. Every time we visited Salt Lake City for my medical follow-ups, we visited the Cancer Wellness House. Survivors at the Summit began with the vision that cancer survivors could achieve their own personal summit that they might never have dreamt was possible.

My husband, George, was inspired to offer the summit of snowmobiling to cancer survivors. We organized our first ride in early 1999, bringing survivors from the Cancer Wellness House to ride in our beautiful Wind River Mountains. These men and women had never been on snowmobiles.

We arranged with Gary to rent snowmobiles and clothing. (This was during the final year of Bucky's Rentals.) Gary and George planned the routes that would be best for these novices so that they could enjoy their summit experience. About 10 survivors and their spouses or supporters came that first year.

One couple got separated from the group and thought they were going to be left behind. Not a chance! When we noticed they were missing, George and some more experienced riders went looking for them while I kept the novice riders together. George and crew located the lost couple over a nearby hill in some deep powder. The wife was walking up the hill.

When we returned with all the riders and the equipment, Gary heard about the escapades of the day from the survivors themselves. That evening at dinner, stories were told and re-told. There was a lot of laughter at our table, with everyone recalling the day's fun moments.

During the planning and preparation for this ride, I learned that Gary is also a cancer survivor. Doctors discovered cancer on him when he was just 10 weeks old and had to cut the bad cells out of him. They didn't think he would survive. I related Gary's cancer experience to the other survivors, and they asked Gary to tell his story. I remember him saying, "Actually, it's my mother's story. I was just a baby."

We organized a second Survivors at the Summit ride in March 2000. Bucky's had ceased renting snowmobiles, but Gary still helped us prepare for the trip. This time, 15 riders came, and only three of them were repeats from the previous year.

Many of the riders started the day feeling unsure of their abilities. Some were definitely "not going to drive." But by lunchtime, their fear seemed to have melted away. After driving for a bit and playing in the powder, those less confident riders not only wanted to drive the machines; they didn't want to relinquish their turn! One couple tried playing in some powder, but they decided they were not "off-road people" when their snowmobile tipped onto its side.

Regardless of the challenges these survivors faced that day, they had a lot of fun.

The idea behind these Survivors at the Summit rides was fantastic. There was a lot of interest, and of course, many memories were made. But the logistics of bringing survivors to Pinedale from hundreds of miles away – and most without snowmobiles – proved to be too large a commitment of time and money for most of them.

Although I am not defined by my cancer, it seems that cancer repeatedly brings remarkable people and experiences across my path. Gary is just one such person. And the Summit rides we put together count toward those awe-inspiring experiences.



For more on this story, see "Being Born," an essay in *Tough Love: A Wyoming Childhood* by Kate Meadows.

A 2-year-old Katie with her dad as he recovers from his harrowing snowmobile accident, 1986.

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# TESTIMONIALS AND QUIPS

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"I grew up in Sublette County, and since I can remember, I have known Gary and Ruth, not only as good business people, but also as community-minded people. Gary and my dad, Tom Jackson, were roommates in college. They grew up riding the back country together, back in the day when they had it almost exclusively to themselves. Because of this history between my dad and Gary, it is not a surprise that my own path crossed that of the Neelys regularly growing up.

I have been a die-hard Arctic Cat rider my whole life. Even so, Gary has always treated me like I was one of his top customers, all the while being friendly. It's not a quality that is found around every corner. It takes a special kind of interactive mentality and hard work to make a business successful over a 50-year period in a small town like Pinedale. Customer care is the only insurance a business like Bucky's has in regards to longevity.

The folks at Bucky's do it right, and the test of time is proof. I respect the Neelys and their solid help down at Bucky's for this very reason. I congratulate Bucky's on its accomplishment and look forward to sharing some good stories with the crew at the front desk the next time I bring in a broken "A" arm."

– Mike Jackson (Pinedale, WY)

"We have over the years tested to the extreme all of the equipment we bought from Bucky's. Sometimes we broke things. But we were always back working or playing as soon as Bucky's could get the necessary parts and get things repaired. Both Gary's business and mine have seen some rough times. But we still hang tough, and that is what it takes to be successful. It makes a difference, dealing with people who care so much about their customers."

– John Linn (Big Piney, WY)

"[In the '80s] when you showed up with a Bucky's sticker, everyone in the country knew you showed up for business and you meant to do good. Even still today, machines run well when they come from the shop."

– Brent Cheeney (Pinedale, WY)

"Congratulations on 50 years of adventuring in beautiful Wyoming!"

– Love from Jeff, Susie (Lund), Sarah and  
Nathan Reich (Altamonte Springs, FL)

"Thanks, Gary, for carrying a great product line, for running a great business, and for loving my dear baby sister."

– **Becky Otterness (St. Peter, MN)**

"I really enjoyed knowing Bucky and Lucy through the years. They were very fine, strong people."

– **Jim Pierantoni (Rock Springs, WY)**

"My family and I have become lifelong friends and customers of the Neelys. We even own lots next to each other on Pine Creek. Because of the excellent and personal customer service we have at Bucky's, it has always been our pleasure to make the eight-hour drive to Pinedale for visits and business transactions."

– **John Buyer (Elizabeth, CO)**

"Gary and his staff are truly outstanding. I live 1,200 miles away, and they always treat my family and me like family. My family and I ride sleds that were bought and serviced at Bucky's. Bucky's always has anything you need, be it for winter time on sleds or summer time on ATVs. The people who work there ride what they work on. Therefore, they can always help you, and you know the work will be done right. Thanks, Gary and the rest of the staff, for making me feel so at home."

– **Rodney Wilson (Weatherford, OK)**

"Gary is a great friend, business associate, fellow board member and citizen. It has truly been my pleasure."

– **Dave Bell (Pinedale, WY)**

"Mom and Dad have both passed away now and missed the 50th Anniversary of Bucky's, but they will always be in our hearts and minds. Their hard work has built a quality business for Gary to buy and expand on."

– **Ellen Neely Staniforth (Evanston, WY)**

"Way to go guys! Keep on sellin' and being on top for another 50 years!"

– **Jim Forrester (Middleton, ID)**

"The crew at Bucky's always go out of their way to get my sled running and repaired for the next big adventure. They always make me feel like I am their most important customer. They know my desire to be a good rider, and they go out of their way to help me achieve my goals. Actually, I am pretty spoiled, and I love it."

– **Kelli Drake (Rock Springs, WY)**

"I can never thank Gary and Ruth enough for their kindness, generosity, and flexibility they have shown and continue to show. I also thank Sandy for being a patient teacher and a man of character with whom I am privileged to work."

– **Phil Loftus (Pinedale, WY)**

"We have never known such a hard-working and friendly family who has been such a wonderful addition to the community."

– **Dorothy Radakovich (Pinedale, WY)**

"Congratulations on 50 years! (Wait, we aren't THAT old, are we?)"

– **Charlie Brown, Pagosa Springs, CO**

"My best wishes to a friend for life made in the mountains that he loves so much."

– **Phil Meadows (Edinburgh, IN)**

"I look forward to all the years and memories to come with Gary, Ruth, Sandy and his wife, and Debbee. I feel at home when I walk into the shop. I am always greeted with a smile and a hug, and that, to me, is the best feeling."

– **Kelli Drake (Rock Springs, WY)**

"I have met people all over the country who know Gary. He has made a huge impact on so many people's lives, everywhere."

– **Tom Lund (Sandy, UT)**

“Thank you, Gary and Ruth, for three years of fun memories and knowledge I will always carry with me.”

– Shelly White (Casper, WY)

“We congratulate Bucky’s on its 50th Anniversary of business ... Thank you for allowing us into your lives.”

– Joe and Debbie Sudbury (West Valley, UT)

“Congratulations on 50 years of being in business, and thank you for being such good friends!”

– Warmest regards from Barbara Miller (Bloomington, MN)

“With a lot of hard work and good management, Gary has built Bucky's into a far larger business than it was when he bought it from Mom and Dad. We buy lawn mowers and other equipment through Bucky’s and are always satisfied with the products Bucky’s sells.

– Ellen Neely Staniforth (Evanston, WY)

“Debbie Miller is the real trophy of the Bucky’s showroom.”

– Kelli Drake (Rock Springs, WY)

“Congratulations, Gary and Ruth, on Bucky’s 50 years in business. We are looking forward to retiring downstream from you on Pine Creek. God speed to Sandy and Amy as they take on the tradition of excellence at Bucky’s Outdoors.”

– John Buyer (Elizabeth, CO)