

Tribute to Hallie Rugheimer
Bozeman Folklore Society Wintergreen Dance Weekend
January 24, 2026
Oral History Reflections by David Mogk

Strap on your boots,
Resin up the bow,
Find a partner,
Cuz Here we go.

It is indeed an honor to present these memories of Hallie Rugheimer, the start of the Broken String Band, and the contra dance tradition in the Bozeman area. I'm David Mogk, a founding member of the Broken String Band along with Hallie and one of the original callers. I'd like to share some memories from those early years, and this reaches back to over 40+ years so please forgive me if I forget or leave out a few names or details of events.

It all started in the winter of 1983-84 at a meeting of the Alliance for a Non-Nuclear Future at the old Traveler's Lodge at Lindley Center. I met Hallie and Doug Mavor at that gathering and we had a casual conversation about the absence of any old-time music in the valley. Doug had just moved here from North Carolina from the tradition of Appalachian music and played the hammer dulcimer. I was a very young assistant professor who had some contra dance experience as a graduate student in Seattle where I attended weekly dances at the old G-Note Tavern. And Hallie of course, loved all music forms and was a

regular in the International and Scottish folk dancing communities. In those days, there were informal acoustic jams at Larry Barnhart's Back Porch Picking Parlor that was mostly Bluegrass music, but beyond that there really wasn't an outlet to play or dance to old time music.

Hallie, Doug and I wondered if there would be any interest in contra dancing here in Bozeman. So, we reserved the Lindley Center for a dance night, managed to bring in Larry B. Smith from Missoula to call the dance, we hired Homemade Jam from Helena with David and Angie Nimick playing the tunes, we hung a few posters around town and maybe had a public service announcement on KGLT and waited to see what would happen. To our amazement, we had about 50 people show up, and they expressed an interest in having more regularly scheduled dances.

So, we started having some informal jam sessions around town with Doug Mavor on hammer dulcimer, Dan Long on guitar, Peter Boveng on banjo and fiddle, Doug Haberman on guitar and upright base, Gwendy Stuart shared piano with Hallie which freed her to also play her accordion. She certainly could raise a joyful noise to the Lord on that squeeze box! After a couple of initial practice sessions, Hallie graciously opened her house at North Hills Ranch to regularly host Thursday night practice sessions—a tradition that carried over for years to come. I showed up just to enjoy the music. Someone said “Hey! You're not playing anything”. And I admitted to having no ability other than to make noise on a mouth harp so they gave me a copy of Don Armstrong's “Caller/Teacher Manual for Contras” and said “You're the caller”. So, I was pretty much thrust into being a self-taught caller, but I did at least have some

dance experience. That was the great thing about the early days of the Broken String Band—it had to be do-it-yourself all the way, as there was no one else to do it for you, so if we wanted to play music and dance we just had to step up and practice and learn our songs and dances on our own. Everyone was welcome to contribute. Over the years I've expanded my dance repertoire to include the dances of Ted Sanella's "Balance and Swing" and "Swing the Next", Larry Jennings' "Zesty Contras", Larry Edelman's "Square Dance Caller's Workshop", Ted Hodapp and Carol Ormand "Another Contra-bution, and a shout out to all the great resources at the Country Dance and Song Society. Doug Mavor, Richard Jensen (who also played rhythm guitar) and I split duties as the original callers. Over the years others joined the calling ranks including Lindsay Turnquist, Mitchell Frey, Rab Cummings, Barbara DeFelice, Mark Clausen and a few other brave souls. Maybe some of you at this weekend's workshops encountered some of this great music and dance tradition.

The Broken String Band was always a community-centered band, with Hallie as the anchor. Early band members, Doug Mavor, Peter Boveng, Dan Long, Doug Haberman, Gwendy Stuart, and Hallie were quickly joined by other musicians interested in old time music. We were blessed to have some really fine musicians join us including Pete Feigley (guitar, banjo penny whistle), Rick Veeh (mandolin), Tom Robison (fiddle), classically trained Suzanne Ferraro (wood winds), Lindsay Turnquist and Kaitlin Griffin (hammered dulcimer). But the Thursday practices were really open to anyone interested in learning and playing old time music. I'll just name a few more musicians at the risk of offending those I may have left off or

forgotten: Gus Lawson, Joe Hudak, Judy Dahlquist and Barb Burnett on fiddle, Rick James on guitar, Rich Morse squeeze box and flute, Phil Schladweiler and Eric Frost (banjo), Dennis White keyboards and strings (and Dennis was also the founding member of the Montana Mandolin Society), Gerry Bishop percussion, and so many more. The Broken String Band was also multi-generational, and we welcomed musicians such as Rich Morse's daughter, Kerry on fiddle, and Tom Robison's fiddle class students to join the band. All told, Hallie and I counted over 200 Broken String Band alumni who played with us at one point or another over 20 years, and that number is probably much higher given the transient nature of musicians in a college town. The general rule was that if you came to the Thursday practice you could be on stage to play the dance. So many a dance night we had up to 10 folks jamming away—creating a wall of sound that Phil Spector would have been proud of. The beauty of the Broken String Band was that it gave so many musicians of all abilities an opportunity to learn to play and perform in a public forum where they may otherwise never have had that opportunity. This was a testament to the profound impact Hallie had on the music scene in Gallatin Valley

We had to find a venue for regular dances. We had some practice dances at places like the all-purpose room at the Methodist Church and in public school gyms around town. We finally selected on having the “First Friday” Dance Series upstairs at the Eagles on Main Street. In those days, the Eagles sponsored Thursday night amateur boxing matches upstairs, so when we arrived to set up for our Friday night dances we had to muck out the room, air it out from stale cigar smoke, and mop up the floors from spilled beer. Members of the band had to be

our own roadies, setting up the sound system and doing the pre-dance sound check. Music Villa was great as they rented us the sound equipment we needed and helped guide us through sound engineering. A “smiley face” on the channels on the sound board boosted the treble so the caller’s voice could get up and over the background noise, and the bass was firm and strong to set the beat for the dance. Invariably, the sound had to be rebalanced from the empty room pre-dance check to having a room full of dancers. But we learned as we went. The upstairs contra dances also had to compete with the background noise of the downstairs electric country and western two step dance bands. So just to let the downstairs folks know we were there, a good solid communal balance and swing would make our floor and their ceiling really bounce. The good news about having dances at the Eagles was we drew new dancers from the downtown scene, and you could always nip downstairs for a quick adult beverage if you had a medicinal need. And, Dick, the Manager was always good to us, knew we wouldn’t cause any trouble, and let us store the sound equipment in their closet which really helped with dance logistics.

To try to ensure we had enough dancers, Gwendy and I initially developed a phone tree to remind and even beg folks to show up for the dance. Richard Jensen was a fine artist and designed the Broken String Band Logo. Hallie eventually stitched the Web of Music banner that accompanied the Broken String Band gigs. The Broken String Band got its name from Doug Haberman, who was known to pound his guitar so vigorously he could never make it through a set without breaking a string. Thus the name. We were going to change the band’s name for each dance as the musicians were always different, but once the logo was

made for posters we were locked in. Along the way we were able to purchase our own sound system, but this was before the age of microelectronics and you could easily get a hernia lifting those 3 foot speakers up onto their braces. The sound system has now been donated by the Rugheimer family to augment the equipment of the Bozeman Folklore Society. Hallie was also able to add her electronic piano to the BSB sound, and Roland became a much valued part of the ensemble. This was a great improvement over the Eagles spinet piano that was perpetually out of tune.

We worked really hard to put together really interesting music sets—a balance of reels, jigs and hornpipes from the Celtic and Appalachian music traditions mostly. We put together a lot of medleys to get through a long set: the Red Haired Boy took the Road to Lisdoornvarna to attend Maire's Wedding, the jig set with Coleraine and Swallowtail Jigs, and the infamous Medley in D, also known as the Deadly Medley, with Fly Around my Pretty Little Miss, Over the Waterfall, and Soldier's Joy, reserved for dances in a particularly long set. The callers were challenged to find dances that fit well with the music set practiced by the band, and there is nothing more beautiful than a perfectly matched song and dance such as Petronella. Each half of the dance usually ended with a couples dance, and we offered a variety of polkas, schottisches, and waltzes, and oh my, the waltzes were just so beautiful: Midnight on the Water, Margaret's Waltz, Si Bheag, Si Mhor, Ashokan Farewell....

The First Friday dances could not have happened without really great dancers. We were blessed to have a cohort of dedicated dancers cross over from the International and Scottish dance

communities: JoAnne Jennings, Morris and Ardy Jaffe, Margaret and Rufus Cone, Ken and Margaret Emerson, Richard Gillette and Susan Hinkins, Barbara DeFelice, David Jones and many more. It was so great to have a cohort of dancers who could guide our newcomers all the way through a dance set. The First Friday dances were also always family friendly. When our own kids were toddlers, there was always someone in the group to keep an eye on them while Gwendy and I played and called, and eventually they'd just take a nap in the pile of coats in the corner. Eventually, they came to be pretty good dancers and I could usually recruit them to get up to dance to fill out a set. Many of our best dancers over the years turned out to be elementary, middle and high school students—they actually listened to the calls!

The Broken String Band got to be a regional traveling band, playing gigs around Montana and the Pacific Northwest. We were listed on the Country Dance and Song Society list of dances to attend and attracted gypsy dancers from around the country. We expanded our musical abilities early on by attending some of the early Bear Hug and Lady of the Lake Dance Festivals where we learned from the best, Penn Fixx from Spokane, Sherry Nevins from Seattle, Laurie Anders on accordion, Sandy Bradley and the Small Wonder String Band from Seattle, and Wild Asparagus from the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts. Wild Asparagus, with George Marshall, Ann Percival, and David Cantieni, came back to Bozeman and played at a First Friday Dance followed by an all-night jam with our band members. We began to play for weddings, and our first gig was to play at Gwendy and My wedding at the Springhill Pavillion in 1985! It was a good thing to use this as a practice

gig as we didn't know if we knew enough songs or dances for a full wedding set and we actually had a paying gig the following weekend! We played weddings at remote settings, and on more than one occasion Peter Boveng would pull up to our house, we would pick up and load our upright spinet piano from our living room into the side door of his VW micro bus and do a gig at places like the Spanish Creek Campground or the old Crosscut Lodge. We played at a large number of benefits for local organizations, often doing a dance set following the satirical, poetic songs of Greg Keiler. We played for senior citizens at the Gallatin County Rest Home, and were regaled with stories from their childhood from the early 1900s when they would ride buckboards from around the county to attend harvest celebrations and dances at the Springhill Pavillion. We played at Bannock State Park for the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Bannock Days celebration, and at a community dance at the Clyde Park Community Center for our beloved friend Dorothy Bradley. One of the highlights of the Broken String Band history is playing at the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle and getting our hour's fame on the big stage. Hallie's daughter, Mary and husband Johann, kindly housed our little itinerant band at their house in Sammamish, Washington. The crowning achievement of the Broken String Band was their 2002 trip to Europe to play in the Czech Republic, and which resulted in creation of their one and only CD "No Discouraging Word". Rick Veeh, Phil Schladweiler, Rich and Kerry Morse, Gerry Bishop and Hallie were the band members who made the trip. And once Hallie moved out to Weather Rock Ranch near Wilsall, who can forget the numerous dance weekends she hosted on the dance floor in the loft of her barn—weekends celebrating so many different dance forms and music traditions,

partaking of potluck meals, and just enjoying the pleasures of our music and dance community. Hallie also offered Weather Rock as a wedding venue, and my own daughter, Emily was married there, with swinging music by L'il Jane and the Pistol Whips.

Our dancers also traveled to dances around the country, from the G Note in Seattle to the Spanish Ballroom at Glen Echo National Park outside Washington DC, and they both represented the Bozeman dance scene and also brought back great suggestions of new music and dances they enjoyed, and the Broken String Band tried to accommodate.

Eventually, members of the Broken String Band drifted off to other ventures, family and professional responsibilities. And we were fortunate to be able to pass the baton to the capable hands of the Bozeman Folklore Society. But for almost 40 years, Hallie Rugheimer was always there as the foundation of old time music and dance in the Gallatin Valley. Through her grace and generosity she made it possible for generations of musicians to have the opportunity to learn and grow in their musicianship. She helped build a dance community that has endured across generations. And our lives are just a little richer because of Hallie's legacy of song and dance.

I'm sure that Hallie is with us tonight, and would take great satisfaction that the dance goes on here at Wintergreen and all the other Bozeman Folklore events. These words, sung to the Shaker hymn Simple Gifts, ring true:

Dance, Dance, Wherever you may be....

So, let's honor Hallie's memory by kicking up our heels tonight and having a foot-stomping good time. Thank you for the opportunity to share these memories, have a great time tonight, and bask in Hallie's memory.