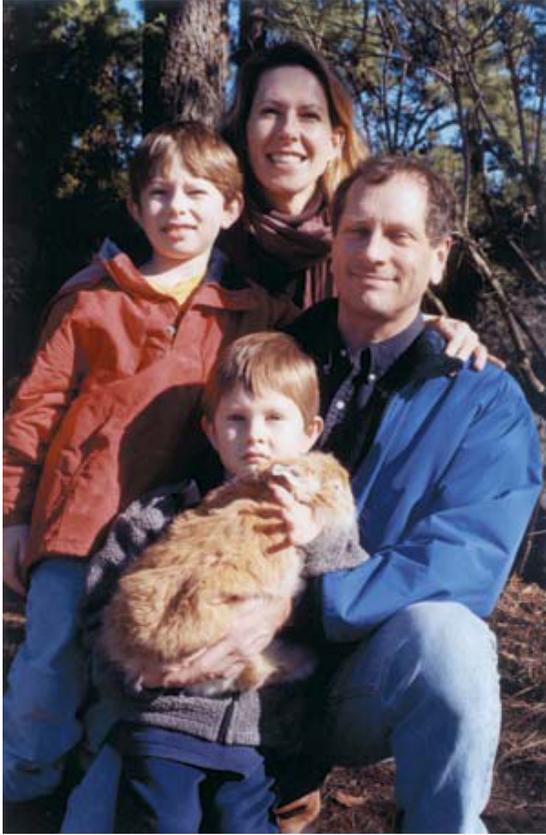


Our Stockholders

Karen and Paul Lindholdt



by Carrie Lipe

Asked how they met, Karen and Paul Lindholdt both begin to chuckle. I realize I'm about to hear a story that's been told before.

Paul starts out. "In 1993, I was a professor at the University of Idaho and an environmental organizer on the side. I was canvassing one evening and Karen stopped to sign my petition."

With a wily grin, Paul adds, "I memorized her phone number from the list."

Karen chimes in. "It was a Saturday night. I was a law student at the University. I had just walked out of a concert and Paul comes up with his petition. I look it over and say, 'Sure, I'll sign.' I remember him commenting, 'Boy, you're tall. Do you play volleyball?' I said, 'Yes, I play volleyball.' So the next morning — Sunday morning mind you — the phone rings at 7:30 a.m."

Paul groans and rolls his eyes. "This is her Big Fish story — as the years go by, the time gets earlier and earlier."

"It was, Paul. It was 7:30 or 8 a.m. and my phone rings and it's Paul asking if I want to play a game of volleyball! I say to my roommate, 'Well, who the heck does he think he is calling at this hour on a

Sunday morning?!'" "But," Karen adds, returning Paul's wily grin, "I said yes."

And they've been volleying ever since.

"We're a good team," says Karen. They must be. Between the two of them, they're successfully keeping half a dozen weighty balls in the air at all times.

Ten years later, Karen is now staff attorney and forest watch coordinator for The Lands Council, a non-profit organization based in Spokane, Washington, with a history of protecting thousands of acres of forest and water in the Columbia Plateau watershed. Paul is a tenured associate professor in the English Department at Eastern Washington University, where he teaches environmental studies, writing and literature. He is also vice-chair of his local Sierra Club. Both continue to hike, swim, ski, camp and play volleyball. If that weren't enough, they jointly parent their two sons, 6-year-old Reed and 3-year-old Chase.

Karen and Paul were each drawn to environmental work from early experiences in nature as children. Karen was raised near Boise, and her family had a condo in the forested mountains to the north. "I grew up exploring near McCall, Idaho, one of the most beautiful landscapes in the country."

"Then I went to college in Los Angeles," explains Karen. "This contrast made me value the natural environment in the Pacific Northwest. I knew I would return to be part of the struggle to preserve the habitats so important to me."

Early on, Karen began making plans for a future as an environmental attorney. She chose the University of Idaho for her law degree because it was a state school, and "I wanted to keep my debt minimal; I knew there was a big difference in earning potential between working in the nonprofit sector as an environmental attorney and working in the private sector."

Now, after nine years in her field, Karen says, “I’m glad I stuck to my path. I love my work and feel good about making a living as an environmental lawyer.”

In her position at The Lands Council, Karen wears two hats. As Forest Watch coordinator, Karen and her volunteers literally “get out and bushwhack through the national forests.” They inspect stands of trees on national forest lands in a four-state region. “Outside documentation is necessary because the Forest Service often claims it is abiding by the minimum percentage requirements for old-growth protection outlined in state forest plans, when in fact it is not.”

When violations are discovered, Karen changes hats. “As staff attorney, I bring allegations to court when the Forest Service is out of compliance with legislation such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act and the Clean Water Act.”

Paul says, “I entered a love for the environment the way many men in America do — through hunting and fishing, through resource extraction.” Raised in the Seattle area, he tramped the Northwest with his father. Paul recalls, “About 15 years ago, before my father died of cancer, he and I independently started coming to an epiphany that these sports were destructive.” Paul’s passion for environmental preservation crystallized when he and his father returned to places they had enjoyed years earlier. “What had been pristine was now desecrated. What had been serene was now shattered.”

About this time, Paul, who holds a masters and a doctorate in English, was on one-year teaching contracts. “I was not worried about a tenure track. So I thought, what the heck, I might as well do what I love, what I believe in. With my left hand, I started writing a kind of literary activism; and with my right hand I maintained the austere, removed, neutral stance of typical academic scholarship.”

Paul explains, “When I accepted the position at Eastern Washington University, they saw a way to join my left and right hands.” Paul now spends part of his time teaching environmental studies, one of only a few English professors in the nation whose job description includes an interdisciplinary component. Paul’s research also allows him to work in an emerging field that uses literature to study ways humans perceive and interact with the natural environment.

In his own writing, Paul has been part of a movement “to bring a personal voice, a subjectivity, into academic discourse.” Paul likes to use the term “genre-bending” for his experiments to make more permeable the boundaries that used to circumscribe writing styles. “In journalism, I might report about an environmental issue with less of the distance and objectivity of a traditional journalist, with more the passion and subjectivity of someone actually living on the land. In poetry, I might teeter on the brink of proselytizing. In creative non-fiction, I might hybridize elements of fiction and essay.”

Paul reflects, “In fact, it’s probably this writing style that forged a strong connection with MaryJane. I used to write guest editorials for local newspapers, and MaryJane was very supportive of my work.”

Asked how they became stockholders, Paul smiles. “I became a shareholder in 1998 when MaryJane called me out of the blue and said, in her typical straightforward style, ‘We need a computer system. Can you come up with 10 thousand dollars?’ With the help of my mother, I cobbled together the money, not because I thought it was a great financial investment at the time, but because I believed in MaryJane and what she was working for. Now look at her go!”

Karen mentions that one of their family’s favorite ways to recharge is through visits with MaryJane and Nick at the farm. “I always come back more refreshed, more committed to feeding my kids well and taking care of myself, more inspired to stay focused on my true goals.”

We all need places to find serenity, to idle down, to recharge. Especially if you’re volleying as effectively as Karen and Paul are to insure the possibility that such places remain on our planet.

Like the “genre-bending” experiments Paul uses to expand the creativity of written words, Paul and Karen experiment actively in their partnership to permeate the boundaries that used to prescribe parental divisions of labor. By supporting each other’s professional lives, and by sharing daily parenting and household responsibilities, each is able to grow and contribute more than they could if constrained by gender-defined boundaries.

Says Karen, “ It is important for my sons to know I value being their mother and to know I also value being a respected member of our larger community.”

Paul adds, “I’m committed to my profession, but I don’t have plans for huge book projects on my plate, at least until the kids are older. The term ‘absent fatherhood’ is just coming into the American lexicon. I don’t want that term to apply to me.” He states, “It’s a matter of being available as a dad, being in close proximity to my sons, being intimate and nurturing, as well as being effective in my career.”

I’d say Paul got it right when he called Karen up at 7:30 (or was it 6:30?) that Sunday morning, and Karen got it right when she agreed to join the game. We’ve all been benefiting from their teamwork ever since. Thanks, Karen and Paul.