

"I THINK, REALLY, IT STARTED WHEN WE CAME OVER RABBIT EARS PASS, AND I SAW THIS VALLEY."



MRS. BROWN AND HER WELCOMING SMILE.

BY CINDY SANDELIN

"Why on earth would you want to write a story on me?" asks the smiling woman sitting behind the desk. "I'm not an old timer - I haven't lived in Steamboat all that long."

Mrs. Florence Brown, who was born in East Chicago, Indiana, has been a citizen of Steamboat Springs, though, since 1969, when she, her son Kevin, and her daughter Karen came here to find a place to open a bookstore.

"Kevin got the idea for a book store. He was up here going to Whiteman School. The boys at the school used to sit around and dream up all these ideas — how they would someday come back and one was going to own the theatre, one was going to own a restaurant, and Kevin was going to own the bookstore. Then he started in on me. I said, 'That would be fine,' thinking, 'Oh well, let him dream.'

"He always said that the only thing he ever spent money on was books and records, so the only logical thing to do was to have a book and record store.

"Some of the youngsters at Whiteman came from pretty wealthy homes. One of Kevin's classmates thought it was a good idea, and he decided that if Kevin really wanted this so badly, he would loan him \$10,000. It scared me. I thought, 'We can't do that!'

"Along about the same time when Kevin had this idea, my daughter was getting married. All of a sudden, I realized they were going to leave

and what would I do — spend the rest of my life going back and forth to the Samsonite Luggage Company? After my husband died, all I could think of was to get the children through school. My thinking stopped right there. I never thought a thing about what I was going to do. I thought, 'Good Heavens! Now what do I do after they leave? They're not staying forever.' Then I started thinking kind of seriously about the bookstore. The more we talked about it, the more I thought, 'Maybe this would be a good idea.'

"So, I agreed with him that we would come up to Steamboat one summer and look around. We came one weekend in August. We weren't looking for anything. I just wanted to see what the town was like because I'd only been here in the winter one time when I brought Kevin up to school. I discovered it was very nice. Kevin took me up to Whiteman School and out to the Hot Springs. We went out to Fish Creek Falls and wandered around the neighborhood. I was hooked. I think, really, it started when we came over Rabbit Ears Pass and I saw this valley. I saw the valley and said, 'This is it. This is where I want to be!' That was in August of 1968. We decided to make plans from then on.

"My daughter still had one year of school and I wanted someplace for her to come back on weekends and things so we stayed in Denver. I wound up my job and we got the house ready to sell. The following April - April of '69 - we came

out here. By this time, we had decided that we wanted a house and we'd put the bookstore in the house. I didn't want to talk to a real estate agent because I thought, 'They're going to try to sell me whatever they have.' My husband had been a lawyer, and his partner had known Bob Gleason. I was thinking that, as a lawyer, Bob might know about real estate deals and houses that were up for sale. Maybe he could kind of watch for something that would be suitable for us without doing the real estate business and trying to sell us a certain type of thing.

"On a Saturday afternoon we came up. I made an appointment with Bob Gleason. He was kind of discouraging. He decided that it was kind of a funny thing to do — to try to run a bookstore, and not be on the main street of town. He said, 'This will never work.' Everybody kept saying, 'Are you sure that you know what you're doing?' I said, 'Well, this is what we want. We think that maybe it would work and we don't need a lot of money. We think it would be a good thing.'

"While I was talking with Bob, Karen and Kevin were driving around town. As I came out, they pulled up in the car and said, 'We found it!' They drove me over here and sure enough, there was a 'For Sale' sign on this house. The only thing wrong with it was the color. It was pink! I said, 'I can't live in a pink house!' But, we decided that we liked it. So, we called the real estate agent, Mr. Eldon Brummett. He said he'd get the owner of the house (Mr. Art Bogue) to show it to us. It was empty because it had been rented. We came in the door and I saw this



LOOKING AT ALL THE NEW BOOKS.

room. It was panelled like this with all the bookshelves and everything. I thought, 'This is it.' I'm a Libra and they say it is really hard for us to make decisions. It takes me a long time to decide whether or not to buy something like a sweater, but I bought the house in five minutes. It really was a quick decision but we felt that it was so ideal! We didn't really care what we bought with the rest of the house. Little did we know, we didn't even have heat upstairs. We didn't really care though.

"Things worked out nicely. We went back to Bob Gleason and told him that we wanted the house. He asked, 'When do you want to close?' I said, 'I'll be working until June 30.' He said, 'How about the first of July?' So the first of July we closed on the house. I think that two or three weeks later they announced that LTV bought the mountain. Everything went up— just skyrocketing! We were so lucky! That's when I decided that it was meant to be.

"From then on, we just started picking up the house in Denver — cleaning out. We'd fill up the car, drive up here, empty it out, and started cleaning up here. We did this leisurely. Of course, we had to sell the house in Denver. There was a lot of work to do on that to get it ready. What money we had, we wanted to spend on stock, and not fixing up and decorating. So, we



CINDY SANDELIN (AUTHOR), MRS. BROWN AND KEVIN IN FRONT OF THE BROWN BOOK CORNER.

started buying stock-books and records. We didn't think that we could make it as a bookstore, so I thought that we should have some gifts, too. Finally, on November 9, 1969, we were ready. We got everything all together and opened up — with no fanfare or anything.

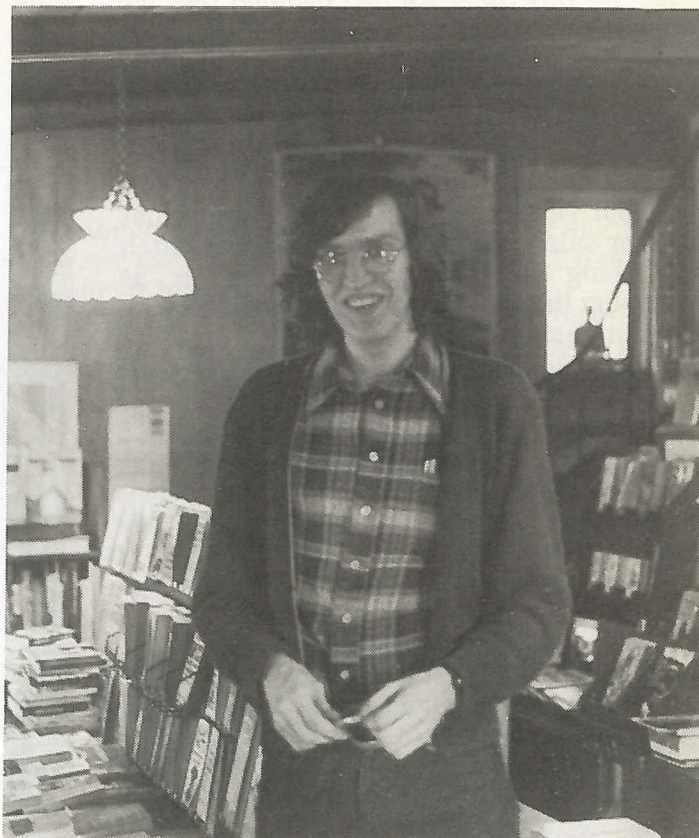
"We had a great little friend, Jack Sawyer, living down at the Rustic Lodge, and he kind of adopted us. He found out what we were planning to do, and he thought that it was a great idea. The week before we opened up, he went up and down main street telling everybody that there was going to be a new bookstore.

"When we opened up, some of the kids from the college came down. I think that we took in about eight dollars that day. We've been going ever since. It was just amazing. Fortunately, it was a good time of the year. It was early in November, and everybody was buying things for Christmas. There were very few gift stores at the time. Here we came with incense, banners, candles, and all sorts of things. We started, and I guess that people were just intrigued, because we have had good results from the beginning.

"Then another thing happened. On the weekend when a lot of people started out to Denver to go shopping, Rabbit Ears Pass was closed. It gave us just what we needed, because everyone found that they would have to shop here. A lot of people discovered us. One woman said that there was probably something from our store under every Christmas tree. And the kids took a fancy to us, so we were in very well from the beginning.

"How anybody ever stuck with us in the very beginning, I'll never know. We didn't even have a copy of *Books in Print*. We knew that there was such a thing, but we didn't have any copies because the company that puts them out was going over to a computer system at the time. Somehow or other, they got things mixed up, and we were in business for five or six months before we got our copy of *Books in Print*. We were in business longer than that before we knew there was such a thing as the American Booksellers Association! If anyone ordered a book, we had no idea of how to get it — none whatsoever. There was a warehouse in Denver, but we didn't even have sense to know that that distributor was on his way down. We thought that the way to find a publisher's address, was to find a book by that publisher, open it, and see if the address was there. We muddled our way through, is what we did. People had a lot of patience with us because there wasn't anybody else, I suppose. Anybody could have come in, and just wiped us out.

"Then all the other bookstores opened in the fall of 1972 — Boomtown Books, Sunrise, and the Cosmic Cowboy. On one hand, we would kind of worry, but on the other hand, we were glad



KEVIN BROWN.

because we didn't feel so obligated to get someone a book as soon as possible. Now there was someplace else to send them. (Of course, Sunrise folded, and the Cosmic Cowboy bought out Boomtown Books, so now there is just two of us.)

"When the mountain first started developing, though, everybody said, 'You're going to have to open up a branch up there or you'll get into competition. You'd just better get up there!' We even went so far as to call someone to talk to them about maybe renting space. Fortunately they never called back. Kevin and I went up to the mountain and we decided that we really didn't want any part of it. We figured that if we got involved in it, it would get so large that it wouldn't be fun. We came up here to have a good time, not to worry about expansion and all that sort of business. We decided that we'd stay right here and do the best we could."

Indeed, Mrs. Brown has done well. She has wound her way into the hearts of the citizens of Steamboat. Her good-natured smile and the warm atmosphere of the Brown Book Corner can cheer up even the gloomiest of days. Steamboat Springs just wouldn't be Steamboat Springs without Mrs. Florence Brown and her bookstore.

"She's a very intelligent lady, very nice, and a great asset to the community. She's a good friend and a very welcome member of this area," commented Mr. Eldon Brummett.

"She probably doesn't have any enemies.



THE PEOPLE THAT WALK THROUGH THIS DOOR "ARE JUST A GREAT BUNCH OF PEOPLE."

Everyone likes her — she's just that kind of person," said Mrs. Dee Richards.

"We're very happy that we came. I've never been sorry that Kevin talked me in to this. In fact, I thank him now and then. The people here are so great, and there's just an amazing amount of talent in this town. That's one nice thing about having a bookstore. The nicest and most interesting people in town come in here. We don't have any narrow-minded people come in because they don't read books anyhow. I go to the grocery store and I wonder if I could handle all the types of people that come in to a place like that.

"Now in here, everyone who comes in here is just as nice as can be. Someone once told me that we sit here in our ivory tower and, if we think that all of Steamboat is like it is in here, then we are very badly mistaken. I'm glad because I love them. The people have just been perfect to us, so we've always tried not to take advantage of them. Even now when we buy the Christmas ornaments, we're supposed to mark them up a certain amount, and we're given a suggested retail price. I take one look at it and I think, 'How much would I pay for that if I was going to buy it?' If it's not the suggested retail price, I don't mind putting it down. We've always felt that we would rather sell more and make less than sell just a few things and make a lot. That wasn't why we came, to make money. We came to have a new life. We've found it and

we just love it. It was a real happy ending type story. And, in the meantime, Kevin's gotten married and has a youngster. Now we feel very much a part of the community.

"I remember when Kevin was trying to persuade me to come. He decided that we would do very well together because I would know what would appeal to older people and he would know what would appeal to younger people. We couldn't miss. One time he said, 'Just think, we could go up there and create a whole new image!'

Part of that "new image" is Kevin Brown's war games.

"One of the things that you learn in booksellers', school is that you shouldn't try to be all things to all people. Your own interests and personality should be reflected in your bookstore. So, since Kevin is very interested in war games, we decided to give him a little space in the bookstore for war games. It took some doing but we gave him a space because that's one of his interests," says Mrs. Brown, adding, with a smile, "Well Kevin, do you want to explain your war games?"

"Well I think that my parents first bought me a war game when I was 12. It was one of the first war games published at the time. I think that they got it for me because I was interested in history. My interest in war games just grew from that," explained Kevin.

"You do learn a lot of history, though, because

each game is based on true historical facts. They are all well-researched," added Mrs. Brown.

"Some of the games are just one battle, not the entire war." said Kevin. "Some include the economics of the war situation, too."

"And then it gets really complicated," chuckled Mrs. Brown.

"They present a problem that you have to solve. They take a long time, too. You usually can't finish one game in an evening."

"There used to be more or less one company that made war games. Now the field has expanded and one company carries over 150 games! Each game is a different battle, during a different time period, and they are all different sizes. We don't have very many larger games, but some take up a whole garage floor just to lay out the playing board on!"

Although they don't have enough room to lay out a playing board that would take up a garage floor, the Browns do find room for the things that they really want in the store — a friendly atmosphere, a cheering smile, and, or course, their hobbies.

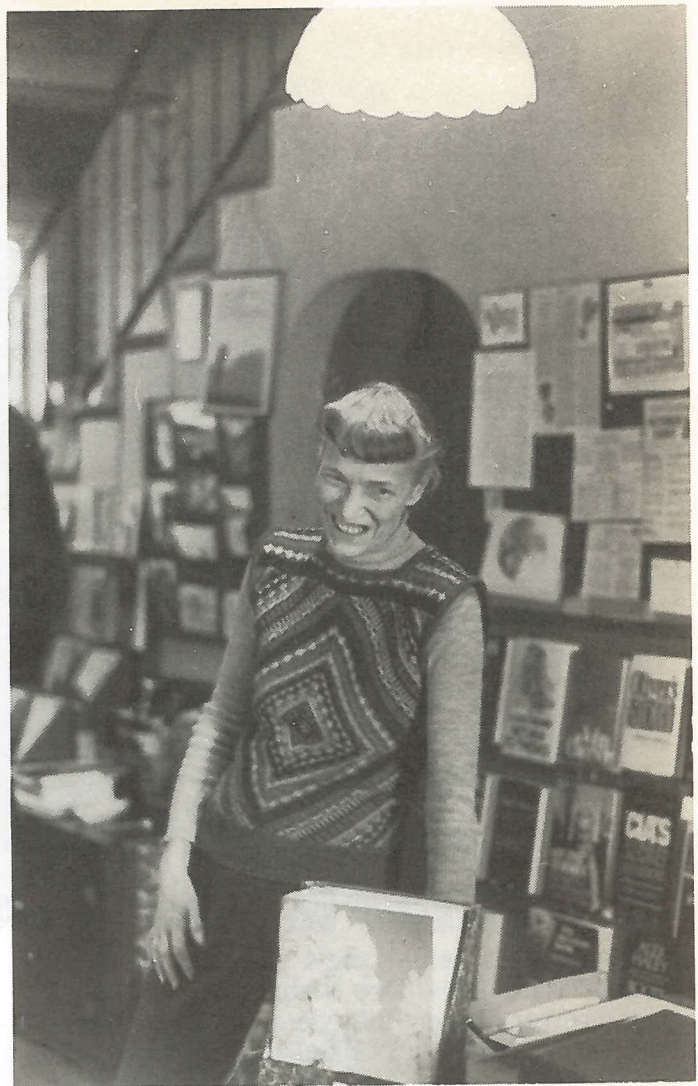
While Kevin has his war games, science-fiction and history books, and books on hobbies like electronics, Mrs. Brown likes non-fiction, do-it-yourselfers, political science type books, and books about people. Also she likes the theatre and plays.

"A curtain goes up within five miles and I can hear it. I'm there. I see a movie maybe once a year, but plays — I don't miss any of them. They are so much fun!

"I used to sew a lot, too. Now I don't have time for hobbies. All we do is bookstore things, because we do so many special orders. We have such a varied group of people and they have such varied interests that we couldn't possibly carry all the books that they want. So we do lots of special orders.

"Politics is kind of a hobby, too. I remember one year when I was at a Girls' College in Chicago, and they had a model political convention over at Depaul. We were invited to go. A bunch of us were sent over there to represent our school. Of course, going from an all girls' school to an all boys' school was half the thrill. Still, though, it certainly engendered an interest in politics which I haven't lost since. Of course, I'm not into it as much here as I was in Denver, but I've always gotten really involved in the political scene.

"I worked in the legislature - in the House of Representatives in Denver - as a docket clerk for two sessions-just to watch what goes on in the state house. A docket clerk is the person that keeps a record of where each bill is assigned, what time it goes to what committee, and when it goes to be printed. A docket clerk knows exactly where each bill is at all times and makes sure that it goes through the proper order. It is



"A BOOKSTORE SHOULD REFLECT YOUR OWN INTERESTS AND PERSONALITY."

very interesting to be on the floor of the House and watch what goes on-through the whole thing. People come in and visit and sit up in the gallery for maybe half an hour, and it doesn't really make a whole lot of sense to them. But if you're there for a whole session it's very interesting. It can be very deadly dull and lengthy because everything has to go through a certain set of procedures. It is an experience that you certainly wouldn't want to miss if you had the opportunity."

But owning a bookstore is an opportunity, also, because new and interesting people always come in. Not only have many of the talented people in Steamboat dropped into the Brown Book Corner, but also many nationally famous people have like Euell Gibbons, Mary McGregor, Mary Calhoun, and Dick Cavett.

"A lot of people know this story, but it's about Euell Gibbons, the man who wrote *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, and all of those "Stalking...." books. It was a Saturday afternoon in

February one year and the store was really crowded. It was a Three Wire Winter. The snow was really up there. But, this man came in and he said, 'Do you have any books on the edible plants in the area?' I said, 'Oh yeah.' I thought it was a little strange because we don't usually sell things like that in February. I showed him *The Rocky Mountain Edible Plants* and he said, 'Oh I have Harrington.' (That was the author of that book.) I said 'Well, then there's this,' and I showed him *The Western States' Edible Plants* or something like that. He said, 'I have that, too.' I said, 'Well, you have the best. What are you looking for?' He said, 'Do you have *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*?' I said, 'Oh! People around here just read that for fun in the wintertime. When they go out to really get plants they take one one of the books that I just showed you.'

Finally, the man with him said, 'I think you'd better tell them who you are.' The man said, 'I'm Euell Gibbons.' The whole store was silent. One of the boys went home and told his wife, 'I just left Mrs. Brown with her foot in her mouth!' However, Mr. Gibbons was very nice and he admitted that *Stalking the Wild Asparagus* really was geared to the East Coast. He was in the process of writing another book for around here, and it was going to come out in a few years.

When the book did come out, it was called *Stalking the Faraway Places*. What a strange thing to say! I don't think that we're a faraway place! But, he was probably the most famous author who came in here.

"Another author that came in was Mary Calhoun. She introduced herself to me but I didn't know who she was. I had heard that there was a childrens book author in Steamboat Springs, but I hadn't heard of her before because, by the time that she was writing, my children were already grown. When she came in I thought, 'What in the world has she written?' So I looked her up in



"SOMETIMES IT'S JUST LIKE CHRISTMAS
OPENING NEW SHIPMENTS OF BOOKS!"

Books in Print and I saw this long column of books written by Mary Calhoun. I was impressed!

"Dick Cavett was in here once, too. We were forewarned this time, though. Even then we weren't expecting him, but it was kind of fun when he came in. He came in and Kevin was working real hard at the desk because it was almost 5:00. Kevin and his wife lived on Spruce Street, then, and he was getting ready to go home. I was in the kitchen trying to get something finished before I had to come back out front.

"This couple came in and Kevin said, 'Can I help you with anything?' the man said, 'Oh no, we're just browsing.' Kevin went back to work and all of a sudden he thought, 'That voice, that familiar voice! He looked up and sure enough it was Dick Cavett. Then Kevin had to figure out a way to get me out here. I recognized him, too, and I thought, 'I wonder if Kevin knows who this is?' We finally discovered that we all knew who everybody was. We never did say, 'Oh, you're Dick Cavett,' but he understood that we knew who he was. They were just a very nice couple.'"

The Brown Book Corner has been visited by many famous and interesting people, but no one is as talented as Mrs. Florence Brown is at getting along with people. You'd never believe that Mrs. Brown doesn't know every single person in Steamboat because she treats everyone to her smile, friendliness, and hospitality. Even though she isn't an old-timer, she has, indeed, made her mark on the community of Steamboat Springs.



"ONE OF THE BOYS WENT HOME AND TOLD
HIS WIFE, 'I JUST LEFT MRS. BROWN WITH
HER FOOT IN HER MOUTH!'"