When Cari Michaels was finishing up her undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota, she decided to spend a couple of months as a Courier for Frontier Nursing Service. Her educational experiences and goals had led her to search for an opportunity that would allow her to explore her interests and passions!

Cari believed that she wanted to work in childhood development and public health. At that point in her studies, she wanted to do something that would show that she was taking her degree seriously as well as something that would provide her with substantial experience. She began looking for internships and her search came to an end when a childhood friend, whose aunt was a FNS Nurse Practitioner, spoke to her about Frontier Nursing Service.

Cari made a call to FNS and headed down to Wendover in 1988. Although her arrival was unexpected due to lost paperwork of some sort, she was greeted by a fellow Courier at the airport and given a quick run-down of FNS.

When Cari arrived at Wendover, she walked into a very important board meeting and was put straight to work washing dishes in the kitchen for hours that night. Looking back, Cari remembers the sincerity of Kate Ireland, a kind-hearted staff member at Wendover, as she made the effort to come into the kitchen to introduce herself to the new Courier.

Shortly after she arrived, Cari observed a C-section and had the opportunity to be beside a woman through both her labor and delivery. As a Courier, she shadowed pediatricians at the hospital, delivered supplies to clinics twice a week, and helped with dinners at Wendover. Her most memorable experiences involved nurses and nursing aides. The nurses would make rounds assisting people every day and helping people who couldn’t get into the clinic. Cari explained, “When you talk about getting a deep experience of how people live and what their challenges are, that is where I really learned it.”

Cari reflected about her time spent in the clinics and hospitals. In order to receive academic credit, Cari conducted research during her time as a Courier as well, mainly focusing on contributing factors to childhood obesity. Overall, Cari performed whatever duties were asked of her, which tended to vary based on what the needs were each day. “It was certainly the type of experience where people say you are doing things you never expected to do—because there were just so many needs.”

One day, while working with a nurse practitioner at the Beechfork Clinic, a member of the community came running into the clinic asking for assistance with

- Cari Michaels
an accident that had just occurred. The courier drove the nurse practitioner to the site of the accident where they saw a vehicle that had gone off the road into a ditch. Inside the car was an injured woman, who happened to be an employee at Frontier. They were able to roll down the window just enough for Cari to climb through and brace the woman’s neck. Actually, Cari was the only one at the scene of the accident who was able to fit through the tiny opening! The Courier did everything the Nurse Practitioner told her to do to treat the injured woman. Four men driving by noticed the accident and helped lift the woman out of the car. The woman was taken to the hospital and, thankfully, recovered. This incident occurred not too long after Cari arrived at Wendover, giving her the opportunity to jump into action in Hyden fairly quickly.

At the end of her two-month Courier experience, Cari packed up and headed back home. Shortly after this, she was asked to consider taking a job with FNS. Cari applied and was offered and accepted a position at Wendover. In April of 1989, Cari moved to Wendover to take over the position of Courier Coordinator and the Wendover Manager.

When she arrived, Cari remembers that Wendover seemed a bit neglected. She decided to work with the new Director to put Wendover back on the map! They worked towards putting the Big House on the National Register of Historic Places. In order to make community members feel more welcome at the Big House, Cari reinstated Mary Breckinridge’s tea time, inviting the local community. They even brought speakers in occasionally to attract a larger crowd.

Additionally, Cari and the Director, along with the help of local women, began a Garden Committee in which women in the community worked on the grounds at Wendover. This was another hands-on way to make the community of Hyden feel welcome at FNS! As the Courier Coordinator, Cari led a few eighteen-year-olds as well as a couple of Couriers in their early twenties. These Couriers performed the daily tasks that Cari assigned on the whiteboard, which often included driving to and supplying clinics. Frequently, Cari would consult with the Couriers to ensure that they were matched with tasks that reflected their interests. Cari worked with these young, eager, and smart individuals who traveled to Wendover with their curiosity and excitement about what their Courier experience would hold for them. “I loved being a part of other people’s experiences at that time of their lives.”

Cari’s experiences as a Courier herself, Courier Coordinator, and Wendover Manager have made a lasting impact in her life. When asked when in her professional career path she has felt the most confident, she will reply, time and time again, with these positions. She loved meeting people in the community, being the liaison between the Couriers and community members, and working with groups that came into Wendover wanting to know all about Frontier Nursing Service!