Larry Wilson Oral History Interview

October 15, 2011

Debo: My name is Debo Powers and today is October 15, 2011. I'm interviewing for the first time Larry Wilson. This interview is taking place at 286 Kintla Ranch Road north of Polebridge, Montana. This interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and is part of the North Fork History Project. So, Larry, tell us a little bit about your early background, where and when you were born.

Larry: I was born in Kalispell in 1937, and [I have been in this area] except for a short period after I graduated from college when I went to Arizona thinking I wanted to get out of Montana. Two years convinced me I wanted to come home, so I came home and started teaching in Columbia Falls in 1960. In 1974, I quit teaching and went into the logging business and I retired from that in 2002, and here I am.

Debo: And here you are. So how did you get to the North Fork? How did you find out about it?

Larry: It's interesting. This project caused me to think about the first time I was here, because I always thought when my dad bought Kintla Ranch was when we really came here. But the first time that I can remember we came to the North Fork was during World War II. I'm not sure of the year, 1942 I think, maybe 1943, but I was 4 or 5 years old. My dad had just been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and had leave. We came home and we camped at the mouth of Whale Creek. I was pretty small, so my dad carried me as we forded the creek and we went fishing at Whale Creek. He caught two 15-pound bull trout that day that we kept alive for the whole time that we were camping there and then took home and smoked. At that time the old homestead barn was sitting near the mouth of Whale Creek, and we found a dead coyote inside. Little kids aren't turned off by dead coyotes, so my dad helped me and we saved the skull and bleached it and I had it in my room until I graduated from college, I guess.

So that was the first time in the North Fork, and then after the war in 1947 my dad bought Kintla Ranch [from Matt and Mata Brill]. That really started when we lived here. When he sold it in 1953, the next summer the new owners of Kintla Ranch didn't operate it as a dude ranch and hired me as a caretaker, and the money that I earned as a caretaker allowed me to buy this property from Tom Reynolds. So, basically, I've been here since 1947.

Debo: When your family owned Kintla Ranch did they operate it as a dude ranch?

Larry: Oh yes. My dad was a game warden at the time, so my mother really operated Kintla Ranch. We had a wrangler, a cook, and two girls that did housekeeping and waited tables and sometimes a handyman.

Debo: You had guest houses, so people came up and stayed?

Larry: At that time Kintla Ranch had six housekeeping cabins where people could come and rent the cabins and cook and stay there on their own, and we had eight cabins up around the lodge for guests who ate at the lodge. I think they were pretty expensive in those days, $10 a night I think.

Debo: That's great. What age were you when your family owned Kintla Ranch?

Larry: They bought it in 1947, so I was 10.

Debo: As a young boy you probably had a good time around the ranch.

Larry: Oh yeah, this is a great place for kids.

Debo: Yes, I bet.

Larry: Bart Monahan was still on his homestead, and we would go visit him. We rode horses anywhere and played kick the can on horseback. Matt Brill came and helped. Anytime we had pack groups Matt and Mata [pronounced Máy-ta] came and helped, so I knew the Brills. The Holcombs [Harry and Lena] and Wurtz's [Frank and Ella] were all still here living on the North Fork at that time.

Debo: When you had guests come up you took them on hikes?

Larry: Well, we took them on day rides. Mostly then the guests that we had were not like the [ones who went to McFarlands]. At McFarlands [Jack and Mary] they were a western cowboy type dude ranch based on horseback riding. The Kintla Ranch was more a longstanding clientele of people who had been coming here for 20-some years. They came to fish mostly, but we took day rides and occasional pack trips for people to fish at Kintla Lake and Upper Kintla Lake, and would hike into Frozen Lake. There was no road then. They fished a lot in Canada, also. At that time the border was open. A man, a Canadian who acted for the U.S. and Canada, could sell Canadian fishing licenses, so we would drive up there, get some fish. There wasn't much floating the river in those days.

Debo: That's kind of new, isn't it? When you were a young boy and you were living at Kintla Ranch did you go to school up here?

Larry: No. In the winter we went to Kalispell and I went to school in Kalispell. That was kind of a change, because during the war I went to 13 different elementary schools for six grades, and then when we came home to stay after the war then I attended school in Kalispell.

Debo: How many months a year was your family up here?

Larry: My mother would come as soon as the road was open, and then my little brother [Joe] and I would come as soon as school was out, and my dad would just be here on weekends and during his vacation time from the State.

Debo: Because he worked for the State?

Larry: Yes. We stayed until school started, although my mother stayed longer because we had the hunting concession in Canada at that time, so we ran a hunting camp until the end of October at least and if the snow wasn't too deep until the end of November.

Debo: You had the ideal way to grow up.

Larry: Yes.

Debo: You are a lucky man, Larry Wilson. What was the North Fork like during that time when you were young?

Larry: Well, I get a kick out of people who say it's like it was now, and it isn't. At that time the homesteaders were still here. They were just beginning to get old, and of course they sold to retire, many of them. That was the only real asset they had, their land. And so slowly summer people came on the scene. The very first, I think, in 1948, the second year we were here, were the Foremans [Orville and Helen]. They were the first of the real summer people that we knew on this side of the river. There were some summer people that you will be interviewing who were Park employees that we never thought about. That was not part of our social life, I guess. But the Park employees were also summer residents and many of them then later bought land, like the McNeils [Ed and Cecily] and Maas's [Paul and Maxine] and the Walters [George and Dorothy], and they had cabins then on this side of the river. [Actually, the McNeils were not Park people.]

Debo: Edwards [Burt and Thelma] and Harts [Ray and Fern].

Larry: Was Hart a summer employee at the Park?

Debo: No, he wasn't a summer employee, but he was up here in the summer. Okay, well you knew a lot of the homesteaders then.

Larry: Oh yeah, they were neat.

Debo: Tell me about some of them.

Larry: Well, Bart Monahan was a bachelor homesteader up here. He lived in a little cabin on property that the Chrismans [Allen and Charlotte; earlier Baird and Esther] own now and in a very little cabin about 8 x 12 feet inside, and the interior of his cabin was black from creosote from the lodgepole pine that he burned for firewood. He was one of the neat guys that I really liked. He was always friendly and would sit and talk. He was getting quite old at that time, but he took one bath a year and that was always on a sunny day in May. He would pack his galvanized tub out under the overhang of his porch, build a fire under it, heat water, take his bath and put on brand new long johns in May, which he had cut the buttons off and sewed up the front. The only buttons remaining were the trap door, and he didn't take them off until the next May.

So, if you touched his bed your hand would be black, because everything was just coated solid black. We never ate there. [Laughs] I don't know how he ate, but he was one of the neat guys, and Charlie Wise was another. At the time we knew him, he was a bachelor. His wife had died in the flu epidemic in 1918 up here. He homesteaded what is now Square Peg Ranch. His little daughter choked on a button. He carried her in his arms from Polebridge to Belton in the snow. He probably went on the train from Belton to Whitefish where there was a hospital, but she died. So, his whole family died. By the time I knew him he was quite elderly and was the caretaker of the oil well in Canada just across the border. But he always treated all of us kids like we were adults. He gave me my first shot of whiskey. My mother was not happy about that, since I was only 11 years old, I think.

We used to have dances every month, the first Saturday of every month, which became NFIA [North Fork Improvement Association] meeting nights. We would have a meeting followed by a dance, and the dance lasted until after midnight [when they had dinner], and sometimes it would

start up again after midnight and go until daylight, just depending on the band, because we always had live music then. And there was no drinking in the buildings. At that time the dances were mostly at the Quarter Circle MC Ranch in the Park or at Kintla Ranch, alternating months, and the men would drink outside. There was no drinking in the building. But boy, Ruth Sondreson when she would catch Loyd drinking she would whop on him good and then make him go to the car and stay there.

Debo: [Laughs]

Larry: But the homesteaders, like Frank and Ella Wurtz, were just super people. I still have a pair of her moccasins that she made from moose hide. My dad always had them. That's what he wore, socks then moccasins, then his pacs in the winter so that when he got into the tent or in camp at night he could take off his boots and wear his moccasins. The Holcombs, you know, were tremendous people. Nobody who ever met Lena could forget her smile, I'm sure. When Pa Holcomb would come out he would always say, "Well, come and sit a spell." And when you went into their kitchen, because that's where he always went to sit, then Ma Holcomb would always say, "Well, you've got to have a bite to eat," and she'd bring out something. And they had a big, monstrous garden. They canned all their own vegetables. They canned their meat. Just amazing people, amazingly tough people those homesteaders. You know Frank Newton was a packer for the Forest Service. His wife, Ethel, was the daughter of another homesteader, so yes, they were just neat.

Billy Adair was still there, but I never really knew him. At Polebridge the first people I really knew was old "Smilin' Ben Rover," who never smiled, and his wife Annette. They had the post office at Polebridge, and she was infamous for reading everybody's postcards. When people complained she just said, "Well if you want it private you put it in an envelope and seal it. If you write it on a postcard it's for everybody to read," and she did. She was always commenting on postcards that people received.

Debo: Was the post office at their cabin, the Ben Rover cabin?

Larry: No, no. That was not even there then. They lived in what is now the saloon. And the post office was in the store.

Debo: Okay.

Larry: There was also a post office at that time at Moose City. Madge Cooper Terrian was the postmaster. Madge was not a homesteader. The homesteader at the border was Frank Clute. Madge retired from the railroad as a telegrapher, and she bought Frank Clute's place. I don't know whether he moved, he died or what, but Madge was there and she always believed that oil would be found on the North Fork, so she was the real classic case of "land poor." She had several thousand acres scattered around the whole North Fork, property that's now attached . . . let's see, who owns it today? I think Jim Gaitis bought some of it from Stoltz that Madge owned and Peter Guynn owned some. Both of the homesteads at Whale Creek and the Community Hall belonged to Madge, and Madge and Ollie donated the land that the Community Hall sits on to the NFIA. She had thousands of acres of oil leases in Canada, and that's where the name of Moose City came from. She had it all planned that the big hay meadow there, that's now an airstrip, would be laid out as a town when the oil boom came. So, she had it all laid out and planned. But, of course, it never happened, in her lifetime anyway. And she died, I must have

been 25 or 26 years old because I was teaching school in Columbia Falls when she died [1961], and Ollie then stayed on the North Fork and worked for the Foremans for several years and lived in their lake cabin which is Ed Peterson's homestead house for two or three years. Then Ollie moved to town and lived with me until he died [1975]. He didn't die at my house; he died of lung cancer in a VA hospital, but he was a World War II vet.

And Ralph Thayer, of course, owned the property just south of me and he was one of the last homesteaders to die, actually. Somebody asked me, "Gee, didn't he ever marry?" I think he married five or six times. He had lots of wives; he just outlived them, is all. He had just started building the cabin at the Ford Ranger Station when he left for World War I, and they didn't finish it until he came back, and then he finished it working for the Forest Service. He was probably one of the more famous early rangers up here. He ran like a deer and laid out most of the trails in the North Fork on the Forest Service side. One time running through the woods he jumped over a big downed larch tree and lit right in the middle of a grizzly bear, and just kept running. He got up a tree, but the grizzly got him by the leg. It didn't quite pull him out of the tree but pulled his boot down. Injured him pretty badly, but he managed to walk—I can't remember exactly now, six or nine miles out to where somebody picked him up. He didn't run as fast after that. He died relatively recently, only 30 years ago or so [1983]. His homestead cabin is owned by Nancy Hubbell today, and his homestead has been divided into many parts. Annemarie Harrod is on there, Tad Brooks, Green, Novak, Docal, Halsey.

Debo: He had a big piece of land.

Larry: He had 160 acres. Well, the Novaks and the Docals, I know, each have 20 acres now. I don't know what Annemarie's got, and Green has more than 10, but I don't think it's 20. I'm not sure, but yes, it's broken up pretty badly. First he sold his homestead house and 40 acres to the Hubbles [John and Nancy]. I don't know why or how, but they bought it and then he had 120 left. He called me from the Soldiers' Home in Columbia Falls one time and offered me the property for $1,000 an acre, which was a little bit low at the time but not way low. I said, "Geez, why did you call me?" He said, "Well, I thought maybe you would buy it and you wouldn't subdivide it." I said, "No, I don't have that kind of money. $120,000—if I bought it I would have to subdivide it, so you don't want to sell it to me." So he sold it to Johnny Mathison who had purchased his original 40, to Johnny and his partner at that time, Ed Ernst. They were horse loggers. As soon as Ralph was dead they subdivided it into 10-acre parcels, so that's how it got all broken up.

What other homesteaders? Well, Tom Reynolds wasn't a homesteader but he had been here longer than anybody. He's the one I bought this property from. He purchased it during the Depression for $1 an acre. That was the back taxes owed, and he sold it to me for $10 an acre. And then he got to thinking. I think I was 14 or 15 when I bought it, and he was afraid the people up here would think he took advantage of me, so he threw in a Model T truck with a spare engine. I sold the truck that fall for enough to pay for the land.

Debo: Really?

Larry: So, the land was really free.

Debo: That's fantastic.

Larry: Yeah. The interesting thing was it had a spare engine, and the Model T truck that it came out of was sitting on the property. It had been there for years and years and years. When we were kids we would walk from Kintla Ranch out to the main road to get the mail and we would play in that truck, and about five years after I bought this property the truck disappeared. I later found out someone had seen Frank Evans loading it up. So, I called Frank and he said, "Well, Tom Reynolds gave it to me." I said, "Well, I don't think so, since it wasn't his anymore. It was mine and on my property." It was kind of a landmark where it sat, but Frank took it. I think he fixed it up or used it as parts of several to put together one and his son I think still owns it, so that was probably better than if it just sat there and rusted anyway.

Tom and Marie Peterson were here when we came. Merry O'Hare owns their house now, and they lived here year-round. Tom used to work, but she was a lot younger than Tom. After we moved here he was ill with degenerative heart disease, and they would take him out for most of the winter. But while they were living here she would snowshoe from their homestead about eight miles out to the main road and meet the mail and then snowshoe eight miles home. For all the people that lived on Trail Creek at that time they had a little cabin, just 6 x 6' or something, that sat right at the junction at Trail Creek Road and the main road with a little sheet metal stove in it and they could sit and wait for the mail. Once the mail came then you could answer your mail sitting in that little cabin and put it in the mailbox, and the mailman on his way down would pick it up. But high school kids in the mid-1950s just put a cable around that little cabin and pulled it up the road. It all fell apart and it's never been replaced.

Debo: That's too bad.

Larry: Although Tom Marx, who owns that site now, has told us many times that we could rebuild Uncle Tom's Cabin if we wanted to, but we never have.

Debo: Is that what it was called?

Larry: That's what it was called, Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Debo: Did the mail come twice a week like it does now?

Larry: Twice a week, just like it does now. It was a little different; we had mailbags. You put your outgoing mail in a bag that the mailman would take to town, and you picked up your mail in the other bag. It was quite a contest up here who had the best-looking mailbags. They were all sorted in town, and they would put your mail in a bag and you would take that bag out, put your other bag with the outgoing mail in the box for the mailman to take to town. And if you didn't have any outgoing you still sent the empty bag in. I always wondered what happened to all those mailbags.

Debo: Did people actually decorate them?

Larry: Oh, sure.

Debo: So, you got your own mailbag back each time?

Larry: Yes, every time. You had to provide your own, and ours said Kintla Ranch on it. Most others had Reynolds or Peterson or whatever their names were, and they were made from a

variety of things. At that time everybody bought feed in 100-pound bags, and the feed bags were flowered patterns and stuff. People used those for mailbags and pillow cases and women even made skirts out of flour bags, feed bags.

Debo: That's interesting.

Larry: And diapers, because there were no throw-away diapers in those days. What other homesteaders were here then? Ed Peterson was here, but nobody saw much of him. He was gone by about 1950 or 1951. He had shot and killed Billy Kruse up here in 1932. He was found innocent by reason of self-defense, but he was always real shy after that. I met one of his great-nephews or something who was here this summer, so hopefully we're going to get some pictures of him, Ed and his brother Emil, which is the property the Foremans own now.

Debo: You mentioned the Newtons, Ethel Newton.

Larry: Well Ethel was a Hensen. She was a granddaughter of A.G. Vance who homesteaded down there on the flat where Iola Mason owns now. That was the Vance homestead. And the Hensens [Ben and May; May was Vance's daughter] were the ones responsible for naming Polebridge. Billy Adair built what we now call the Polebridge Mercantile in 1914, or that's when it opened, and the townsite was called Adair. If you look at the old maps, that's what's on it, Adair. But the Hensens felt that Bill Adair was charging too much, so they built another store that was located about halfway between the Merc and the bridge. I've got some old pictures of it in the house somewhere.

Debo: Which side of the road was it on?

Larry: It was on left-hand side, right where the Loop Road comes around. It was just past that meadow and, of course, the remnants all burned in the 1988 Red Bench Fire. Up until then you could see the collapsed building still there. That's how May Hensen got the postmistress job which had previously been at Kintla Post Office in the Park. They closed it and moved down to Polebridge and Mrs. Hensen is the one who named Polebridge. She named it, of course, after the bridge. And they ran that store. It was never open when I was up here, so it closed sometime [around 1936].

Debo: And she called that post office Polebridge?

Larry: Yes. That was the original Polebridge post office. Then when it closed Adair finally got the post office at the mercantile, and after Adair sold then it became known as the Polebridge Mercantile.

Debo: Do you know what year that was?

Larry: Well, I think it was about 1948 when the Rovers [Ben and Annette] came [actually, they owned the Merc from 1943 to 1955]. That's when "Smilin' Ben" showed up.

Debo: He never smiled, huh?

Larry: He never smiled. I never saw him smile.

Debo: Did everybody call him "Smilin' Ben," or just you?

Larry: I don't know. Just me for sure. I know I did. All of us kids did. He and Annette sold that place four or five times. Well, they didn't actually sell it. They leased it for a year and the people were supposedly going to have an option to buy, but he made them buy the inventory. He didn't move out until about the first snow, and then the people were trapped there for the winter with no customers, or precious few because there were still a few homesteaders around that bought a few things in the winter. The mail stopped there, but they couldn't make a living at it. Then Ben and his wife would cancel the lease in the spring and come back for the summer themselves.

I've got a newspaper article that was written by a lady in Yuma, Arizona who said she and her husband with their little kids had spent a winter at Polebridge. One of the "customers" of the Rovers.

Tom Ladenburg was not a homesteader, but I think it was his great uncle who was one of the original employees of the Anaconda Company that came to file for coal rights and homesteads that they would then sell to the Anaconda Company. Even though the coal didn't pan out, some of them ended up keeping theirs. Mickey Berne was his name. He kept his and bought a bunch of others and so ended up with that big place.

Also of the original people up here was Pat Walsh's uncle. Pat was the son of a sheriff [Dick Walsh] for many years in Flathead County and his older brother [John and Harriet Walsh] was one of the first people that came up here with the oil people, building I-don't-know-what-kind of roads to move in big steam engines to power the drilling plants. If you go to the head of Lower Kintla Lake you will find the oil boiler still laying there in the water. It came up here pulled by horses. It's hard to imagine.

Debo: It is hard.

Larry: And across the border in Canada, only about three miles from the border, is another oil well that also has a big steam boiler. It's still sitting there, I'm sure. It's been ten years since I've been across the border here, but at that time the oil derrick still stood, too, and most of the buildings.

Debo: So, if you hike up to Lower Kintla you can find it?

Larry: Oh yeah. It's sticking right up at the edge of the water.

Debo: It would be good to take a picture of that.

Larry: I'm sure there are pictures of it. I don't know if I have any anywhere or not, but probably. It's been quite a while since I've hiked to Kintla. We used to horseback ride up there a lot to Upper Kintla to camp. But the Park was easier to enter then. You could camp anywhere you wanted and you didn't have to have permission and check in. If we decided we were going to go to Boulder Pass we would just saddle the horses and go, and I don't know if that would fly today.

Debo: It wouldn't today.

Larry: No. You've got to pay a fee to camp on our land.

Debo: Because there are so many people, I guess.

Larry: Yeah.

Debo: The original homesteaders used the Inside Road to come up, right?

Larry: Until 1954 the Inside Road was a better road than the main road. In 1954 the spruce beetle epidemic hit the North Fork and the spruce were all infested, and so the Forest Service improved the road from Columbia Falls to Whale Creek Road, and that's when they began building the side roads—Whale Creek Road. I don't know about Red Meadow, but they logged heavily up Red Meadow. All the drainages were logged; Trail Creek, too. And the Forest Service remained involved for many years while heavy logging went on up here, and that improved the road so that it was better than the Inside Road. If you travel the Inside Road today it's about like it was.

Debo: It's about like it was back then?

Larry: Back then, right. My mother and Ruth Sondreson were the big speed demons on the road because Ruth was cooking for a logging crew and my mother was cooking for the guest ranch, and so weekly they made trips to Belton to buy groceries. They didn't go to Columbia Falls very often because the road was better to Belton. And they would, of course, feed breakfast, get in the car and run like mad for Belton, get their groceries and get back in time to cook dinner. When my mother once made the trip in 2½ hours that was considered a record. If you've ever been up Anaconda Hill and all those narrow roads, you know. It's a narrow road, but the cars weren't as good, but there weren't as many of them on the road either. I've always been a counter, and when we came up the road we would count the cars we met. 20 cars was big—you know, it must be the 4th of July or something to have 20 cars on the road. I still count cars, and this summer I averaged 30 cars between Camas Bridge and Polebridge every day until after Labor Day, and 10 or 15 from Polebridge to here. And since I go through the Park I never count the ones to Columbia Falls because that road is too rough now.

Debo: So what was the road like when you first came up here as a young boy?

Larry: It literally had grass growing in the middle of the road, and when you met somebody you both had to get over. And when logging trucks came you sometimes had to back up to find a place to get by, because they couldn't back up. The first time after we bought Kintla Ranch and we came here the thing I remember was, it was after dark when we got here, and from the North Fork Road down to Kintla Ranch, which is a mile and a half, you couldn't see the sky because the branches of the trees overlapped the whole road. It was that way almost to the border. Grass in the middle. It was rough. Flat tires were common, of course, but the biggest thing I remember is people who had banged their oil pan and knocked a hole in their oil pan and lost their oil. There were all kinds of interesting remedies for fixing that. You could drive in a wooden peg and then you wouldn't leak too much, and you could make it to town. Or you could take it off. Now Matt Brill would always patch his. He took the oil pan off, put a bolt through with leather washers on both sides of the hole, seal it up that way and keep going.

Debo: Those were the days.

Larry: Yeah. It's really kind of fun. I complain about the road sometimes, too, but the road was a lot different then than it is now. The closest thing they have to the original road is the Inside Road, which is about the same as it ever was, but on the North Fork side only from probably Holton's [Ron and Peggy] north to the border it's pretty much on the same roadbed—same mud problem, same drainage problem and it's very nearly like the road was then, except over the years with power graders and stuff they have widened it so it's not a one-way road. It's basically a two-way road. But still on the original track and the road in many places is the lowest part of the terrain, so the water melts there. But back then people laid in their groceries. Madge Cooper Terrian at the border would always have all of her groceries in by October 15th.

Debo: For the whole winter?

Larry: For the whole winter, because you didn't know. Any time after the 15th of October it could snow and you would be stuck. The road, when it was full, was not plowed all winter until late spring, and then if there were logging jobs the loggers would plow it. On occasion the county would bring bulldozers and open the road. Trail Creek Road, the year that Tom Peterson died [1962], Loyd Sondreson brought his bulldozers up. Tom had spent the previous month at Polebridge because he wanted to be on the North Fork to die and Loyd Sondreson plowed Trail Creek to Tom's house so he could go home, and he died about a week later in his own house that he built. Marie lived for many years after that and wrote her book [*Homestead Memories*]. She was killed in a car accident just outside of Columbia Falls [1978]. The homesteaders were tough.

Debo: So, they could be snowed in for the whole winter, basically.

Larry: Oh yeah, they expected to be snowed in for the whole winter. When I was in high school and college we would come up the road as far as it was plowed, wherever that might be. I can remember the year I was a freshman in college it was plowed to Trail Creek Road for a logging job; the loggers kept it open and then we snowshoed to the border to visit Madge and Ollie. Madge always had peanut butter. Ollie loved peanut butter, but he didn't get to have any until some of us kids were there, then she would bring out the peanut butter. But we would hike to just across Colt's Creek and then cut across the hay meadow to the house. When we got within sight of the house we would shoot a hole in the chimney to let them know we were coming. She would have the peanut butter out and the cocoa on by the time we got to the house.

Debo: [Laughs] You didn't go to school up here, but there were some schools up here.

Larry: No, not then.

Debo: Not then, the schools were over at that point?

Larry: The schools closed during World War II. I think when you talk to Naomi Hoiland, she can tell you. I think she was a 1st grader the last year there was a school up here. Her grandmother [Ruth Coan] taught at the school. So that would have been 1941, 1942, somewhere in that area. And, of course, it was only grades 1 through 8 when it was here. It's interesting, the Land Use Planning Committee received input from the new landowners in the 1980s. They didn't want to encourage a school up here because that would bring more people, which might cause the road to be paved, and might cause all kinds of disasters, I guess. But it gives people something to talk about.

Debo: So, there were no schools up here except for . . .

Larry: Jerry [Wernick's] boarding school, the Tamarack Springs Academy. I'm not sure when he opened. It's been a while now, since the 1980s maybe.

Debo: I think so. So, the social life up here, you said there were square dances once a month.

Larry: That was only in the summer. In the summer they alternated between Kintla Ranch and Quarter Circle MC, but of course both of those operations closed in the winter. Somebody might stay at either place, but the roads weren't open, the roads weren't plowed. In the winter the homestead families for years had gotten together for social events. Holcombs was one of the most popular places because Lena had a piano, and so they just moved all the furniture and danced, did square dances or whatever. If you go there it's a pretty small living room by today's standards. But the thing I remember in the 1950s were canasta parties. Everybody played canasta. It's kind of a rummy game played with seven decks of cards, and it's a fairly lengthy game. A lot of people can play, and if you need more people you put double canasta decks together and you can play as many as you want to. So, there were card parties that went around from house to house, and then as now all the women were good cooks. There were a lot of dinner parties, but cards were a big thing. In the homestead days they were heartier. We have our beach party now on New Year's Day, no matter what.

Debo: I've been there.

Larry: We go down and build a fire [at Abbott's Flats] and have hot dogs and beans and spend two or three hours on the riverside. Well, in the homestead days they would gather at the mouth of Trail Creek, usually in February, and they would camp there for a week catching whitefish to can. They would smoke them and can them and the women would be doing that with tents set everywhere. That's a two-mile walk in there today, and it was then, too. Everybody snowshoed in and brought all their stuff and set up and had a big community camp, smoking fish.

Debo: It was probably cold.

Larry: Well, yeah, probably. It's nasty here in the winter sometimes. It was a certain weekend in February; it was the height of the big fishing thing. But people didn't go to town. The only time they went to town was if somebody was really sick or somebody died. Mid Connelly's grandfather died up here at his son's homestead, which is now owned by Hoilands. What was his name? Austin Weikert was the homesteader, and it was his father who died. Various locals, including Charlie Wise, were there for the whole thing. They took a week to get his body to town in the winter.

Debo: A whole week?

Larry: A whole week. They wrapped him up and they broke trail for horses part of the way, pulling him on a sled out of there initially. From Polebridge down I know they used horses and a sled. I'm not sure where the horses actually started to pull, but ended up it took nearly a week.

Debo: I wonder why they didn't just bury him up here.

Larry: Well, there were four feet of snow on the ground. And he was froze stiff. They just left him on the sled at night, of course. He didn't care, and they would go from one homestead to another, so no doubt some days they could have made it further but they stopped at homesteads, and that's what people did then. You just stopped wherever you could for the night. Adair started his whole business by having an overnight place for people to stay [on the Park side]. When Matt and Mata Brill got married they came by horse and wagon up the Inside Road, stayed one night at Sullivan Meadows, one night somewhere just north of Polebridge, Big Prairie probably, and were sure they could make it home to Kintla Ranch the third night, but the river was running high and they didn't make it in time. It got dark and it was raining hard, so they slept under the wagon the third night before getting home.

Debo: What time of year was that?

Larry: That was in June, so the river was high and you don't just jump into it.

Debo: And people used to take horses and wagons across that river?

Larry: Yes, but June is not a good time. That's why they had the flying machines and the cable cars that people could ride across, and so you would arrange for people to pick you up from the other side. But, you know, in the homestead days there were 14 homesteads in Big Prairie, and that was the initial settlement on the North Fork. But in 1910 that ended when it became Glacier Park. The Park didn't harass the homesteaders at first. It took them a couple of years to get going, and then they started pressing on the homesteaders and stopping them from hunting and trapping. Most of the homesteaders made their living by working for the Park or the Forest Service in the summer, and there was trapping and working on their homestead in the winter. The women were left home all summer many times. Mata Brill was a notable exception because she cooked at Lake McDonald Lodge and so did Matt, so they were gone together.

But you hear the stories of the big fires. In the late 1920s the Holcombs buried a lot of their possessions when they abandoned their place because they were afraid it would burn. It didn't, but they didn't find all their stuff afterwards, perhaps because they couldn't remember where everything was, so I don't know what they were missing.

The only treasure I know about on the North Fork was in the winter of 1946 or 1947 Kintla Ranch Lodge burned to the ground. The guy who had been managing it that year disappeared about three days later, and all of the income from the hunting season disappeared with him. He always maintained it was in the lodge when it burned, but I don't think so, because the story was that there were 200 silver dollars included in the checks and money. I've been over that site with a metal detector and never found any silver dollars. But we did find the silver, Mata Brill's good silver in a metal box under the ashes.

Debo: Oh.

Larry: Since I've been here there have been three major floods. Relatively speaking, we thought the 1948 flood was a big flood. It flooded about waist-deep in all of the river cabins at Kintla Ranch. It took a lot of clean-up. But the big flood, of course, was 1964 where parts of the main road were gone. The valley was really flooded. Houses were damaged up here but not washed away, even in 1964. But the most devastating flood up here probably was 1995. It wasn't really a flood anywhere but here, and it was mostly caused by a big log jam below Polebridge that

backed the water up. So, it was backed up at Kintla Ranch where it did not flood in 1964. Cabins flooded again. John Frederick's North Fork Hostel was wet and there were other places that got wet. But they didn't flood for very long—three or four hours and then the dam broke and the water receded, but it was a lot of cleanup. I don't think the hostel was ever really clean until Oliver moved in. He gets in every crack and cranny.

So, flooding is not a big thing. This last spring a lot of people worried about flood insurance, but I wasn't one of them because I'm a mile from the river and up two benches. It's neat to live on the river, but you have to understand the risks if you do that. Fires, north of Trail Creek the 1910 fires burnt a lot of the North Fork and then there were no fires until the 1920s. Then there were no big fires again the years I worked for the Forest Service from 1955 to 1960. We were praying for a fire to get the overtime. We had a couple of little fires and not much overtime, but not many fires up here. I think the spruce beetle epidemic removed so much of the spruce that that eliminated major fires for a long time.

Then in 1988 we had the Red Bench Fire which was gosh, beyond anybody's belief—it was nearly 50,000 acres. And then the Moose Fire came in 2001 and the Robert and Wedge Canyon fires came in 2003. And so now about 70 percent of the North Fork has been burned over again, so it will take 20 or 30 years [to grow up].

I don't know, people say if you fight fires you just postpone big fires, and my feeling is if you manage the forest you don't ever have big fires, because if you properly manage you would have mixed age trees in every drainage. People were all against the big clear-cuts, but when you drive out of here and get out on the bluff there where you can see all the open mountains and look kind of southwest you will see a big green patch, 100 acres or more. That big green patch was right in the middle of the Wedge Fire, but it had been clear-cut 25 years before and the trees were just second growth trees and they were 15 or 20 feet high. That big fire, when it came into it, burnt hot on the edge and then just slowly went to the ground as it went in and didn't penetrate over about 100 yards.

The same thing is true with fire breaks that were built behind the Ford Ranger Station. If you do that so that you never have too much old timber and not too much young timber . . . I don't have an answer to that, what is the right mix. Ten percent old growth, that's I think a rule today or six percent old growth forest. It seems to me if you set it up like a bell curve, okay 6 percent— those are the As. And if you had 6 percent that are bare ground just being ready for replanting and then you set percentages of forest in each drainage. It can't be forest-wide, it's got to be just in each drainage, so if you've got old growth, you've got mature timber, you've got stuff that's ready for commercial thinning, stuff that's ready for pre-commercial thinning and newly planted, and all those stages of forest laid out properly will prevent a fire that starts on the Whitefish Divide and goes to the Continental Divide, because that's what they do here. They blow from west to east.

But I haven't been hired to be dictator yet, so it might not happen. Actually, that's not an original idea with me. The first person where I heard it was the forest supervisor at Flathead National Forest named Ed Brannon, and that's what he wanted to set up in the forest plan. I don't know if they ever got a forest plan done. They're still fighting about it, I think.

Debo: When you bought this property then what happened here? Did you build this cabin yourself?

Larry: The cabin that is my photo studio—it's 12' x 15' inside—that was the original homestead cabin, and that was the only building that was here.

Debo: Whose was that?

Larry: It was a fellow by the name of Rue. I never met him. They were long gone. During the Depression they left and the land went back to the county for taxes, and Tom Reynolds bought it. He used that little cabin when he was here cutting wood, but it had a sod roof and he had tacked cardboard and I don't know what all to absorb water. You opened the door and it just stunk horribly, because it was moldy and they didn't have a stove. We took the roof off and put a 2" x 4" solid roof on it and used it for several years until I could afford to build this place.

When I built this cabin, it was about the early 1960s. I think Lynn Ogle's parents put the foundation blocks in for this cabin in the early 60s. I was teaching school in Columbia Falls then, and I hired Ollie Terrian to be the builder. I had an old John Deere tractor and all the logs here were standing dead lodgepole that came not just from this property but from all my neighbors. Everybody said, "They're standing dead, take it—you can have them." So, we drug the logs in with the tractor and put up a gin pole and built this cabin and only bought things like putting on the roof. My students from town came up, and I didn't have to work at all. I just set up a kitchen outside, because every boy I ever had in the 8th grade I would bring them up in groups of 5, and we would stay in that little 12 x 15' cabin, and that's why I needed a bigger cabin.

And the kids that I had had previous years—the football team, when we put the roof on it all the lumber went on this roof in one day, in about three hours actually. The whole football team was here. They won a football game on Friday night, the first time they had won a football game in quite a while. They came up here and I cooked and they put the roof on.

Debo: I bet they had a great time.

Larry: Oh, there were so many kids here. We built the scaffolding the weekend before so the guys on the roof could just stand there on the scaffolding and kids from below would hand up the lumber. It was 1" x 12" boards and they just stood in one place and nailed down their little section of the board and another board was coming up and they just kept going and it was all on in no time.

Debo: That's great. What year did you finish your cabin? Of course, cabins are never finished.

Larry: I'm not sure. Mid 60s, about 1963 or 1964, somewhere in there it was finished, not as it is today. What you see here of this log was done then. And then we had a boys' camp here for several years, another schoolteacher in Columbia Falls and I. Over time when I stopped teaching and started logging we would do most of our work up here. One time I had a crew of 25, and so we built the kitchen on, and it needed a shower, so we built the shower on and then didn't even think about a toilet, just didn't think about it. We had used the outhouse for so many years you just didn't think about it. But I was up here one winter shortly after that alone and got sick with the flu, and I'll tell you, going from bed to outhouse, or from bed to boots to warm coat to outhouse and then back, boots off and then the bed, boy that was a real trial. And so the next year I put another addition on the back of the kitchen and we have a septic system and toilet now, in addition to the shower. The shower was an unheard-of really neat modernization.

When we were working here we would eat breakfast at 5:30 in the morning. The guys would be on the job by 6:00 and then they would be done by 2:00. That's when they quit normally, at the latest. Sometimes if things went well they got their job done earlier, then they would fish, swim, do baths in the river or Trail Creek. We used to lay in the water under the Trail Creek bridge. It was kind of dangerous if you were really tired, because I was getting up at 4:30 then. By mid-afternoon I was really dragging sometimes, and I fell asleep a couple of times down there laying in the water and woke up really cold. That water is cold. It felt good on 90-degree days.

Debo: On the days when you were logging did you stay up here year-round?

Larry: Different years. Yes, some years we did. The year we logged the Foremans we were here all winter. Mostly what I tried to do is get jobs in the valley for the winter, come here in the spring and stay all summer and into fall. We always stayed here until Thanksgiving logging, and it depended. You get an open winter and we could stay longer. We would stay on the job until we had to move to town, but we would cut posts and logged over most of the North Fork. We did all the property that's now Moris's [Dennis and Sue], several of the neighbors there, Fishels [Bud and Charlotte], Ladenburgs [Tom and Joan]. We worked on Ladenburg's right up to the day he sold it to the government. I think we worked on Fishel's for five years and Ladenburg's for five or six. We were logging on Fishel's in 1988 when the Red Bench Fire came through. But yes, we didn't stay all winter usually. It's a long winter.

Debo: It is a long winter.

Larry: Because if you log properly you don't want to leave high stumps, so we always promised landowners we would cut stumps lower than eight inches. If there's four feet of snow on the ground that means a lot of digging before you can saw the tree down, and then it's dangerous, too, because you've got the tree well, the hole that it's in. The lip of it can cause a tree to change how it falls, so exciting times.

Debo: Well, tell me about the North Fork Improvement Association. When did it start?

Larry: The North Fork Improvement Association started in 1947, and it was started to improve the road, bring telephones and electricity to the North Fork, and to give the landowners a voice in fish and game regulations. I hate it changed the name. I almost never joined again after they changed the name to the Landowners Association. People in California have Landowners Associations, you know, and if people aren't smart enough to know that the Improvement Association was the Landowners Association, which was one of the arguments for changing it, they're not very bright and shouldn't be here anyway. But every year I think I'm going to put in a proposed amendment to change it back and keep doing it every year until it changes, which is basically what the people did that got it changed to the Landowners Association. They tried it once and it failed badly and the second time I said, "Oh, this is dumb," and I didn't argue about it and it passed.

But I think you will find as you talk to long-time landowners there's a lot of resentment about that name change still to this day, even though it's not your fault, or any of the officers' today's fault. It happened by a vote of the membership, but the old-timers don't like it. And the idea was, like I say, to improve the road, bring electricity and phones and have a say in fish and wildlife matters. Well, we do that still and we've gone through a lot of changes from bitter battling. For a period of time the local people didn't join the Improvement Association and it became mostly a

social thing up here. The social thing was organized and carried out mostly by summer people and the locals weren't here for that. You know, their social lives were different. They were working, didn't have the time that the summer residents had, or whatever the reasons.

It wasn't that anybody was fighting with anybody initially, but over time then the summer residents were concerned about more and more subdivision, and so they started a drive to zone the North Fork. Well that got the locals interested, so then we had several years where the two groups showed up and we would have 150 people at election night. People who had never been to a meeting for years joined and came to vote. It was the locals versus the summer residents and the locals won. I don't know if that would happen today, but the locals won. My dad was a big ring leader in that whole process, and Gus Sonnenberg, because they were against zoning, because there were still a large number of the locals whose major assets were their land, and they didn't think that it was quite right that the summer residents had come in and bought these subdivisions up and now they wouldn't have a chance to do the same thing when they wanted to.

And there was some reason on their side and there's also some reason on the other side, when is the area just changed so much that you can't stand it anymore, it's not the same. Well, I don't know where that is. It's changed now so it's not like it was in the homestead days, but in many ways we have many similarities today. People by and large, even people who disagree, get along. People who dislike other neighbors will still stop and help them if they are stuck on the road, and part of it's because we rely on each other as well as, if you don't have to talk to somebody or see them it's easy for you to decide they're no good. And we have some of that here, but the homesteaders had some of that, too. They had people that fought. Billy Kruse was considered a jerk by everybody up here, except Tom Reynolds who thought he was a great guy. And Tom Reynolds outlasted almost everybody else, so Billy Kruse became a better guy. [Laughs]

But now we've got a pretty good balance. And over time we made peace. About the mid-80s Lynn Ogle and I became heavily involved in the association. We were back-to-back presidents, and our big goal was to unite the community, and we did that with the help of John Frederick and Mike Connors who worked for the Forest Service and we set up the Interlocal Agreement. Okay, we were unhappy with the government. And those first meetings were quite contentious because North Fork residents were mad at the agencies. They didn't like the Wild and Scenic River thing—didn't like everything, hardly anything we liked. They weren't fixing the road right. They weren't grading it often enough. We had, I think, two meetings and then an agency said, "Hey wait a minute. We listened to all your gripes, now you need to listen to some of ours, too, so we'll set up a second yearly meeting." So, we turned it from a once a year meeting on the North Fork to a twice a year meeting. The summer one on the North Fork is hosted by the private groups, and the one in the town in the winter is hosted by the agencies. The idea originally was that then the agencies could shoot back and talk about their concerns with what the landowners were doing wrong.

And it has kind of evolved from that. For a while I wasn't sure we should continue it. It became such a good 'ole boy thing, everybody slapping each other on the back and talking about how great things are and not addressing the issues. And if you address the issues the meeting can be quite long, especially with an argumentative type thing. But I think the current trend is that if the landowners will in advance decide what's bothering them, even if it's just one landowner, and that word gets to the agency that's involved so that the agency knows the questions before they come to the meeting and they come to the meeting to answer those issues, then we have a

chance. Otherwise we have people who want to interpret the Constitution of the United States and whatever, and it doesn't work. Don't tell Duke I said that, because he feels so strongly about it and it just isn't the place, that's all.

Jimmy De Herrera does not decide what the Forest Service is going to do; he just carries out what he's told. But if we have an argument with the Forest Service, Jimmy is still the one to tell it to, because he can pass it on. And if it continues to be a problem then we have the option of going above him and above them and above them until we get to the people that do it. But there's no sense badgering a patrolman in the border patrol about the way Homeland Security has wasted money. He doesn't know. He's just hired and does what he's told, so to me they are just like anybody else who wears a uniform. We should support them. Maybe we don't support the people who set the policies, but them we certainly support. We have a bigger government presence in many ways, but the Forest Service was the big neighbor up here during the logging times. And when they were logging then money went to the schools. Money was also spent on opening trails, and that money has slowly disappeared with the logging money.

I'm a big believer in sustained yield basis, operate where you can cut the same amount every year, create a mixed age forest like I was telling you about. There's always a constant supply of money and it's better for the wildlife, because the wildlife still has the same amount of space. When we get to the point where we're just involved emotionally, you know, God love the grizzly bear. Well, some grizzly bears are good. They are like people; some of them are pretty good, some of them are really good, some of them are lousy neighbors. I'm against grizzly bears in the house, except like this one.

Debo: That's a beautiful bear right there. Is there a story behind this?

Larry: Not really. My dad shot him when they were legal to shoot down on Kintla Ranch, right by the barn.

Debo: Do you have any good animal stories, like animal encounters?

Larry: Well, I told you the one about Ralph Thayer jumping over a log and landing on a grizzly bear. One of the best stories is Bonny Ogle's mountain lion story. Before they had their cabin built they used to stay here a lot. It was winter—I'm not sure what time, Thanksgiving time I think, and that was before we had the indoor toilets. Bonny with her flannel nightgown and her winter coat and her winter boots went to the outhouse. She was gone a long time, to the point where we were thinking about yelling out, "Did you fall in or something." She came back in the kitchen door and said, "Oh beautiful!" "Beautiful what?" "Cat," she said. "A m-m-mountain lion!" We ran out, and the mountain lion was just walking off through the trees.

Well, she was in the outhouse sitting on the seat and the mountain lion stuck his head in the doorway. She had the door wide open, just stuck his head right in and looked at her. And she will tell you, she knew she couldn't get down the hole. There was no place to run. She just sat there and finally—who knows, it probably seemed longer to her than it really was, but finally she said it backed up and walked out of sight. So, she got up ready to run for the house and when she got to the door of the outhouse he had turned around and his head was peering around the corner at her again. So, she froze again and then ran to the house when the cat turned. I took my rifle; I was going to shoot the damn cat. No, no, no. He was a beautiful cat, she wouldn't let me shoot at him, so he safely got away.

But probably the scariest stories on the North Fork don't involve grizzly bears or wolves. Mark Heaphy can tell you, he's had an experience this hunting season. Nothing like coming around a corner and being face to face with a skunk. That's scarier than anything. Open this door to go outside at night to go to the bathroom and see a skunk right outside the door. Ugh. You will be surprised how you can control your bladder after that. But there have not been a lot of grizzly bear attacks up here.

Debo: There haven't.

Larry: Jerry Desanto was mauled by a bear at Kintla Lake. Ralph Thayer, and God when was that? Who knows, in the 1920s maybe. I've got it in the Forest Service records. Robbie Barnaby got mauled about five years ago down by Moran, but bears don't bother you really. I've come to be a believer in bear spray for defending yourself from bears. It's just a matter of aim, you know. A rifle bullet is half inch across. A bear spray is 5 feet across immediately. Well, your chances of hitting him in the face are a lot better with bear spray and it's very effective, and I'm glad other people had to test it, not me.

I have never had an encounter with a grizzly bear, and I walk quietly through the woods. I don't yell or ring bells or anything. When I go for a walk in the woods I go because I want to see things. My dad was a big believer when you hunt that if you could hear yourself a deer could hear you for half a mile, so you better go really slow. It would take my dad 15 minutes to get out of sight from the front door of the cabin here when he went hunting. So, I go really slow and the older I get the slower I go. And now I'll go out away from the house with the ATV and carry my folding chair, then I'll just sit. You would be surprised; if you sit for 15 minutes you will see something. It might just be a bird or a chipmunk or a fast-moving caterpillar, but that's also how you see bears and deer and moose and they won't bother you. Bears don't hunt people; people hunt bears and other animals, too. So, I don't know many scary stories up here, really.

Debo: What do you think about how it has changed? You touched on it a little bit during this interview.

Larry: Well, it has become more modernized. We have cars that have air-conditioning and ride better, and we have a better road. The road is much better. No one would argue that in the last two or three years it's become much, much better than it was. We have better communication, you know. In the homestead days the only communication they had was there were two phone lines, one that came up the Inside Road, there was a Park line and a Forest Service line and those were #9 wire, like two tin cans on a wire is what they really were. And you could talk on them. Ford Ranger Station was a switching station, kind of, so when I worked there a big part of the day was how you set up communication with the lookouts—Thoma Lookout, Cyclone Lookout, all the ones down the line. Because if you left those lines open, then the ringing circuit wouldn't ring and you couldn't hear each other; it became too faint. So, you would shut off the line to Thoma or the line to the border for a while so you could talk to somebody at Polebridge. And then Polebridge would call you, and you would ring the border and hook them together and turn everybody else off, but not everybody because everybody was on one line.

At Kintla Ranch our phone ring was two longs and two shorts. But whenever the phone rang everybody ran to the phone and you listened in. And, of course, the more people that listened the weaker the signal got. So, when my mother was calling Belton to put in the grocery order to have

it ready for when she went to get groceries, very often she would have to say, "Will some of you hang up so I can get this through to Belton?" And they would, but otherwise people just listened. That was part of the social life, I guess, listening in to other peoples' phone conversations like any party line.

Debo: They have a radio thing now.

Larry: Yes, and that's a big change. I think there are probably at least two networks of radios up here. Ed St. Onge and those people use—I don't know—it's a marine band or something, but there's a group of them that talk to each other. On the north end here almost all of us are [North Valley] Search and Rescue members and so we operate on search and rescue frequencies and respond to rescues, and it gives us a network. We give a portable to Nancy Hubble. She's 80-something years old. She's here all alone, so we give her a radio. If she doesn't call us every morning—we have check-in at 8:00 in the morning. The Trail Creek group checks in. Mark and Margaret are kind of in the middle. John Frederick and Oliver are on the network. They don't often report in, but they are a link that we can call to get on a regular phone line. And, of course, Lee Downes is gone now, but he was our south end, so we had communication on the whole North Fork.

When it was extreme fire season we would check in twice a day, and we had different places that different members went to watch for smokes and lightning strikes and whatever, so that really works. How many of Ed St. Onge and those other people are on I don't know, but they do pretty much the same thing. Although it was funny, Ed St. Onge doesn't belong to the North Fork Patrol or to the Trail Creek Irregulars. He was really upset at the Interlocal because Lynn and I didn't tell him about what was going on with the [Ninko] Fire two years ago. Well, we were the ones that after 10:00 o'clock at night got in our car, drove down, talked to the Forest Service people, looked at the fire and listened to their plans and then notified all of our people, you know. We don't owe that to everybody. We're glad to share it, but if you want to know what we know about fires you call us and we will tell you everything we know about fires. But if you think we're going to go house to house it just gets beyond what you can do. It was 2:00 o'clock in the morning by the time we got done with the people we knew that were on the radio and to get down there and talk to those people and come back.

So, I was a little surprised that he would attack us in a public meeting, because he had never said a word to any of us before that. The best way to communicate is to talk to your neighbors.

Debo: That's right.

Larry: It's not to just be mad because they didn't talk to you. But we have that communication. People have satellite phones now. Whoever would have dreamt we would have television. I've got 250 channels on the television, and I can watch the news and everything. When we first moved here it was very difficult to have any radio in the daytime. At night radio reception got better. The thing my dad hated to miss was the Joe Lewis fight. The best radio we had was a car radio. He would run a wire from the car radio antenna to the barbed wire fence and get it all set up so he could listen to most of the fight, because it would get strong and then get weak, and you hoped there wasn't a knock-out before the signal came back.

Most homesteaders up here had dry cell battery radios with a dry cell about a foot and a half long, about a foot wide and four or five inches deep, and they lasted quite a long time. They were

a dry battery, but you had to be very careful. Most people up here would listen to the 5:00 o'clock news, or if they had one program they liked to listen to they would do that. As the winter wore on and the battery got weaker then they would warm the battery by putting it in a cook stove oven to warm it and that would make it better for a while. But you had to be real careful about those things, because they would go dead just sitting in the house.

So, now we can communicate. Law enforcement has good radios. We have ALERT landing sites up here. The helicopter can be here in 30 minutes, weather permitting. The Border Patrol, bless their hearts, are up and down the road every day and they are also taking part in Operation Stone Garden with the sheriff's office. A sheriff officer stopped by here yesterday.

So, our communication is much better. Our living facilities are much easier. We still have to have some back-up things, like I have electricity for the generator, but if the generator fails that doesn't mean I don't have heat or anything else. I've still got propane back-up, lights, refrigerator, cook stove, Coleman lanterns. Most homesteaders had kerosene lamps, and maybe they had an Aladdin lamp that was really bright, but you had to sit right beside those to run them because they get hotter and hotter and then they blow the mantle.

Just think about what the homesteaders would think if they saw Mike Eddy coming with his snow blower, eight feet wide blowing snow 20 feet into the air. When the snow came they just sat still. You got your wood in, you got your groceries in. You had a full root cellar, and you could survive the winter. The only people you saw, really, were the people within walking distance, and their walking distance was more like Mark and Margaret's [Heaphy] than it is mine. Mark and Margaret come on foot to the beach party, nine miles one way or so.

Debo: At least.

Larry: The rest of us go by snowmobile from my house or something. But those people got around by walking. Their stories—I've got some incredible material written by one of the old school teachers at the Ford Ranger Station where she came to a party on foot to Kintla Ranch in the winter. I don't know if it was a dinner party or card party or what, but she was walking home and the wolves were howling, and she was not too sure whether she was going to make it back home or not. Actually, the wolves never attacked her, but it made a good story. But to think she came for just a social evening, 5½ miles on foot on snowshoes to Matt Brill's, spent whatever time of the evening, walked back in the dark to Ford Ranger Station and had school the next day, where she was responsible for getting wood and packing the water and all of those things.

Debo: They were tough, weren't they?

Larry: Yes. I don't know what they were paid then. In 1960, my first salary in Columbia Falls was $4,225. But, of course, at that time I thought if I could just make $5,000 a year I would have more money than I could spend.

Debo: Times change.

Larry: And times change and a starting teacher's salary in Columbia Falls is now $30,000 a year, but I don't think they live much better than we did on $4,225. That's just the economy of growth.

Debo: That's good. Larry, is there anything you think I've forgotten to ask you?

Larry: I can’t imagine. I’ve talked for how long? For hours now, it seems.

Debo: Well, thank you so much. This was great.

Larry: Oh, I enjoyed it and we’ll think of things that I missed or something.

Debo: We will. We will have a follow-up probably.

[End of recording]