Lee and Marietta Downes Oral History Interview

February 29, 2012 and May 10, 2012

Tom: My name is Tom Edwards. Today's date is February 29, 2012, and I'm interviewing for the first time Lee Downes and Marietta Downes. The interview is taking place at 389 4th Avenue WN in Columbia Falls. The interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and is part of the North Fork History Project. Lee, the first question I have for you is where were you born and when were you born?

Lee: I was born in 1928, about four blocks from here.

Tom: Really?

Lee: Yes.

Tom: So, you're a Montana native.

Lee: I'm a real native.

Tom: Marietta how about you?

Marietta: I was born in 1936 at Mason City, Washington, now known as where the Columbia Dam is.

Tom: Okay. So the city is gone, right, under water?

Marietta: Yes.

Tom: So, if you were born in Columbia Falls you've been up to the North Fork all your life.

Lee: That's right. My granddad and my mother homesteaded just north of Columbia Falls, about three miles from here. When I was a boy I used to herd my grandfather's cattle up along the North Fork Road for pasture. After the 1929 fire he didn't have as much, you know, and I did that a lot. Actually, the North Fork Road goes in about the same direction, but from Columbia Falls to Big Creek it's not in the same locations that it was. It just touches on where it was. When the North Forkers would start north out of Columbia Falls, they would use Cedar Creek. It's Crystal Creek now, but for reference they would say First Cedar, Second Cedar, Third Cedar—it was bridges across the creek. When you got up there to about three miles north you could go over Parker Hill. It was the Jimmy Neal Road that was built, and in the spring of the year some of the guys would go that way. It was a little bit drier than down in the bottom where the road is now, and they just went that way. For reference, they would say, "Well, it's Second Cedar," and such and such.

Tom: So, was it a trail that just kind of grew into a road as people used it, in the beginning that you remember?

Lee: Yes. It wasn't plowed until oh, in the late 1940s they started plowing it a little bit, but before that it wasn't plowed. Yes, we lived out there by the aluminum plant. The road would be drifted shut, and it sometimes would be a week before the county got it open. I can remember one time my dad and my granddad and we was in the wagon. It must have been about 32 degrees. We was going by the first Cedar Creek. We was in a wagon, and the water was up to the box on the wagon. Cedar Creek, there was nothing to hold it back. It had just been burned, the whole country, and there was just water all over.

Tom: So, the water would have been up to the horse's belly? You had horses at that point?

Lee: It was right up to the wagon box. I wanted to get to the edge of the wagon box and look out, but they wouldn't let me. They made me sit in the middle of the wagon.

Tom: Did you know how to swim?

Lee: No. I was still wearing three-quarter pants.

Marietta: He's never learned how to swim.

Lee: In the early days at Second Cedar during fire season the Forest Service had a camp there. It wasn't a camp; there was just a resident Forest Service guy. Anybody that would come down the road had to stop going up to the North Fork, and they had to have an axe, shovel, and bucket. They had to be in good condition or they couldn't go, they just wouldn't let them go. They just had to turn around and go get the stuff, or whatever.

Tom: So, let me ask you this question. This is jumping ahead a little bit, but how old were you when you actually moved up the North Fork to the location that those of us today would know as your place?

Lee: Well, when I got out of the service I bought a place up there in 1953. That was my mustering out pay from the Army, and that was Cyclone Parks. You could go there in the fall of the year, in November, and there were deer all over. You could just sit there and pick out the one you wanted. But it's changed. The wolves have just about eliminated the game on Coal Creek. There's no moose left to speak of. I've seen two moose all through the year, and I think it was the same moose.

Tom: [Laughs] That could well be.

Lee: Fool Hen Hill used to have dry bridges on it. There was three dry bridges, and it was quite a deal. It was always sliding in. I can remember it must have been about 1955 or 1956, I come there one morning and there was ten feet of dirt in the road and the ranger was on top of it. He said, "Well, where are you going?" I said, "I was going up to do some erosion work." He thought a minute, and he says, "I'll tell you what, you take my pick-up and go to work and I'll take your pick-up and go to town." He says, "I've got to go to town." So, I traded him pick-ups right there, and I come there that night about 5:30 or 6:00 o'clock and there was the ranger standing on top, and he says, "You're going to be here in the morning?" I says, "I've got to get a way to work." He says, "There's a pick-up on the other side. Use it." That was Bud Paul.

Tom: All right.

Lee: He wound up to be supervisor over in Idaho.

Tom: So, a wood bridge. That was to hold the road kind of on the hill?

Lee: It was so steep that any dirt they put out went clean to the river [under those bridges].

Tom: Interesting that you called it a wood bridge. I thought I understand what you were talking about.

Lee: Three dry bridges. That was one of the road marks, the dry bridges, you know. And just before you get there, there was a logging camp. Tom Lee and Jim Everin had a logging camp. They put logs up there all winter, and they dumped them in the river over by the chute there at the rapids at Fool Hen and floated them to Somers and sold the logs at Somers.

Tom: That was their way of getting them down the river.

Lee: That was the farthest the North Fork was ever to go, but from Coram down and through that area there they had quite a few log drives in that area.

Tom: In 1953 you bought your place, you said?

Lee: Yeah.

Tom: Did you build up there right away and move up there?

Lee: I think I built in 1955. The Forest Service thought they owned that place. They had a cabin there, and the guy that bought the place asked the Forest Service whose cabin that was, and they said, "That's ours." He says, "Well, I own the place, I was wondering." And then he says, "No, you don't own it," and they went and checked and they found out they didn't own it. And it stayed there until 1948, and then they moved it out. They moved it up the creek and used it for a scaler shack for a couple of years, and then they moved it to Ford Station. When they said they was going to get rid of all the buildings [at Ford Station], I asked if I could buy it. Then about ten years later they gave it to me, that building.

Tom: It took them that long to decide, huh?

Lee: Yes, it took a long time, but I finally got it back.

Tom: Other than surviving, what was your job for making pay, money, groceries?

Lee: I logged in the woods pretty much, salvage logged. Then I contracted to the Forest Service, piling brush and whatever, things like that. Then I got a lot of erosion jobs, to go out and fix erosion jobs in different places.

Tom: Let's clarify what an erosion job was. Were you working on the river or a creek or a road? Some of us don't know what an erosion job would have been back then.

Lee: I've been in every drainage of the South Fork, Middle Fork, North Fork working for the Forest Service. I had a CAT and a truck, and I could stop and do a job and move. Sometimes I'd move six or seven times a day and do different places, doing little jobs for them.

Marietta: And the erosion work involved what?

Lee: Well, if they had a ditch plugged where somebody had been getting wood, or whatever, I would do that. Sometimes there would be washouts in the spring, and you would go around and do all that repair work.

Tom: So, were you a contract employee or a regular employee?

Lee: I was a contract employee.

Tom: Did you ever go regular for the Forest Service, as a full-time or part-time Forest Service employee?

Lee: No, just part-time on fires and things like that. I remember one time I was going to work and we spotted a fire. We went down, and me and Bud Frerich did a bunch of hand work and got it stopped. Then a Forest Service guy come by, and we told him there was still fire there. Pete Darling was working for the Forest Service, and anyway he come up and I showed him where the fire was. And guess what? A week later I got a check for fighting fire because of how long I had been there. They was really good, them old forest employees.

Tom: Well, that sounds pretty fair.

Lee: They was. They was real fair years ago. You do a good job, and you didn't have to look for a job; they would just come and get you every year. I would sign a contract for five or six years in advance, what I was going to get paid, and that's the way it went. Then I done a lot of salvage logging, and then they logged in square blocks up the South Fork. They didn't think it looked good, so they would go along and feather them out. You know, go on the edge and go back in. I done a lot of that type of logging and brush piling and stuff.

Tom: Did you have to pay stumpage for that?

Lee: Yes, you had to pay stumpage. Sometimes it was a pretty good deal. Sometimes you got it for two or three dollars per thousand, and you could afford to come in. If there was a couple loads of logs you could come out on it. Yeah, they had it all figured out, you know, what it could cost you and what you should make. They was real fair.

Tom: One of the things that my dad, who was a graduate forester from Missoula, always told me—and I've since began to wonder if he was misinformed or lying to me—he said, "Well, they practice sustained yield, so that they can continue to log forever." Being as you were a logger, did you see where they were trying to make the forest last forever?

Lee: Yes, but the Forest Service had a lot of bad things. They had the spruce bark beetles. They would come in and they would just take the trees out, and it didn't really work, so they would just go in take big blocks of trees out and then the bugs would still continue to the other timber, you know. They would take like Red Meadow and Canyon Creek and Big Creek. They wound up with just huge clear cuts. Well, it really wasn't their fault. They were just trying to manage the timber. It was the thing to do, because if you would have left it go there was drainages where you couldn't even walk in them, with the downed timber and stuff. Spruce doesn't last very long, you know. Six or seven years and it's all on the ground, if you don't log it.

Tom: Well, and they can kind of gauge that against some of the Park Service land, too. In places there it's piled up 10-feet high like pick-up sticks.

Lee: Yes. Then they've got pine beetle in the lodgepole. The Park didn't log, and it just took the whole North Fork. It's just really hard to manage something like that.

Tom: Across the river from you, Sullivan's Meadows, I'm sure you're familiar with that place.

Lee: Yes.

Tom: At one point they logged some private property in the Park. Were you familiar with that? Because you can see it from outside.

Lee: The Johnson Boys logged that, and they're good friends of mine. The Park really had a lot of restrictions. They couldn't haul lumber out until after 5:00 o'clock at night, and things like that. They made it as difficult as possible. In fact, the Cummings place, they wanted to log that. To take logs out of there, they had to take some timber off the Park so they could make the corners with the logging truck, and the Park wouldn't cooperate at all, so all that timber went to waste. I was offered the logging job, if I could get it out of there, but there was no way you could do it with the Park and the restrictions they had.

Tom: Do you know, or did you work with, any horse loggers in your day?

Lee: Yes, I've even done some. My dad and my granddad were horse loggers.

Tom: How did you like that? What did you think of it?

Lee: Well, it was a lot of hard work. It was a lot of really hard work, and you had to have good horses, well-trained.

Tom: Was that kind of logging light on the land?

Lee: Well, yeah. You would get out there, and you come back in later years and log where they horse logged, and if the trees were real big they left them, because they were too difficult to skid with horses. They even had wooden arches and stuff to lay logs, but that stuff was expensive, and most of the guys couldn't afford it.

Tom: Let's get back outside the Park. Talk to me about the town of Polebridge, or the community of Polebridge.

Lee: There wasn't much there in the early days. The store was there, and that was about it. Polebridge, where all the lots are, was a big hay meadow.

Tom: I know that. I hayed that for Ted Ross one summer.

Lee: Did you? A big hay meadow. And the elk used to come there in the spring, and the deer, and of course that's gone now. But if you had a hay field and had any type of clover or alfalfa in it, they would eat it down until you couldn't get a crop off it. They just ate it, just stayed there until it was gone.

Tom: And that was constant, always that way?

Lee: Pretty much. I understand that the sage that's up there on Big Prairie, they were short of hay one winter and they brought in the hay from the East side from the prairie over there. They just cut prairie hay and brought it in. It had sage in it, and that's where the sage come from.

Tom: Really, I never knew that. I wondered why it was there.

Lee: That's what they tell me.

Tom: Well, that makes sense. I mean, it isn't anywhere else around the North Fork, is it?

Lee: Mike Berne told me the story about Johnny Walsh and I can't remember the other guy, but anyway they were short of groceries in the spring and it was a big job to cut that Inside Road out to go get groceries. Anyway, each of them was waiting for the other one to go cut the road out, and Johnny Walsh started out first. He went down the road and cut them trees out and got through with his wagon, then he would unhook the wagon and horses and drag the log back into the road. He done that all the way to Belton. It used to be Belton instead of West Glacier.

Tom: I know. I traveled that road when I was eight years old, because my dad was a seasonal ranger. So, we would come back from our lieu days in town and drive up there. He always planned it so that he would hit Dutch Creek. I think that was the edge of the boundary for the Logging Creek ranger station. So, at 8:00 o'clock in the morning we would be just past Dutch Creek, and he could be on the job and call the patrol to get home. My grandmother lived in Kalispell, so we would go to town and spend two days in town with her and then come home early in the morning, probably Friday morning. I think our lieu days were Wednesday and Thursday off. We *always* had to cut trees on that road. Or we would go to the McFarlands for a square dance [on a Saturday], and a wind would come up. You would end up with six trees in the road between Polebridge and Logging [Creek]. That was seven miles we would have to cut before we could get home.

Lee: Yep. That was the only way into the North Fork for a long time. In fact, the county used to plow that road so the mail could be brought up.

Tom: How far up did they plow it?

Lee: Just to Polebridge. See, there was a lot of county roads in the Park. I don't know if they [reverted] to the Park or not. But years ago, there were a lot of roads. Even up across Big Prairie was a county road.

Tom: Yes, that's when they forded the rivers. They didn't always use a bridge to get across, and the post office was there.

Lee: There were several crossings. There was one at Quartz Creek, where they come across into the Home Ranch Bottoms, and there was one up there just above Polebridge on the Hensen place, where they crossed in there. They would go across in them old Model Ts.

Tom: That had to be pretty late in the year though, only in the fall that they would get away with that?

Lee: Well, after high water then they could cross.

Tom: Really?

Lee: Yep. In fact, just there at Hay Creek, before the fire, there was a poplar tree that had names and dates on it, 1915 and stuff, but it burned up in the fire. It was a pretty historic tree, really.

Tom: Have you ever stopped and looked at the cottonwoods and the aspen trees on the sides of the North Fork Road? It's almost like a billboard. If you're walking or hiking and you go down the road—in a car you don't see it—but people have put a date or their initial or something and it makes you wonder why is that there. But it's interesting, because they're all along the road if you take the time to get out and look, particularly up far north where the road hasn't been pushed out.

Lee: Yes. On the North Fork Road, there on the Home Ranch Bottoms, there was a poplar tree there that had Johnny [Hothic's?] name on there. He was the young fellow that Ralph Thayer pretty much raised, and he wound up to be a supervisor, too, in the Forest Service. He got pretty high up. I have tree in the basement of my house up there. I cut it off and put it in there, but since the bark has fallen off and stuff and it lost the name, but it was quite a big deal.

Tom: Did you use it?

Lee: When you went over Fool Hen Hill, right there's that big hole on the left that's called the Devil's Pot. It used to have that name on the maps even. The road went just on the north side and then side-hilled all the way to the bottom at Big Creek, past Hell Roaring Creek. At Hell Roaring Creek there used to be a big patch of cedar trees. In the early days, Mickey Berne located the road from Junkins Corner to Coal Creek. That was in 1915, I think it was.

Tom: I don't know Junkins Corner. Where is that?

Lee: That's Blankenship now.

Tom: Okay.

Lee: That there was Oscar Junkins' homestead, and they called that Junkins Corner. He was an early homesteader up that way.

Tom: So, you bring up an interesting point. Have there been a lot of the name changes in the North Fork, and were the names a lot of times because of the people? Like Sullivan's Meadows is named for whoever homesteaded there. Have you seen a lot of change in that respect?

Lee: Yes. I know, like the Devil's Pot and Fool Hen and stuff like that. Mr. Walsh named Fool Hen Hill and Hell Roaring Creek, Rabbit Hill. There's a lot of them names have disappeared over the years. Rabbit Hill is just across Coal Creek, then there's the beaver ponds on the right. That's Rabbit Hill.

Tom: Will those beaver ponds ever present a problem to the road, or have they in the past?

Lee: Yes, the river was running right there for a while and would wash the road out. Then in 1947 they built a road up over the hill and around it. Then they finally got enough money to

rebuild it and put it down below again. For about 10 years the road went around that particular spot.

Tom: What do you think they will do with Wurtz Hill? Do you think they will ever do anything with it?

Lee: That was named after [Frank] Wurtz. He homesteaded there in the early days. I think they've got the history on that pretty much.

Tom: His grandson put together a book on the Wurtz place. But I was worried, because it's a similar deal with the road. At some point they may have to move that road because that hill keeps…

Lee: Yeah, it keeps slumping.

Tom: Yes.

Lee: There's been a lot of changes in the North Fork. Actually, you know from Columbia Falls to Coal Creek the road just crosses the spots where it has been. It's not the same. From Fool Hen Hill to Deep Creek, in there it was on the side hill and then it come down in the bottom, and it was dangerous to drive in the wintertime, especially with a two-wheel drive outfit. It always wanted to crowd you off the road.

Tom: How long was it before you got a four-wheel drive outfit?

Lee: 1959.

Tom: Were you glad to have it? I bet you were.

Lee: Yes. I had seen one, and I just figured that was a lot better than putting chains on all the time. It really was handy.

Tom: You mentioned that it's cheaper to live up the North Fork than in town.

Marietta: Yes. Not only cheaper, but you only depend on what you have put away for survival. I could live up there for six months at a time on what I kept in my house from canning. Down here it's ten minutes to the store.

Lee: I had a hard time with Ma. She would go downtown, and she would buy three loaves of bread. I would explain to her you don't have to buy three loaves at a time down here. I says, "I want fresh bread. If we buy one loaf at a time, it's only ten minutes to the store here." But we finally got it all figured out.

Tom: You brought up an interesting point, though, and I don't want to let this get away. To live up the North Fork it takes the two of you.

Marietta: Yes.

Tom: But you don't have to pay a light bill, let's say, but you have to have lights.

Marietta: Yes, we have the generator.

Tom: You don't have to pay a water bill, but you have to pump it out of the ground or off the spring.

Lee: We would get up at daylight and go to bed when it was dark.

Marietta: That was North Fork hours. Now, pretty near the North Fork was running that way, except for the real young people who liked to hoot and holler all night. But down here it's too fast. You push buttons and you depend on everything, and you don't have that feeling of safety and survival that we had at the North Fork. You knew you could take care of you. I could take care of a couple of my neighbors real easy up there, because I canned all the time. Down here I'm lost.

Tom: Did you have a big root cellar in your place?

Marietta: We had a root cellar. We didn't use it much. We had a basement. We used stuff mostly in the basement. When the generator was running, that day you washed your clothes, you vacuumed the floor. You baked that day. Everything was done that day, and then we were good until the next time we needed it, which would be about once a week. And you get kind of almost frugal in what you have up there, because you didn't want to burn it all up because you didn't know when the fuel would come up, or the propane. But down here if the electricity goes off we have nothing. We have the wood stove, and we still have him splitting wood.

Lee: Yes, but we depend on electricity for it. It's got a fan.

Marietta: It's a different way of living. About the only thing at the North Fork I didn't like was North Fork Road. Although, at one point I loved it. I could have kissed every mile of it getting to our house. We went to Washington, D.C. in 1984 to see our son. When we saw that North Fork Road, I could have kissed it all the way home. I don't like traffic.

Tom: You knew you were home. It felt good, yeah.

Marietta: I recall up there, one winter I didn't get out until April.

Tom: Let me ask you this question, because you lived on the North Fork Road and you guys didn't have pavement in front of your house, but I always remember and to this day appreciate the smell of the dust. I mean it's a pain, it's a nuisance, but it's like you say, it's like being home when you recognize that.

Marietta: It was pretty continual up there. You could open the front window, and in an hour's time you could write your name across the table and on all the furniture, there was so much road dust. And mostly it was tourists, people coming to look. It's a great place.

Lee: Well, that place we had up there was homesteaded by Joel [LeMay?]. He was in his teens when he homesteaded. But he left there in 1922, because there was too damn many people.

Tom: Really? Where did he go?

Lee: Alaska. Never heard of him again.

Tom: So, who homesteaded the place that to me was called the Ladenburg place? Did you ever know those people?

Lee: Mike Berne homesteaded it, and then he hired other guys to homestead, then he'd buy their homestead for $100 or $200, until he had like 900 acres there. There was quite an activity for coal back then, and up Coal Creek about a mile there's a shaft back in the hill. [Quince?], it was. Anyway, Patrick Walsh Sr., Dick's dad and Pat's granddad, was one of the guys. They made rafts and pulled it down to Coal Creek. They had a big raft there, and it was pulled to Columbia Falls for the Talbot Building. He wanted to burn coal, so that's where they got the coal.

Marietta: Floated it all the way down the river.

Tom: That must have been quite an adventure.

Lee: Yes. Well, those timber oaks—I drug the paddle wheel out, me and Bob Hurd with the Forest Service. It was sitting down at the bridge down there, and they've got a sign there [where a coal raft crashed into the bridge abutment]. Anyway I got elevated to a ranger on that sign.

Tom: That wasn't why I asked if you if ever worked for the Forest Service, but it ties right in, doesn't it?

Marietta: Yes. There's always a little bit of blood there.

Lee: I had a contract with them, but it was an open contract. When they had some work they would get me.

Marietta: They knew that if they got Lee, he would go right then. He wouldn't say tomorrow or the next day.

Tom: So, did you have a pretty big garden at your place?

Marietta: We had a nice garden.

Tom: Did you garden every year, or did you do carrots one year and potatoes the next year? How did that work?

Marietta: We planted potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbage, peas. What else?

Lee: Well, beans and stuff like that was iffy because a lot of years you would get a frost every month, you know. But carrots and cabbage are pretty frost-resistant; you could raise them. But a lot of the guys up there had greenhouses, small greenhouses, and they would grow gardens.

Tom: What's the earliest greenhouse that you remember somebody having?

Lee: I didn't even know the people, but I was doing work up there at Trail Creek, doing different improvements for the Forest Service and stuff, and there would be greenhouses there.

Marietta: Tell him about the time we grew 51 cauliflowers. Remember the cockamamy cattle?

Lee: Oh.

Marietta: The cauliflower were all ready to harvest, so we went to town to get some vinegar and stuff. We were going to pickle a bunch of them. We come home and we didn't get enough [cauliflower] to fill a gallon jar. The cattle came in and ate them all. Tom [Ladenburg] comes down, and we really were mad and upset, and we were telling him. He said well, it wasn't his cattle. He knew for positive it wasn't his cattle. Well, how do you know? He said, "I smelled each one's breath, and they didn't have any cauliflower on their breath." [Laughs] So a few weeks later Charlie Ritter, who was a neighbor of ours and up from Ladenburg's, he came down with a ribcage. He had bought a half a beef and had taken everything off of it, and he brought it down so we could use it for bait for coyotes and stuff. Lee hung it on the fence and everybody thought we had a cult going on there, because he'd hang that out there and Tom would hang the coyotes on the fence.

Lee: The girls made a sign, remember? It said, "Cows Beware," and hug it there with the ribcage. Tom got quite a kick out of that, you know. Everybody thought we was having a big feud, but we wasn't.

Tom: Well, back with open range, when the cows were there in the summer many, many people had their yards trashed by the cows, and they weren't happy with it.

Lee: No. It was open range. If you don't want them, you've got to fence them out.

Marietta: I think a few of the locals up there ate a few, you know, because they would get so doggone mad at losing their gardens.

Tom: I know that to be a fact, I do.

Marietta: Yes, we do too, but we try to be nice about it.

Tom: But having said that, the incident that I know about, it wasn't eaten by the people; it was eaten by a grizzly bear.

Marietta: Uh-oh.

Tom: But the bear had a little help getting the cow.

Lee: Well, years ago when Finley Arnett was up there he had a cow that was lame, and it couldn't stand the drive to Columbia Falls, so he was going to haul it, and he left a couple of other cows there with it. Anyway, when we went up to get it a grizzly bear had come in and killed one cow, and he turned it in to Fish & Game. Lorne Diest and Ross Wilson went up, and he killed another cow, and they finally killed the bear. That's the only real grizzly bear getting cattle up there that I know of.

Tom: The one other story that I heard, and you probably heard of it too, was when Ted Ross was at the store. He had horses that he rented to dudes, and he also rented them to the Border Patrol for their annual ride down the border. But one winter, the story that I recollect was that a grizzly bear got into the barn area and chewed up a corral and chewed up a horse. I remember seeing one

horse that had a big stitch on her hip. The story I was told was that it was part of that bear attack, but that was only hearsay.

Lee: Well, [Fletcher] "Hoolie" Stine used to have a place up there, that big meadow just across Hay Creek, and his corral was made with three logs. There were two logs laying on the ground and one rolled in the middle, and that was his corral.

Tom: Was it very tall?

Lee: Yes. That kept the horses in. They were big logs.

Tom: They could have been 4 feet high, or 5 feet tall.

Lee: There's a story that Ralph Thayer told me about Hoolie Stein. He used to make a little whiskey and sell it. Anyway, the 4th of July everybody got oiled up, and Hoolie passed out with Ralph Thayer and Frank Newton. They took and tied his pant cuffs with bale twine and then stuffed his pants plum full of horse manure when he was passed out. He wore a pair of Army pants that was about two sizes too big, and they had them just plum full of horse manure. [Laughs] I imagine that would be quite a surprise, waking up like that.

Tom: I'm surprised he didn't retaliate and get back at them. He probably did, at some point.

Lee: I imagine payback was hell. I never heard about the payback for it.

Marietta: Did you tell him the story you told me about the cook in the [CCC Camp] here in the North Fork, that his bread dough fell on the floor?

Lee: Oh, that was the Forest Service cook at Big Creek. He was from down south. Ralph Thayer and them old guys knew he was scared of bears. They had the garbage can sitting just outside the cook shack. They took some ketchup and spread it around out there and fired a couple of shots and told him the bear was there. Anyway, the joke wound up being on them, because the guy says, "To hell with it," and he packed up and left. He wouldn't come back. They tried to tell him it was a cheap joke, and he says, "I don't give a damn; there's too many bears," and he left.

Marietta: I was referring to the story you told me about the CCC Camp that had the pigs, and the cook spilled the bread dough on the floor.

Lee: That was down in the Swan where that happened. It wasn't up at the North Fork. But anyway, he was packing the dough over to mix it and it fell on the floor. So, they took it out and fed it to the pigs, and it killed the pigs. They swelled up and died. They took them out to the dump, and a bear come along and ate the pigs and ate that dough, and it killed the bear too.

Tom: Quite an epidemic. One action led to a whole bunch of others. [Laughs]

Marietta: So, don't trust the bread dough. My grandpa said that really happened up in Canada, where he came from. The missus was mixing up bread. They had two kids who were watching, and they were hungry, and they asked for bread dough. She gave them each a chunk of bread dough, and then she had to go outside to get some water or something. When she come back in they had got into more bread dough and they got horribly sick, screaming, and she didn't know

what was wrong. They hooked the team together, and it was a long ways to a doctor, so they were going to head for the nearest neighbor. By the time they got there the kids were dead, and it was from bread dough.

Tom: I'll be darned. See, I never heard that and we baked bread and stuff, I just never thought of eating raw dough, or rising dough I guess is a better description.

Marietta: I've heard a lot of different things from a lot of different people. Should have been put in books years ago.

Lee: Them old cars that they had years ago had real narrow tires and were high. They would go through a tremendous amount of snow. They would go through more snow than a lot of these four-wheel drives will go through today.

Tom: Because they were taller.

Lee: Yes. They were so high and made such a narrow track. Ralph Thayer told about in January driving up to Trail Creek. He told about in the early days, in the middle of the night he heard a lot of whooping and hollering and the Indians would go by with 60 or 70 horses that they stole on the east side. He said a month later there'd be whooping and a hollering and the Indians were driving them back. They would steal them from each other, just back and forth all the time.

Tom: What year would you suspect that that occurred?

Lee: That was early 1900s.

Tom: I didn't realize that…

Lee: Well, you've got to get ahold of Howard Green, because he tells about going up Trail Creek with Ralph Thayer and I can't remember who the other guy was. When they got up there he showed them Indian graves. It's in the Timothy Meadows area up there.

Tom: Sure.

Lee: But Howard went back years later, and he said it had changed so much since the road was put in, and they logged it, so he couldn't even identify the spot where they were, it had changed that much over the years.

Tom: Things do change, and they change in about ten-year chunks. I'm sure you can remember things that you remember one way and 10 or 15 years later it was different, and you never imagined that that would be the case.

Lee: Yes, it changes tremendously.

Marietta: It's hard to imagine just looking at these construction places, how a home will go up or a hospital or something. It's just almost overnight.

Lee: A grizzly bear got Ralph Thayer in 1928, I think it was, up Canyon Creek and crippled him up pretty good. Ralph told me the story of what happened. He sat down on a log. He had his pack

and his axe, and he was located trails. Anyway, a bear grabbed him when he was eating lunch. He said, "I had sense enough to grab my axe," and he chopped over his shoulder. He says, "I got a pretty good lick in," and she turned him loose. He walked from there to the North Fork Road with a broken leg. He made a crutch and made it out. He says there weren't as many cars in them years, and just as luck would have it a car come by just as he got to the road.

Tom: Amazing.

Lee: He said there was an old doctor by the name of Burns; he was the old-time doctor here. He asked Ralph, "Should I get the chloroform or the Old Crow?" Ralph says, "Give me the Old Crow," and he set his leg. [Laughs]

Tom: Did you have any personal encounters with a bear?

Lee: Oh, yeah.

Tom: How did that happen?

Lee: Well, somebody killed an elk right close to my camp in there. I got up the next morning and there was about a foot of new snow. A guy walked right by, and I thought they were going after the elk. It quit snowing about 10:00 o'clock, and I said, "I'm going to see where they're going." I went out, and there they come with the elk. I could see that they hooked onto it and was dragging it. And, of course, it was snowing then, and you couldn't see much. I said, "Well jiminy Christmas, the damn fools are dragging it the wrong way." So, I got on their trail and I was going to catch them. I got out there, and there was a grizzly bear, in thick lodgepole, and he drug it around. There was a little point, and he was on the other side. I looked, and as soon as I made eye contact with that bear he come. He tried to come through that lodgepole, and it was so thick he couldn't get through. He had to get on the trail where he drug the elk. But anyway, when he come around the corner he was probably 30 or 40 feet from me, and I says, "Well, I better shoot him," so I shot. After that he forgot all about me. He stood on his hind legs and started grabbing at lodgepoles. They were an inch and a half to two inches, and he would bite one off and pull another one over and bite it off, roaring all the time, and then he fell over on his back dead.

Tom: So, the guys got run off by the bear, or was it just the bear was dragging the elk?

Lee: The bear was on the elk; it was the bear that had walked right by.

Tom: I see.

Lee: But it had enough snow on it I couldn't really tell, you know. Yeah, there was a lot of bears. Ted Ross killed an elk by my cabin, and he went to get it. He left it overnight and the next morning the bears had it. It was gone.

Tom: That's still some concern today. One of the kids that lives up at Moose Creek, Greg Ouellette—you may know him or not—a couple of years ago at Thanksgiving dinner at the Hall he had shot a deer in season. Everything was fine, but he left the gut pile. On his way home he had to pass a couple of cabins of people, and he stopped to tell them, because they were joggers. He said, "I just wanted to let you know that there's a gut pile not too far away, if you're out

jogging," because that's what brings the bears and the crows in, so he was being neighborly and telling them just pay attention to what you're doing. Same story, different time.

Lee: Yes, if you see a raven sitting in a tree stay the hell away from there, because there's something big on that gut pile.

Tom: Exactly. The birds get run off by the big guys. At the Interlocal meeting, maybe last summer or the winter before, Fish & Game said the biggest predator in the North Fork for killing things was the mountain lion. But mountain lions were starving to death, because wolves or bears were running them off so they couldn't benefit from their kill. I never thought about that.

Lee: Just this last fall I don't know who killed the moose, but there was a dead moose up Coal Creek. A grizzly bear and five wolves were fighting over it. The grizzly bear won. I waited about a week afterwards, then I went there and looked. You could see where he covered stuff up, but there wasn't any hair, there wasn't any bones or nothing there, everything was gone.

Tom: Yep.

[End of first recording]

Interview continued in May 2012. Also present was Gary Haverlandt.

Lee: I think I'll start out today and tell you about Charlie Hudson. He lived at Spoon Lake. He had a cabin there. He trapped out of there, and in the summertime he rented boats. I think in the winter of 1939 and 1940 Frank Hall trapped with him up Canyon Creek. Kimmerly Creek is a side drainage, and they had a cabin up there. Anyway, the story that Charlie tells is that Frank was supposed to sneak into the Park and trap, and he didn't miss him until about March. He never come back, so he reported him missing. Of course, Ralph Thayer, the Forest Service and I can't remember who was sheriff, before Dick Walsh, they looked around, and they finally found part of the body that the bears had dug out of the snow and chewed up. They found a boot with a foot in it, but they never did find the skull. I know Ralph spent a lot of time up there looking for the skull, and they never found his rifle or anything like that, so there's a lot of mystery there. He was a pretty tough old guy. In fact, years ago in the Forest Service every employee was a game warden. They were supposed to enforce the law. It was after the 1929 fire, and Charlie shot a moose. It was visible from the North Fork Road, and snow on there. The Forest Service guy come over and started talking to him. He said, "You know, I'm going to have to turn you in." Old Charlie said, "If you don't get the hell outta here you're going to be laying right alongside this moose." He got away with it; they never turned him in. He had to have something to eat.

Lee: Yeah, he was a pretty tough guy.

Gary: Did you know many of the homesteaders?

Lee: Yes. I knew Mike Berne and John Walsh. I remember meeting him, and I knew his brother Dick a lot better. There was one that they called Dutch [Louie Pichler] that lived up there on Big Prairie, too. I remember he would walk out in the winter about December. We lived up the North Fork, about four miles up—my dad had a place in there about where that taxidermy shop is.

That's on part of his place. I remember he would walk to town and spend overnight and then the next day, probably about noon or so, he would come by and Mom would make him coffee. I remember he had a sack of hard candies. They were little Santa Clauses, probably about three inches high, and they were filled with strawberry jam. I've never seen anything like them since. And they were really good. I remember us kids got the sack when he stopped by.

Tom: Did you know homesteaders on the upper end of the valley above Polebridge?

Lee: Yes, Ralph Thayer, and there was another one.

Tom: The Holcolms [Harry and Lena], did you run into them?

Lee: Yes, I remember them. In fact, I went to school with his granddaughter [Wynona "Nonie" Chapman]. She married a guy in back of where they've got the Hall up there.

Tom: The Mathisons?

Lee: Yes, Mathisons [Johnny].

Tom: We know you were involved in the North Fork Patrol. Were you involved in the Community Hall?

Lee: Yes.

Tom: What can you tell us about the Patrol?

Lee: Well, we started that—what give us the idea, there was snowcatters, I think it was in Minnesota somewhere up there in the northern peninsula. Anyway, they organized. The snowcatters were going out, and they would loan the cabins and stuff to check them out, and we kind of got the idea that way. Because when I first started doing it we did a lot of it with snowcats to get around to where the people were. The people weren't there in the winter, and it finally got so we'd go by and if there was no tracks going in we didn't disturb it. Because if you drove in with a snowcat then you couldn't tell if somebody skied in or walked in after it froze, so we kind of quit that.

Tom: You were president or head of the Patrol for a number of years?

Lee: Yeah, for 20-some years, I guess. We've got a real good guy there now.

Tom: Mark Heaphy.

Lee: Yes. He is very good, very thorough and very honest. I really admire him.

Tom: Yes, we like him, too. We stopped last week and were talking with Margaret and then saw Mark. He had been in town.

Lee: He would have fit right in with the old-time North Forkers. He would have fit right in.

Tom: Did you serve on the North Fork Improvement Association?

Lee: Well, I can remember when they built the Hall. I was a property owner up there since 1953.

Gary: Did they build it in 1954?

Lee: Yes, I think so. I was working for Rex Brown up Trail Creek, and they had a big blow-down up there and the Forest Service had difficulty selling it. They was asking a minimum bid of $1 a thousand and nobody would pay it. So, they asked for bids and Rex Brown bid 50-cents and he was the only bidder.

Tom: So that's where the logs came from for the Hall?

Lee: No, I don't think they come from there. I can't remember who sawed them, and it wasn't Loyd Sondreson. It was another guy, and he sawed them. He was kind of a local guy up there. I can't remember who it was. I knew Ralph Day. He was the mailman for a number of years. He was Holcomb's son-in-law.

Tom: Did you have good mail service the whole time you lived up there?

Lee: Yes. After 1978, I got my mail downtown here because I was all over the valley. I would be up the South Fork or over at Tally Lake or somewhere, logging or something, you know.

Tom: So, whenever you were in town you would just stop by and got the mail on the way?

Lee: Yes. My ma picked up my mail for me. Because if you went into a logging camp, you were there five or six days a week. It's hard to get a haircut even. All the barber shops are closed. I remember my hair was long one time and I just took my knife and cut it myself. The guy says, "Where did you get that haircut?" And I said, "Oh, that barber there in Martin City," and nobody would go get a haircut there. [Laughs]

Tom: When you were in the logging camps, did they have cooks?

Lee: Sometimes. Sometimes we "bach'd, it," it just depends. We had to cook in a cookhouse and done real well that way. A lot of times I would be out building a road and I would be by myself, sometimes just worked and helped put in pipes and that was it.

Tom: So, was having a cook a pretty time-saving thing? Did you get more work done that way, or you just ate better?

Lee: Yeah. In the summertime I usually worked daylight—10, 12, 15 hours a day.

Tom: That way you didn't have to spend so much time in the woods?

Lee: Well, you had to get the jobs done. You had time limits, and when you'd get up there on them high ridges you don't have a long season. When it hits the end of September you're just about done with road-building, because you start getting snow and then you've got soft roads and you have to wait until it freezes up, if you're going to use them that winter.

Tom: Can you tell us your impression of the social life when you lived up the North Fork, either one of you?

Lee: Yes, it used to be they made their own entertainment. They would go around and have parties, and after they got the Hall they was pretty active with that. They had the 4th of July fish fry. One stipulation was you had to bring your own fish, but it wasn't too bad in them days. You know, a guy was allowed, I think, 10 fish. I think for a while it was 15 and then they dropped to 10. Now it's pretty easy to get your limits, they've got it down to 3.

Marietta: They can't get enough fish for a fish fry.

Tom: That's right.

Lee: In the early days there was a lot of trappers. Towards the end there, in the late 1930s, the Fish & Game had a study. I've got a copy of it here somewhere, if I can find it. It was done on the Whitefish Divide. They even had snowcats. They called them snow machines, but they had a motorcycle engine in them. On good snow conditions they could go, but if it was a little bit adverse, on powdered snow they weren't any good.

Tom: Did you get involved in trapping at all?

Lee: I trapped some, yes. When you're working in the woods you don't have a lot of time for trapping, you know. I had the job, so it didn't interfere much.

Tom: Have you always been a hunter? Did you hunt for meat? How did that work for you?

Lee: I didn't kill even a grouse last year. That's about one of the first years I've never killed anything in my life. I've got an elk every year since I was 11 years old, other than the time I was in the service.

Tom: How did you preserve it or keep it or freeze it?

Lee: My mom used to can it, and Marietta canned it, and then we cut and roasted. When it got real modern we got a deep freeze.

Tom: You always had a deep freeze up there?

Lee: Not up there. We have one in town, and we would stop by and pick meat out of the freezer that way.

Marietta: But we had a smokehouse, and we preserved that way, too.

Tom: So, you smoked it and then canned it?

Marietta: We did some that way, but most of the time when it come out of the smokehouse every neighbor in the North Fork was at our house. They could smell it cooking and they came for treats. The same way at the hospital. I was over there for almost a year. I had to make up a bunch

of smoked stuff, jerky, and bring it over to the hospital. Lee would bring it in, 10-15 pounds at a time. It would be gone before noon. Everybody in the hospital was in there getting their share and then some.

Tom: Lee, tell us about your smoker. Did you build it yourself?

Lee: Yes.

Tom: Some of us have never had a smoker, so give us a little history on smokers.

Lee: Well you've got to have a little stove, you know, and be able to control the heat. I would start the fire. I use green wood to make a lot of smoke to begin with.

Tom: What kind of wood?

Lee: I preferred alder to anything. It's really good. You can use any of the hardwoods if you peel the bark off, birch and cottonwood, and you can use that, but alder is the best. You don't have to peel alder. The alder doesn't have any resins in the bark like the other ones do.

Tom: The common one I'm familiar with is where they take an old refrigerator and run the salt through that.

Lee: Well, the last one I had was four feet square.

Tom: Oh, big.

Lee: Yes, and seven feet tall. I got us a monitor on the wall, and I know what my temperature is. I can just go look and see. And toward the end I like to get it up to about 150 degrees, for oh maybe 45 minutes or an hour, and then your meat starts to get firm and you can take it out, or you can dry it. But when you bite it it's just like biting a rock, because you want it to keep a long time, you have to most of the moisture out of it.

Tom: What would be an average time for your smokehouse?

Lee: It just depends on how thick you cut your meat. You can cut it thin and get it to dry out a lot quicker, but I like mine kind of chewy, you know. I like a little moisture in it.

Tom: Did you brine it or anything, or just smoked it as is?

Lee: No, I used the High Country jerky mix. They've got about 10 different flavors. I like the High Country. It's really good. The pepper mix, I think they call it.

Tom: Did you put it on as a dry rub?

Lee: Yes. You've got to use a plastic or a stainless steel can. I just cut a meat block and I put it out there. I just laid the meat on it, enough sticks on it, and you lay it in a pan. It takes 24 hours—about 12 hours later turn it over so it's nice and even.

Marietta: So it gets an even solution on it.

Lee: And smoke it. We used to try brine, but that's a lot more difficult, a lot more work.

Marietta: I had to teach him everything he knows on smoke.

Tom: I wanted to ask you, because I've never canned meat. I assume you used a pressure cooker.

Marietta: You bet.

Tom: Could you tell us a little bit about how that works?

Marietta: I pack raw meat in the jars, and then add a teaspoon of salt and a clove of garlic and put the lid on it, put the water in the pressure cooker with the jars, bring the pressure up to the temperature, which was usually about medium, and it would take about 4½ hours. Shut her off, take her off and take her up, she's done. The kids would gobble it up, and Lee would gobble it up. But back to the smokehouse, I was making my living before we were married smoking jerkeys—bears, all this stuff for everybody, and I would cure them. Then I married him, and I still was doing the smoked turkeys and stuff for people for Christmas and Thanksgiving, and he decided he would take on delivering them back to the people that brought them to my house to be smoked. Well, he was coming home having a party. He was a little tipsy at times. He had fun at it, and it brought in a good living.

Lee: If I got an old bull we would get suet and put a chunk in there about as big as a walnut, and it gives it a little bit of fat in there.

Marietta: In the jar we canned.

Lee: To help break it down.

Tom: Then you stored it in your cabin in a root cellar? You had a basement in your house right?

Marietta: Up there, yes.

Tom: How long could you store canned meat for?

Marietta: I'll tell you a secret, but it's going to go in the dump up there. I have canned chicken that's still fully canned that's been up there for 30 years since I moved from the South Fork. But I don't think I would want to eat it now.

Lee: It's still good. I checked it the other day.

Marietta: But there's no way after that length of time that I would want to eat it.

Tom: How do you check it or how did you know?

Lee: You can tell.

Marietta: I date my jars when I can. I mark it right on the top of the lid when they come out of the pressure cooker. We moved it from the South Fork up the North Fork. I guess you would say that was my bad weather meals. If somebody walked in that I didn't know about, or we had unexpected relatives pop in, we'd have dinner. And it was easy to get a jar of elk meat, deer meat, sometimes canned grouse and then other times just whatever was there, the chicken. But my kids, when I canned my chickens they were all involved with them, and they thought they were some doggone pets. They didn't want to eat chicken for years. Rabbits was the same way.

Lee: She used to can cakes, too, in the jars.

Marietta: I still do.

Tom: Are you talking fruitcakes or something else?

Marietta: Just the cake.

Tom: I don't understand that. Can you explain that a little better?

Marietta: Well, it's usually an applesauce cake. Just make up a double batch of applesauce cake and measure them out in my jars, fill the jar half full, put a piece of wax paper over the top glass on the lid, put the lid on it and the sealing ring, put them in the pressure cooker for about 25-30 minutes, at a pressure of about 7½ pounds. They it would come out fully cooked and fully sealed. Larry Wilson was really surprised. He come to my house. He was sitting there. I said, 'I suppose you want dessert?' Yeah, he wanted dessert, and I said, "Well, I guess it will have to be canned cake." He'd never heard of it. I brought it out and he thought it was pretty good. He come back quite regular there for a while.

Tom: How did you get it out? Did it just slide out?

Marietta: It slides out. You just put a little bit of butter.

Lee: Just took a knife and go around the jar.

Marietta: You didn't have to do that.

Lee: You have to use one that's got a tapered...like them freezer jars or something. Wide mouth. They work perfect.

Marietta: They just come out all by themselves. There's usually enough fat when you make up your cake. Mix it up, it will cook inside the jar and slide out. We canned just about everything.

Tom: You learned that as a child?

Marietta: I've been canning since I was six years old. My mother had polio when she was a child, couldn't do a lot of things, so good old Marietta was taught how to run the pressure cooker. The main story behind the pressure cooker was you never left that stove when that pressure cooker was on there. I sat right there in front of the stove, have a book and a timer, and that's how I do it. When it's time to take it off I heave a big sigh, because I've heard of people

blowing pressure cookers up clear through the roof of their house. We had a neighbor lady that liked to go down to Rex's every once in a while. She put her pressure cooker on the stove. She wasn't canning, she was just cooking a roast in it. It ran out of juices and blew the pan up right through her trailer house roof.

Lee: Yes, beans are bad in that. The neighbor lady was cooking beans in there, because you can cook them faster, and a bean got up there and plugged the thing; it blew up, and she had beans all over the kitchen.

Tom: It's not funny.

Marietta: No, it's not.

Lee: It's funny afterwards.

Tom: [Laughs] Tom Ladenburg was your closest neighbor when you lived in the North Fork?

Lee: Yes.

Tom: You must have known Roy Cooper.

Marietta: Oh, yeah.

Lee: Roy Cooper. Frank Newton. Frank Newton had a real sense of humor, when you get to know him. I was moving up there and I said, "Well gee whiz, I'll have to build a smokehouse." "Oh, don't build one; I'll give you one." We was out there, and I was looking at a saddle I was going to buy from him, then we come back and he said, "There's your smoker any time you want it." It was made out of river rock and about 12 feet high, built into the bank. He said, "Just take it any time you want it."

Tom: Were you able to move it?

Lee: No. I would guess it would have been a good load for a dump truck. We was working six days a week and we got off a little bit early on Saturday and you had to hurry to town. I could remember we worked so much I couldn't even get in the stores to get a pair of shoes. I had to call a guy who owned the store, Moody, and then he would open the store and get me a pair of shoes. I used to wear them Red Wings, and I'd wear out two pairs every summer.

Gary: You were doing a lot of work then, huh?

Lee: Well, you're walking on those spruce logs, and the bark on them is real sharp and it just cuts the soles right off.

Gary: It takes me 20 years to wear out a pair. [Laughs]

Tom: I guess the moral of that story is you worked a lot harder than we do, or did.

Lee: Yeah.

Marietta: He never worked close to home most of the time. It was out and away. When we lived up the South Fork he worked at Spotted Bear. He would get up at 4:00 o'clock in the morning to be up there in time to go to work. Coming home it would be the same way. He would work until dark, then he still had to load up and come all the way back down to the house. He would usually get in and would be on the telephone with all of his crew. The next day he would get up, and we would start loading him up again. That would be on Sunday, and he would be ready to head right back up the South Fork to go to work again. He spent a lot of time away from home.

Lee: Yes, and pretty near all of the roads and stuff I dealt with, they've done away with them.

Tom: Yes.

Lee: Skookoleel Creek and Hollowat Creek.

Tom: Yes. That's a commentary on how today people think they have to commute a long way. They don't realize that ever since the advent of the automobile, especially in Montana, you guys started out close to home and just worked your way until you were commuting a long distance.

Marietta: Can you imagine being little kids living up the North Fork at his uncle's place, walking from there clear to Columbia Falls to school and walking home, little kids.

Tom: How far was that?

Lee: Oh, about 4 miles, I guess. One way.

Tom: That's eight miles a day.

Marietta: And all the little animals, and the big animals.

Lee: I started out when I was six years old, carrying a lunch, and I never quit until I was 70 years old—carried a lunch all that time.

Tom: Did you pack your own lunches?

Lee: No, my ma packed them for me.

Marietta: Then we married and I packed them.

Lee: There was times I did. To save walking. I remember my Aunt Mary was going to school and my granddad had a place just by the tracks up the road a little bit, where the North Fork Road takes off. We would pack our own lunches there and walk to school from there. But even from there it was a long ways. He had a homestead on Hawk Creek, him and Hugh Kergen. They were old-time homesteaders. He moved to town, and he was janitor of the school. He would see us kids walking and he would keep ringing the bell until we got there so we wouldn't be tardy.

Tom: How long was your school day then?

Lee: I think we got out about 3:30 or 4:00 o'clock, unless Mr. Jensen wanted us to stay afterwards. Sometimes if you had done something wrong you had to spend a half-hour or an hour after school, you know, and do arithmetic or whatever he wanted you to do. Helmer Jensen.

Marietta: Talking about packing lunches, I packed for him and our six kids, and I would get so sick and tired of packing lunches. We bought cheese in the little wrappers, single slices. One morning I got up and here were all these lunches to pack. I just threw the cheese in the bread, bundled it up in a baggie, put it in the lunch pails and sent it.

Lee: Heck, that wasn't so bad, Ma. You should have had to eat them.

Marietta: [Laughs] He come home bellowing. Why was there paper in these sandwiches.

Lee: The oldest daughter learned how to bake, and she learned how to make a chocolate cake. She had pretty good luck with them, but after about two months of chocolate cakes I says, "No more chocolate cakes." So, then she made chocolate cupcakes.

Marietta: And chocolate chip cookies. He got his fair share of chocolate, and then some.

Tom: When your kids got big enough then did you have quite a bit of help in the kitchen?

Marietta: Oh, I'd get two of them in the kitchen, two of them to something in the yard, two of them to the garbage, or two of them outside with the steer, this sort of thing. We never had a lot of cows, just enough to keep our kids busy. And you never cooked anything unless you made two gallons at a time—two gallons of spaghetti, two gallons of clam chowder, and you were lucky if you had enough for the next day left over.

Tom: So, you raised cows on occasion, I take it.

Marietta: Yes, just for meat. But our kids were so touchy; I mean everything was like their best friend. They didn't want to eat it after it was killed. They would kind of go on strike. I would freeze the rabbits in meat cartons, then while they were gone in school I would take them out, thaw them out, get them all fixed up and ready for supper. You would put them on the table and they would say, "This was Sweetie Pie" or this was "Fuzzy." They wouldn't eat it.

Tom: One of the questions we have on here, just kind of jumping around, is whether holidays on the North Fork were any different than people in town would have had?

Marietta: Yes. I'll just put it this way, and I love my North Fork and I love my people. You have this side and that side [differences of opinion]. There's no down the middle. But for the holidays everybody was close together, nice to one another. It made it very nice. To this day, at the hospital I would have up to 18 North Forkers in my room visiting in one day. Some of them were people that I didn't consider friends, but they came and visited, said hello. It was real nice.

Tom: I made the statement once, and I want you to agree or disagree with this. I said what makes the North Fork special to me is the people.

Marietta: That's right.

Tom: That sounds to me like what you guys are saying.

Marietta: Yes. And then the out-of-state people started moving in and stuff. Right away you can feel every person kind of not really bristle, but just kind of get a little leery, and the first thing you know you'd warm up to them. They're nice people. They moved out here to get away from back east because they are such stuffed shirts back there. They don't talk to one another, never hug, never shake hands, nothing. But they come out here and you open your house up to them right away, and they're okay.

Lee: Yes, about the first year they really enjoyed the North Fork and then they spent the rest of their life trying to change it to what they wanted.

Marietta: And it didn't work. They are ruining it now.

Tom: Well, the same thing in the cities too, Columbia Falls and even Whitefish. People want to change it to where they left, I guess.

Lee: In the early days when they come down to town a lot of people come with horses and wagons. And up the road, just about across from Glacier Rim on the old North Fork Road, there was a campground that they used there, and they used that for years. In fact, there was a big tamarack log that was cut into a horse trough so they could water the horses there.

Gary: Is that Welcome Springs?

Lee: I don't know what they called it. It's on the old road, and there was a bunch of big cedar trees around it, a really nice place, no underbrush, and that horse trough laid there for years. It had a little log hollowed out and chewed into a trough. That got kicked out, and then the trough just fell all to pieces. But that trough had been there, I don't know, 20 years that I knew of, and then all of a sudden it was gone. We was logging back up there on the top. Me and my dad was getting some cedar out. There was a little cabin there. I could have hauled it in the back of my pick-up. I could have got that cabin and put it in the pick-up, and I let it go. I went back about two years later saying, "I'm going to get that," and it was gone. Somebody else got it. But it was made out of split cedar, and he had it fitted together real nice. It was probably four feet high. You had to crawl in on your hands and knees, and for a door he had a piece of canvas nailed on the top and the side, and that was it, and bear grass all over the floor. One little shelf with a candle on it and a little stub of pencil and a piece of paper there where nothing was wrote on it. I don't know whose cabin it was, but it some old trapper. There was a lot of trappers. I think Margaret Heaphy has got the book, *The Land of Giants.*

Tom: I've heard the title but I'm not familiar with the book.

Lee: Well, you ought to read it, if you get a chance, but it's different than most of the western history, you know. They always start off in St. Louis and come up the Missouri. They started on the coast and come up the Columbia, and it tells all about the trappers. They had a lot of Indian troubles. In fact, I think they had more Indian troubles over there than we did on this side of the divide.

Tom: That's interesting.

Lee: There's three or four references in there of 1830s-1840s guys coming up into the Flathead area. There was one, I think it was the Missouri Fur Companies. It's a book that's out of print. I loaned it out and never got it back, but I think it was in 1836 or 1838 when [Joseph] Smith went across from Salt Lake, across the desert and into California and up the coast to the Columbia. When he got to the Flathead House he was looking for his trappers, and they told him they were on the North Fork of the Flathead. I found a trap in a tree that was completely growed in, into a tamarack tree. You could just see enough of it to see it was a trap. Don Gimble has it out there now. I gave it to him. He understands it goes to Fish & Game when he's done with it. But that trap, John Fraley looked at it. He finally got in there and got a picture of the pad, and he said the trap was made in 1830 to 1835, somewheres in there.

Tom: That's really old.

Lee: There used to be another trap just like in the Polebridge store, but through the years it disappeared. I don't know if somebody sold it or gave it away or whatever, but it had a different chain on than what you see on the traps today.

Tom: You brought up the Polebridge store. Could you go back and tell us about the first storeowner that you met or what dealings you had, many or few, with the Polebridge store?

Lee: I remember Ted Ross real well. I was going by there quite a bit, and I remember one time me and Dewitt stopped by. We had worked six days in the woods, and we said, "Well, we'll have a beer going to town," so we bought a six-pack of beer and Mrs. Ross wouldn't sell me a six -pack of beer. She says, "You're too nice a boy to be drinking beer." She wouldn't sell it to me. George bought a six-pack, so we got a beer. She would sell it to him; he was older than I was.

Tom: I remember that they didn't want to sell beer at the store.

Lee: But they had to for income.

Tom: Right. They had to change their mind to stay alive.

Lee: He bought it from Ben Rover, and Ben Rover told him, "If you get a bear just shoot him with a shotgun and you'll never see him again," and he says "That's it." And so Ted did that. Every time a bear would come, he shot it. Finally, come hunting season and he shot a bear. When he was skinning it out he got a whole handful of shot. He was shooting the same bear all summer. [Laughs] He took it over to Rover, and he says, "Ben look'a there, you told me one time, but look'a there." Here had a whole handful of shot that he skinned off of that bear.

Gary: What year did he buy the store?

Lee: Ted Ross? It had to be 1952, 1953, in there [actually 1955]. In fact, what was his boy's name, Bob Ross? When I was working for Rex Brown he worked up there for a little bit, and he set chokers for me. Then he got drafted into the Army. He had to leave before summer was over, I remember that. I gave him some good advice. I says, "Don't volunteer for nothing." [Laughs]

Marietta: Did you ever tell him the story about putting in the well for Ted Ross?

Lee: Oh, yeah. Ted drove wells, you know. He had a deal rigged up on the rear-end of his truck, with a rope and a big weight, and he would drive that down. He pointed the pipe on the end, then when he got done he would drop a stick of dynamite down there and blow the end off. Well, he come down one day and he says, "You got some fuse?" I said, "Yeah, I've got some dynamite fuse," so I gave him that. Pretty soon he's back, he says, "You got some dynamite?" He says, "It didn't go off, and I can't get it out, the fuse won't lift it out." I says, "Well I've got a kinepak." It's a pound of explosives. It's not an explosive until you squirt this juice in it and mix it up, and it's like dough. I should have only used half of it, but I says, "Well, as long as I've got it mixed up we'll put it all down there." So, we put it down there, and he already had one charge in there. We got off, and we set that off, and boy you couldn't believe the explosion and the cloud of smoke. People come running out of their houses asking what happened. We says, "Yeah, what happened?" We broke every mantle in Polebridge.

Marietta: And rattled my house eight miles away down the road.

Tom: [Laughs] I'm going to inject here, because not everybody that's going to hear this is going to understand what you just said. You broke every mantle on the Coleman lights, because they are very fragile. I would have thought you were going to say you broke every window. But actually, what you said was more important than that, because . . .

Lee: Yes, we broke all the mantles. Bob Grimaldi's got that place now. You know, everybody in Polebridge has had trouble with sand in their pumps and stuff. He says, "I don't have any problems at all." He says, "I've got the best well in Polebridge."

Tom: [Laughs] So, the wells were on the lots Ted sold south of Polebridge then?

Lee: Yes. He's the guy that subdivided it.

Tom: I didn't remember that. I worked for him at age 15 or 16, and I hayed that field which is now the Polebridge subdivision one summer.

Lee: Yes, he used to hay that years ago. Then that place where [Wallace] Donaldson is, Hoolie Stine had that big meadow. I thought Hoolie Stine homesteaded, but he didn't. He bought it from the original homesteaders. They had that Hay Creek, and there was flumes out there. Where it went across the little dip they made the wooden trough and irrigated all that land out back. That's one heck of a farm. It's got four feet of topsoil on it. It's just fabulous.

Tom: All that Hay Creek drainage?

Lee: Yes. And Hay Creek isn't in its original channel now.

Tom: It's south of the original channel?

Lee: Well, right there as you cross the bridge it followed just about along the edge of that meadow and then went back down by Chadwicks and went in. In 1964, Bob Olson owned that 80 acres, and it cut across and they had a lot of gravel in there, and he wanted it for the gravel.

The Geological Survey wanted to put it back in its original channel, and he says, "No, no, no, leave it there." After a couple of years, he thought well maybe it was better back in the old channel," and they said, "It's too late now; it's going to stay where it is."

Tom: So, are you saying that it ran north to start with from the bridge, or has it always run south from the bridge?

Lee: No, it run through where the bridge is, but just as soon as you know where the house is there?

Tom: Yes.

Lee: It turned to the left, and if you look there's an old channel.

Tom: Left, that would be north then.

Lee: Yes, right kind of to the east pretty much.

Tom: Okay.

Lee: It run to the north a little bit and then to the east. And then it swung to the south again.

Tom: I didn't know that.

Lee: That's the best farmland on the North Fork right there, that area there. Finley Arnett owned all of that at one time. He had 800 acres in there.

Tom: How did he get so many acres? Bought out other homesteaders?

Lee: Buying out homesteaders that wanted to sell out, and he got it all.

Tom: You knew him, Arnett?

Lee: Yes. He lived out here in Bad Rock. He had a farm, and he was an agronomist, you know. He raised cattle. He would winter them down here and then he would herd them up to the North Fork. They would get right there just before you get to Fool Hen Hill on the right. There used to be a logging camp there, and it was a little meadow. He would stay overnight with them there the first night. But he would get a calf, and he would put the calf in the back of the pick-up. Of course, then the cow would follow the pick-up right along behind, and herded along and would get up there. It took them two to three days to get there.

Tom: Ladenburg also ran cows up there? Yes or no?

Lee: Yes, he always had cows at different times, you know, but he tried to run too many. You know that place, if you've got 40 head of cattle that's a lot, because if you can't grow enough feed for them and you have to buy hay you're going in the hole. He would build the herd up to 100 head and start buying hay, and then he would have to sell them off. It wasn't paying off.

Marietta: We would have cows on the hills behind us in the snow that would starve to death, and cows that would get over in the Park, and one would come out in the spring half starved to death.

Lee: Well, he thought he had them all in. There's still 8 or 10. He didn't keep very good track of them. He didn't even know exactly how many he had.

Tom: Well, up country they would range up there, above Polebridge by 5 or 6 miles. I don't know how far up they would go, but quite a ways up country.

Lee: They were all over. Well, he depended on his neighbors and on people that weren't there for their grass, you know. It's just not cattle country.

Tom: Did anybody other than those two run any cows up there, that you can remember?

Lee: Well, old Cooper used to pasture up there in the summertime, but he would buy in the spring and then he would sell in the fall. He didn't try to winter anything.

Tom: About how many head did he run up there?

Lee: Oh, see he had Donaldson's and Arnett's place in there. He had that leased.

Marietta: How many cows?

Lee: I don't know, he would run about 60 to 80 head.

Marietta: But he kept track of them.

Lee: Yes. Every evening they would want to get on the road, you know, because that pavement was there and that's warm. The cows would get out there and lay down and eat, and he would have to herd them off.

Tom: Can you tell us about when he died? You were up there at that point.

Lee: Well, we heard a shot, you know, me and my daughter. I says, "We ought to go up there." He was bothered by a bear, but anyway we got to working and didn't go up there. It's a good thing we didn't, because they had stabbed him is what they had done.

Marietta: You're talking about Roy Cooper now.

Lee: Roy Cooper. Yes, he got stabbed with a big chef knife. They are real long and pointed. He was sitting on the couch, and they stabbed him here in the neck and it come out his back and into the couch. You could see the spot where the knife went into the couch. Then Art Harker went over there. He was supposed to come over for dinner or something. He went over there and he come down, because we had the only phone in the North Fork at that time down at the lower end.

Marietta: The police radio.

Lee: He said, "I think Cooper committed suicide. He's sitting there with his hand over his head and blood all over," so we called the cops and they come in. They could see it was murder, so then they couldn't do nothing, and it took two hours to get a deputy up there. Yes, they had his horses saddled and they were going to go north into Canada, and Cooper told them they couldn't make it. So, evidently they took his word for it. Took all his guns and stuff like that. There was a bartender at Missoula, and he called the cops and he says, "I think I just bought a hot gun," and he told them about it. It was one of Cooper's rifles. It was one of the only ones they recovered.

Tom: Being as we're on the subject of death, do you remember anybody else that died in the North Fork that you knew?

Marietta: Frank Evans.

Lee: Well, just where Cedar Lake is, there's two guys buried about there that I don't know, it was in 1918 when they had that flu. They hadn't been in for quite a while, so they went up and checked and they were both dead in their bunks, and they buried them out there. They can't even find where the cabin is anymore.

Tom: How did Frank Evans die?

Lee: He committed suicide.

Tom: Did you know him very well?

Lee: Yes, I knew him pretty well. In fact, I was probably one of the few guys that ever got any of his rose petal wine. He used to pick rose petals and make wine.

Tom: I got some.

Lee: Did you? It was very fragrant.

Tom: Yes. It wasn't bad.

Marietta: What was his girlfriend's name?

Tom: Ginny [Tcheng].

Marietta: Yes, but she had another name. Moonbeam, Moonshine...

Lee: Beam Blossom.

Tom: I don't remember that.

Lee: Yes. I stopped there one time. I was doing some clearing for him, cutting some brush off, and when we got done he says, "I'll make you some sassafras tea." That's the only time I ever had any. It's really different. But I guess originally they used the root and he says, "I found out if you get the bark down close to the bottom of the tree and just use the bark." It was quite tasty.

Gary: He made it from a plant up in the North Fork?

Lee: No. He picked it up back east from where he was from originally. He called it sassafras tea. I remember he used the bark or the root, but the bark has got it, too. He had chunks of it there, and he would just kind of grind it up and make tea out of it.

Marietta: Remember back when they used to make the bear boards for on your windows and stuff with all the nails in them?

Tom: Yes.

Marietta: Charlie and Dorothy Ritter had been having trouble with a grizzly bear up there, and they had them all around the house. Frank Evans went there for something. But anyway, he stepped on one of those boards. He had to get all those nails in his feet.

Lee: No, they were in his boots. They had a storm door. It was closed, and he was trying to get their attention. He was pretty excited. Remember his Volkswagen burned up?

Tom: Okay.

Lee: I guess it was on fire, and he was trying to get their attention real quick, trying to get the fire out. They had the bear board out there with spikes, and it went through his boots. He was out there hollering. He finally got their attention, but it was too late to save anything.

Tom: He was always doing different things. I remember one time I spent the weekend, or my day off, up there with them. It must have been in the fall, because he had baked apples, and I don't know that I'd ever had a baked apple. I had had apple pie, but he had this like a restaurant-sized pan, maybe it was bigger than 9" x 13". He had about 12 baked apples in there, stuffed with brown sugar and they were pretty good.

Marietta: And raisins.

Tom: But the first one was good. The second was okay, and then I think we had one for breakfast the next day, because without proper storage and just him living there, you had to eat all the baked apples from the beginning to the end. That was the one thing that was out of place, or different, that I remembered from him.

Lee: That house he had, that was Chauncey Beebe's homestead. He was there in the early days.

Tom: I always thought it was the Adair homestead, but they must have bought it?

Lee: No, that was Chauncey Beebe's homestead.

Tom: Oh, I see.

Lee: It went up just about to the store and then back on the hill somewhat.

Tom: Well, yes it does. It goes up on the ridge there, and right where the T is in front of the store, that's where that fence line that's part of Polebridge subdivision now was their property line, I think.

Lee: He was quite a guy, old Chauncey was. He married [Eva] DeFord. I think that's where Rachael Sweet was; part of that was the old DeFord homestead. He married the DeFord girl and then they moved to town here and raised their family down here. They was in Bad Rock first, and then they moved into Columbia Falls. He was a government trapper, a damage control guy. He went out and got grizzly bears and mountain lions and stuff like that. In fact, I don't know where it would be now, but they made a movie of him capturing lions alive. They wanted them for a zoo or something. He would run them up a tree. He had a 2" x 2" with eyes screwed into it with a little cable and a noose on the end. He would put it around her head and lock it and pull her out of the tree and sent them to the zoo. They didn't have tranquilizer guns in those days.

Tom: Well, what do you say we call it off for today?

[Pause in the recording; some material is missing]

Tom: Over your knowledge of the North Fork, is that a pretty fair assessment of how people came and went up there?

Marietta: Yes.

Lee: They would have a family. They would have to get the kids to school, things like that. Like Dewey Parrish, I remember him. They homesteaded up there. He was back of where the community hall is, back in there. He was a great guy for finding bees, bee trees and honey trees. But in the lower North Fork, from Columbia Falls to Canyon Creek, there was a lot of cedar. A lot of them were hollow, and that was the perfect home for bees. He would go along and find them. He would put out a bait station with sugar water and get the bees coming to that, and then he would follow a bee for as far as he could see him and pretty soon another bee would come by, and pretty soon he would find the nest.

Tom: So, he was tracking bees? I would have never thought to do that. Shows how little I know about the outside world. Did you ever find any honey and have an abundance of it?

Lee: Yes. My dad and my granddad did. I remember they had a big cedar tree when I was a little kid. It fell down and broke open, and there was two hives in the same tree. You couldn't believe how much. We had washtubs full of honey, and boy was that good honey. Of course, with the kids around ours didn't last as long as Grandpa's did. I can remember going to Grandma's, and she would have fresh bread and honey. In the lower North Fork, where the shooting range is, there my granddad had a homestead, and my mother had a homestead there. The hills after the fire were just pink with fireweed.

Marietta: Boy, that makes good honey.

Lee: And then, probably about the first of June, they would bring in several carloads of sheep, and they would unload them here and start up the North Fork. Before fall, as the summer progressed and the feed opened up on the high ridges, they would be up there on the high ridges

on the Whitefish Divide. They would pasture the sheep up there. And in Werner Basin, I can remember it was in 1953, I think it was, I was in there, and there was a little camper in there. They had a big rock, and it had SD's Small Sheep Camp 1935. I think that was about the last year. 1936 was probably about the last time they brought them into the Whitefish Divide.

Tom: Sheep had never been really big in the Flathead Valley have they?

Lee: No. I can't remember anybody having any sheep down there.

Tom: I can't either.

Lee: Fuzzy Barton, there was one guy had four or five bands. They hired Fuzzy to pack groceries to the different camps and stuff, to Stryker and so on. He had a couple of horses and he would take groceries to the guys all summer long. He said they brought him a rifle and all the ammunition, and he was supposed to shoot every bear he saw. He claimed he killed several hundred bears. I don't know if he did or not. That's what he claimed. The CCCs had a road that followed Big Creek and went up to [Larsen's?] homestead. He had a couple of homesteads up there. And then Hollowat, there was no road then. There was a road on the state land, but then when you got up there on North Coal and South Coal there was no roads in that area, when I first went in. And there was a lot of game in them days.

Marietta: Lots of bears, too.

Lee: And you know, most of the people didn't want mule deer, they wanted whitetails. They didn't really hunt them.

Tom: Is there a difference in your book between whitetail and mule deer?

Lee: Oh, if you get them in the rut I think I would prefer mule deer to a whitetail. If you get them during the rut, you know, they ain't very good.

Marietta: Haven't got enough garlic to cover it up.

Tom: [Laughs] Ha, good point. Bull trout were really big back in the early days. I remember my uncles talking about fishing at Big Creek. They had pictures of really big Dolly Varden. Did you fish for those at all?

Lee: Well, let's see, Big Creek, Coal Creek, Trail Creek, and Whale Creek had been closed to fishing for as long as I can remember.

Tom: Oh.

Lee: They was spawning streams, and they always had them closed. In fact, one year they did open it up for two weeks in a year, but it was right when the fish were spawning and they didn't know where they were spawning. They let fishermen go in, and they had a check station at Big Creek. You had to tell them where you got the fish and things like that. But it was only for a two-week period, a very short period of time.

Tom: Were you a big fisherman?

Lee: Oh yeah, I did a lot of fishing.

Tom: Did you can bull trout?

Marietta: I canned them before we were married.

Lee: My mother used to can them all the time. After I got to going to school, you know, we had a place. We stayed at Grandpa's place down here, and I just loved to go. You were allowed two a day. You know, 4, 5, or 6-pounders you could catch them, nothing to it. And my dad was a fisherman, and we would go fishing. In fact, my grandmother out at [Corn Fur] there was a cedar camp out there and my grandpa and grandma cooked there. Where [Henry Rigby] was.

Tom: So, you say a cedar camp. Was that for cedar lumber or shakes?

Lee: No. They took out poles and posts. They would get an order for poles, and then they would go through there. Of course, it's got to be really good timber for poles. There can't be no rot in them or no rot on the outside, and things like that. And then the hollow ones, you know, if they had a shell one of them they would make posts out of them. In fact, before the fire, right where the Blankenship bridge is, there was a patch of cedars there, great big stuff, 4 and 5 and 6-foot on the stump. My granddad logged that out before there was any roads in there at all. That was about, oh 1915 I think it was, somewhere in there.

Tom: Early fires.

Lee: Yes. My dad wasn't big enough to be in the woods yet then. He was just a little kid, but Granddad used to go in there, and him and Corbett, that was his nephew, they got that stuff out.

[End of recording]