

Robert D. Ross Oral History Interview

November 28, 2017

This is an oral history interview with Robert D. Ross, conducted on November 28, 2017, at his home on Sendero Drive west of Kalispell, Montana. Interviewers are Lois Walker and Christine Heitz. This interview is sponsored by the North Fork Landowners Association and is part of the North Fork History Project.

Lois: Since we lost the first interview that y'all did—when Karen gave me the tape recorder it was not there—I would like to go back over some of the basics. You are Robert D. Ross?

Bob: Robert D.

Lois: When were you born?

Bob: January 7, 1935.

Lois: Tell me who your siblings are and your order of birth.

Bob: The oldest child is my sister Betty. She was born February 5, 1933. She is now 84.

Lois: But she's still living?

Bob: Yes. And I told her that you would like to talk to her, but she does not seem to be very interested in that, because the North Fork has some negative memories for her. It was a very difficult time for her. I'm number 2. Number 3 is my sister Norma Frederick. She is three years behind me. And then our baby brother, Kenny, he was a caboose. He's seven years younger. His birthday is July 11, 1942, I think it is. He's a snowbird. He goes back and forth between Helena and Arizona.

Christine: Good for him.

Bob: Not necessarily.

Christine: Well, hard on you. Yes.

Bob: Well, I don't see why people do that.

Lois: People in Florida couldn't understand why we came up here, either. "Are you nuts?" Where were you raised?

Bob: I was raised in the Flathead, Kalispell, born in an upstairs apartment across the street east from Russell School.

Christine: Was your dad a minister?

Bob: No.

Lois: What did he do for a living?

Bob: In my younger years growing up he was a woods worker, a logger. He worked in the woods. Can I give a little bit of history there?

Lois: Sure.

Bob: My father was born in a sod hut in the sandhills of northern Nebraska. The last of seven kids. Somewhere in the process his older brother, whose name is Earl, came to Montana, before the highway went across Marias Pass. He came as far as Cut Bank in an old car with his family, put his stuff on a freight train, came to Belton, and was on his way to Oregon. But he took a ride in a wagon up to Lake McDonald. This would have been in the early 1920s. It was so beautiful that he stayed a while. There was a cabin camp for sale, which sat right behind what is now the Apgar Gift Shop. That used to be the old schoolhouse. Right behind it there is an open space where my Uncle Earl had his house and three cabins.

Lois: For heaven's sake.



Ted Ross (front row, right), as a young man with his siblings. He was born in Butte, Nebraska, on St. Patrick's Day in 1904.

Bob: So, my dad and his parents came in a Model T from Chamberlain, South Dakota, to Billings. In Billings my dad decided that he wanted to join the Salvation Army. He left my grandparents in Billings and went to San Francisco for a year in the Salvation Army Training School. In the meantime, my grandparents came to Apgar, where their oldest son was living. My dad, at the close of his Salvation Army Training, was stationed back in Kalispell, but he did not like the Salvation Army. To use his term, something may have been more significant. He said, "I didn't like to stand on the corner ringing my bell and begging for money." So Dad, in 1923 I think, ended up at Apgar with his parents, living in a tent along McDonald Creek.

Christine: He must have known the Brewsters.

Bob: He knew the Brewsters very well, and I can remember the Brewsters. And a logging company—it wasn't Slack, but it was one of the early companies that had a logging

contract over by the Flathead ranger station. Do you know where that is? You take that road that goes back toward where the horse corrals are in that Quarter Circle Bridge, and you keep following that road. It takes you back where you can see the Blankenship cabins. They had a logging contract back there. My dad took me back and showed me where the camp was. In fact, I have some old tin plates and tin cups from where the logging camp was. He worked there sawing timber, and that's where he got involved in the timber industry. He met my mom, who was born and raised here. She was raised out in the Helena Flats country.

Lois: What was her maiden name?

Bob: Esther Rasmussen.

Lois: Okay, I've heard the name. I've seen it in the old papers.

Bob: They got married and had us four kids. I can remember in my youth, I imagine maybe I was three or four years old. going up to my Uncle Earl's cabin court. We would go up there in the summertime as much as we could. If he didn't have a cabin that was open, Dad had a tent and we would pitch the tent out there. We would go up on Logan Pass, when it was still a gravel road. My cousins had an old Model T car that had a flatbed on the back—just lots of childhood memories. I can remember the old Apgar house that sat down by the lake shore, about where the boat dock is now. Brewster's, which at that time was just a store and a gas pump, sat there.



Ted and Esther Ross's four children: Norma, Bob, Ken, and Betty.

Lois: I had no idea your family went back that far in the area.

Bob: I've been associated with Apgar and the North Fork as far back as my memories go. My dad was a fisherman, so we would go up the Inside North Fork Road. We hiked all of those trails back into Logging Lake, Quartz Lake, Cerulean Lake—all of those—when I was just a kid, maybe 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 years old.

Lois: Do you remember going over to the Mercantile when the Rovers owned it?

Bob: No, no. I don't even think the bridge was built then. I don't know when that bridge was built.

Lois: It went in originally in 1916, but it kept getting washed away. It was damaged a number of times.

Bob: I don't remember the bridge until I was working for the Forest Service, and then that was the old pole bridge that went across the river.

Lois: It had a name—Henshaw Ford. I think that's what they called it in the old days.

Bob: Do you have the writings of the Petersons, Tom Peterson?

Lois: *Homestead Memories* by Marie Price Peterson?

Bob: Yes.

Lois: Yes, I have it.

Bob: Chris, Where do you live in relationship to the Peterson homestead?

Chris: I don't. That doesn't ring a bell.

Lois: She was Marie Price, and she was one of only a few women who had their own homesteads. She filed her own homestead on Tepee Lake Road. Then after she and Tom got married, she swapped with the Forest Service for a piece of property that was adjacent to his. It's where Merry O'Hare is today, at the end of Trail Creek.

Bob: I'm wondering, is she in a part of the old Peterson homestead?

Lois: No. They are north of Trail Creek on the main road, the North Fork Road.

Bob: That's where the Peterson homestead was, on the Trail Creek Road.

Chris: On Trail Creek, but I'm on the North Fork Road. I go past Trail Creek.

Lois: She's up by where Shorty Waters was.

Chris: Nine-tenths of a mile.

Bob: Nine-tenths. You're before Colt's Creek then?

Chris: Yes. Do you remember Shorty Waters' homestead?

Bob: Are you before Tom Reynolds.

Chris: Yes.

Lois: Way before Tom Reynolds. Close to where the Foremans were, the Sawtooth Ranch.

Bob: Okay. Are you on the left-hand side then?

Lois: She's on the right.

Bob: I always had you on Trail Creek. Okay.

Chris: The Hoilands are on Trail Creek.

Bob: Now are the Hoilands staying up there in the winter?

Chris: They are right now. That could change.

Bob: But Duke is doing okay? No, Duke is not doing okay.

Chris: He's coming in for more surgery on Friday the 17th.

Bob: That insidious disease, just insidious.

Chris: Your folks. How did your dad end up over there in Polebridge then?

Bob: My dad worked as a sawyer in the timber industry, and you know how seasonal that is, on and off and on and off. He wanted to get a steady job, because now he had four kids. He ended up at Flathead County High School janitoring, and he ended up after several years being in charge of the whole high school maintenance program.

Lois: That must have been painful, after being in the North Fork or being out in the Park.

Bob: My dad could not stand that kind of stress from the teachers, from the administration, in charge of the maintenance. He went up the North Fork fishing and stopped at the Polebridge store to buy a candy bar or something, and he talked to Ben Rover. Ben said, "I'm selling the place," and that just sparked something inside of my dad. They owned a home here in Kalispell, and my dad ended up trading with Ben Rover. Ben Rover moved to Kalispell, and Mom and Dad moved to Polebridge.

Lois: Oh really? I didn't know that. When did Ben's wife Annette die? Annette died, then later he married Adolph Opalka's widow.

Bob: That transaction took place in 1954, and I think Annette probably died about two years afterwards, about 1956 or something like that. [Actually, she died in August 1955, shortly after they sold the store.] Dad sold that northern part of the property to Ben Rover so he could build the Rover cabin up there.

Lois: So, Ben did build that?

Bob: It wasn't as nice then. Basically, it was just maybe a 12' x 16' cabin where he could go spend the night by himself.

Lois: And then the Wilderness cabins were across the road from it?

Bob: Across the street.

Lois: Right. And the old Hensen store. They didn't operate it all that long, I found out. They opened it in 1920.

Bob: Was it the Hensen store? Bill Adair did not build that?

Lois: No, he didn't. It was built in competition, because the Hensens felt that his prices were too high. This was Ben Hensen, Sr., the one that was married to May who was A.G. Vance's daughter. They built that and went into business in 1920. But once they got up into the Depression, it sounds like they only ran it until 1929. They had kids. They had Ben Hensen, Jr., who married Ann Hensen, and then the daughter [Esther], who married Frank Newton. The kids needed to be educated, so they moved to California. They just came up in the summers after that, and they gave up the store. It sat vacant for many years, finally just sort of tumbled down, and then burned in the 1988 fire.

Bob: Yes, it burned finally, because I used to go roam around in that house trying to visualize, you know, because I thought it was Adair that built it. I was wondering why did he just move a mile down the road and build another store.

Lois: And they were the first ones to get the post office. The post office was not in Adair's originally. The Hensens got the franchise to have the post office there. The story goes that May was the one who came up with the name Polebridge. The post office said, "What do you want to call the post office?" She said, "Well, I want to call it Polebridge because of the pole bridge," so that's where the name Polebridge came from. They operated the original post office there. And Ben Hensen, Jr., when he took over from his dad was the youngest postmaster in the United States at the time. Then when they gave up the store the post office moved to the Merc.

Bob: Who built the Wilderness cabins?

Lois: Well I've got that. I've got the whole list of owners. I haven't focused on it.

Bob: How far back does it go? Do you know?

Lois: Pretty far. I started with the people who owned it at the time the NFIA [North Fork Improvement Association] was established in 1947 and then just kept tracing it back. Frank Evans had the most information on the sequence of who the different owners were, but it goes back quite a ways.

Bob: There was so much history lost in that 1988 fire. Just tragic, tragic.

Lois: Was your mom on board with buying the Merc?

Bob: No, no.

Lois: How old were you kids then?

Bob: I was in my first year of college. I had left home and I got a letter, or I did I talk to my folks on the phone? I was in Minneapolis, and they were thinking about moving to Polebridge, and I just thought—because I had just spent two years working up there for the Forest Service. I had started in the Bob Marshall, and they transferred me up to what used to be called Big Creek. And I thought Polebridge?!

Lois: Generators weren't what they are today back then.

Bob: Well, they didn't even have one. Down in the basement they had what they call wet cell batteries. For my mom to move from a home that they had paid for, to where she didn't have electricity. They did have sort of running water, but in 1954 it was primitive.

Lois: Back to the outhouse. Norma was just coming out of high school, I presume?

Bob: Norma had graduated from high school that year, I think. My brother Ken went up. He was 12 years old.

Chris: What happened to his schooling?

Bob: He went to the Calvert Home Schooling system out of Chicago.

Lois: He's still living, is he not, Ken?

Bob: Yes. He's down in Yuma.

Lois: Does he have a lot of memories from those years?

Bob: He has very pleasant memories. He loved it, and Dad loved it, but Mom didn't.



**The Rosses purchased the Polebridge Store from Ben and Annette Rover in 1955.
The old cabin that served as a wood shed was still standing to the right of the store.**

Lois: Someone told me that your mom became pretty good friends with Ruth Lawson, and sometimes when she just needed to get away she would go over to Ruth's house.

Bob: Yes, they were very good friends with the Lawsons.

Lois: She would lay down and take a nap when she couldn't cope.

Bob: Because there was no privacy in the store.

Lois: Absolutely.

Bob: No privacy, and Mom was a very private person. Living in the public like that was very, very difficult for her.

Lois: Someone told me she had a hearing impairment.

Bob: Oh, she was deaf.

Lois: That would make it even harder, my gosh.

Bob: She finally got hearing aids, but those first-generation hearing aids were very, very inadequate. She lived in a really isolated world and suffered depression as a result.

Chris: Did she?

Bob: Yes.

Lois: What did they do with the saloon building? Did they live in the saloon or did they live above the store?

Bob: Well, at that time there was no saloon.

Lois: Karen Feather calls it the mother cabin or something, I mean the original.

Bob: Well, my folks used to live in that.

Lois: They lived there and worked in the store?

Bob: Yes. They started upstairs in the apartment, and Mom just did not feel like she had a home. Because she had nice furniture in Kalispell, so Dad then moved things over into what is now the Northern Lights, and they lived in there for several years.

Lois: Again, pretty primitive there, too.

Bob: Oh, very primitive. I think Bill Adair must have built that.

Lois: He did.

Bob: And lived in it himself, he and his wife.

Lois: They did.

Bob: When Dad bought the store, Ben Rover had a liquor license, and my Dad was a very, very strong believer, having graduated and served in the Salvation Army, and he would not buy liquor. He would not renew the liquor license. Of course, in those years logging was just going gung-ho out of the North Fork. He said a logging truck was coming down the North Fork Road every ten minutes, and of course those loggers wanted to lubricate themselves.

Lois: Yes, I'm sure they did.

Bob: I can remember the struggle that he had. He talked to me about it, because by that time I was out of college and I was pastoring a church. He said, "I'm just having a terrible time with this," but he said, "I've got to do it to make a living." So, he finally got it where he could sell beer in the store. But the saloon came under Karen Feather?

Lois: Karen Feather started it, right, in 1976. Of course, in between we had the Oiens. Your dad sold to the Oiens, and then the Oiens sold to the Olsons, and then the Olsons were the ones that sold to Karen.



Ted Ross Salvation Army photo

Bob: Yes, I knew Bob Olson quite well. I never did really meet the Oiens. They didn't have it very long, I don't think, did they?

Lois: Just two years. Someone told me that the Olsons are in an assisted living place or at the Veterans Home in Columbia Falls now. Do you know?

Bob: I've totally lost track of them.

Lois: If they are still there, I would like to go talk to them, too.

Bob: They would have a lot of history.

Lois: I bet they would.

Bob: Did you know Roy Cooper?

Lois: Yes.

Bob: Dad and Roy Cooper raised cattle together, and he did anything he could to make a living.

Lois: Did your dad make use of the barn back there, the hay barn?

Bob: Oh very much, very much.

Lois: Do you know anything about the ice house or the machine shop, the other buildings back there?

Bob: I can't believe the ice house. Have you been in it?

Lois: Yes, I know. It's pretty bad.

Bob: I was in it this summer. I just about dropped dead.

Lois: I know. [Chuckles] You talk about dissimilar, yes.

Bob: Stainless steel! If dad knew that he would rise right up out of his grave.

Lois: They took the whole building and moved it off, then came in and built a new foundation. They've got washers and driers and stuff in the other part. It was a huge project.

Bob: Somebody invested a lot of money.

Lois: Yes. Then Will [Hammerquist] bought [Tom] Riemer's old cabin, which was sort of falling down. They lifted that up and brought the whole cabin over onto the property.

Bob: I haven't driven to our old cabin recently. The last time I was there Riemer's was leaning pretty bad.

Lois: It was Rick Kerr's. I just met him the other day. He came to see John [Frederick], and he now has plans on that property to build up. John said he had seen the architectural drawings. It's going to be up about 6 or 8 feet, and it's going to be octagonal, just state-of-the-art everything.

Bob: Why so high off the ground?

Lois: Flooding, probably. I mean, it is in the flood plain there.

Bob: It is in the flood plain, and that's why I could never put in a septic system.

Lois: Now you can't do anything, unless you were grandfathered in.

Bob: What's the store doing with that new stainless steel toilet? Where are they sending the effluent?

Lois: They put in a huge septic tank.

Bob: A holding tank.

Lois: A septic system, yes.

Chris: A septic field, a huge septic field.

Bob: How did they put in a septic field, since it's on the flood plain?

Lois: It was grandfathered.

Chris: The County said it was better than what it was, so what they had was either the pit toilets or an old, old system of some sort. That was like three years ago when the Reiswigs had it. What they told us was, the way the county finally got on board was the realization that doing something, an engineered system, would be hands-down better than what was already there.

Bob: I am surprised they let them do it.

Lois: The original was put in by Karen Feather. When they converted the cabin to a saloon and put in the bathrooms and the kitchen, they put in at least a rudimentary septic system at that time. But it was not adequate at all, so now they have a huge one.

Lois: The store has indoor plumbing now. They have a bathroom in there. They don't tell the public that, but they have one.

Bob: I thought they probably put a big holding tank out there and had to have it pumped?

Chris: Ed Neneman dug all of that up.

Bob: Because when I sold our cabin to you, Chris, I was inquiring about a septic system, and the guy in charge—was it Russell?

Lois: Yes. He has since retired.

Bob: He said the only way Polebridge could solve its problem was to put in a pump station and put a big drain field up on the bench. That's what he told me.

Chris: Yes. That's what he was suggesting.

Bob: I thought, "Well, that's never going to happen."

Chris: Yep.

Lois: The cabins, the three rental cabins south of the store, they were there already?



Behind the store sat the "modern" cabin, the ice house, and a building known as the machine shop.

Bob: Yes.

Lois: Ben Rover had put those in?

Bob: Yes, but they had never seen any paint. My dad painted them red.

Lois: Oh, did he?

Lois: But it was Karen who painted the Merc red. I have pictures of it early, and it was kind of a grayish/tannish color, I guess.

Chris: Do you remember that?

Bob: The roof?

Chris: No, the front of the Polebridge Mercantile. What color was it? Do you have any photos?

Bob: It used to be tin colored, kind of the color of that artificial ...

Lois: Stonework?

Bob: Yes.

Lois: And they just called it the Polebridge Store, right? It wasn't until Karen came, who wanted to promote the store a little more. She came up with the "Polebridge Mercantile" name, and that first winter they made those letters out of wood and mounted them on the front and painted the store red.

Bob: How long have you been associated with the North Fork?

Lois: Just since the mid-1980s.

Bob: Okay. Because early on, probably back in the 1960s, my mom was so dissatisfied. She wanted a house, so my dad built a room onto the right side of the store, which would be kind of a sitting room. It was a nice comfortable place, like a living room.



Ted Ross built an addition onto the south side of the store, with intentions of setting up a café. It survived until 1982, when it was removed as the store got a new foundation.

Lois: Somebody said that your dad thought about starting a café there or something.

Bob: He wanted to put in a café, because so many people were asking for a sandwich or a hamburger. But Mom would never do it, and he could not find the money to develop it. But somebody tore it down.

Lois: That happened in 1982, when Karen replaced the foundation. The foundation under the store itself was just logs and was starting to crumble. She hired Ron Wilhelm to take those out and put a stone foundation under it, and at that time they took the addition off.

Bob: Did they actually lift the store up?

Lois: If they did, not much, but she said, “We needed to fix that foundation.” Then she said Wally Nolan had quite a tab at the store. He owed her a good deal of money, so she said, “I made a deal with him. I told him if he would replace the foundation under the mother cabin . . .”

Bob: What do you call the mother cabin?

Lois: The cabin that became the saloon. She said, “It came out almost to the dollar exactly what he owed me, so he fixed the foundation, and we were good.”



The Rosses also managed the three rental cabins south of the store.

Chris: Tell her about the experience that your mom had with the swallows.

Bob: Well, on the south wall, up along the rafters, the barn swallows...

Lois: Yes, they are everywhere.

Bob: For 110 years they had nested up there. That south side would be coated with mud from when they were building their nests. My brother Ken was maybe 16 years old or so, and he was developing a rash. Mom was trying to figure out where this rash was coming from. Then one day she was up making his bed and saw these little critters in his bed.

Lois: Mites of some sort, I bet.

Bob: They were lice. Those birds were carrying lice, and they had come in through the cracks and infested that whole upstairs. That just drove my mother, the fastidious Norwegian housekeeper, insane. They contacted the county. Back in those years fumigation was not like it is today, but the county put some kind of bombs in there, and my folks had to move out for a weekend. I guess it took care of the lice. But my dad then, for several years, had to have an annual project in the spring when the swallows returned to get up there and knock those nests down, and those swallows are persistent.

Lois: They are.

Bob: He would knock the nests down, and they would come right back and rebuild, and he would knock them down, and they would come back and rebuild.

Lois: He didn't put any sort of spikes or anything to discourage them?

Bob: He finally hung some cloth up there. I don't know if you remember, but for years there was cloth hanging up there.

Lois: Strips of stuff, yes.

Bob: Finally, the swallows got the message, and they went someplace else.

Lois: Yes, you have to teach the next generation. You cannot return. This is not Capistrano.

Chris: So, you guys moved to town in the meantime?

Bob: I was gone. I was back in the Midwest, but I remember it was a major family tragedy.

Lois: How often did your dad come to town for supplies, and did she go with him?

Bob: No.

Lois: Did she stay and mind the store?

Bob: Dad would go to town Tuesdays and Fridays. No, what was mail day?

Lois: Tuesdays and Fridays, or today it is.

Bob: I think it was then, too. He would go to town twice a week. Mom never went to town with him.

Lois: What kind of vehicle did he drive?

Bob: Well, he started with a 1949 Chevy half-ton pick-up, and it was like riding in a lumber wagon. He wore that out, and then he went to a station wagon, and Ken wrecked that. In those years when the logging trucks were coming down there, down at the home ranch bottoms area the dust would be so thick on that flat stretch of road. The logging trucks would go down the road, and you could not see anything. Ken was on his way to town to buy groceries that week, and he tried to drive through that dust,

and he ran into the back end of a logging truck, and that ruined the station wagon. There were some very difficult years for my folks up there. But in those years there were a lot of summer people that lived right in the area, like right there on that flat, where all the cottonwood trees used to be. Between the store and the bridge, on the left-hand side, there used to be a lot of cabins back in there, and the people over at Havreville—do you remember Havreville?

Lois: Yes, I do.

Bob: They would depend on my dad for supplies.

Lois: That makes sense.

Bob: When he would go to town he would have a long grocery list, and he would buy supplies for all these people. Then they would be waiting in the store about 7:00 o'clock at night when he came home. You know, here's your ham and potatoes, and here's your so and so. He didn't charge anything for that. I think he upped the price 10 percent—like if their order was \$12.95, he charged them maybe \$2.10 or something.

Lois: So, he was very ethical.

Bob: Very, very ethical, and he gave too much stuff away.

Lois: Did he keep a tab system where people could charge things up and pay later?

Bob: Only people that he trusted.

Lois: I heard a story about him wanting to make a real go of the post office, to be sure that it survived. That he would take books of stamps to town with him and sell them to his friends, so that it looked like he was doing more business than he was.

Bob: Yes, because the post office was always on the edge. They were going to close it down. No, we'll do it another year. It was very, very interesting how he even became postmaster. It was a challenge for him to pass the Civil Service test for him to become the postmaster of Polebridge, Montana.

Lois: Did he have a GS rating?

Bob: Yes, and he actually got a pension when he sold, \$110 a month.

Lois: In those days they would have paid a contractor to have the post office in there. He would have rented that space to the post office, so I suppose he got some income from that, too.

Bob: I imagine he got something.

Lois: Not much, but some.

Bob: Mail day was a huge, huge day. Who was the first mailman you can remember?

Lois: Well, Becky [Hardey], but she was way on down the line.

Bob: Fred Boss.

Lois: Yes, I know of Fred Boss.

Bob: Fred Boss was there for a long, long time. I can't remember the name of the person before Fred.

Lois: Virgil Lane was one. I've got a list of them.

Bob: Do you have a list of all the mail carriers?

Lois: As best I've been able to put it together.

Bob: Fred would come with these big bags of mail from Columbia Falls, and he and Dad would sort all the mail that was going on up the line.

Lois: Was the Kintla Post Office still operating?

Bob: No, Trail Creek was closed. And then on the way back he would pick up mail from the various boxes. Then they would sort it and ship it on into town.

Lois: But he was coming up the Outside Road at that time, right? Out of Columbia Falls, rather than Belton.

Bob: Right.

Lois: Well, you know, Ralph Day carried the mail for quite a few years, Ralph and Esther Day. There are pictures of them in the winter coming up the road with that old tractor. He had a track vehicle that he actually drove. They put like a flatbed with a tent on it, with a little heater, so she could sit back there in the back.

Bob: Yes, Fred had a snowmobile to get up into your country, because he had to go all the way to the line. He had to guarantee that he went all the way to the Canadian line.

Lois: Was it Fred that Frank Evans had the running feud over his mailbox about, or was that somebody else? It wasn't high enough. It wasn't low enough.

Bob: I wish I had known Frank better, because he carried an awful lot of history.

Lois: And natural history and such. Because he was running guiding tours into the Park.

Bob: He had a pack string.

Lois: Yes. What I heard is the people actually hiked into Bowman or Kintla, and the horses were for bringing the stuff, not the people.

Bob: But wasn't Frank also a teacher in Idaho, or at the University, biology?

Lois: Northern Idaho, yes. Biology, botany, something like that. He was a great naturalist. He really knew his onions.

Bob: How far back does his history go in the North Fork?

Lois: He bought there in 1944. That was Chance Beebe's homestead, originally. Chance and Eva, who was Eva DeFord. They married in 1914. They moved to town, I think, about 1920, then Bill Adair bought that land from them. He's the one who sold it to Frank and Edna in 1944. Prior to that, Frank was running a guiding operation out of Hamilton, I believe. He went back east and would give talks, about how he wanted to set up an operation here, but he needed a nurse. One of the young ladies who came to his talk was Edna, and she said, "Well, I would like to do that." So, they got married and she came out and helped work that operation with him. They had their two children, Bud and April, then dear friends of theirs were killed in a car accident, so they took their two children, who were Floyd and Sharon Luke, and they raised them, so they had four children. He taught at the university there in Idaho. They ultimately got divorced in 1975 or 1976, and then he was living in the North Fork full-time after that, until his demise.

Bob: He had a girlfriend, didn't he, and that girlfriend was a part of his tragedy?

Lois: Yes. And do you know, the other day I got an email from a gal saying, "I'm visiting here with Karen Feather and Alice Blood. Karen says you're doing some North Fork History; we should meet you." I said, "Unfortunately, I'm going to be in town, but I could meet you for dinner." So, I met them at the Nite Owl. Ginny said she had to go to the bathroom, and I started talking to Alice. We got on the subject of Frank Evans, and finally I realized who she was. I said, "You mean, that's *the* Ginny, the girlfriend Ginny?" "Yes, that's her. She lives in California now." Here she had come for a visit. Well, that opened a whole avenue of discussion. I want to get a complete set of Frank's columns that he wrote in the paper. Evidently Floyd Luke has compiled a set. I want to scan and digitize them so we've got them for the archives. My goal is to someday have a Center for North Fork History and a North Fork History website so you can look all this stuff up.

Bob: Did Ginny jilt Frank?

Lois: I think it was never as mutual as he would have liked. He was smitten with her. They had been together for quite a while. She is a lot younger than he was. She wanted to go to China. She I think has some Chinese heritage, because her name was Tcheng, and he thought he was going to go to China with her, but she really didn't want him to go with her. She had a series of teaching jobs, and I think she was teaching in Missoula at the time.

Bob: Well, that was just a very tragic incident.

Lois: Yes, it was.

Bob: Did the original Bill Adair homestead cross the North Fork Road and include what is now Frank Evans' property?

Lois: No.

Bob: You said he bought it from Bill Adair.

Lois: Yes. The Panorama Ranch is what Frank called it, the old Chance Beebe homestead. The Evans' own all the way up to the Merc. Whether the original Chance Beebe homestead went that far, I don't know. I think the Adair homestead was essentially where the Merc and the saloon are, and the meadow that got subdivided and all the way back to the river.

Bob: Bill Adair must not have had a full 160 acres in there, then.

Lois: I don't think it was a full 160, but it was close, maybe 120-130.

Bob: And Panorama Ranch must go up the hill, because somebody told me that he had a pressurized water system coming off the spring up there.

Lois: Yes, and he sold 20 acres to Austin Weikert's daughter, Mid Connelly. She's just got a slice that goes right up the hill, and her cabin is up at the top at the south end of Frank's property.

Bob: How does she access it?

Lois: [Chuckles] It's about a 27 percent grade.

Bob: Up the top of Vance Hill?

Lois: Not Vance Hill. South of Frank's place there's a driveway that goes in and straight up that hill.

Chris: It's in the trees. It's hard to see.

Bob: Well, I knew she was up there, and I was wondering how she accessed the place.

Chris: Right off the North Fork Road.

Bob: She doesn't stay up there in the winter time?

Lois: She doesn't. Did you see the article about her in the paper?

Bob: I saw the article in the paper, yes.

Lois: She was here visiting, and she said, "I really want to meet Chris Peterson." I said, "Well, let me call him and have him come up." Her dad, Austin Weikert, was in the service, in the Marines in World War I. When he got out and was coming home to Montana—he was born here—he got ahold of which a magazine, *Harper's Bazaar* or some very popular magazine at the time, and Mary Roberts Rinehart had published her story of going through the Park in 1916.

Bob: I have that book, yes.

Lois: Well, he saw that article. It must have been serialized, I guess, and he said, "That's where I want to go." Chris Peterson reenacted her trip last year, in 2016.

Bob: I never met him. I sure would like to.

Lois: He's a fantastic guy, he really is. Anyway, Mid said, "That's how my dad ended up out here, and I want to meet Chris and talk to him about Mary Roberts Rinehart." Well, she wanted to talk about her dad; Chris wanted to talk about her.

Bob: That was a very interesting article, and I knew that place existed up there, but I thought probably the access was on that road up at the top of Vance Hill that went back in the hillside.

Lois: It's been cut up, up there. You come back past Ed Neneman's, and then Ken Knapp has a place there. But back further, there's Eric Rudolph, the Korda-Draynas, the Erickson doctors are up there. There's not a clear path from Mid's place over to Ed's.

Bob: There's quite a ravine in there, too. It would be difficult to put a road in. While this is in my mind, my folks were very, very good friends of Joe and Blanche McDougall across the line. Did you ever meet the McDougalls?

Lois: I never met them. I've talked to their grandson.

Bob: Who lives in Martin City?

Lois: Yes.

Bob: Yes, I have his book.

Lois: *Sage Creek McDougall and I.*

Bob: In later years they would leave Sage Creek and come down to Polebridge and stay in the Northern Lights, because dad would rent it to them in the wintertime. Dad and Joe were good friends. Mom and Blanche were kind of like lightning rods.

Lois: She was a waitress in Columbia Falls. That's how they met originally.

Bob: But Dad and Joe were good friends. I was up to the Sage Creek ranch several times with my dad. That's like taking a step back in time, where they lived up there. Then that fire went through and burned the whole thing down. There's nothing left. I tried to find it one year, and there's just not even . . .

Lois: Was your dad friends with Sonny Bowman? Did he know Sonny Bowman?

Bob: Yes. Dad was really excited about that, that he was going to bring business in.

Lois: I wondered if the concept to subdivide the meadow, if your dad was inspired to some extent by Sonny's plans [to create Frontier Land of the North].

Bob: I don't know if that ever happened. I think my dad looked at it more as retirement income. I don't know how many acres the store had when Dad sold it to the Oiens. Because he had that hayfield subdivided off, so at that time the Polebridge property only included from the fence to the north. You know where that old threshing machine sits up there in the field?

Chris: Yes.

Bob: That's a part of the store.

Lois: Right.

Bob: There can't be more than 30 acres or so left in the store.

Lois: Where the Polebridge Townsite lots are, I have that there are 48 lots and it's about 50 acres overall. Most of them are nine-tenths of an acre, but there are a couple that are bigger, ranging from .68 to 1.76 acres.

Bob: Where is that 1.76? I think you have one of the bigger ones, Chris.

Lois: Yes, it has to be one at the end of one of the roads.

Chris: I don't recall.

Bob: It's a little over an acre.

Chris: I want to say 1.16 is what I thought I had.

Lois: How did he go about promoting or selling those?

Bob: People who would come in the summertime to camp at Bowman Lake and Kintla Lake, he just began by word of mouth. He had a guy from Polson come and do the surveying.

STATEMENT			
FROM	H. Gene Warren		
	Reg. Land Surveyor		
	Box 173	Haugan, Mont. 59842	Sept. 30 71
TO	Ted Ross		
ADDRESS	Box 97		
CITY	Columbia Falls Mont.		
TERMS			
	Survey and Platting of Skyline Acreage No. 2 and drawing plans for septic systems and wells.		730.00

The invoice for surveying and platting the Skyline Acreage subdivision.

Lois: I wondered about that.

Bob: And he laid out the roads. I forget who put the roads in; maybe Sonny Bowman did.

Lois: No, because Sonny died in 1968, unexpectedly. Otherwise we probably would have seen some of that development, but he died.

Bob: But Dad, again, was raised dirt poor, and he did not realize the value of money. He was selling those lots for a couple of hundred dollars apiece.

Lois: My gosh.

Bob: To him that was a lot of money. The people that began buying the lots were his friends that he had made over the years that came to vacation there. I'm thinking of people back in Illinois, people back in Wisconsin, people back in the Midwest who would come out in the summertime.

Chris: That's where I bet [Don and Suzanne] Mears came from, next to us; they've talked about being friends. Then I lose track, because then he starts talking about how that cabin came from the Park. They are from Blue Island, Illinois.

Bob: Yes. They were in Chicago, I think.

Chris: And that cabin that's still there. He told me one time came it from the Park, and his grandfather bought it.

Bob: Wally moved it over from the Park.

Lois: There are some cabins there that came out of the Slifer ranch. The Slifers wanted to start a girls' camp or something.

Bob: Back in Hidden Meadow.

Lois: The building that was Bob Schepe's studio came out of there, and I think Ben Bowerman's cabin came from there, too.

Bob: Yes, his cabin came out of there, and then quite a few came out of McFarlands' Quarter Circle MC Ranch..

Lois: Right. And the building that became the North Fork Hostel, where Betty and Wally lived, was the big building from the ranch.

Bob: Which was the dining hall.

Lois: Then the building that's the kitchen at the Hostel was brought over later, also from there and attached.

Bob: Yes. It came from McFarlands', because I was quizzing Betty about this just recently. How did he get that across the bridge? She said she doesn't have any pictures, but she remembers how he built it up with blocks and got it up high enough, because those railings were about maybe eight feet high.

Lois: So, he did come over the bridge?

Bob: No, he brought the small one over the bridge. The big one, the dining hall—and I did not know this until Betty just told me this maybe there or four months ago—Lloyd Sondreson floated it across the North Fork River up above Bowman Creek.

Lois: Really?

Chris: Well, that makes sense.

Lois: Yes, it does. It would be a lot easier.

Chris: Yes, or wait until it froze.

Lois: Just bring it down across the flats.

Bob: Did you meet Wally?

Lois: I never knew Wally. Who knows the most about him and his exploits?

Bob: Betty doesn't like to talk about it.

Lois: I know. Somebody said that Ivan Windsheimer had stories about him.

Bob: Yes, Wally and Ivan were very, very good friends.

Lois: Ivan's gone now.

Bob: I think the way Wally got involved in this house moving stuff was right there at Polebridge, lifting the store up. But he brought the Hostel over long before that.

Lois: I wondered, because John Frederick bought the Hostel in 1979.

Bob: Do you remember the old Moran house, the Forest Service place? Wally is the one that lifted that up, took it down the road about half a mile, and parked it on a side road. Do you go back far enough to remember that?

Lois: I know a bit about it.

Bob: Betty and Wally had lived in it for one summer.

Lois: How many kids did they have?

Bob: Six.

Lois: Oh my gosh.

Bob: She had to bring those kids in to school every day, because Wally was out trying to make a living. Coming up Fool Hen Hill one day through the snow, her car had picked up the snow and packed the engine solid full of snow. She was stalled, and a logger was coming down the road to go get his load and met her. Those are the memories that she has. Her life with Wally was not good.

Lois: But they stayed married?

Bob: They stayed married, and Wally died of a brain aneurysm.

Lois: When was that, roughly?

Bob: About 1980.

Lois: Oh, that early. So, Betty and Norma are both still living? All four of you are?

Bob: Yes. All six of their kids were still alive and still at home when Wally died. Scott was maybe 10, so she raised those six kids by herself. Her life has not been easy.

Lois: When they sold the Hostel to John, did they move to town at that point?

Bob: I think he was still in the house moving business. He was in Deer Lodge a lot of the time, moving houses down there, but then he got a job up at Grosswiler Dairy. He was the head dairyman at Grosswiler's, and they lived in one of the farmhouses there. But who would tell you most about Wally? It would be nice if you could talk to his son Scott. He lives in Columbia Falls. He has a very successful cabinet business. He's done very, very well. Scott and Missy Nolan.

Lois: I'll tell you, moving buildings in the North Fork is a time-honored tradition. I don't know how many cabins people will say, "Oh, this used to be over there."

Bob: Do you remember the Block house that used to sit up by Trail Creek?

Lois: Yes.

Bob: That's over in the Park now.

Chris: It went into the Park?

Bob: Yes. When you drive up towards the McFarland place, before you get there, there's this big log house that sits there.

Chris: Yes.

Bob: That's the old Block house that used to sit up by Trail Creek.

Lois: You mean the customs house?

Bob: No, it was before you get to Trail Creek. You go around this curve and drop down into the flat. Sitting right up here on the left was a big log house, and it was owned by Bud Block. We called it the Block house. Somebody moved it all the way from there, got it across the bridge, and it sits over near Havreville.

Lois: Really? I didn't know that.

Bob: It used to be owned by Ross Wilson. I don't know if Larry still has something on it.

Lois: I'll have to ask him. One of those Block buildings burned in the Wedge Canyon Fire in 2003.

Bob: This was moved long before that. This would have been moved maybe in the 1960s.

Lois: For heaven's sake. I was thinking of the little cabin that used to sit right at the intersection with Trail Creek, where people would go and sit and wait for the mail and then answer letters before the postman came back. Larry said in either the 1950s or 1960s, a bunch of kids came along and put a rope around it and tore it down.

Bob: Well, you go around this corner and you drop down onto the flat, and you have this really nice log house on the right.

Lois: That was all Ralph Thayer's property at one time, and his original cabin is still standing. John and Nancy Hubble owned part of it, but she moved back to Arkansas after her husband died?

Bob: [Showing picture] I printed this out on my printer.

Lois: The double dry bridges, is that what you call them? Up at Fool Hen Hill. There were three of them originally.

Bob: They came through my email.

Chris: Lois had them. She listened to your interview.

Lois: I scanned them from Larry Wilson's collection.

Bob: I'm trying to figure out, looking at that picture, how they got that across the span where they are supposed to be, because they are building it not on location. They are building it at some other location.

Lois: Right. They probably had chains and dragged it somehow.

Bob: Just by plain old manpower.

Lois: Yes, exactly. I love the canoe on top. [Laughs]

Chris: I did too! I saw that and I thought well, maybe they are going to go fishing.

Lois: It reminds me of the Wright brothers, when they would take their flights, like when they flew up the Hudson River and around the Statue of Liberty, they carried a canoe underneath the plane, so that if the plane went down they could use the canoe.

Chris: That is great photography, for as old as this is.

Bob: Before they built those bridges, I wonder how they got around Fool Hen Hill.

Lois: You know the story of Fool Hen Hill, don't you? It was Pat Walsh's grandfather. This was when they were thinking about drilling oil wells up over the border, so this was 1908 or 1909, something like that. Patrick Walsh had been hired to guide these guys up there. They were coming back, and one of them got really, really sick. They got up over Fool Hen Hill, and the snow was so deep Walsh said, "We're going to stop and camp here." I guess they managed to get themselves some grouse and make soup, until this guy got a little better. They called that Fool Hen Hill, and the name stuck.

Bob: Because they shot a fool hen right there.

Lois: [Laughs] Talk about harrying times.

Bob: My first trip up the North Fork, between my junior and senior years in high school, when I switched from the Flathead Wilderness to Big Creek, those three bridges were

there. I was working at Big Creek when they rebuilt that whole section of road. That was my last year working up there before I went to college. Because the old road, rather than dropping down off of Fool Hen Hill like it does now, stayed high up and came down right by Hell Roaring Creek.

Lois: Really?

Bob: And then around Deep Creek it used to go way back around that ravine. I can remember as I would drive back and forth on the weekends, I would see where they were pioneering this new road, and I thought my goodness, they are totally changing this road. But they took off the bridges. I thought those bridges were pretty unique.

Lois: When you were at Big Creek, did you hear any talk about the hostelry that Hoolie Stine had there? He got an easement from the Forest Service and built a two-story building there that was sort of a halfway house, because of course it was a two-day trip in those days.

Bob: Where was it at?

Lois: It was adjacent to the Big Creek Ranger Station. I've come across mentions of it in *The Columbian* newspaper. It talks about how he was responsible for maintaining that stretch of road and keeping it plowed in the winter time.

Bob: I've heard that name, Hoolie Stine.

Lois: Yes. His homestead is there as you come south out of Polebridge. It's that very first homestead there, back kind of where Snell's cabin is, where Wallace Donaldson's place is, then the old Hoolie Stine homestead is still there. You hear stories about Prohibition and him buying the 50 pounds of sugar at a time and all that.

Bob: Those old homestead buildings back of Wally Donaldson's—that was Hoolie Stine's?

Lois: Yes.

Bob: Because Finley Arnett lived there when my folks were there.

Lois: That's true, a little later he did, but that was Hoolie's originally. Hoolie is short for Hooligan. His name was actually Fletcher, but they called him Hoolie. If you come from the Merc and go straight down the road you come out at his homestead. I think the road may have come in that way originally.

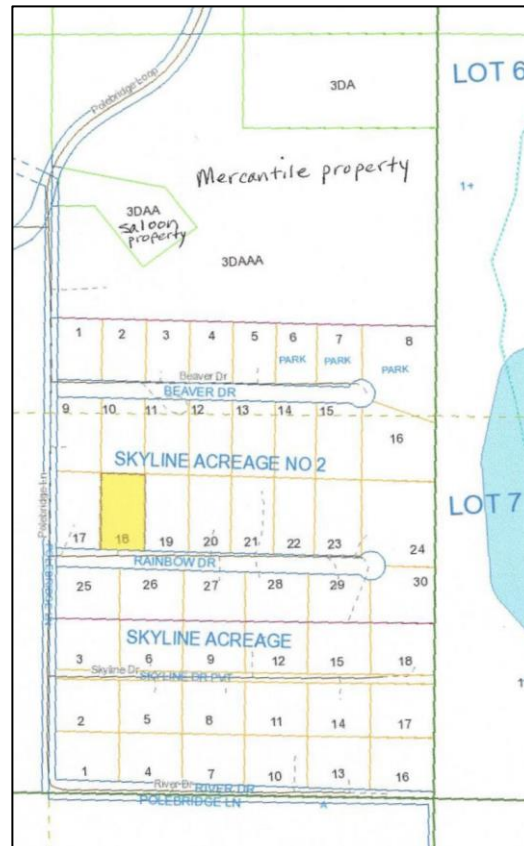
Bob: My dad found that out when he was subdividing, because he was wondering how he was going to have access to Skyline Acreage, because the people who owned the store at that time would not let him have access through their property. He was thinking he was going to have to come in through Finley Arnett's place, but he was down at the county researching records and found that old road right-of-way. He was so happy about that. But the people who owned the store weren't all that happy.

Lois: There's Skyline Acreage 1 and 2. Did he create them as two separate subdivisions at different periods of time?

Bob: Well, basically they were the same, but I think he did it because of some financial reasons, that he didn't have to spend all the money at once or something.

Lois: How many of those lots went to relatives? Did he give some to family members?

Bob: Just us four kids. The Hostel went to my sister. I selected mine off of Skyline Acreage, because I liked it at the end of the road, right out against the river. My brother is just up Rainbow Drive on the right-hand side.



Map of the Skyline Acreage subdivisions, commonly referred to as the Polebridge Townsite.

Chris: Deb Kaufman owned Kenny's.

Lois: Who is there now?

Chris: Friels. The Fears are at the road, then Groebes right across. Right next to Groebes' is the house that Deb Kaufman owned. She bought it from Kenny.

Bob: And that house came, I think, out of Hidden Meadow, the Slifers' place. And then my sister Norma is right across the road. Her cabin sits back in the trees. It's right next to the property your son had. It adjoins it.

Chris: It's what we call the Bat House.

Bob: Are there bats in there?

Lois: There were.

Chris: John Frederick was closely tied with that house, I thought, as well.

Lois: It was then sold to the Naficys, and they've now sold it to Middleton. They bought Bob Grimaldi's first—you know he owned four lots. [Tom] Riemer was on the corner, then Grimaldi owned four, and then there's another one, and then the Hostel. They bought that last one of Bob's, and they also own the Bat House now, so they've got back-to-back adjoining lots.

Chris: They called it the gravel pit.

Bob: Yes. In fact, the reason there was a gravel pit was because Dad dug there to gravel the roads. That's where the gravel for the roads came from.

Chris: Oh, no kidding. And you guys dug all the wells, I think is what I remember.

Bob: Dad had a system. He knew exactly where the water table was between 22 and 25 feet. He bought an old county dump truck, but a 1949 or 1948—it was an oldie. He took one of the rear duals off and rigged up a clutching system. He was tying a rope around that rim, and then he had a tripod coming from the empty rim across the tripod. Then he had a clutching system where he could tighten this rope that was going around the rim. When he had it up, it was loose. When he lowered it, it would tighten up and lift this hammer up.



Ted Ross's apparatus for drilling water wells. He sank wells, on request, for families that purchased lots in the Skyline Acreage subdivisions.

Lois: So he would just drive a casing down there?

Bob: He would drive I think it was a 1¾-inch pipe. In fact, I've got one of the points that he used here in my shop. The point was welded solid to the end of the pipe, so when he got down to where he knew the water table was he would drop a stick of dynamite down there.

Lois: I heard the story about Grimaldi's well and your dad putting the dynamite down it.

Bob: Then before he blew the dynamite he would fill the hole full of water so there was pressure. When that dynamite went off, it was just like Old Faithful geiser. But then it would take two days to pump the water clear, because the dynamite just blasted a big hole down there.

Lois: Marietta said she would hear it all the way down at their place.

Chris: And all of our lots had wells, as I recall.

Bob: Put in by him.

Lois: That's an amazing amount of work.

Bob: He was clear up at Madge Terrian's place putting in a well, in Moose City.

Chris: He was just an absolute genius when it came to making things work.

Bob: You do what you have to do.

Chris: Did he love it?

Bob: Yes, he thought it was exciting.

Lois: So, when he sold the store to the Oiens he must have sold them a reduced amount of acreage, because he was still in the process of subdividing.

Bob: Yes. I think it was 20 acres [actually 25].

Lois: Well it's 50 together, for all 48 lots down there.

Bob: Is there 50 acres in there?

Lois: Yes, there are.

Bob: I didn't know there was that much.

Lois: It's interesting. When I was looking through Frank Evans' columns, in 1972 he said, "There are now two roads in the Meadow. They don't have names yet, but they're there." Then when you skip to 1978, he says, "There are now 18 cabins in the Meadow."

Bob: It created some tension. Even with the county, because Dad deeded those roads to the county. There was one year that my road was not getting plowed. I could not get into my cabin in the wintertime, so I called the county. They said, "Oh, it's your dad that gave us all those headaches." [Laughs] But they had to plow those roads, because they were county roads.

Lois: And they still do. And that's a big plow that he takes in there, too. I don't know how he gets turned around and gets back out.

Bob: Well there's a cul-de-sac there.

Chris: They turn around at my place on Rainbow.

Bob: Yes, there's a big cul-de-sac there. Who owns Windsheimer's place now?

Chris: Two brothers. Is that the one across from me?

Bob: Yes, right across from the cul-de-sac.

Chris: Two brothers, the Kuehnerts. One is from Seattle and one is from California. They are there mainly on the 4th of July, and then one will come for a week or so in the fall. They are close friends with Dan Freund. They hang out with that musician group of people that are down there all the time. Very nice men.

Bob: How about the people over at the end of River Drive who used to block the road, saying "this is a private drive"?

Lois: They are still there, and they are still blocking the road.

Bob: They do block the road?

Chris: They park a vehicle. They have pretty obnoxious dogs.

Bob: Because that's a county road all the way to the river.

Chris: Tell Lois, didn't your dad trade some land with the Forest Service? Breanne told me one time that your dad traded land with the Forest Service so that could forever be an access, particularly for the subdivision owners down to the river.

Bob: Yes, because at that time at the end of the road the way the river had washed there was a pool, and we called it a swimming pool. There was a pool of water there, and the road went all the way to it.

Chris: And he traded land.

Bob: He made some kind of arrangement with the Wild & Scenic Rivers people, because it's Wild & Scenic River country.

Chris: So, not the Forest Service?

Bob: It's a part of the Forest Service, but a different division, because where your property ends, out to the river, it's Wild & Scenic River. They've got a corridor all the way down, I think.

Lois: That's the right timing, the late 1970s.

Bob: I can understand those people don't want public access, because that would be public access to the river, the only one besides Polebridge.

Lois: As long as they can get away with it, they will.

Bob: As long as nobody presses it. But even when I had the cabin, they were obnoxious. They were what I call snotty people.

Lois: Tom Edwards said he used to do haying for your dad, when he owned the store, and he ran livestock of some sort. He would hire young boys to hay that meadow.



**1965 aerial of Polebridge, before the south end of town was subdivided.
Note the old hay barn and corral at the top of the photo.**

Bob: Yes, because dad had horses. His original intent was to kind of make a dude ranch out of it, so he had five horses, and then he had cattle, and he would put up that whole field out there into hay.

Lois: Did he have fences?

Bob: Yes, it was all fenced.

Lois: How about going north of there, on the other side of the saloon? That's still some Merc property up there.

Bob: No, that was never hayed.

Lois: What's the story on the old equipment?

Bob: Yes, the thresher you have referred to.

Lois: And there's some between where the old barn was and John Frederick's house.

Bob: I don't know where the threshing machine came from. I think it belonged to Ben Rover. It was there when Dad bought the place. It has a separate motor, so it is not

powered off of the tractor. It has its own separate Kohler four-cylinder motor on it. Now that I think about it, there was a couple of years that Dad did raise grain to feed the stock, and he actually used that old threshing machine. But it was as old as Adam and Eve, and one year it just quit. I think some belts broke on it, and he took it up there and parked it, and I don't think it's been moved since.

Chris: I bet it hasn't.

Lois: It's so scenic; everybody takes their pictures there. Many people were sad when the structure on the Evans property, on the right as you come to the Polebridge turnoff, was torn down. People thought that horse barn was old, but it wasn't. That was built in the early 1970s by Frank Evans and Jerry Costello and somebody else.

Chris: It had the Panorama name on it, didn't it? Yes, I remember when it was built.

Lois: It had a clerestory and such, but there were no windows. It was a horse barn for him.

Bob: Dad called it the Horse Chapel.

Lois: Yes, he had horses in there, stables.

Bob: It came down in the last year, because the last time I was up there it was down.

Lois: It was getting to be a real trap, and of course tourists would go in there. Bud Evans paid Ed Neneman to go ahead and knock it down. Rob Fisher helped, and they covered it with branches. As soon as it gets cold, they'll burn it.

Bob: Why the branches on top?

Lois: Just because people were rooting through it. It's a liability issue. He was afraid someone was going to get hurt.

Bob: Yes, I remember when that was built. There was an old cabin that sat across Polebridge Lane. Whose cabin was that?

Lois: You know, Frank would buy cabins and haul them down to his place. There was one that came out of Moose Creek. There was one that came out of the border that he brought down. Then he built a little one for Marie Price Peterson after Tom died. He built her a little cabin where she lived for a number of years.

Bob: Well, there's one that looks like it's still rented out just north of his place.

Lois: Yes. That's where Rob Fisher stays when he comes. There used to be one in between the Chance Beebe house and where Rob stays. That's where the Costellos rented. He had renters that some people say were Mexican. Some people said they were Russians. Anyway, they got careless and burned the thing down.

Bob: I wonder what year that would have been?

Lois: In the 1970s, because he wrote about it in his column, that it had burned down. He called that the Frank Fisher cabin, I think.

Bob: Does anybody ever stay in the big house, Frank's big house?

Lois: Yes. Bud Evans, his son, and April Donahoe, his daughter.

Bob: It's still in the Evans family?

Lois: Yes. They are usually there for the 4th of July. This year they weren't. They get so irritated with the traffic and with people parking on their property.

Bob: The 4th of July at Polebridge has just gone crazy.

Lois: It's crazy. And then Gib Bissell arranges for the fly-by every year. It's an AT-6 Texan that flies in. I think actually Ray Thompson owns it, but somebody else flies it. I think we've had it four years in a row. It's in Canadian livery. And then there's a guy who has an F-4 Corsair.

Chris: At Crystal Lakes, Jim . . .

Lois: And boy, they buzz the crowd. It's great. Everybody loves it. [Laughs]

Chris: Everybody loves it, but you're right, it's turning into a nightmare.

Bob: I can't imagine 2,000 people packed into that spot there.

Chris: What they are worried about is there is no exit. There's no egress, so you get everybody marching down the road to the Merc.

Lois: They've block the Loop Road, so you can't go around anymore. The Coolidges, Dale and Linda, are at the end of the road there, and they really wanted it blocked off. After the 1988 fire, when it burned the little bridge, the county never put it back.

Bob: Can you make the loop going down past the store, over towards Polebridge and then from Polebridge go over towards Hensen's place? Can you make that whole loop around there?

Chris: You can walk it.

Bob: Where is it blocked at?

Chris: The bridge burned, so there's no way to get down into that coulee.

Lois: People do it on skis and snowmobiles.

Bob: So, there is no exit that way?

Lois: No, the Loop Road is not a Loop Road anymore.

Chris: That's been one of Larry Wilson's pet peeves since I've known him.

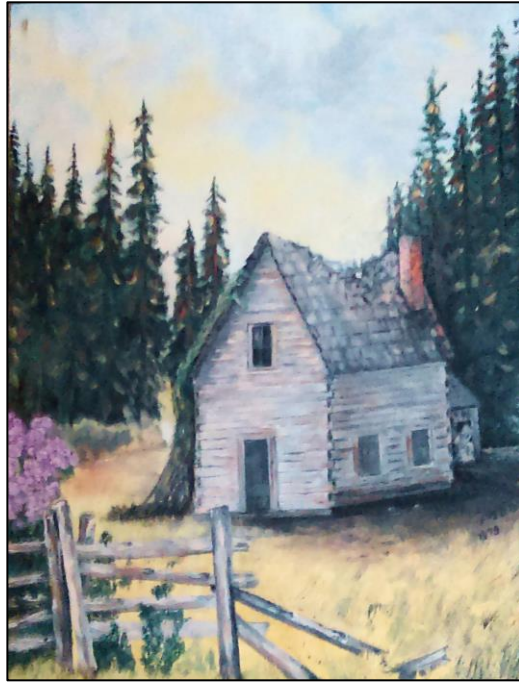
Lois: Traffic control on the 4th is crazy.

Bob: Plus, there's no toilets at Sondreson Meadow.

Lois: Yes, that too. No SSTs, sweet smelling toilets.

Bob: Yes. The only reason I still subscribe to the *Hungry Horse News* is in case Chris Peterson puts a column in, and then to read Larry Wilson's column.

Chris: Me too. I feel exactly the same way.



Painting of the old Hensen Store by Fred Boss.

Bob: That keeps me in contact with the North Fork. I love the way he writes a column.

Lois: And his photography, oh my gosh.

Chris: His photography is unreal.

Bob: Does he take his boy with him? He says "we."

Lois: Yes, he calls him Boy Wonder.

Chris: You will only see the back of him, or maybe a profile.

Bob: I've heard that he's autistic. Is that right?

Lois: Yes, he's severely autistic. He does not communicate well at all, but Chris says he's a hiker. He can take him anywhere.

Bob: He must be in his 30s now?

Chris: I don't know how old he is.

Lois: I didn't get the impression he was that old. Maybe 20s.

Chris: For a while I just thought it was probably because he didn't want the child identified, but now I think it has to do with his autism.

Lois: When did you build your cabin on Rainbow Drive?

Chris: Oh, tell her about the number of fires you went through. [Chuckles]

Bob: Our original cabin came from McFarlands. It was the boys' dormitory at the ranch.

Lois: Oh really?

Bob: I was pastoring in Wisconsin at the time, so it took us two summers to get it torn down. We tore it down piece by piece. Every stick was labeled. We had a code. We hauled it over and just stacked it. Then we laid cement block down and began the process of putting this puzzle back together again. The summer we put it together we were really pressed for time. We got the roof on, but we didn't have any metal roofing. We just had tar paper with strips holding the tar paper on, and we didn't have cross beams on it, just the rafters.

Lois: Oh boy.

Bob: Dad called me the following March, and he said, "Bob, I've got bad news. We had an 18-inch wet spring snowstorm, and your cabin is down." To make a long story short, I went to the bank and borrowed money, and Dad hired somebody from up there. Most everything was salvageable—it was just laying in a heap—and we put it back together again. By the time we came out in July or August of that year they had it back up. I got some aluminum roofing and put aluminum on the roof and put cross ties in it so it would hold together. We really enjoyed that. It was 24' x 48'.

Lois: That's a good size.

Bob: A very good size, and we had partitioned it off on the inside. It was just a nice summer retreat for us. Then the summer of 1988 was the first year that those big fires started to burn in the North Fork. They started up there on Benchmark, and they called it the Red Bench Fire. Were you in the North Fork then?

Lois: We were here, yes.

Bob: At first I didn't think it was going to come down the valley, because the winds are always westerly winds, and they were just going to blow over into the Park and blow out. But lo and behold, if God wouldn't change the winds right out of the northwest, and it just came sweeping right down.

Lois: So fast.

Bob: It was on a Wednesday, and I have Wednesday night Bible study in my church. Some of the guys from the church said, "We'll go up with you." I said, "No guys, I will stay and do God's work, and it's up to God to take care of my cabin."

Lois: [Chuckles] As they say, "Trust in God, but row towards shore."

Bob: As I came home that night from church, I was coming down Three Mile Drive, and I looked up at the North Fork and the whole sky was just glowing red. I got a call in the morning that said, 'Your cabin burnt.' Interestingly, it came down the river channel.

They had bombed the store with a retardant, and that's why they saved it, but the barn burned. That barn was so historic.

Lois: They said the thing about the barn was that it burned from the inside out, because the hay and everything that was in there caught. So, it didn't attack it from the outside. A spark got in there, and it went from the inside.

Bob: I didn't hear that story. A spark got in there and burned it down?

Lois: Yes, it burned from the inside out.

Bob: That was so historic, because off to the side was where we saddled the horses, and all the tack was there. And then it followed—there's a high water channel.

Lois: Yes, the slough goes down through there.

Bob: Yes, that separated the Hostel from my place, and it followed right down there. The fire got my dad's cabin. Just like it was diabolic—got my dad's cabin, got my cabin, and got my Uncle Don Rasmussen's cabin, which is the one right across from you. It adjoins Windsheimer's.



Ted and Esther Ross shortly after becoming proprietors of the Polebridge Store.

Chris: Where was your dad's cabin? I didn't catch that.

Bob: On your son's property.

Lois: So, he kept a place up there?

Bob: Yes, he built a cabin.

Chris: And then his daughter's place; Norma's place was the Bat House.

Bob: Because her ex-husband, Ken Stromberg, was up there. He got ahold of a dozer someplace, and he dozed a line around it. But there's been this kind of stuff between Ken and me, because he's a logger and I'm a preacher, and he didn't agree with me. My philosophy is that he watched my cabin burn. When I came up the next day and was going through the ashes, John Frederick came over and he said, "Bob, I'm so sorry." He said, "I was so busy trying to save the Hostel. I saw your cabin, but I couldn't do a thing about it."

Chris: So, he stayed.

Bob: There was a whole line of cottonwoods down through there, and it was wet there just beside the Hostel. It kind of followed that ditch, as I tried to go back and follow it. John told me it came up out of that ditch. I had a woodpile back there, and he said it got started in the debris from my woodpile and then got up into the cabin. So, I figured that God did not want me to have a cabin up there, since I had turned it over to Him and he let it burn. [Chuckles] And I missed it so bad, because by that time the Christian Center where I was pastoring was just exploding with growth, you know, and we had built a new building.

Lois: Where was this?

Chris: At Kalispell. He was the pastor for the Christian Center up on top of the hill.

Bob: That big church on the north end of town, that's where I was pastoring. I used Polebridge for a retreat. When I was overwhelmed, I would just go up to the cabin. In 1992, I just decided God or no God, I have to have a cabin. So, I built. The old cabin faced north and south; this new cabin faces east and west out toward the river. I got logs from Glacier Log, and over the course of that summer in 1992 we framed it in piece by piece, and you've got a beautiful cabin.

Chris: Yes.

Lois: She does. It is lovely.

Chris: But the parishioners helped you a lot, didn't they?

Bob: I had a friend in the church who was a carpenter who actually donated a week of his time to put the roof on, because putting those rafters up was much more than I could do. He donated an entire week, and we got the roof on.

Lois: Did you do any photography in all those years you were out hiking? I have two big projects: one is to document all of the homestead-era buildings that are still standing on the North Fork. You know, the homesteads that were in the Park have been studied and documented to death, archeology and all that, but nobody has done it on our side of the river. So, I'm trying to reconstruct the homestead map, where the original

homesteads were and where those homestead buildings were. And the ones that are still standing I want to get pictures of them and document them, before we have another fire and lose more of them. Another thing I want to do is document the ranger stations, Ford and Moran. Big Creek is already pretty well documented, because it's on the National Register. The Moran station Ralph Thayer built. The Park did a series of four interviews with him at one time. Larry always said that Ralph built the big barn that was at Ford Station, the one that Ross Wilson moved and is now on the Holycross property.

Bob: Say that again now.



Ted and Esther with their four grown children.

Lois: There was a barn where they kept the horses at Ford Ranger Station. It had a stable and a corral. Ross Wilson, when they were surplusizing the buildings at Ford Ranger Station, said, "I'll take that barn," and he hauled it down onto the place that he and Katie had, which is now owned by the Holycrosses, and that barn is still there.

Bob: That was at Ford.

Lois: It was at Ford originally. But in the interviews with Ralph he doesn't say a single thing about working at Ford Ranger Station. He talks about Moran. He said, "I built all those buildings at Moran." I heard that Wally had taken one of the buildings there.

Bob: That's that big warehouse.

Lois: And moved it off, and eventually it burned or something. But the other buildings that were there, I would like to document the buildings that were at Moran at one time and see if any of them still exist or if they are all gone. Do you have any memory of buildings there?

Bob: No. And you asked if I'm a photographer; no, I'm not. You know, I've hiked every major trail in the North Fork.

Lois: I need to get to George McFarland, because he was a great photographer.

Bob: I never did take pictures, and I've hiked to every lookout in the North Fork at least once, some twice.

Chris: There were one or two you were saying you couldn't find the trail to. That's when I first talked to you about Bill Walker, and I said, "Bill is the head of the trails organization now."

Lois: They have to be careful, because the Forest Service has let some of those trails go, and they are no longer in the inventory. But there are people who remember the trails and want to hike the trails, so there's the "tell" trails and the "do not tell" trails.

Bob: Does the Forest Service not even want volunteers to open some of those old trails?

Lois: No, they don't, because they can only have so many total miles of trails, and if you put those back in the inventory they can't do it. They strictly control how many miles of trails they are allowed to have.

Bob: I wonder why that is, because one of the trails that I tried to find, and John tried to put me on it, was the trail up to Nasukoin Lake. Somewhere up around Center Mountain it's supposed to take off.

Lois: Are you familiar with the Grizzly Inn, the cabin that's up there not too far from Nasukoin Lake? There's an old cabin, big old logs; it's been up there forever, and it has sort of been maintained over the years just by the Traveler's Code. The Forest Service doesn't seem to really recognize it, but Rich Clark says there's a bunch of guys who just maintain it and put a roof on it from time to time.

Bob: Where would that be? Because I've hiked in to Nasukoin Lake, just by bushwhacking, but I don't think there's a maintained trail in there. Where is it?

Lois: There's one that they have reopened, coming down off of Nasukoin.

Bob: Which I've done.

Lois: That trail for years was not maintained, but there's a fellow named Rich Clark who has mules, and he's just sort of made it his own personal goal to open these up and use them.

Bob: Are you familiar with the one that takes off in the Center Mountain area that heads up? On the map it goes up to Nasukoin Lake.

Lois: I think that must be the one that this cabin is on. That sounds like the same one. It takes a while to hike back in there.

Bob: Well, now that you can't get across Whale Creek, because that bridge is out. You used to be able to drive around Center Mountain before they closed all those roads. I was back in there looking for any kind of a trailhead, and I could not find it. John

Frederick said he knew where it was, and he said once you find the trail the tread is still pretty good, but you've got to crawl over a lot of downfalls.

Lois: John says that one year he and Jerry Costello went to the Grizzly Inn on a snowmobile and carried all the shingles to redo the roof the next summer. He said it was much easier to get there in the winter than it was to try and pack them in with a mule.

Bob: The time I was in to Nasukoin Lake I went up Moose Creek all the way to the end of the trail, and then I could see where the lake lay right up there under the mountain, and I just bushwhacked my way up there. I can't do that anymore.

Chris: Were there grizzly bears? Will you talk about how you as a child, or you guys, just roamed all around. Did you not have a bear problem then?

Bob: Never had a bear problem, no. You weren't even aware of them then, because now they are so much in the news. But Roberta and I were hiking up Hay Creek not very long ago. We got almost up to the lake. If you're familiar with Hay Creek, you go through a patch where there's a snow slide where things emptied, then you go through a patch of timber. We were right up to where the trail crosses the creek the last time, and I came out of a patch of timber and stopped, and I said to Roberta, "Is that a stump?" That stump began to move, and honestly that bear was not any further than from here to the house. But I don't think the North Fork grizzlies bother people. What's your philosophy?

Lois: There are a lot of bears up there in the Hay Creek drainage now. When Bill was opening Trail 4 back up they were always spooking bears. I think in the old days if a bear came on your property you shot it.

Bob: Dad shot three of them one year, because they were killing his cows.

Lois: And they knew that, you know. The bears are getting braver now, unfortunately, because people don't shoot them every time they see them.

Chris: You would think they were there, even in the 1940s.

Lois: Oh, you'll hear stories, Ollie Terrian talking about one getting into their root cellar. Yes, they were there.

Bob: Yes, they had confrontations. One year grizzlies killed some of Dad's cows, and that's why he shot them, with the permission of the game warden. But it's true, they were shot at in those years, and I think they developed a human aversion. But I was thinking in regards to trails. I wish the snow was not on the ground, and I would take you out to my firepit here. Over the years, as I've hiked in the North Fork—and God, you don't need to listen right now—but I've picked up old signs.

Chris: Oh! Have you really?

Bob: Because I knew where trail junctions were, see.

Lois: Yes. And they had some neat old signs in those days, too.

Bob: Yes, and you kick around in the duff and, lo and behold, there's an old sign laying down, those old aluminum ones, you know.

Lois: Tin, yes.

Bob: That had dots on them.

Lois: And you don't see many of them.

Bob: You don't see them, and so I've restored them and I've got them. Inuya Pass and Thompson-Seton.

Lois: Oh, I've got to bring Bill to see them. He would just love that.

Bob: And I've got them on posts out there, just memories.

Lois: When you go in peoples' houses, Harry Holcomb shot a bear that came into the house. Charlie Wise shot one. Hazen Lawson had a bear on his wall that had come into the sun porch and was eating Ruth's pies. He took umbrage at that, so he shot the bear. Jerry Costello has a bear on his wall. Larry Wilson does.

Chris: I think there's a picture at the Hall of a woman on snowshoes with a rifle.

Lois: Yes. That was Marie Price Peterson, I think.

Chris: The story goes that she got her bear every year, or something like that.

Bob: I don't doubt that she did, up there on Trail Creek.

Lois: Well Chris, it's getting on to 4:00, and I know you need to go. I would love to get a picture of the two of you while we're here. I don't have any pictures of your parents, not the first picture. I have no idea what they looked like.

Bob: Well, there's my dad. That's when he graduated from the Salvation Army School.

Lois: Oh, I have my scanner here.

Chris: Could she scan it Pastor Ross?

Bob: Yes, that's fine.

Lois: The North Fork Landowners Association bought me this handy dandy little battery-operated portable scanner, and it's wonderful.

Bob: Do we take it out of the frame to scan it?

Lois: If possible. I don't have any pictures of the Mercantile during the years when your parents owned it. Do you know if they made any changes internally to the decoration, to the walls or to the configuration of the inside?

Bob: I've got the old clock that Bill Adair had, hanging in my living room, the old Regulator.

Lois: Would anybody in the family have their wedding picture or a picture of you kids at some point?

Bob: Oh yes. I've got pictures of Mom and Dad. How would I get them to you?

Lois: I will come back sometime.

Chris: Can we come back?

Bob: If you're nice girls, you can.

Chris: We have to bring dessert though, Lois. You're going to have to bring one of your pies.

Bob: My favorite hike in the North Fork is at the end of Whale Creek, and to go up to Inuya Pass and then on up to Thompson-Seton. That is the most majestic hike. I've done that about three times.

Lois: [Scanning photos] I've been scanning all of Larry Wilson's albums, and he must have I don't know how many of them. I can scan maybe 150-200 pictures at a time on this.

Bob: I imagine he has a lot of North Fork pictures, huh?

Lois: He does. There are gaps, but I will get all his done and get them all catalogued, and we will see where the holes are. I got a bunch from Nonie Mathison before she died that were her mom's. I just got a call from Frank and Ethel Newton's granddaughter who was up, and she had a whole pile of pictures.

Bob: My dad's name for Mr. Newton was Fig Newton.

Lois: [Laughs] And they would ask the ladies who was the most handsome man in the North Fork, and they all would say, "Frank Newton." Why Frank? I guess he just must have been a real gentleman.

Bob: Another family, the Hammers?

Lois: Walt and Hazel Hammer?

Bob: Walt and Hazel Hammer right at the top of Wurtz Hill up there.

Lois: I don't have any pictures of them either.

Bob: But somebody still owns that place back there?

Lois: Yes, they do. Oh, what's her name, because all those kids went to the Ford schoolhouse.

Bob: You go up the North Fork Road, and there were real communities. People lived fairly close together, like up above Ford where Holcomb's place is. There's a real community in through there.

Lois: There was, yes.

Bob: Do you have to drive back up to Trail Creek tonight? Do you mind driving the road?

Chris: Do you know what I think it is? As I grew up, my high school years were in Glasgow, and the wind and the snow. We went ice skating when it was 5-10 below zero, and we didn't know it was cold, because there was always a bonfire at one end of the coulee that had frozen over. And there would be tons of people, and it was just what you did in the winter.

Bob: So, the road doesn't bother you?

Chris: Not at all.

Bob: What do you drive?

Chris: I have a four-wheel drive Chevy. I don't have the snow tires on yet, so I'm a little less happy.

Lois: We're brave women, you know.

Bob: Have the roads been plowed?

Lois: Just. On Sunday when I came down, the road was just awful, because it was just one track and then you'd meet the logging trucks or whatever, and it was terrible. As I came down Randy, the plow guy, was just starting up.

Chris: We don't know what he did, but he skipped, and then he would plow. Then he would skip and he would plow.

Lois: I have to go back up tonight. I'm hoping it's okay.

Bob: Have they plowed as far as Trail Creek?

Chris: Off and on, not a lot.

Bob: So, it's tracks.

Chris: Between the logging trucks, like Lois said. The Edwards' property, overlooking Moose City, and then across the road from that, Don Sullivan's big chunk of property, they all got real spooked this summer because they were sitting on the edge of their property watching Canada burn.

Bob: Oh, that fire, yes.

Chris: The three families right there—Edwards, McDonough, and then Sullivan.

Lois: That's Tom Reynolds' old place.

Chris: Yes. They all got in contact with Stoltz, and they are doing a lot of logging.

Bob: So, they are logging their private property.

Chris: Yes, they are.

Lois: Thinning it anyway.

Chris: I guess some of the trees that are coming out of there are unreal.

Lois: It's prime for burning, I think. They have aspen that have huge trunks on them. I've never seen aspen as big as they have up there.

Chris: You can see it from the road, once you hit the bed and breakfast that's up there, The Way Less Traveled, there's a hotbed of aspen through there that's just incredible. Anyway, the Border Patrol goes up and down the road several times a day.

Bob: Several times a day?

Chris: They mean that. That is a very active area.

Bob: Because that is a remote section of Montana up there, and that would be a perfect place for sneaking across the border.

Lois: You can go on the Internet and say "I want to cross the border," and it tells you exactly what trails to bring through the Park. If you want to get across, you can come across.

Bob: Did the fire burn into the Kishenehn?

Lois: It did. How many acres did it burn in the Park, maybe 60 acres?

Bob: Right in the corner up there?

Chris: Yes, but that was the smaller one. The one that was really something to watch was the one that was right across the border, the Keno Fire.

Bob: I take it it was up in the Frozen Lake country, up in that country.

Chris: There was a small one there. I can't remember what they called that one.

Lois: The Gibraltar Ridge Fire near Eureka was the big one.

Chris: The one that all these people got spooked by was the one that burned over 30 percent of Waterton National Park. It was the Keno Fire. They saved Prince of Wales Lodge, but they lost the Visitor's Center.

Bob: It burned right down into town, huh?

Chris: It did. Karen McDonough and her husband watched it. It was a lightning strike that then went *poof*, just like that. They were sitting out on their little teeny deck, and they saw it start.

Bob: Right up on the ridge, huh?

Chris: And it just went *whoosh*, north. It was really interesting for people our age, because the Canadian loggers that were up there were what kept it from coming to our side. They got busy with their big bulldozers and just did massive earth moving.

Bob: You see, you get into a hot button with me, because in the olden days that's exactly what happened in America. The loggers would get their machinery out and start building fire lines.

Chris: And now we're not allowed to do that.

Bob: Oh, everything has to go through Washington, D.C.

Chris: But the Canadians don't have that, so that was an eye-opening experience for people like the McDonoughs who could actually see what was going on.

Bob: Very disgusting. Very disheartening, like the Lolo Fire, and the one that burned Sperry Chalet. If that had been attacked early, vigorously—that's all unnecessary. Don't get me started.

Chris: We have similar strong feelings on that. But I think Lois is right, the road doesn't bother me.

Lois: To me, especially if you are driving at night, it's like the road just hugs you. It's like a friend. I never feel afraid going up that road.

Chris: As I get older, though, I notice that a flat light bothers me more. My eyes bother me.

Lois: When the snow is deep and I have trouble getting through it, I worry. In the summertime all you have to do is wait five minutes and somebody will come along. In the winter that's not true. You could sit there a while before somebody came.

Bob: You stay up there all winter?

Chris: Yes.

Lois: Yes. It's home now.

Bob: At one time, when I had my cabin, I was thinking when I retire—which I retired at 65—I'm going to sell this house, remodel my cabin, and I'm just going to become a North Forker.

Lois: It takes dedication. It's not easy. Snow removal is not easy.

Bob: It's not easy. I finally figured out that I do need a little more social interaction.

Lois: Oh, we have social interaction. We probably see more of our neighbors in the winter than we do in the summer. And because there's no place else to eat, if you want to eat you will fix it. If you say to somebody, "Would you like to...?" there's an immediate "Yes!" Any meal that somebody else cooks is a good meal, you know.

Chris: Yes.

Lois: We do a lot of socializing in the winter, but it's tough. It's not easy, no doubt.

Bob: Well, the wood; just keeping your place warm, just the matter of staying alive. My dad used to put in 15 cords of wood, because he fed both the store and the apartment.

Lois: Who got the wood in for him?

Bob: He did it himself.

Lois: Wow. That's hard work.

Bob: Then he put up ice in the wintertime, to put in that ice house.

Lois: I've heard that. Out of the slough, that area back there?

Bob: We called it the beaver ponds.

Chris: Wasn't that one of your jobs?

Bob: I was pastoring in Hungry Horse at the time. I had to go up and help him. That's why when I walked into the ice house this summer I thought, "This is not right!" [Laughs]

Lois: Was he just getting too old to do that? Is that why he decided to sell?

Bob: And Mom, yes. He sold the place to the Oiens and bought the house in Columbia Falls, and then he subdivided that and lived off of that money for quite a few years.

Lois: And could have gotten a lot more, I'll tell you.

Bob: I know the Kaufmans had it for sale for \$950,000. I don't know what Hammerquist bought it for.

Lois: Nothing like that.

Chris: Reiswigs bought, and I don't know that I ever heard what that figure was. They bought the saloon from Heather Kaufman.

Lois: Flannery Coats and Stuart Reiswig owned just the Merc, and then his parents bought the saloon.

Chris: Those are separate lots now.

Lois: \$700,000 maybe, something like that.

Bob: I still don't see how he makes it selling doughnuts.

Lois: Oh, you don't know how many they sell in a day. Those bear claws, and they \$6-\$7 apiece, and he will sell 1,000 of them a week. I mean, he makes good money.

Bob: I mean, sell some pork & beans.

Lois: [Laughs] Well, if I could have you sign the release form giving the interview to the North Fork archives.

Bob: You know if you get this done in my lifetime, I sure want to have access to it if it's on the Internet. I don't know how many years I have left to live, but I sure would like to see a complete history of the North Fork.

Chris: And the pictures, wouldn't that be fabulous?

Lois: I have all of Larry's articles scanned and digitized, and I've got all of John's. Once you put the word out then it starts to come, and it's like drinking out of a firehose, really. I almost can't keep up with it fast enough.

Bob: Are you talked to Arne Boveng?

Lois: Yes, I have.

Bob: Because he started doing a history, and he interviewed me several different times.

Chris: He did? He never told us that.

Lois: Well, that turkey. I know he knows a lot about the Park homesteads.

Bob: Yes, I think he did it more on the Park side than he did on the North Fork side.

Lois: I'm enlisting his help to help me do the existing homestead structures. I've created a spreadsheet of whose property they are on today. Whose original homestead it was, what structures are there and when they were built. Some people are touchy about that, and I have to tell them it's just to document it in the archives. I'm not going to publish it. I'm not going to put it out there.

Bob: He was telling me about some homesteads that I didn't even know about, up on Camas Creek, where the Camas Creek Road comes through, between there and over on the North Fork on the Inside Road. He was going to take me to some of those places, but it never materialized. Are you aware of that place?

Lois: Yes, there was a gal named Patricia Bick who did a study in 1986, and it documents all of the homesteads, with maps, where they were, and what structures were there. It's really a terrific book.

Bob: Some years ago, somebody from out-of-state was going to build a new cabin back on the old Christensen place—was it the Christensen homestead or the Sullivan homestead?

Lois: You know, I don't know.

Bob: They had to get special permission to reopen that road that went back to the homestead, in order to haul logs in there. You don't have information on the Park side as much?

Lois: I don't. I haven't focused on that.

Bob: I was just wondering if any of those old homesteads on the Park side, even like Slifer's, if that's all Park property now, I suppose.

Lois: Just about. The old J. K. Miller place is still there. He was an attorney in Columbia Falls, and then he was a judge. He witnessed the Park trying to force people out, especially in the 19-teens and 1920s. And in 1929, the Park got its first appropriation to actually buy people out, so in the 1930s when the Depression was hitting people hard anyway, and they wouldn't let them trap or hunt, there was a big push to buy all that land, and boy they got a lot of it.

Bob: Chris Peterson, in one of his recent articles, said what the McFarland family got for that piece of land, and it was a ridiculous price in comparison to today.

Lois: I was interviewing Kay Rosengren. She and her husband worked various ranger jobs, and she was very close to Mary McFarland. After Jack died, she said they had the air strip and everything. The Park, first, they just didn't like them leading trail rides in the Park and such, and the Noffsinger family filed suit against them, because they felt they were infringing on the Bar X Six franchise. Kay said they were so nasty to Mary, she said, "I watched a guy once, he flew in on behalf of the Park Service and he was so rude to her." She said, "I know the kids say they wish mom hadn't sold, but she really had no choice. They just kept on her to sell." [Actually, the Park Service used eminent domain to take the property.] She did, but she outsmarted them in the end. Just south of their place was a piece of property that someone was selling. She bought that, and that's where they are today, the strip where George McFarland is.

Bob: That's where the cabin is.

Lois: Kay said they got the homesteads, but they didn't get rid of Mary. She lived there until she died, and the family still comes.

Bob: Is there still a McFarland up there living on that property?

Lois: Not full-time. The grandson Jack comes in.

Bob: But it's still a McFarland property?

Lois: It's still in the family, but it's only maybe nine acres, if that. It's not that much.

Bob: Some years ago each one of them tried to get the right to use a snowmobile in there, and the Park Service just was plain nasty.

Lois: They were.

Chris: They were terrible.

Bob: In case a baby got sick. Well, that's tough luck, you know.

Lois: Ski in, if you want to go.

Chris: I would have done it anyway.

Bob: Yes, that's what I was thinking.

Lois: Well, if Regi [Altop's] not around, who's to know?

Bob: You go north of McFarland's and you go up the hill on Round Prairie, and up on that bench sits an old homestead up there.

Lois: That's the J.K. Miller homestead.

Bob: I've hiked up there several times. He has a huge barn so he must have had horses.

Lois: He was a gentleman farmer, and he had I don't know, 250 fruit trees. People did all the work for him. He had the money, and he had it done.

Chris: He was wealthy. Jan Caldwell told us that he was an attorney.

Lois: He was an attorney and a judge, Judge Miller.

Chris: In Kalispell. What Terry Atha pointed out, who reconstructs old buildings and stuff like that, each one of those buildings was built by somebody different, and the way he showed it to us each one of the logs are nested differently. One log home builder built it where the log came and then your next log was scribed out and it sat down on top of it. And then another building—anyways, there's...

Bob: I never examined them that closely.

Chris: Oh my gosh! And we found the outhouse.

Bob: I found a root cellar. Just down over the hill, there's a root cellar.

Chris: Yes, we found that. There's the barn, the house itself, and the outhouse are all three different styles of the way you put logs together.

Bob: Interesting. How about the Doverspike place. Is that gone now?

Lois: Dan Doverspike? I don't know.

Bob: The last time I was up to Kintla it was really rickety.

Lois: There were like 40 homesteads, originally, on the Park side. Now I think there's three left. The original Schoenberger place [now Cusick], and Pat Walsh still has the Walsh place, although the house is not where it was originally, and the Heylman place.

Bob: Schoenberger's place is not where it was originally either, is it?

Lois: I don't know. I thought it was.

Bob: Maybe so.

Lois: The McCarthy place, the Park has turned that into kind of a museum thing, that small cabin that's still standing. I finally got down to the Park archives recently and copied as many of the oral histories as I could. One of them was Walt and Hazel Hammer. The file had their name on it, and I said, "Oh goody!" I opened it up, and there was a little yellow sticky that said "Not transcribed." So, I asked the gal and she went back and said, "Well, I do have the tape." This is from 1975, the old cassette tape. If it hasn't bled through, or it might break if we tried to do listen to it. I said, "You really need to get those tapes digitized."

Then there was a file for Burt and Thelma Edwards. It said there were two tapes. I opened it up, it said "Not transcribed." She went back and looked, but said, "I can't find those tapes anywhere. You know, they used to reuse those tapes."

Chris: Oh my gosh!

Lois: A lot of times people were talking about the west side of the river. In Ralph Thayer's interviews, they would be transcribing along and he would start talking about his place on Trail Creek. And the transcriber wouldn't transcribe that part. The Park doesn't care about that." [Laughs] But that's the part I want to read! But those tapes are so old, I would be afraid to listen to them.

Bob: Do you find in the Park Service that there's a mentality that we don't want to go back and talk about those days, because we want to forget about them?

Lois: Yes, because it was their policy to tear things down or auction them off.

Chris: When I went through Kintla Ranch, I had never been there either. It saddens me greatly that all those buildings—there's no attempt to shore up the old water tower.

Lois: That's all Forest Service property now.

Chris: Did I say Park Service? I meant to say Forest Service.

Lois: This was Matt and Mata Brill's place up there.

Bob: Yes.

Chris: And they had what I think is kind of a unique complex.

Lois: It was.

Bob: It was kind of a community unto itself at one time.

Chris: And all those buildings are just collapsing. Yet if you went to them and said, "Hey, I would like to buy what's left of the barn and move it," they'd say, "Oh no. Oh no." You wouldn't be allowed to do that, because it's history.

Bob: But they're not taking care of history.

Chris: But they won't take care of it either, so it's just going to disappear.

Bob: Well gals, happy trails.

Lois: Thank you. Thank you for your time.

Chris: Can we impose on you again?

Bob: I love to talk about the North Fork.

Lois: When you get some photos together, I will be glad to bring my little scanner down.

[End of November 8, 2017 Interview]

* * *

Partial Interview with Bob Ross, September 23, 2015

Interviewers: Karen McDonough and Christine Heitz

Bob: Have you in recent years seen that round cheese cutter, sitting on the counter at Polebridge?

Karen: I have not.

Chris: No. And I worked there when we first bought our property, and it was never anywhere around. I remember Deb [Kaufman] using what could have been the old postal boxes. She would have socks for sale in those boxes, but I never saw the cage or the cheese cutter.

Karen: I know you have to remember the old gas pump where you pumped the gas up.

Bob: I was thinking about that earlier. That's one thing I would do when people came to buy gas in the evenings. I would sit out on that front porch, either the front porch or over at what is now the saloon, and read. If somebody came to the gas pumps I would go measure the gas with that old hand pump and fill it. That was a challenge for my dad, because bulk delivery would charge quite a bit to deliver gas up there, and in the early years he could not really afford to pay the charge for bulk delivery. He had about three 55-gallon metal drums that he would put in the back of the pick-up, and he would just go down and buy 100 gallons of gas and fill those drums. Then he had devised a system to get that in the ground, because at that time the tanks were in the ground right beside the store, on the north edge of the store, right there actually beside the gas pumps, and I helped him. In fact, we would get them on what he called the stone boat. We'd drag it over there and siphon it into the tanks. We had an old tractor—I don't know if you remember the old tractor. It was an old Case tractor with the narrow front wheels and the big back wheels. He would use that for dragging stuff around the store. Ben Rover had gotten that, and it was part of the store when Dad got it. But those gas pumps—I watch antique shows, and those gas pumps now are selling for \$10,000 as antiques. I've wondered who got that old gas pump.

Karen: It's sitting next to the saloon, against the wall there by the picnic tables.

Bob: It's still sitting over there?

Karen: Yes.

Bob: Do they have night patrol up there? [Laughs]

Karen: I don't know. I doubt it. [Laughs]

Bob: It would look real nice sitting out here. It's still sitting out there, huh?

Karen: Because when I see it, it brings back so many memories.

Bob: So many memories, yes. I can remember tourists driving up and wanting gas. Even back in the 1950s and 1960s that was still quite a unique thing. People that came from the Midwest were quite enamored with that old gas pump.

Karen: Can you think of any exciting happenings with animals when you were up there?

Bob: Stuff keeps coming back to me as I talk. Did you ever meet Finley Arnett? He had the place just south of the Polebridge store. The old homestead house, you know the meadow right there on Hay Creek? If you go back there are some old low buildings; that was Finley Arnett's homestead, and his son-in-law built the cabin that sits up there closer. Finley ran cattle up there, too, and sometimes Dad's cattle and Finley's cattle would get mixed up, but they had them branded, so they would sort them out in the fall. But one spring day Finley comes running up to the store and said, "Ted, I think the grizzlies are into our cattle." So, Finley and my dad, there used to be a lane road that went right down where the Polebridge Lane goes now. There used to be a fence line there and a gate. You could go down to Finley's property through that gate. Sure enough, they found two dead calves. So, Dad comes back and calls the game warden, who was Lornie Dietz. I don't know if that name rings a bell or not, but he was a long-time game warden here in the valley. Lornie told Dad, "Well, either you take care of it, or I can come up and take care of it." Because in those days, the early 1960s, grizzly bears were still a nuisance animal. They were not a protected species.

So, Lornie came up, and would you believe that day they shot three grizzlies back of Finley's place in that brushy area back there. They shot three grizzlies. I asked Dad what happened to the bears, and he said the game warden hauled them into town. "Well, why didn't you keep one of those and skin it out?" Those hides are worth \$25,000 today. Well, he said, in those days they were just pests, and you just got rid of them. They were not something to be treasured.

There were bears that came all the time. I don't know how many bears Dad and Joe Opalka shot, just plain black bears, because there was no garbage service out of the Park. Your father [Karen's dad Paul Maas] took care of it in the Park, but over at Polebridge there was no garbage service. You hauled it out to that dump by where your cabin is, and the bears would come in all the time. Dad would chase them away, shoot them, whatever. They were a nuisance. In the wintertime, though, when he was feeding cattle, the elk would come in. You probably both have seen the elk that used to come in down by the home ranch bottoms. Well, that same herd of elk would come to Polebridge in the early years, and it was not unusual for Dad to be feeding 25 head of elk. I would go out there, and in that old barn there were cracks between some of the logs. I would get in the hayloft and look at the elk out through those cracks. They would come right up to the mangers and eat hay out of the mangers along with the horses and the cows.

Dad called the state and said, "Can't you do something about these, or at least reimburse me some hay money, because they are eating as much hay as my cows are?" They said, "No, we can't do that, but you can, you know, fill your freezer, if you want to." [Laughs] So Dad started eliminating the elk herd by putting elk in his freezer, though he didn't have a freezer. He hung it, of all places, in the ice house, which is now an apartment. Stories like that—moose coming in around the place, especially in the wintertime. There was lots of game. Do you remember the Giefer Creek grizzly?

Karen: I do.

Bob: Well, he visited Polebridge and got inside my old cabin, so my cabin became famous because the Giefer grizzly was in it. That's the old cabin that burned down. It was in the spring. I think it was March, when they were having all the troubles with that guy. I heard they finally killed him up on Trail Creek. But you could see on the door that I had—it was a handmade door that came off the dude ranch over there—you could see the grizzly prints on that door. All the way to the top of the door you could see where he leaned against that door and tried to get in. Well, he couldn't get it in because it was about that thick, but he broke the window that was right beside the door. When I came up in the summer, you could still see his hair on the glass where he crawled through the window. He went in and, of course, got on our bed. He tore the bedding all up. He pooped on the floor, and of course he went out the cabin through another window. He wouldn't go out the same window he came in. Interesting stuff like that. My cabin became famous, because the Giefer Grizzly became quite a famous bear.

Karen: He did.

Bob: Stories like that just kind of punctuated all through life at Polebridge in those years.

Karen: I hope you can remember your brother-in-law, Wally.

Bob: Wally Nolan.

Karen: Had a pet. Do you remember what that was?

Bob: It was a badger named Josephine. She became quite a pet. They used to have badgers up there, and when Mom and Dad lived in what is now the saloon, the well for that cabin was right outside the back porch. It was a hand-dug well with an old pitcher pump. Mom was telling Dad, "This water is tasting strange." Dad says, "Oh no, just keep pumping it. It's stale or something." But it finally got so bad Mom would not drink it anymore, so Dad pulled the boards off of the well, and there was a badger down in the well that got into the well and drowned. Yes, the water did taste. Mom had a legitimate complaint. But Josephine became pretty famous, Wally taking the time to catch that. I think he caught it just as a pup and raised it. The thing would actually come in the house and run around. My sister Betty—you ought to interview Betty.

Karen: I would love to interview your sister and your brother, both.

Bob: Because Betty and Wally lived there for quite a few years. She would have some stories to tell.

Karen: But it's been totally fabulous listening to you.

Bob: Did you know Betty?

Karen: I did, yes.

Bob: She lives here in town. She's 83 now, but she's still got good health and lives by herself.

Chris: I did not know the Mercantile was a hotel, you said?

Bob: Yes. They had rooms. He rented out those rooms upstairs.

Karen: They didn't live upstairs?

Chris: So, it was a hotel before it was the Mercantile?

Bob: No. It was the Mercantile, but they rented out rooms upstairs for trappers, loggers, whoever came through. That was before the cabins were built.

Chris: Then your mom would feed them, like a boarding house?

Bob: No. The hotel had been shut down by the time my parents came, and the cabins had been built. But Mom took care of the cabins, changing the bedding, cleaning the cabins in the summertime. She never did get into that, but it was a part of making Polebridge work in those years, part of the income.

Chris: Sure.

Bob: And wood. Dad had to make 12 cords of wood every fall. He did it by himself. There used to be an old woodshed that sat just south of the cabin where they've got kind of a gazebo or something sitting there now. Isn't there something sitting just south . . .

Chris: I think they moved it.

Bob: They moved the gazebo?

Chris: Yes.

Bob: Well, there used to be a woodshed there, and he would have to cut up 12 cords of wood. Remember the big barrel stove that used to be in the store? He would cut 24-inch lengths for that. Then he would have to cut wood for all the cabins, because loggers would stay in the cabins in the wintertime. And, of course, they had two stoves in their apartment, so they would go through 12 cords of wood in the winter. And make up ice. There was just a lot of work associated with Polebridge back in those years, a lot of work.

Chris: And no washing machine or anything.

Bob: When she first moved up there she had a gas-powered machine that you cranked and got it started. That's why when he finally bought a light plant and she could get an electric machine, she was quite happy. Coleman lights throughout the place. There were no electric lights.

Karen: Well, I have thoroughly enjoyed listening to you. I think we need to stop and rest and get back with you again, because I'm sure you're going to jog some more memories you would like to share with us.

Bob: Stuff keeps coming back into your mind as you talk.

Karen: Maybe it would be kind of fun to see if we could do your brother and sister, and then maybe have all three of you together, when you could work off each other's stories.

Bob: The problem is my brother goes to Yuma in the wintertime. In fact, he's going to Yuma the first of October to spend the winter down there. But maybe I could talk my sister into talking to you, because she's got a lot of memories up there. Some of them are sad, because her and Wally had kind of a hand-to-mouth existence in those years. Remember the old Moran work station that used to sit in the meadow at Moran Creek?

Karen: Yes.

Bob: Wally bought that, and they lived in that for a while. Then Wally had to move it off the property or the Forest Service was going to destroy it, so he moved it down the road maybe half a mile, just on some state land, because that's state land in there, and she lived in that for a part of one summer. Yes, there were some tough times. I noticed one of the questions here is what have I seen change in Polebridge over the years—it's impossible to express it. It's a feeling.

* * *

Interview with Bob Ross, June 13, 2017
Interviewers: Karen McDonough and Christine Heitz

Chris: Today is Tuesday, June 13, 2017, and we are at Pastor Ross's house, interviewing him about some of the memories that he has of Polebridge. Interviewers are Karen McDonough and Christine Heitz.

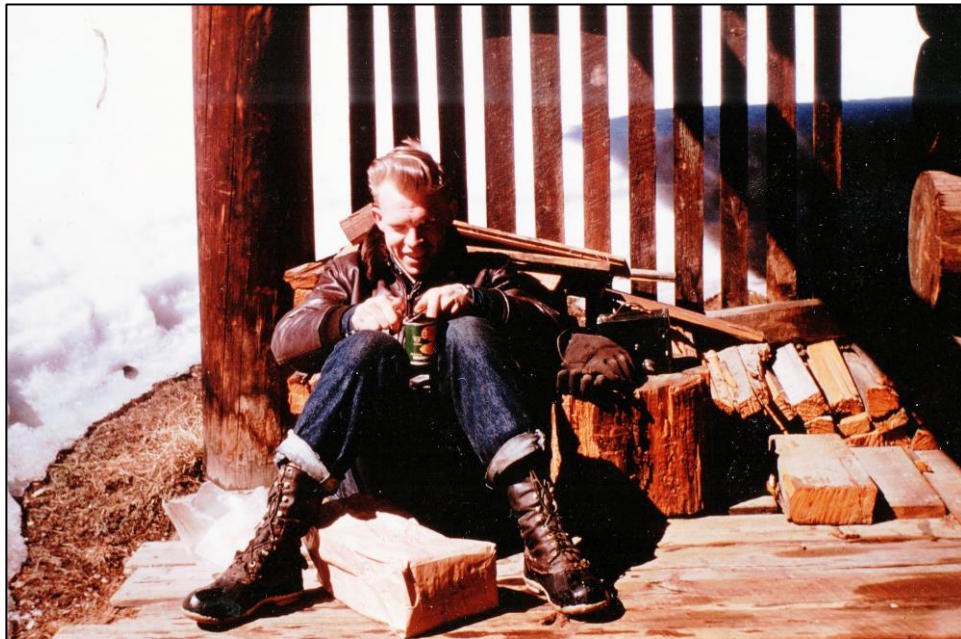
Karen: So, would you please state your name and tell us your memories of the North Fork, the first time you were there?

Bob: My name is Robert Ross. My father was Ted Ross, who owned the Mercantile from 1954 to about 1970 [1955-1967]. But I was up the North Fork before then. My first trip up the North Fork was between my junior and senior years of high school. I worked with the Forest Service. That would have been in the year 1952. My first long trip was all the way up to the Canadian line. I was stationed at Big Creek, and I do remember the old road quite well. The memory that is cemented in my mind is of the three bridges across Fool Hen Hill. I wish they were still there, and I wish I had a picture of them, because it would make us realize the comfort of modern transportation and what the county and the state really have done to that road. The road used to be just basically a two-track that wound sometimes way up on the side hill, and then other times came down toward the river. I remember that very keenly, and I remember some of the old-timers who lived up there in those years. Tom Reynolds and I worked together one summer. I found him to be a very nice, kind, elderly man who always spoke with that keen Australian accent that he had.

I remember Ollie and Madge Terrian, who sat in their little cabin—or house I guess you would call it—right along the North Fork River, up on the Canadian line. Ollie with his toothless mouth and Madge with her motor mouth, just constantly talking. But I can still see the living room or the kitchen where we sat and had coffee together. The Forest Service worker that I was with was asking them questions. Of course, I

was 17 years old and listening to all this conversation. I worked up there for three different summers. I went on to college, and during college I worked up there on trail maintenance. Eventually, through trail maintenance, I got into every segment of the North Fork, from Ninemile Lookout on the south, which no longer exists, all the way to Thoma Mountain Lookout on the north, which still exists and has been rehabilitated, and everything between those two places.

So, those are my earliest memories. The Polebridge Store, in those years, was owned by Ben Rover, and whenever we were up in that country we would always stop and have not a can of pop, but a bottle of pop. I remember my first trip into the Polebridge Mercantile and its uniqueness. Of course, it was not as unique in 1952 as it is in 2017. When I was in there, the old-time stuff was kind of natural, because we were old-time people. But now to walk into that store and see the hand-hewn rafters and all of the old stuff, it's unique for me to realize that my father was the third owner of the store—Bill Adair the builder; Ben Rover then bought it from Bill Adair; and then my father bought it from Ben Rover. To realize that I was a part of the early, early North Fork development and some of the original homesteaders that lived up there yet, though I did not meet very many of them.



As a young man, Bob Ross worked for the Forest Service in the North Fork and performed trail maintenance on many of the trails along the Whitefish Divide. He had the opportunity to meet a number of original North Fork homesteaders.

I met the Holcombs, and of course met the Sondresons, though they were not original homesteaders. I met Ralph Thayer, who really was an original North Forker. And some of the old-time people, and to realize the history of the place as I look back on it. It didn't mean so much to me then as a 17-year-old boy, but I realize now that it really was a very historical event for me. Then to have really a lifelong association with the North Fork, because after my father sold the store, he kept the Skyline Subdivision. He kept what was the hayfield and the garbage dump out there and

subdivided it into Skyline Subdivision, which I understand the county did not like and did not appreciate, because now they have to maintain the roads.

Chris: Oh yes.

Bob: Dad turned all that over to the county. We built a cabin back over on the end of Rainbow Drive and had river frontage and so on. I really had a lifelong relationship with the North Fork, from about the time I was 17 years of age until about 2003.

Chris: 2002, yes.

Bob: I sold it in 2002 when I sold our cabin to the Heitzes. But still I get up there every year. We hike the trails. You are being recorded, Roberta. Now, you asked me some questions about some of the things that I've talked about, some of the more specifics.

Karen: We talked about what you remembered, the best story you can think of when you had animals involved, one of your encounters that way. Did you have any?

Bob: Dad was a horseman. He used to be a cowboy when he was young in Nebraska, so one of the first things he did was he bought horses. He wanted to have kind of a dude ranch, renting out horses and people taking trail rides, which never did materialize, because he was so busy running the store and the operation that he never had time to really organize the other part of it. But one of my keenest memories of horses was when I was working for the Forest Service, which was really tragic. It was one of my last assignments. I think I was either a year out of high school or it was during one of my first years of college. We were given the assignment to clear the Whitefish Divide Trail from Lewis Pass down to Red Meadow Road. At that time the road ended at Tuchuck Campground. We were given three horses, one to ride and two pack horses. There were three of us. We packed up Trail Creek to Lewis Pass, in those meadows just before you get to the pass, and set up our main camp. We had to find the Whitefish Divide Trail, because it had not been cleared since back in the 1930s, and the Forest Service wanted to open the trail from the Canadian Line all the way down. We had to find the trail, which was a very, very difficult assignment, but we finally found some old blazes by hiking up on top of the divide, and kind of created a trail from the meadows where we were camped up to the established trail. And we began to head south, mainly clearing it and just finding old blazes.

We got about five miles south, and rather than hiking all that distance every day, because our camp was still down by Lewis Pass, we decided to move camp up on top of the Whitefish Divide and then work out of that camp. The only problem was there was no water up there. And the horses, I think, had gone two days without water, and we were on a ten-day hitch. By this time we were over Yakinikak Creek. You know where Yakinikak joins Trail Creek. We were over that, and it did not seem like it was too far down to the creek. So, I suggested, because I was kind of in charge of the operation, that we would set up camp down in Yakinikak and then just bushwhack back and forth up to the Divide.

Well, it was a very, very unwise decision, and trying to get those three animals down to Yakinikak, with all the deadfalls and debris in the way, about halfway down one of the horses fell while going over a deadfall. It was a dead tree with snags sticking up

about six inches, old broken tree branches. That horse fell and poked a hole in his abdomen with that branch sticking up, and we had to lift the horse off of it. It was a tragic, tragic experience. But we did make it down and set up camp down in the creek, but I knew that I had to report that wounded horse. By this time, it was about 5:00 or 6:00 o'clock at night, so the next morning I hightailed it down Yakinikak Creek Trail, down the Trail Creek Road, to the Peterson place. They were about the only residents on Trail Creek at that time, Tom and Marie Peterson. And they had a Forest Service phone, and we called the ranger station. The packer came up the same day and met me at Peterson's and we hiked. He had a horse with him, so we rode back up to where our camp was. He realized the horse was severely injured, but he thought it could be saved through a vet, so they took the horse down. I thought for sure I was going to lose my job, but I think they realized it was partly their mistake to send us loose up there, not realizing that there wouldn't be any water for the horses.

Of my experience with animals that stands out in my mind, though I did have some good experiences with my dad's horses. We took several trail rides, mainly up to Cyclone Lookout. That's in the olden days, before the road back to Cyclone Lake was built, and the old trail took off right by the old Moran Ranger Station, which no longer exists. That was a favorite trail ride of people, because you could see that lookout sitting up there. I would do that on weekends with people. Dad loved horses. I didn't love horses that much, but during his time they were very much a part of the Polebridge operation. That and rafts. He had rafts where we would put in at Polebridge and float down to Coal Creek with people. He wanted to make it a dude ranch. That was his goal, but it was an idea whose time had not come yet, but he was trying. He really worked at it. Dad loved Polebridge, and I can say Mom hated it, because there were no conveniences up there. This was in the days when they didn't even have modern generators. They had a wet cell battery operation down in the cellar of the store, and they had an old Briggs & Stratton motor with a generator attached to it, and they would recharge those wet cells once a day. Then there would be enough to run a dim light for a few hours. But it really was remote, and it was very difficult for Mom. The old hand washing machine. But dad loved it. I spent my summers up there until I got married, and Polebridge has many, many fond memories for me, though it has changed over the years.

Karen: Do you remember when they used to go out and cut ice out of the river? Did you help with that at all?

Bob: Icemaking, yes, before the days of modern ice machines. The old barn no longer exists, of course, because it burned in the 1988 fire, but back behind the barn toward the river there were beaver ponds. That's what we called them. Dad would go back there, usually sometime after January 1st, and he had all of the old icemaking tools—whether they were from Bill Adair's and Ben Rover's time or whether Dad found them someplace, I don't know—but the old ice saws with the real rugged teeth on them, and the handle, and all the tongs. And he would use the horses. He had a stone boat with a sleigh on it, and he would load that with ice and haul it up to the building that's just behind the store, which is now I understand a residence. Am I right?

Karen: I'm not familiar with that. I don't know.

Bob: But at that time it was an icehouse, with big thick walls about a foot thick, filled with sawdust, and even sawdust up in the rafters and sawdust all over on the floor. We would haul ice in there and pack each cube of ice. The ice was about two feet long by maybe one foot wide. They couldn't make them any bigger than that because they were so heavy. We would lay them in this icehouse and then pack each block with sawdust around it. We would fill the icehouse, because in the summertime tourists were coming with their iceboxes, and we would sell ice by the pound. We would go out and chip off a pound or a pound and a half or two pounds of ice, then try to clean it up and get all the sawdust off of it. That usually would last all summer, if it was a good ice year, if the beaver ponds were frozen over. But sometimes there would be a cold snap and put maybe six inches of ice in it, then you would get heavy snowfall and the snow acted as insulation and you wouldn't get that good build-up of ice. But in a good year there would be 18 inches of ice, which would really make good ice.

Another part of that store which was so unique was the old gas pump. I wish that whenever it disappeared I would have been able to get it, because those things are worth over \$1,000 now. It had the old glass top and the handle on the side that you would pump back and forth, and there was a tank buried out just to the north of the store which would hold 250 gallons of gas. Dad would have the Texaco wholesaler in Kalispell bring gas up whenever it was getting low, and we would pump it into that thing. I can still remember people from the east, especially, standing watching gas flow up in that gas bulb, and they were trying to measure. They wanted five gallons of gas, and you don't measure it very specifically. You just measure about where those marks are on the glass. Very interesting, and Dad became kind of a wholesale agent for everybody that lived up there.

In the olden days there was a settlement over in Glacier Park called Havreville. There were probably a dozen or so families that had cabins over there. Rather than them going into town every week, they would bring orders down to Dad, and Dad when he made his weekly trip into town, would buy groceries for them. The McFarlands had the active dude ranch up there at that time—very, very busy. A lot of people from there would come down to the store. I'm trying to think of some of the names of the people that still lived up there. Their names slip my mind, but that big two-story log cabin just as you're entering into the McFarland meadow, on the left-hand side—Con Robinson from Great Falls. He was a very steady man. Then there were homesteaders who lived up there, who would bring their orders to dad. Finally, the order got so big that he had to buy a pick-up to haul the orders in. When he would come back from town, which would be about 7:00 o'clock at night, the store would be filled with these people ready to pick up their orders.

The mail route—Dad was a postmaster and had to go through the qualification program to become a U.S. Postmaster. Mail days were Tuesdays and Fridays, and at that time mail came bulk from Columbia Falls to Polebridge and then had to be sorted according to all the people that lived on up the line from there. The mailman helped to do that, though but it was Dad's primary job. The old hand stamp that said Polebridge, Montana—everything was stamped there. The stamps were canceled there. Then the mailman would take that right up to the Canadian line and drop the mail on the way up. Then on the way back he would pick up the mail that people left

in their mailboxes to take back, and then that all had to be stamped at Polebridge and taken back to Columbia Falls.

There were some very interesting people that lived up there in those years. Joe and Blanche McDougall lived just up across the line, but they got all their supplies from the North Fork side, because there was nothing north of them until you got up to Fernie. So, all their supplies would come via Polebridge, and all their mail would come via Polebridge. The mailman would leave it in a box at the Canadian line, and Joe and Blanche would come down and pick up their supplies and their mail that the mailman left at the line.

Charlie Wise lived at the line at that time, in a little cabin. When I was working for the Forest Service we stopped a couple of different times at Charlie Wise's cabin and talked to him. He lived in a little one-room cabin up there about where the American Customs house is now. He is a man that is etched in my memory. I will never forget Charlie Wise. Some very tragic circumstances in his life had led him to become the mountain man that lived up there by himself. Then in the wintertime, because Dad tended to be adventurous, he had invested in an old snowmobile. It was a Bombardier and was one of the first snowmobiles that ever came out. He and some other people in the wintertime would make the trip up to Sage Creek where Joe and Blanche were wintering at the dude ranch that they operated. I think back to that, because once you got north especially of Trail Creek in those years, there was absolutely nothing. I mean there was absolutely nothing, and you think of all the eventualities of stuff that could happen with those old machines. But being that he was an adventurous man, he looked at it all as a challenge. One year he even took my mom with him, sitting on the back end of this old snow cat. I can't believe that she did it, but she did. Then for a couple of different years Joe and Blanche, because they were getting older and it was too treacherous to winter up on Sage Creek, came down to Polebridge and stayed in what is now the restaurant. At that time it was a log house where Bill Adair used to live. He had built it for his house, but it later became a cabin. They rented it out as a cabin, and the McDougalls stayed there all winter, and then would go back to Sage Creek in the spring of the year.

Those things seem so distant and so remote today. Stuff like that just doesn't happen anymore. But I have many, many memories of those remote days and the remote circumstances. In those years the road was owned by the Forest Service. It was a Forest Service road, not a county road, and therefore if there were no logging operations going on, there was no maintenance on the road and there was no snow-plowing. If there was a logging operation, whoever the logging operator was, it was his responsibility to keep the road open so he could get his trucks down. Loyd Sondreson was one of those, and many times Loyd Sondreson would plow the road from Whale Creek all the way down to Canyon Creek, and he was a lifesaver for people. But there were times when my mom and dad were marooned up there for a couple of weeks at a time because the road was not open.

I was pastoring in Wisconsin. This would have been in the late 1950s, and we were coming out here for Christmas, just Roberta and I; we didn't have any children. It was the week before Christmas, and I called Dad from Columbia Falls. In those years the telephone system was very convoluted. They didn't have the wire system. All they

had then was the old crank phones. We had to go through West Glacier to get up there, because the line went from West Glacier up the Inside Road to the ranger station and then down to the Polebridge Store. So, I called dad from Columbia Falls, finally got ahold of him, and said, “I’m leaving. If I’m not there in a couple of hours come looking for me.” I was in just a regular sedan, a two-wheel drive car. It was a Plymouth. I got as far as Scoville Point. Do you know where Scoville Point is?

Karen: I’m not familiar with that.

Bob: That point where Camas Creek Road joins the North Fork Road, that is Scoville Point. There was a snow slide that had come off of the mountain, and it was probably the length of my office here. I’m standing there looking at that. Of course, I’m a dude now, and I don’t have a shovel or anything with me, and I’m wondering how I’m going to get through this. I think that with my hands and maybe some sticks—my mind is foggy on this—I’m trying to break a way through this snow slide to get my car through there. Do either one of you remember Roy Cooper?

Karen: The name is familiar.

Bob: He was the guy murdered up there, right by Moran Station.

Chris: That’s right, yes.

Bob: Roy Cooper and Dad were friends, because they raised cattle together. They had cattle, along with Tom Ladenburg. Roy had an old Army Jeep. I mean it was an actual military jeep, no tarp on it. I’m trying to get my way through this snow bank, and all of a sudden my dad and Roy Cooper show up in this Jeep, all bundled up, with their sheepskin caps pulled over their heads. He literally, with that Jeep, drug me through that snow slide.

Chris: Oh gosh.

Bob: That was the road back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I complain about the road today, but really I have no complaints thinking of the way the road used to be back then. I was working for the Forest Service when the road from Canyon Creek to Coal Creek was rebuilt, from the old two-track that used to go up on the side hills—they were totally rebuilding it. I can remember coming home on Friday nights with my car, having to barrel my way through mudholes that were high centering on my car. The road was a disaster as they tried to make it from basically an old wagon road into a modern road. I guess the road will always be an issue in the North Fork.

Chris: Yes.

Bob: It’s just one of those things that I don’t think will ever go away. When I’m driving it now with my modern car in August and you hit those washboards that you swear are going to knock the wheels off your car, it’s still better than it was back in 1957 and 1958. So, there’s the road, there’s the river, there’s the horses, there’s the store. At Big Creek there was the old bunkhouse. There was the old dormitory that was all so familiar to me. The dining hall had a full-time cook in those years who served meals.

Karen: Was that when Tom Reynolds was the cook?

Bob: No. When I knew Tom, part of the time he was a log scaler. I don't know why this happened, but it was during the years of the beetle kill when they were trying to get rid of the beetles, and that's when roads were being punched up all those drainages—that was the days of the real logging trucks and the real loggers. For some reason, the Forest Service set up a scaling shack right there at Big Creek, right by where the road comes out of the facility. They actually had a swinging platform where Tom Reynolds stood on the platform, and he could reach the whole load of logs, and he would scale the logs. He was a scaler.

Another year he and I were working trail maintenance together, though he was not really good at trail maintenance, because he was kind of a frail man. He was not a real physically vigorous man. I was not there during the years that he was a cook. I can see the cook in my mind. He was a little guy. You know, Ford Ranger Station was active in those days, and I do remember they had a cook there. They had a crew stationed out of there. In fact, before the Whale Creek Road went in, we cleared the whole Whale Creek Road clear back to Whale Lake. To start the project we were stationed out of the Ford Station Ranger, and we set-up a gypsy camp back there. There was a cook there by the name of Frenchie, from Martin City, a big guy. Just a big guy who had eaten a lot of his own pancakes. Frenchie—he served tremendous food.

So many changes. I just think of that, as I sit here. Moran was a work station, out of which crews worked. And Ford was a station, out of which crews worked. To see how the Forest Service has condensed all of that until now there's nothing up there. Everything is operated out of Hungry Horse, I think. But in those years, things were kept in a lot better shape. I don't know if the government had more money, because in our trail maintenance, I mean, we cleared all the major trails, and cleared them all the way to the top of the mountain. We would have trail bosses. Dave, I can't think of his last name, but I know it will come to me. Toad Paulen was another trail boss. They would actually ride our trails. Another work station was Forks. There used to be a cabin right where the forks were, where Hollowat Creek joins Big Creek. Just before you cross the bridge to the right-hand side, there was a Forest Service cabin there. I worked out of that cabin most of one summer, clearing up to Moose Lake, up to Warner Peak Lookout, up behind Big Mountain, up Big Creek. In fact, American Timber had a portable sawmill sitting way up at the head of Big Creek. We cleared Skookoleel. All of those trails we cleared out of the Forks patrol cabin. All of those things have disappeared now. Whether the Forest Service doesn't have the budget money anymore, or whether there's just a difference of philosophy, I don't know. I'm still happy to hike the trails up there as much as I can, but I understand now that most of them are cleared by volunteers. I think maybe some of your people up on Trail Creek are in charge of that, right?

Karen: Well, they are not quite all the way up. Bill Walker has headed it up. They actually have a trails group called the North Fork Trails Association.

Bob: And it's strictly volunteer. They're not reimbursed at all?

Karen: Strictly volunteer, and they do a wonderful job.

- Bob: In some cases, I think they are retreading and repairing the tread on trails, because I've been up to Thompson-Seton and beyond Lake Mountain, to Nasukoin, and those trails are kept in good shape.
- Karen: I think they enjoy it. It's almost like a mystery for them, trying to find the old trails and the maps and open them up again. Which you would understand, when you said you would open up the trails and how hard it was for you.
- Bob: Yes, and it's a mystery. It's a challenge to find an old cut. Okay, here's a cut. We know the trail came close here. There's an old blaze on a tree over there. It's a challenge to find that old trail. My wife and I in our early years hiked from Ninko Cabin up to Thompson-Seton, following Ninko Creek rather than going up Inuya Pass that way. We got back up in there, and you crossed Ninko Creek, and then the trail really begins to fade as you get up to Seemo Pass and you follow the ridge around to Thompson-Seton. I got up there, and the trail had not been cleared in 113 years, and Roberta thought Bob, you've lost the trail, and I said, "No, we have not lost the trail." Because I could see the old cut marks and the old blazes, and we made it all the way to the lookout, though that trail had not been maintained up in that high country for years and years. I don't know if they are maintaining the Ninko Creek Trail anymore or not. I've hiked Thompson. I hiked Inuya Pass, and they are keeping that trail very well maintained.
- Karen: We need to get you with Bill Walker and let him listen to your trail stories. He will tell you what he's been doing, because they are doing a wonderful job.
- Bob: I like to hike to Coal Ridge Lookout. It's partly a problem because the Forest Service doesn't open that road until June 30th because of grizzly bear habitat back there, and then they close it about September 1st, and if you don't get into that window you don't get back into that country. But John Frederick told me that this volunteer group was clearing the trail from the old Moran Creek ranger station that goes up to Coal Ridge and onto the lookout, and I did find it. It takes off right before you cross Moran Creek, up there before you get to the lookout. But they didn't retread it. They cut the trail out, and they have to walk the side hill. Because there are some of those old historic points—like Coal Creek Lookout was a very, very historic spot. Coal Ridge Lookout was a very historic spot. But the last time I was up there, you couldn't get up onto the catwalk, because the stair was all catawampus, and I guess either last year or the year before the Forest Service burned it down.
- Karen: Oh really?
- Bob: Yes. Well, that's really sad to me, those are such historic spots. Especially in my memory, because I was up to those spots when they were in their heyday. I mean, they were functioning.
- Chris: Lois Walker sent along an article that is dated 1966. It's basically talking about a project called Frontier Land of the North. Do you have any recollection of this? It was a land development idea.
- Bob: By North Forkers, or by somebody from the outside?

Chris: It talks about Gerald Bud Manion, a Kalispell businessman, and the writer journeyed up the North Fork. They wanted to get a first-hand look at the site of the proposed recreational complex.

Bob: Okay, that comes back to me.

Chris: It says, “Ted Ross, operator of the store and postmaster at Polebridge, directed us to the Hugh Bowman property where there’s a lot of activity.”

Bob: Right. Bowman was out of Great Falls. You go up Vance Hill, around some corners, and the last corner before you hit that straight stretch, before you hit Red Meadow Road—from Red Meadow Road south, down to those corners, was all bought by this Bowman. He did put in an airstrip. You can see it today if you drive up Red Meadow Road and look to your left, a clearing that goes down there. That was an airstrip that he put in, and he was going to build a big dude ranch in there, with eating facilities and overnight facilities and just a full-fledged dude ranch.

Chris: Well, it’s Frontier Land of the North. Do you think that’s where Skyline acreage came to fruition? Did your dad note what was going on up there?

Bob: Well, dad was interested in it because they brought him a lot of business. They were renting the cabins and spending money in the store, and he was basically for the idea, because it would mean traffic. I don’t know whether he got the idea for Skyline Subdivision out of that. I never did connect those dots, but it could be, because Bowman or his financial supporters, I think, ran out of money. They finally pulled the plug, so no buildings were ever built. Once the airstrip was built, it just died. Nothing more was done. But that was 1966, and I think Dad sold in 1969 [1967]. It could be that that was an idea that was planted in his head, “Hey, I can do that here,” because Dad wanted to put in a café. If you could sell hamburgers and French fries. Part of it was the limited power supply he had—they didn’t have modern generators like they have now. And part of it was my mom refused to get involved in that. “No Ted, no.” [Chuckles] So, he never was able to pull that off, but he had these ideas of how he could make more money and get more traffic. He never thought of a bakery, but he did think of hamburgers. Whether that came from these developers or not, I don’t know. I never thought of that. But I do remember that was going to be a huge investment up there on that land. Evidently that land must be private.

Karen: We will leave this with you, so you can read it. It’s interesting.

Bob: Because he could not do that on Forest Service land. Maybe he leased it.

Karen: He said his father purchased the North Fork property in 1936.

Bob: Yes.

Karen: I just kind of skimmed through it. I’m sure it would be interesting to you, too.

Bob: That must be a big chunk of private land that lays in there.

Karen: There’s still some private land up there that’s for sale now, between the Walkers and Paradise Ridge Trail.

Bob: Well, all the way from the top of Vance Hill clear up to Red Meadow, there's quite a bit of private land up there. But that was all homesteaded in the early days, and maybe that was part of an old homestead.

Karen: I'm not familiar with it. I just know that there is a big chunk of land. Can you think how much is for sale right now that's close to the Walkers?

Chris: I don't know. [130 acres]

Karen: I want to say it's over 160 acres, I think. It's more than a homestead. That's just before you get up to what you talked about. The Edwards' had a southern part of the property down there, and then you get over the hill and then you get into Red Meadow Creek.

Bob: Who owns that property up there where that movie was made [Heaven's Gate]?

Chris: Cimino.

Bob: Michael Cimino, because he had a big chunk of land in there. I know he bought it, because he had it for sale.

Karen: But he passed away last year.

Bob: I heard that he passed away.

Karen: He had also sold a lot of the property that he had. Some of it went back to the people that... We will talk about it when we get off this, because we are going to have to come back. We've already got you for an hour. You're so interesting, and it's so good that we will try to figure another time we can come back.

Bob: Maybe I will think of more stories.

Karen: I would love it, if your sister would be feeling better.

Bob: She has ended up in the Immanuel Lutheran Nursing Home.

TED ROSS
By John Frederick

June 6, 1983

Ted Ross was born on Saint Patrick's Day, 1904, in a sod house in Butte, Nebraska. Later he started his education in a sod school house.

In the spring of 1925 the Ross family moved from Nebraska to Billings, Montana, in their 1917 Model T Ford. Ted had 28 dollars in his pocket.

The next year Ted moved to Apgar where his brother lived. He worked for Slack and Jury who were logging on private land in Glacier National Park. Later Ross cut post and poles at Apgar with a man named Lee.

Ross first came to Polebridge via West Glacier in 1926 where he bought fishing tackle. He does not remember whether he was in the Hensen Store or the Adair Store.

Ted and two brothers cleared right of way for route 2 south of Glacier Park about 1930.

On September 26, 1931, Ted Ross married Esther Rasmussen.

In late 1954, Ted Ross heard from Annette Rover while she was hand cranking the old gasoline pump that the Polebridge Store was for sale. Ted was tired of being a janitor at the Kalispell High School, a job that he held for eleven years.

Esther Ross thought the location was too remote but later changed her mind.

The papers were signed in January or February 1955 and on June 1 the Rosses moved into the store.

During the years the Rosses were proprietors of the Polebridge Store, there were no hours. When they were awake the store was open and sometimes the owners were awakened in the middle of the night by people needing emergency gasoline or by someone whose car was stuck in a snowbank. People became angry when the Rosses couldn't attend parties because they had to keep the store open.

With only six or seven year-round residents the Rosses had good times and boring times.

It was awkward for Esther to watch the store because of a hearing loss. Ann Hensen was one of the reliable people who worked for the Rosses.

The Post Office was the bread and butter for the Rosses. Lyle Wyant and later Fred Boss was the mailman for the North Fork.

During the winter Ted and his son Kenny put away 20 tons of ice in the ice house in 100-pound blocks that were sawn to size for customers.

A whole herd of elk, up to 25, would feed on the hay with the horses by the big barn behind the store. Ted Ross said the elk ate more than the horses.

The Rosses had some bear trouble. Their Australian shepherd was killed by a black bear. The bear had been feeding on garbage near number three cabin. Ted shot the bear, a large old bear, from the back porch with his 30-06 one night about 11 p.m. The bear's rump was full of old and new buckshot from Ben Rover shooting him in the behind.

In 1967 the Rosses sold the store to Dorothy Oien. The Rosses felt they could no longer keep up with the work.

Ted kept 50 acres of the store property and subdivided it for income.

Other than putting in wells in the North Fork and selling land, Ted Ross retired in 1957 to Columbia Falls in the home where they still live.

Polebridge 'pioneer life' was good to Ted Ross

By JACKIE ADAMS

Annette Rover was dispensing gas from the old-fashioned glass-topped pump on the porch of the Polebridge store.

"This place is for sale," she remarked casually.

Ted Ross, then a Kalispell school custodian who spent summers at Polebridge, remembers the scene well, even though it was back in 1954.

"It just stuck with me," he said. "I couldn't get over it."

But when Ross suggested to his wife, Esther, that they take over the store, she said it would be "too much like pioneer life."

It was like pioneer life, but the Rosses, who bought the store anyway, liked it well enough to stay there 12 years. When they finally gave it up, it was because "we were just getting too old for the amount of work there was there."

The Polebridge Store, 36 miles from anywhere, has had six proprietors since it was built of hand-hewn lodgepole and spruce by Bill Adair in 1914. The Rosses bought it in 1955 from the second owners, Ben and Annette Rover.

They ran not only the general store, but the post-office, the weather station, five tourist cabins and a horse rental concession.

Pioneer life? The first winter the Rosses lived at Polebridge, the light plant broke down. It wasn't much of a plant — 16 big batteries that were recharged once a day — but it wasn't fixable. They carried water from a well and used kerosene and gas lamps for months until they could install a new plant.

That winter, it got down to 42 below, and there were many feet of snow. Mrs. Ross went to Columbia Falls to wash clothes and bedding for the cabins.



The former Polebridge Store is called the Polebridge Mercantile today, but basically it's still the same place built by Bill Adair in

1914 and run by Ted and Ester Ross for 12 years at mid-century. It has had six proprietors, the current one being Karen Feather.

Ross recalls Polebridge winters, however, as peaceful and beautiful seasons.

"There weren't many people up there then — just snow and wild animals. We fed 25 or 30 head of elk right along with our rental horses."

"My boy and I trapped and hunted lions. We'd snowshoe on the river and watch the wildlife. It was very interesting to me."

Only Kenny, the youngest of the four Ross children, was still home when they moved to Polebridge. He spent his first year of high school with his grandmother in Kalispell, but after that he joined his parents and finished high school by correspondence. A teacher who lived nearby helped him if he needed it.

Several grizzlies were shot right in the Rosses' yard, but the only animal that ever really caused them problems was the moose.

"In winter they'd run down the road ahead of your car until they got tired," Ross relates. "Then they'd stop crosswise in the road, and there'd be a berm of snow on

the roadside so you couldn't get around them. Sometimes you'd wait half an hour."

"One time I tried tooting my horn at a cow moose. She came after me, and if I hadn't put the car in reverse, she'd have smashed the hood."

But summer, when the tourists came, was when the store really hummed. The Rosses had to hire extra help.

Besides groceries and gas, the store stocked patent medicines and first aid items. Hauling in supplies from Kalispell was an all-day job two or three times a week.

It also added to the expense of items in the store, of course.

"A lady came in and looked at a cake mix and said it was only 47 cents at B and B," remembers Ross. "So I told her, 'Well, if it's only 47 cents at B and B, then that's the place to go get it!' She decided to take it."

Nonetheless, the Rosses say they met "many lovely people" and although they took checks from every state in the union, only two small ones ever bounced.

They put a lean-to on the south side of the store, intending to open a cafe, but they never got around to it.

The 1964 flood hurt their business for several years.

"We were at the end of a dead-end road all that next summer," says Ross. "Bridges and sections of road were washed out and business was practically nothing."

People got out of the habit of spending vacations in the North Fork and the store didn't recover for some time.

When they sold the store in 1967, the Rosses kept a cabin for themselves and 50 of the 80 acres they owned. Now comfortably retired in Columbia Falls, they still spend a good deal of time at the cabin. They subdivided the 50 acres.

A cheerful and active 76, Ross comments, "There are very few places left like the North Fork. I hate to see the changes. There's just no place for wildlife to be anymore."

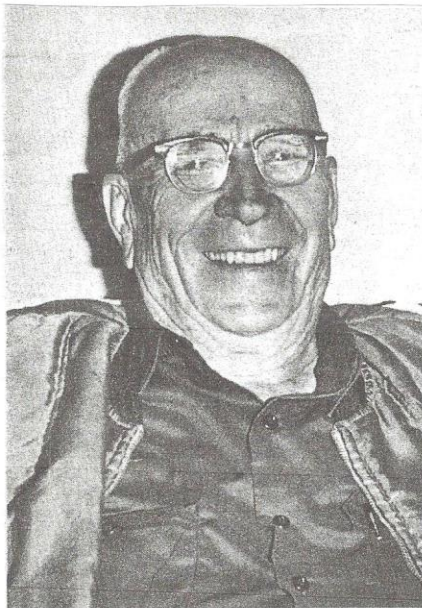
But he says it without bitterness, accepting the inevitability of change.

After all, it doesn't pay to get too serious about life — "A little malarkey along with the truth doesn't hurt."



This 1960 photo shows the Polebridge Store as it was when Ted Ross and his wife, Esther, were the proprietors. The old gas pump on the porch to the left of the store entrance later was replaced with a newer model out in the yard. The white stand just

left of the building is a weather station, and next to that is a privy. On the other side of the store are a garage, a public "three-holer" privy, a woodshed and a barn with a hitching rack for horses. The picture was taken by Wayne Johnson for a postcard.



Ted Ross

Ted Ross recalls stories about trapper Ollie

To the editor,

I read with much interest in the Dec. 4 issue of the Hungry Horse News Larry Wilson's account of the wolverine that came back to life.

Well, I bought a wolverine fur from Ollie. I can't remember the year — it was one of the first years we had the store. Ollie said he had to kill it twice, but he didn't go into any detail as to why. But, if this is the same wolverine, and I believe it is, it is now in our living room.

This wolverine carries the marks of the wilderness and many struggles, both with trappers and doing battle in the wilds. One claw on a front foot may have been left in one of Ollie's traps. Half of one fang was gone. It also carries marks of a bout with a moose or elk because the hoof marks are still on its back. Part of the hair is gone or scraped off. Its body carries the marks of combat and struggle for survival.

Ollie was a very interesting storyteller. He was telling me about one excursion he took down river from his place. He had traveled on foot further than expected and on the way back it was past sunset and, while following a game trail through thick brush, he was all bent over, almost on hands and knees, and came face to face with a grizzly bear. Ollie said that bear showed his teeth and growled at him. He said, "I showed my teeth and growled right back." That must have really frightened the grizzly, for Ollie didn't have a tooth in his mouth.

He was a good beaver trapper, for one winter he would come to the store to skin out those he trapped, and I would take the carcasses out behind the barn, wire them to a tree and watch the wolves and coyotes come in for a feast on them. In early spring grizzlies came and made a meal as well. We had many interesting experiences while operating the store.

Ted Ross
Columbia Falls

Editor's note: Ted Ross owned the Polebridge Mercantile from 1955-67.