

WALLACE AND MARGERY DONALDSON ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

August 21, 2018

This is an interview with Wallace and Margery Donaldson at their place at 10085 North Fork Road, just south of Polebridge. Today is the 21st of August 2018. This is Lois Walker interviewing them on behalf of the North Fork History Project.

Lois: Give me some background information. Where were you born and raised?

Wally: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and until about age four I lived in Kansas City, Missouri. But I was brought up in Montana.

Lois: How did your family happen to come west?

Wally: My grandfather came from Iowa in about 1900. I'm not sure exactly when it was. His name was Finley Arnett.

Lois: Oh, Finley Arnett was your grandfather! I didn't know that.

Wally: Yes. So, my mother moved back with her parents when I was four years old. I don't remember too many details of probably the first year of living in Montana.

Lois: What were your parents' names?

Wally: My mother was Alma Donaldson. My father was Walter Donaldson.

Lois: So, she was an Arnett, and she married a Donaldson.

Wally: Yes.

Lois: And your grandparents were Arnetts.

Wally: Yes. They came from Iowa. They're buried at the cemetery in Columbia Falls.

Lois: I just had an opportunity to look at the map of that cemetery after John Frederick died. He wasn't married, and his sister didn't come out until later, so I had to make initial arrangements for a cemetery plot for him. The man spread out all these big charts, and I was looking at them. There are so many North Forkers there, especially the ones who had homesteads on the Park side.

Wally: My grandfather had a homestead on the Park side. That was probably about 1910, at Camas Creek. They lost that homestead. The Park originated in 1910, right?

Lois: Yes.

Wally: So, it was before the Park was official.

Lois: What did your dad do for a living?

Wally: He was a chemist. He worked for the Food and Drug Administration.

Lois: At St. Louis or Kansas City?

Wally: I don't know where all. At that time we lived in Kansas City, that I can remember. But my parents separated. He did not come back to Montana. He had ties back to Ryegate, which is near Columbus, Montana. He's buried in the cemetery at Absarokee.

Lois: I know from talking to Jim Rogers, and from a binder of stuff that he gave me, that Finley Arnett bought this property in 1937, I believe.

Wally: I thought it was 1935, but . . .



Finley Arnett

Lois: The family that filed on the homestead originally in 1918 only stayed here until 1923. They lost a child, and they went back to Minnesota. They retained the land, but they weren't living here. Then in 1937 they decided to sell. They came out and took a lot of the things out of their cabin and equipment, and they had a water pumping system of some sort.

Wally: Yes, there was a well there.

Lois: It looks like their cabin was right on the creek. Has Jim shown you those pictures?

Wally: Maybe someplace.

Lois: Do you have an email address? I can email some of them to you.

Wally: Yes. The story I heard was that my granddad bought this place from [Fletcher] Hoolie Stine when he lost it due to back taxes.

Lois: Did he know Hoolie Stine?

Wally: A little bit. What I've heard about Hoolie Stine is that he was a road builder and knew how to build roads. It was only many years later that I found out that he was a civil engineer. He was supposed to know how to build roads.

Lois: I didn't know that. Had he done it with the Army?

Wally: I don't know.

Margery: Who was it that told you he was an engineer? Was that Tom Ladenburg or Lee Downes?

Wally: Probably Lee Downes.

Lois: I've gone back through all the old newspapers, and you find interesting things about Hoolie Stine. The county contracted with him to keep the road open in the winter. You can imagine what kind of a job that was back then. The road didn't even come all the way to Polebridge yet. They'd only made it up to about Coal Creek. I suppose he did it with horses and something he pulled behind. Then he built kind of a lodging place, on land just to the north of the Big Creek ranger station, halfway up the road. He leased the land from the Forest Service. He could bed down maybe 16 or 20 people there, because in those days it took two days to get up here. People would come that far, spend the night with him for \$1 or \$2, whatever he charged, and then come on up the next day.

Wally: In the 1940s, the road was not kept open in the wintertime.

Lois: I believe it. People talk about having to have their grub stake in before winter came, because you weren't going to get to town.

Wally: Yes, you'd go to town and do your last shopping the first part of October, because after October 15th you could have a snow, and there was no way out of here until May. We did hear about mail carriers going through the Park. One of the mail carriers confronted a moose and spent some time up a tree. But Hoolie Stine had 160 acres. What we called the Melin place was 80 acres on Hay Creek, and that cabin was right by the creek. [He says Merlin, but documentation confirms that the family name was Melin.]

Lois: Hoolie's homestead cabin is back here behind your place. Do you know if the road originally went closer to his cabin and into Polebridge that way?

Wally: The road did go closer to the cabin. I think there was an easement across this property, and then going west along the section line fence. That was following section lines so that the road came to a corner and turned.

Lois: I notice that your property now extends also on the west side of the road, quite a ways isn't it? Is that all hill over there?

Wally: There's a bench there, and a steep slope. I'm not sure how high it is. I would say about 200 feet, maybe more. Yes, it extends a short distance onto the bench there.

Lois: What did Finley Arnett do for a living?

Wally: He farmed. He graduated from Washington State University in Pullman. He married a girl from that area.

Lois: What was her name?

Wally: Lily Richardson.

Lois: Do you have memories of coming up here with your grandparents as a child? What are your earliest memories of coming?

Wally: Yes, it was our privilege to come up here. We didn't quite connive to come up here. I don't know when I first came. It could have been 1944, and certainly by 1945. By that time the North Fork Road was a one-lane road with turn-outs. In the 1940s, when they were selling timber up here, part of the price of the timber included road construction. Some of these turn-outs were in thick lodgepole pine forest, and they used a bulldozer to clear that out. There was no fire. You read in the textbooks that fire is necessary for lodgepole pine to open the cones so that the seed can germinate. That is not true. All it requires is open space, because lodgepole genetically is a very shade-intolerant species. So, if you just clear the land where you have forest, there is seed in the ground that will germinate, some of it this year and some of it ten or twenty years later even.

Lois: I'm really curious. The area from where the saloon is, all the way up to the Park entrance, that huge area that burned in the 1988 Red Bench Fire, you see a lot of downed trees. It looks like maybe they were sycamores or something. And there's been almost no regrowth in that field.

Wally: They were aspen.

Lois: You remember them when they were standing?

Wally: Well, we have aspen around here. Actually, we burn aspen wood rather than pine.

Lois: Did your grandparents ever live here full-time? Did your grandfather farm it from the very beginning?

Wally: Well, the field was about half the size it is now, the half by the cabin. But I remember as a child clearing off from there to the road.

Lois: How much had Hoolie Stine cleared in order to prove up on his homestead?

Wally: Probably about 20 acres.

Lois: Around or near the cabin?

Wally: Around the cabin, yes. He had an irrigation system with a flume from Hay Creek. That survived until the 1950s. There was a bridge across the flume that diverted Hay Creek water down onto the field here.

Lois: Do you know what he raised? I've never heard of him having livestock or farming. He was always busy doing so many other things.

Wally: I don't know much about Hoolie Stine. As I told you, I wasn't even aware that he was a civil engineer, but he also used alcohol to excess and thought he could make more money making moonshine than he could building roads. That's how he lost the place.

Lois: I wonder if he was ever fined or caught out for making moonshine.

Wally: I don't know. He had built a hut by a spring back on one of the arms that fed the little slough back here. We called it the little slough. It's 200 yards east of the old cabin.

Lois: I knew that Finley Arnett had bought it from Hoolie, but I didn't know if they had known each other, or whether he just bought the property.

Wally: No, he just bought the property. I can't even say whether he talked to Hoolie Stine. He knew that he had the moonshine still. There's still a depression in the ground where that was. Trees have grown up there. Actually, what germinated in that depression is now a tall tree.

Lois: What kind of tree?

Wally: I think that is a cottonwood. We have a few cottonwood here, and we have many quaking aspen.



Fletcher "Hoolie" Stine homestead cabin in 1990

Lois: Do you have any idea what possessed your grandfather to buy up here in the middle of nowhere?

Wally: He was looking for property.

Lois: He owned property elsewhere in the valley, did he not? His name is well known.

Wally: Yes. He bought the farm there where he was.

Lois: Which was where?

Wally: Three miles south of Columbia Falls on Highway 2, which they call Rt. 206 now. Highway 2 was routed from Columbia Heights south. There was one turn, maybe more than one turn, down to the Creston Y. That continued on into Kalispell. You'd turn at the Creston Y and across the Flathead River and through Evergreen. It went around a hill that was in Evergreen, a short distance from the railroad viaduct. When I was in college, there was a girl from Kalispell whose mother said, "Let's take you for a ride." The hills had a water tank way up high, 100 or 200 feet or so, and it was gone, completely wiped out. But Highway 2 still makes that curve around that hill. They could have gone straight, but they didn't change it.

Lois: So, when you would come up as a young person, obviously the Hoolie Stine cabin was still there. Were there any other structures on the place at that time, or did your grandfather add any structures?

Wally: He didn't add any structures. Yes, there's a barn there that is falling down. That had shakes on the roof. Shakes are unavailable, so the barn was not salvaged. We put a metal roof on the house in about 1971, and that is still in good condition. There is a shed—I forget how that measures, maybe 12' x 12' or so—that was probably the homesteader shack. They built the cabin afterwards. So there's a barn, the shed, the house, and there's a cattle shed, as well. That fell down in about 1949 or 1950.

Lois: I have some pictures that Larry Wilson took years ago. Everything is still in pretty good shape in those pictures. He's always had an interest in photography.

What year were you born?

Wally: I was born in 1936.

Lois: So, it was about 1940 when you came out here, coming up on wartime.

Wally: Probably 1941. I don't remember 1941 or 1942. The summer of 1943, that winter I had scarlet fever and it took a few months to recover. So, I might actually have come up here in 1943, but 1944 and 1945 I'm sure of.

Lois: Where did you go to elementary school?

Wally: At Bad Rock School. You've heard about Bad Rock?

Lois: I have. Near Mickey Berne's homestead? And they still have picnics out there for all the old-timers?

Wally: Mickey Berne wasn't in the Bad Rock area. You're talking about the Canyon, and Mickey Berne belongs to the Canyon. Bad Rock School was about three miles south of Columbia Falls.

Lois: Is it still standing?

Wally: No, it was built in 1899 on one acre of land which was deeded for that purpose by Dan Sullivan, with the provision that if it ever ceased to be used for a school it would revert

back to his ownership. When the school was annexed into the Columbia Falls district, the district was going to sell it, and they said, "No, you don't own it." It was used as a chicken coop and a couple of other things, then it burned down. The woodshed, which was converted to a teacherage, also disappeared about that time. I don't know if it burned in the fire or not, but it's gone.

Lois: That's too bad. You went all eight grades there?

Wally: No, second through eighth grades.

Lois: Is it true that you and Mid Weikert and Larry Wilson were all at Flathead County High School about the same time?

Wally: Yes, I knew Larry Wilson. I went to Flathead County High School. I thought he was up in Columbia Falls, but I remember being in a class with Larry.

Lois: He went to Cornelius Hedges for some of his elementary. I did an interview with Mid Connelly, and she referred to "that man whose down below here, I went to high school with him." I wondered who that could possibly be, then I realized it must have been you.

Wally: Connelly?

Lois: Mid Weikert Connelly. She was Austin Weikert's daughter, and she married a man named Walt Connelly. They're up on the ridge, just north of your place. She bought that land from Frank Evans. It's 20 acres, going right up that hill, and she and her husband built a cabin up there.

Margery: She must have the steep road coming down, at the end of our property.

Lois: Very steep, yes.

Margery: I could never remember her name.

Lois: It's Mildred, but she goes by Mid. Her mother, Ruth Weikert, was a school teacher at the old Wurtz Schoolhouse for just one year. Did your grandfather farm this area himself, or did he lease it out to other people to farm?

Wally: He farmed it. He raised hay on it.

Lois: Everybody raised hay in those days.

Wally: Mainly it was something like 20 acres. The addition clear out to the road was in the late 1940s.

Lois: Was that heavily wooded?

Wally: No, it had been burned off. There were mainly stumps, trash, and brush on it.

Lois: How did you come to develop your interest in agriculture and farming?

Wally: I was raised on a farm. Granddad had 200 acres south of Columbia Falls and raised cattle. We had a cattle drive from the farm there, through Columbia Falls, and up to here for two and a half or three days. It was typically the first weekend in May.

Lois: That sounds exciting. Did you ride a horse? Did you help with the drive?

Wally: Cows will go places that horses will not. In order to get the cows back on the road, you walk after the cows. We walked the distance. Because a horse would only be a nuisance.

Lois: That's a long walk. And there are some hills in the way, too.

Wally: Yes, but we had three days to do it.

Lois: What route did you come? Did you come up the Inside Road?

Wally: We came up the North Fork Road.

Lois: How many cows are we talking about?

Wally: 60 to 80, especially with calves.

Lois: Were there other people who did that too, who took their livestock down to the valley in the fall?

Wally: Ladenburgs did. Typically, they had a wagon. I'm not sure that they didn't have a tractor on that, so that they could carry the calves that couldn't keep up. And they had a more abundant supply of hay. But we had the pick-up loaded with a few bales of hay, and that had to get us here. But there were places along the road where the cows could graze and where they could spend the night. One of those was the old CCC camp. That was our first night's stay frequently.

Lois: That was near Blankenship? I just got some pictures of some of the buildings there.

Wally: Yes. The buildings were gone at that time, but some of the pipes were still there, and there was still water from the cistern that flowed down there. One of those times, the cows were about bedded down and it was about dark, and we heard a mountain lion scream. Granddad said, "Where are the cows?!" He counted all of them, and we were missing about seven calves. See, I didn't know cow behavior back then. I later found out having cows myself on 10 acres in Zillah that one cow will be assigned as a babysitter for the calves. She may have three or five or seven calves with her, and the other cows will be out grazing. She might be grazing around there, but she was responsible. When there is an alarm, all those mother cows come running to claim their calves. I didn't know that at that time, but that's apparently was what was going on. One of the cows was babysitting the calves. We didn't hear any more about the lion that night, but we kept a fire burning.

Lois: That's pretty cool.

Wally: We may have had a rifle along on that trip.

Lois: I would think.

Wally: That would be a .35 Remington, which is about equivalent to a 30-30.

Lois: Did you have some cowboys who helped with this drive?

Wally: No, it was Granddad and my mother, and when we were old enough one of us, or an older neighbor kid. Something like that. Usually three people.

Lois: That's amazing.

Wally: Well, when we started the cows, Granddad would look at his watch and say, "Six o'clock. Time to start them." I'd open the gate, and the cows would start filing out of the lot. Some of those cows knew at that time where they were going. They had made the trip before, so they knew right away they weren't going out to pasture; they were going on a three-day hike to summer pasture.

Lois: Did you have siblings?

Wally: One brother and one sister. A younger brother and an older sister.

Lois: What all crops have you grown out here on your property, and how do you market them? Who do you market them to?

Wally: We haven't been very successful here at growing crops.

Lois: I saw timothy one year, I think.

Wally: Yes, that was natural left over from years ago. The field was planted to alfalfa back in about 1985. Some of it hasn't been tilled up since. The grass area here hasn't been plowed since that time. But we're trying to put it under cultivation and grow hay and get rid of the weeds.

Lois: Always a problem. I saw one year it was disked by horses. It wasn't a tractor pulling the plow.

Wally: Yes, there's a farmer from the Bigfork area who was putting up hay here with horses.

Lois: It was kind of nice to look out and see the mountains and see the horses.

Wally: Actually, this is probably the third or fourth most common place to take photographs. People stop on the road and take a picture of the field.

Lois: Yes, I've done it. It's beautiful, and your cabin is so scenic.

Wally: The house at the edge of the forest, and the mountains in Glacier Park behind. You're thinking of the Stine place, but we also had the Smith place, which was 320 acres just south of here. The Melin place, too.

Lois: Finley Arnett purchased all of that?

Wally: Yes. One year or two we used the Melin place to stay while we were up here. That was right by Hay Creek. It's gone, too.



The scenic view across the Donaldson hayfield from the North Fork Road

Lois: And there was a bridge over the creek that Melin had built. There are pictures of his children on that bridge. He has descendants who have come up and met with Jim.

Wally: Yes, my sister Louise inherited the Melin place and promptly sold it to Bob Olson.



Melin family homestead cabin and bridge across Hay Creek, 1922

Lois: Did you know Cal and Dottie Oien, who owned the store before the Olsons, from 1967-1969.

Wally: Yes, I do remember the Oiens. They were not very neighborly. The Park ranger bought groceries at the store and carried them two miles home. That was about the time we lost a propane refrigerator from our house, too. I remember seeing Bill Adair. He was still around when he sold the store to Ben Rover.

Lois: That was in 1943, I believe.

Wally: That was probably about the first time I was up here.

Lois: The Rovers had it until 1955, for twelve years.

Wally: I think something like benches and chairs were stored in a building at the Evans place. I'm not sure what the connection was there.

Lois: Adair had bought that land from Chance Beebe, whose homestead it was originally. And the original Chance Beebe cabin burned in 1916, and the locals helped them rebuild. How well did you know Frank Evans?

Wally: I really did not know him. He planted Ponderosa pine trees and had that labeled as a tree farm, just north of us.

Lois: Are there any of them still left, or did they burn in the 1988 fire?

Wally: They did not do so well. Frank Evans sent a Christmas card demanding payment for damage to his pine trees from Granddad's cows that got in there. They did get in there, but it would be pure chance that a cow would step on a tree and destroy it. He watched those cows and saw they purposely stepped on those trees, according to him. But there are a few Ponderosa trees on this property. You can just about count them on one hand.

Lois: We have one on our place, and it's not doing well. Do they just not like it up here?

Wally: I don't know. I might have talked to Frank Evans a couple of times, but that is all.

Lois: He had a penchant for buying up cabins and moving them onto his property. He bought the old Fisher barn. He bought one that had been up at the border and brought it down. He had the one that he rented out to the Mexicans or the Russians or whoever they were, that burned the place down [the Quinn cabin]. And the one that Rob Fisher stays in summers now [the Ben Maes cabin].

Wally: Yes, rental property tends to burn.

Lois: So, where did you go to college, and how did you happen to go to medical school?

Wally: I went to college at the University of Montana at Missoula, and medical school at Northwestern University in Chicago. I interned in Charity Hospital in New Orleans.

Lois: How did you end up in Zillah, Washington?

Wally: I had a practice at Fairview, Montana, for eight years. Then we spent three and a half years in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, and came back with the intention of joining a clinic so we could rotate in the field and come back on furlough and have a place to live and work. That did not work out. We could not go back to Indonesia. We couldn't get the visas. We

had a daughter who needed special education. So, we were in Michigan. Michigan is densely populated to someone brought up in Montana. One day I rolled the Cessna—I think it was a 172—out of the hangar and called the tower. They said, “VFR flight is not permitted. Visibility is two and a half miles and haze.”

Lois: You’d had enough of that place, huh?

Wally: So, we turned west. I’d worked at Eastern State Hospital for parts of two years, and I had a Washington license and a Montana license. I knew of a Christian doctor in Ellensburg who wanted a partner. So, we took a vacation trip from Michigan to Montana and Washington. The doctor in Ellensburg was no longer looking for a partner, but he knew that Dr. Dornik in Wapato was looking for someone to work with him. So, we came to Wapato. We couldn’t buy into the practice, and the Zillah clinic became available.

Lois: Are you a GP [general practitioner]?

Wally: Yes.

Lois: How did you two meet?

Wally: We met in Chicago.

Lois: Were you at Northwestern, too?

Margery: No, she was at Trinity College and working at Swedish Covenant Hospital. I was working there as an extern and met Margie there.

Lois: And you have children?

Wally: Six children.

Lois: My goodness! And moving around, and Indonesia. I’m trying to process this.

Margery: Our last daughter was born in Indonesia.

Wally: So yes, we were in Fairview when Granddad deeded this property to me. I’ve owned it since about 1971.

Lois: And you said your sister owned the part that the Olsons eventually bought. Did your brother have land up here, too?

Wally: Yes, and he sold it.

Lois: Well, you’re the only one who had common sense, in my book.

Wally: It’s good vacation property, but it’s a lot to take care of, so vacations are working vacations.

Lois: That’s right. Once you own property, when you come on vacation all you do is work.

Wally: One of the movie stars was quoted as saying, “The problem with owning your own house is, no matter where you sit you can always see something that needs to be done.”

Lois: You're related in some way to your neighbor John Snell?

Wally: My brother Edwin married his sister.

Lois: And he purchased his property from you?

Wally: He purchased it from my brother Edwin.

Lois: That's not a very big place, is it, that his cabin's on?

Wally: I'm not sure if it's 10 or 20 acres. What's the minimum lot size?

Lois: The minimum lot size now is 20 acres, but that didn't go into effect until the early 1990s.

Wally: I think he had his property extended to 20 acres.

Lois: We don't see him very often. I think he rents it out most of the time.

Wally: Yes, he rents it out.

Lois: Did he ever live here full-time?

Wally: No. He came up to spend the weekend or overnight, but that was it. Of course, I have never really lived here either.

Lois: From your trips up as a young person, do you remember any of the homesteaders? Did you meet some of the homesteaders who were still here? You said you saw or met Bill Adair.

Wally: And Ben Rover.

Lois: What do you remember about Ben? I don't know much about him. All I know is they called him Smilin' Ben Rover, because he never did.

Wally: What is now the townsite of Polebridge was Ben Rover's hay field.

Lois: I understand Ted Ross was the one who subdivided that.

Wally: As I recall, Ben Rover's wife was always looking forward to retirement and getting out of here and not working so hard. I think she survived a year.

Lois: Not even that. Annette died within a few months after they swapped houses with the Rosses, when the Rosses bought the Merc. Then he remarried and outlived two more wives. He married a lady who had a cherry orchard down along Flathead Lake, Mabel Teskey. After they divorced, he married Marian Opalka, Adolph's widow.

Wally: There were 80 acres of the Opalka place that Granddad bought.

Lois: Up here?

Wally: Yes, adjoining the Stine place. The Opalka place is between the Stine place and the river, so my property extends from the bench to the river.

Lois: I know that his brother, Joe Opalka, had a place in the Park on the Inside Road, down by Sullivan Meadow. There were at least three Opalka brothers, maybe more, up here.

Wally: I did have a cabin near the river, and a well. There's still an indentation on the ground for either the well or the cellar.

Lois: So, Adolph had a cabin there?

Wally: I don't know.

Lois: The land that Chris and Monica Graff have now, was that part of your property at one time.

Wally: That was what we called the Smith place.

Lois: When you would come up as a teenager, what were your favorite things to do up here? Did you hunt or go fishing?

Wally: We went fishing up here, in Hay Creek and the river.

Lois: Back when you could eat them.

Wally: Yes.

Lois: There were always fish fries. The North Fork Improvement Association would always have fish fry on the 4th of July, and they would have picnics up at Bowman Lake.

Wally: Yes. We really haven't been involved in social affairs in Polebridge. In fact, about the first public meeting we were at was the fire meeting last Sunday.

Lois: I didn't even know you were there, until Jim Rogers said, "Well, they were there."

Wally: You see houses around, but when you see a crowd like that you say, "Do all these people live in this area?"

Lois: Yes, they do.

Wally: How many were there?

Lois: I counted 135 inside the building. And I know that there were a lot of people outside.

Wally: Yes, we were standing.

Lois: What do you remember about Bob and Betty Olson when they owned the store?

Margery: We probably weren't around much, were we?

Wally: He had a son who wanted to do some logging. We let him do some logging, and he made a mess of the forest up on the bench. But we never did see any money. He had a small crawler and a tractor. Ben said, "If you want to use them, go ahead and use them." But I didn't. I missed my opportunity to run a bulldozer.

Lois: But they didn't build their place down here on Hay Creek until after they stopped owning the store, right?

Wally: That was after they owned the store. They built an elaborate house down there on Hay Creek, and old Melin cabin disappeared.

Lois: Jim said that there's some remnant of a structure beside Mary Bassingthwaight's house. It has a different roof and such on it. I heard that Olson helped fight the 1988 fire.

Margery: Yes, he did a lot.

Lois: He had a tanker, or equipment of some sort?

Wally: Yes, he had a tanker and was wetting down the forest adjoining the road. One of the photos at the time that was published in the *Hungry Horse News* was of our place. Our daughter Debbie had cows up here, and they were out in the hayfield.

Lois: I saw that picture. It was so dark behind them.

Wally: Yes. The fire was up there, but the cows were safe in the hayfield. Actually, the trees right around here did not burn, but from the effects of the fire they all died.

Lois: Did you lose any structures in the fire?

Wally: No. This house was not here. Debbie was living in the Hoolie Stine cabin.

Lois: Yes, I remember her. A sweet, sweet girl. And she's married now and has several kids?

Margery: Three daughters. She was just up here this weekend. In and out.

Lois: There are people who remember her fondly.

Margery: She came up at New Year's, through the snow, spent a few days and went back home.

Lois: I'm glad she still comes. Did you ever have a post office box at the Merc?

Wally: No.

Margery: Did Debbie have one? She almost would have had to.

Lois: Did you ever buy ice there? What do you remember about going to the store when you were younger? Most kids remember the cheese wheel, the peanut barrel, and the candy.

Wally: We did see the cheese wheel, but we didn't ever buy any cheese. We never bought any candy or peanuts. We bought a few things there, not a tremendous quantity. You tried not to buy things there, but in recent years we bought five gallons of gasoline there. At \$6 a gallon, but that's cheaper than driving to Columbia Falls to get it.

Lois: You're absolutely right.

Wally: I didn't consider that expensive. We needed the gasoline, and there was no other way to get it. Sometimes the prices are high because of isolation.

Lois: The price of paradise.

Wally: Well, the railroad understood that. If you're buying a ticket from Columbia Falls to Chicago, it will cost you more than buying a ticket from Whitefish to Chicago, because you're from a smaller area and the ticket prices are allowed to be much higher than from Whitefish, which is a larger center and more competitive.

Lois: Some of the people who lived south of you here—how well did you know Tom and Joan Ladenburg? And Lee and Marietta Downes.

Wally: We knew Tom and Joan Ladenburg. He asked me to rent pasture here for several years and kept up the fences.

Margery: He did the haying, too, didn't he?

Wally: Yes.

Lois: He would plant it and harvest it? Or you planted it and he harvested it?

Wally: He would harvest it. He was the one who planted the alfalfa here, back in about 1985. The last time the ground was tilled up.

Lois: I think John O'Hara is the one who built Tom's house for him, the one that he and Joan were in. It was one of the first log homes that he built. Nice place.

Wally: Yes.

Lois: Did you know Ivan and Mary Windsheimer?

Margery: Debbie knew them. And we met them.

Wally: Tom Ladenburg had a generator shed/workshop, and that burned down.

Lois: When was that, roughly?

Wally: I'm not sure when it was. I think that was before we met the Downes.

Lois: Lee just celebrated his 90th birthday this year. We lost Marietta what, two years ago?

Wally: Yes. That would have been in the 1970s.

Lois: Did you know Rose Greene and her husband, down here on the paved section?

Wally: No.

Lois: Who was the county commissioner who got that section of road paved?

Wally: I don't know.

Lois: I know it was a real swamp up until then, especially in the spring.

Wally: Yes. That was cold rolled paving, but that's how that got built?

Lois: Yes. We still have one former county commissioner up here whose license plate says PAVE NF. Did you know Art and Clarine Harker?

Wally: No. We knew the Downes. After Debbie was here, we became acquainted with them.

Lois: Roy Cooper.

Wally: Yes, we knew Roy Cooper. I'm not sure what he did. He had horses and rented pasture from us. One time he said, "Why don't you ride one of those horses, borrow a saddle and go riding?" So, when we had the kids here there was one pinto that was very gentle and would come up to us. We put a bridle on him, and he didn't seem to know anything about a bridle or bit. We put a saddle blanket on him, and he didn't budget. We put a saddle on him and cinched it up, and he stood very still. We got on him to ride, and he didn't know "get up" or "stop" or "turn" or anything. So, we put a couple of the kids on him and led the horse around. He didn't lead very well, either. We tried riding him again. We took the saddle back to Roy, and he said, "Well, did you catch one of those horses and ride it?" Yes. "Which one?" The gentle pinto. "You rode that horse? That horse has never been ridden before." He was very gentle horse.

Lois: Where would you stay when you came up with your kids?

Wally: In the Stine cabin.

Lois: Did they like it?

Wally: Yes.

Lois: So, Deb had come up as a kid? She knew the area.

Wally: Yes, she was familiar with the North Fork area and liked it.

Lois: Did you know Carl and Linda Pittman?

Wally: No, but we heard about them.

Lois: Stan and Connie Stahr?

Wally: No.

Lois: Did you know Helen Huck Ramon?

Wally: No.

Lois: Ed and Cecily McNeil?

Wally: No.

Lois: Did you know Marie Price Peterson?

Wally: No.

Lois: So, who were your friends up here?

Margery: Probably the Downes. Basically, we came and we were here on vacation.

Wally: We came up here to work. About the time we got the work done, the vacation was over.

Lois: How long would you stay?

Wally: About a week at a time.

Lois: Did you ever come up in the fall and just enjoy the area? I know it had to be hard to get away, if you were practicing medicine and you had a family. I don't know how you found any time to come.

Wally: We really didn't hunt in this area.

Margery: We came up one fall with Phil, and was Stacy with him? I can't remember. One of the children were with him, and we did some wood cutting along the road.

Lois: So, what are your projects now?

Wally: We have a fence that we're building along the road.

Lois: And you get out there on the tractor and do your own plowing and harvesting, don't you.

Wally: Yes.

Lois: My hat's off to you. That's a lot of work.

Wally: Yes.

Lois: How many acres do you have under cultivation?

Wally: About 40.

Lois: And who will you sell this to when you get it all baled?

Wally: Anybody who will buy it.

Lois: Are there people here in the North Fork who want it for their livestock.

Wally: Some, yes. We called North Valley Ag a week or two ago, and they have 200 tons of certified weed-free alfalfa, and they don't need any more.

Lois: Jim Rogers said that this was oats this year.

Wally: Yes, plenty of oats. Well, plowing up the ground and trying to get rid of the weeds, with an annual crop before planting back to alfalfa or grass.

Lois: I remember one summer there was a huge grasshopper infestation. This was about four or five years ago. I mean swarms, like you get every seven years or whatever. Monica and Chris were living in the yurt that they have, and she said they would land on the screens and actually start biting through the screens and coming into the house. She said, "I was afraid to go outside." There was an article in a journal about it, that it was something that

happened ever so many years. They had pictures from an infestation in this same area, back in 1918 or something. It was a known event.

Wally: We used to have a lot of grasshoppers here. I've seen something like a dozen grasshoppers, or something like that. We have a natural grasshopper control. It goes honk, honk, honk. This afternoon there were about 16 Canada geese out in the field.

Lois: Going south already?

Wally: No, they come here and graze, and they're here every day. They've been coming here for at least five years.

Lois: We also see sandhill cranes come through.

Wally: Yes, we heard one a year or two ago.

Margery: Did you see them down there in the corner?

Wally: Yes, we did see them. They were here in the hayfield.

Lois: What's your favorite part about coming to the North Fork?

Margery: The peace and quiet. It's very peaceful, except for the road dirt.

Lois: That was sure good news that they're going to grade the road and put down the magnesium chloride. Boy, what a difference that stuff makes.

Wally: I've written a letter to the editor of the *Hungry Horse News*. I just haven't sent it. The way they interpreted their statistics was that there are more vehicles passing on the road from Camas to Polebridge than from Canyon Creek to Camas, so they don't need to pave that part. What actually happens is there are many people, including myself and my son, who travel through the Park to Columbia Falls. The North Fork Road, from Camas Creek to Columbia Falls, is 22 miles, but if you take the Camas Road, it's 42 miles. It's that much more, but probably it's a faster route.

Lois: I find it's about the same time. But it is graded all the way down now. We went down this morning.

Wally: What I'm saying is the county should be embarrassed that they had a major forest fire here, and the firefighters considered the road impassable and contracted to grade it.

Lois: Yes, they're staying at the KOA camp near West Glacier, so it's easier for them to come up through the Park. But if the Howe Ridge fire gets to where they have to close the Camas Road, then they have to come the other way.

Wally: Where do they bring all the trucks in?

Lois: The heavy equipment? I don't know. My guess is, the stuff they've contracted comes straight up the North Fork Road.

Wally: Yes, because the Park said that the Camas Road was not built for commercial travel. It is a Park highway, suitable for cars but not truck traffic.

Lois: Especially heavy trucks.

Wally: So, those vehicles would not be allowed to come through the Park. They would have to come through Columbia Falls and up past Canyon Creek.

Lois: I was glad to see the Forest Supervisor at the meeting, Chip Weber. I walked out to my car with him after the meeting. I thanked him for coming. He said, "Well, I can see why they cheered when they talked about grading the road. I came up that road, and it was pretty rough." I felt like saying, "It's *your* forest. You tell me you don't come up that road very often?"

Wally: It's a county road now. I'm not sure what the maintenance would be on a paved road versus a gravel road, but it could be that they have paid more to maintain the gravel road than if they would have paved it when they were ready to pave it back in 1971.

Lois: Yes, now they've narrowed it.

Wally: They had it graded, all ready to put paving on it then. The environmentalists said, "No, keep the road rough, so that the people don't travel it." Well, people did come. In daylight hours now, there's more cars per hour than there used to be per day.

Lois: They used the oil the road out here, didn't they? I've heard Frank Evans talking that, in the column that he wrote in the paper from 1971 to 1982, oiling the road, and I think he meant oil. I've heard people say that no, that road was not dusty back then, because they were logging, and the timber companies would oil it.

Wally: Not true. When they were logging that, it had tremendous dust. Bert Carlson's son was driving on the road behind a logging truck. The logging truck stopped to check his load and found that Carlson had crashed into the logging truck. He could not see for the dust.

Lois: I've heard that Ted Ross's youngest son did that, too.

Wally: The road was very dusty when we had logging trucks here.

Lois: Did you know Wally Nolan? He was kind of a house mover by trade. When the Park would excess structures, like at the McFarland Ranch, they were either going to burn them, or you could move them out of the Park, and he moved a number of buildings, including the one that is the North Fork Hostel now.

Wally: Yes. No, I can't say that that I knew him.

Lois: It would be fun to document all of the cabins that have been moved up here. It's a North Fork tradition to move cabins around. What were your thoughts on the road when you used to come up? I've heard that in the early days there were trees arching over the road, that it was almost like driving through a tunnel. When was the first time that you ever drove the North Fork Road by yourself?

Wally: The first time I drove it would have been when I was a teenager. I got a license when I was 16, so about 1952.

Lois: What kind of car?

Wally: I don't know. It might have been Granddad's 1949 Ford pickup.

Lois: Was it scary?

Wally: This is not a scary road.

Margery: As a young boy. It makes a difference.

Lois: True, if you go slow enough.

Wally: Granddad related that when they had cattle up here they would sell veal, butcher out two calves and carry them down in the pickup and sell the meat in Whitefish. One time they were going along the road and probably around Home Ranch Bottoms they saw what looked like a wire across the road, but there's wasn't any wire. Apparently, there was a spider web across there, early in the morning.

Lois: What did your grandmother think of life up here?

Wally: She liked it, enjoyed it. She could drive the Ford tractor that we bought in the 1940s, probably about 1948. But when Granddad bought a newer Allis Chalmers, a 35 hp tractor, she said, "I'm not going to learn to drive that. Not gonna do it." Because Granddad had her drive the tractor on occasion and drive a team of horses, too. I just missed learning to drive a team of horses.

Lois: I have great respect for the women who came up here. These were some tough ladies.

Wally: Yes.

Lois: When you hear about their kids getting sick, etc. They would have canning parties to can fish. They would all get together, catch as many fish as they could, and then can them. When we interviewed Marietta Downes, she said she started canning when she was six years old, because her mother had had polio. She said, "I ran that canner, and I canned everything." She started naming all of the things that she canned, including chocolate cake. You fill the jar about halfway, then boil it and the cake expands. You do it in a wide-mouth jar. She said she canned fish, deer, sausages, anything. Then if you needed a dessert, you just opened that jar and ran a knife around it and dumped it out. I'd never heard of that before.

Any other memories you'd like to share with me? New or old?

Wally: We used to go fishing in a slough straight east of here. We'd have to get there in a roundabout way. There was a log jam, but the big 1995 flood took out all the logjams. Now the river which makes a curve at the mouth of the slough has built up rocks there, so that there's water flowing in the slough only in the springtime. So, no fishing now.

Lois: Did you ever ice skate up here, or do anything in the winter?

Wally: No, we were never here in the wintertime. We drove cattle up here in May. Sometimes there were the remains of snowdrifts extending halfway across the road, but there were no tire tracks the first weekend in May.

Lois: Do you know anything about the coal fields at Coal Creek.

Wally: Yes, there was an old mine there, right off of the North Fork Road.

Lois: On the river side?

Wally: Yes. In recent years, I haven't been able to identify the lane that goes back, but it's back there 100 yards or so. Back in the 1940s, you could see the tunnel there, going back a little ways, and some of the machinery around there, and the tailings from the mine.

Lois: I've heard that they pulled coal out up through the way, used it for heating in some of the buildings in Columbia Falls. But it evidently was not of a real high quality.

Wally: No, it wasn't good quality.

Lois: I don't know whether they trucked it out.

Wally: They would have had to have trucked it out. They did discover coal up here, about at Great Northern Flats. It was considered a big discovery. The Great North Railroad surveyed a track up here and they did an assay of the coal. It was a poor quality and not very much of it. So, they never laid a track up here.

Lois: I know they had talked about putting a track up there, and also up to the oil wells.

Wally: My granddad would also talk about the Great Northern surveying a track.

Lois: Did you granddad every go down and get coal to burn?

Wally: That was obsolete by that time, in the 1940s. That mine was not in operation when we were driving cattle here. I was old enough to drive cattle up here only about two or three times. We'd gone down there before and looked around.

Lois: What year did you graduate from high school?

Wally: 1954.

Lois: So, you were year ahead of Larry. His dad had been in the Army during the war, and then Larry went into the Army National Guard when he was in college. Margery, is there anything you'd like to add? When was the first time you came to the North Fork?

Margery: On our honeymoon. And it was a different experience. That was in 1962.

Lois: Did you stay in the Stine cabin?

Margery: I think we just drove up and back. I grew up in Minnesota. I really enjoyed coming out to Montana, because it was so different from Minnesota. I hadn't seen mountains before.

Wally: On our honeymoon, we went through the Badlands in South Dakota and the Black Hills and Yellowstone Park. We slept in a tent at Sprague Creek Campground one night, and it snowed. In those days, it was not uncommon for a bear to walk through the picnic area.

Lois: So, you got to see the Park and Going to the Sun Road?

Margery: Yes.

Wally: Going to the Sun was a mountain road, just a narrow, winding highway.

Lois: I hope this fire stays away from it. Maintenance is enough of a problem without that. When it burned on the other side of the Park two years ago, it actually melted the pavement, and they had to come in and redo it.

Wally: That was when Sperry Chalet burned?

Lois: No, that was last year. What's your favorite part of the Park?

Wally: We've mainly seen the western part of the Park up to Logan Pass. We've gone up to the Hidden Lake Overlook a number of times, and to Avalanche Lake.

Lois: Did you ever get to any of the chalets?

Wally: Yes. We didn't intend to go to Granite Park Chalet, but we started out in the afternoon from Logan Pass. There's a trail about halfway that leads down to the road. We got there and the trail was closed due to bear activity, so we either needed to go back to Logan Pass or to the chalet and up to switchback. That was dark. You know they have bumper-to-bumper traffic during the daylight, but at night the only traffic you encounter is to hear a car leaving Lake McDonald and starting up to the pass.

Lois: It's just you and the goats, that's right.

Wally: We were there at the switchback, the family, so I took one of the kids and hitchhiked up to Logan Pass to get the car. You know why I took one of the kids?

Lois: Why?

Wally: A single man is a risk when hitchhiking, and you might not pick up one. But if he has a child along, there's probably no risk in picking him up. I was at Jackson, Michigan, for a medical meeting. When leaving there I saw a man and a boy hitchhiking, and I thought that was safe. I asked, "Have you been waiting very long?" He said, "All day! We can't get a ride out of here at all. I don't know what's wrong." I said, "You realize that the country's largest indoor prison is at Jackson." But I picked him up because he had a boy with him. But if you try to hitchhike at Deer Lodge, you're going to walk miles out of there.

Lois: Before it's too dark, can I get a picture of the two of you?

Wally: Yes. It's just two days after our 56th wedding anniversary.

Lois: Congratulations! That's quite an accomplishment. Do you have any family photos of the cabin in an earlier day, or with your family here? Do you have a picture of your grandfather and grandmother?

Margery: We have a picture of the children with their grandparents. I think Sue has all the other pictures.

Lois: Perhaps you have one of your children in the area who is computer savvy and could scan some pictures and mail them to me. Your wedding. Any old pictures would be great. I don't suppose anyone ever took any photos of a cattle drive.

Margery: Probably not.

Wally: I don't remember having a camera along anytime.

Margery: Sue Donaldson would be the one who has the family pictures. I think she has all the pictures from the grandparents, doesn't she?

Wally: That's my brother's wife. She lives in Spokane.

Lois: Are you in touch with her by email?

Margery: No, and I don't think I have her address with me either.

Lois: Well, if you're talking with her on the phone, you might let her know that we're interested in any old pictures from the North Fork in the era from the 1930s on. Let me give you one of my cards, in case she has any means of scanning and sending them.

Margery: She probably has grandchildren who could do that.

Lois: I made up my own business cards, and I made some for Larry, too.

Wally: Yes, we appreciate Larry's column in the paper. It's the only reason we subscribe to the *Hungry Horse News*, so we have some idea of what's going on up here.

Lois: Yes, that and Chris Peterson's photography. He takes the most wonderful pictures.

Wally: Mel Ruder did, too.

Lois: The only picture we have of Ben and Annette Rover running the store is a Mel Ruder photo. I understand his daughter now has ownership of those photos.

Wally: Yes, he came out to the Bad Rock School and was taking pictures. There was one of the girls that he refused to take a picture of.

Lois: Why was that?

Wally: She was ugly. Her father came there and threatened Mel Ruder, but he refused to take a picture of her. That was in the days when you had sheet films. He could have even pretended to take a picture and said, "I'm sorry, it didn't turn out." Some of us in Montana are not very diplomatic.

Lois: And G. George Ostrom. He celebrated his 90th birthday this year.

Wally: I usually don't read his column.

Lois: He's not writing much anymore. They're just reprinting old columns. But I have scanned all of Larry's columns, from 1985 on, and digitized them, and we have them all on the computer now. So if you want to look up anything he's written, you can find it. Or, in what year did he write about this issue? It's really handy.

Wally: I should have the courage to send my letter to the editor about the road. It was written more than a year ago but not sent. But this last traffic count on the road, that was misinterpreted.

Lois: It's difficult now, with the bridge construction in Hungry Horse. If you go that way, you've got the construction holdup, and you've got all the smoke and nasty stuff in the Park. They talked about bring traffic across Blankenship, but there's a bridge there that will not sustain the weight of trucks.

Wally: They broke the bridge once with a truck crossing there. I forget who it was who crossed there illegally, was overweight and the bridge collapsed. If they would pave that stretch from Canyon Creek to Camas Creek, then that would be a viable detour for cars. But trucks would have to make the 100-mile detour that we took in 1964 when Highway 2 washed out.

Lois: Well, my phone number is on the card, and my email address, too. Thank you, thank you for your time. This has been so nice.