WALTER J. HAMMER

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

North Fork History Project

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CONTENTS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY - WALTER J. HAMMER

In order that the reader may better understand what the writer has reference to in this narrative I will give names and places which should prevent confusion in the reading of this story.

When I refer to the North Fork it means that part of northwestern Montana which is the drainage of the North Fork of the Flathead River. This would include that part of Glacier Park which extends eastward from this river to the Continental Divide, from the Canadian border southward for about 60 miles and westward from this river to the Whitefish Divide. Most of the homesteads and also Forest Service and Park Service operational centers are located in this area, mostly near the river. There are three forks of the main Flathead River, the North Fork just mentioned which has its source in Canada about 60 miles north of the border, then there is the Middle Fork which rises along the Continental Divide south of Glacier Park. Coming from the southeast it joins the North Fork just beyond Glacier Park on the west side. The joined rivers proceed and pick up the South Fork, a few miles farther west and the three joined rivers then proceed to flow into Flathead Lake some 15-20 miles south of Kalispell. At the south end of Flathead Lake the one Flathead River emerges and flows westward, picking up a variety of other rivers and eventually proceeds to the Pacific Ocean as the Columbia. Speaking of a North Forker I mean those people who live in this wide valley wherein flows the North Fork of the Flathead River, bounded on the east by the Continental Divide and on the west by the Whitefish Divide

PREFACE

Having been told by friends and relatives alike for quite a few years that the story of my experiences in Western Montana should be put down in some sort of narrative which might be of interest to the generations of this clan now present and perhaps some yet to come, I have finally planted this tired old body in my favorite easy chair next to my fireplace and started writing.

This fireplace, which is in fact very different from those I constructed in Montana, is unique in many ways.

My dear Hazel who shared nearly 39 years with me and 24 of those in Montana passed on to a better life after a lengthy debilitating illness and much suffering in this year of 1987 as of June 18th. It was Hazel who was the spark which ignited any ambition I may have possessed and together we made the most of a life in the wilds of Montana which was neither always comfortable nor was there assurance of success with projects attempted. Actually, the area lacked any real opportunities for employment and reasonable income. There were a few exceptions if you could find them, as we shall see. This narrative then should begin with my leaving Lincoln, Nebraska, where an occupational illness forced me to abandon a well-paying job and upon doctor's orders I prepared to leave for an outdoor job in western Montana.

So then as of April 1932, at a time when our country was seeing one of the worst depressions ever, I packed up and headed west not knowing what lay ahead or whether I would even make it to my destination. More in detail as the real story begins.

By the time of our country's entry into World War II, December 7, 1941, I had spent nearly nine years as a bachelor in the area of Montana which is the locale of this story.

After a period of training as a shipyard welder I was nevertheless drafted into the Army and served for the duration, mostly overseas as my records will show.

Upon my return to Montana in February of 1946 I was trying to get myself oriented once again and worked at odd jobs for a time and also started building a log cabin on one of the properties which I had acquired earlier.

It was then in 1947 that I was introduced to Hazel Monson by a mutual friend, and so in 1948 after a lengthy written correspondence, by June 30th we were married.

Hazel had been residing in Phoenix, AZ, during the winter of 1947-48 with a married sister, while I was very busy all the fall, winter and spring trying to get a cabin built. It was not to be completed until a year after our marriage, however.

The 24 years in Montana that followed were rewarding in so many ways, not necessarily in a monetary sense, although the land I had purchased over the years did finally increase in value, but rather in the unfettered, unhurried lifestyle we were privileged to live.

There were problems, of course, some very serious, but I think we both had this feeling of "can-do," since we were totally on our own and were only limited by the elements and our own shortcomings.

The elements were indeed something to cope with at times, and our shortcomings were in evidence every so often as various and sundry things did not work out as we might have planned them. However, our problems were probably not unique but occurring in an environment that could be very hostile unless you were in tune with it. They were probably magnified at times.

Personal frustrations were not uncommon and we had any number of disagreements as one might expect, but I am happy to say that we never had a serious temper "blowup" at our house that we did not patch up the same day it occurred.

In the year 1932 I probably had to make one of the most difficult decisions of my life and it altered the entire course of my future existence.

I could no longer operate in Lincoln, Nebraska, as a photo engraver to which trade I had apprenticed five years prior to 1932. My health had taken a terrific beating the last year or so of this period.

Pneumonia left me with a persistent cough and my lungs and other organs of my body were affected. The doctors insisted I remove myself from this occupation at least temporarily and suggested I spend six months or more in an out of doors rest area.

My occupation was incidentally at that time one of the best paid available to a young apprentice. However, the culprits and destructive elements used in the processes were acids, cyanamide, and various other chemicals damaging to human tissue. The process was changed and improved in more recent years and most of the dangerous chemicals were eliminated. Too late for me. I had spent five years of my life in the worst of conditions and was now paying the price.

So, at about age 22 I started looking for something to put me back into good health and a possible income that might help put me back on track to pay my expenses as I recuperated. I had dropped most of my savings in the famous stock market crash of 1929-1930 (a learning period).

Through an acquaintance I heard of a small dude ranch in far-off western Montana and it immediately appealed to me, since having been born in the Rocky Mountain state of Colorado and taken away from there as an infant I had no memories of mountains, but even in my school days

in Nebraska I often daydreamed of a day when I would go west and see those beautiful mountains where I was born.

As I made inquiries about the dude ranch in Montana I started my plans. I would go west no matter what and the definite destination would depend only on the answers to my inquiries. I did have ideas of going gold panning in Idaho, as well, and had procured maps to that end and some very primitive equipment to use in that process.

In due time I had a reply from the owner-operator of the small dude ranch located in western Montana on what is known as the North Fork of the Flathead River on the westward side of Glacier National Park. There were two points in this valley where mail was delivered: Polebridge and Trail Creek. The two locations about which you will read much in this narrative Trail Creek being the northern most point of mail delivery at that point in time, about 8 miles from the Canadian border.

The reply I received from the dude ranch owner seemed very favorable to me. The man stated that although he would be glad to have me come and stay at the ranch as a paying guest, he was offering me a job on the ranch and would be paying me instead. He mentioned that because of the remote location of the ranch he often had some difficulty keeping hired help. All this sounded plausible enough and appeared to be a good deal for me, so I was quick to write a letter accepting his offer. Much later I was to discover that there was a worm in this apple, but by and large the end results—with certain reservations—were not all bad.

THE TRIP BEGINS

I had purchased a used 1929 Model A Ford roadster in Lincoln, Nebraska, and had it put into good condition, then I disposed of all extraneous personal accumulations which I had no intention of carrying westward.

Finally loading the little car to the point of bulging and carrying a trunk on a special carrier at the rear and a spare tire, I now suddenly had a request from my older sister, Margaret, that she wished to accompany me and would I also take her four-year-old son along as well. They would go with me as far as central North Dakota where our parents were living at the time.

This I agreed to do although it certainly put us in cramped quarters. A Model A Roadster did not have much seating capacity. However, we made it to Dakota with no real problems and after visiting with the parents for a week or so I finally turned directly westward and started a long and difficult trip.

The route of this trip is documented in an old road Atlas which I used at the time and should accompany this narrative.

Since this was the month of April there was all evidence that creeks and rivers would be high or over their banks with spring run-off from winter snows, and so after leaving Dakota and entering the valley of the Yellowstone in Montana I discovered that the Yellowstone River was at flood stage and out of its banks and at various places across the highway upon which I was about to travel.

At filling stations we were advised and cautioned not to travel alone, so about 8 to 12 motorists who were heading west banded together and played follow-the-leader. Depth of water over the highway varied from a few inches up to a point where it would flood the car's ignition system and bring the car to a halt until pulled out onto dry areas, dried out and so continue onward. With many stops and detours to avoid the really low areas we traveled this way for some 80 miles until the

road finally turned to higher ground. After many further detours and bad wash-outs I finally arrived in Three Forks, Montana, where a friend, Dave Andrews, had a job as Postmaster. I spent a night with him and family, and he took me on a night fishing expedition. It was productive.

Leaving Three Forks and heading westward to Butte, the big copper mining country, and on to Warm Springs and Deer Lodge where the state Penitentiary is located, over Hellgate Pass to Missoula and now I am getting into country that really looks like the mountains where I was born in Colorado.

Missoula was a pleasant little town at that time, much logging and sawmilling in progress and even though it was depression time everything seemed to be booming and buzzing here as also were the mines at Butte and Anaconda.

At Missoula then my route turned northward and after a few miles, skirted around the Moiese Buffalo Range, a vast territory set aside for the propagation of buffalo as well as antelope, deer, and elk. There were a number of these great animals near the roadway and seemed to be afraid of nothing. My first sight of this famous animal.

As I came near the southern end of Flathead Lake I had a choice of roads to take, one around the east side and the other around the west. I chose the west side since I had inquired about road conditions and was advised to take the west side road. This gave me the first and most beautiful view of the Mission Range of mountains far east beyond Flathead Lake.

Flathead Lake—one of the most beautiful bodies of water in western U.S.A. and also one of the larger bodies. Fishing here has always been fabulous and in more recent years the lake became the source of a great sweet cherry industry. The east side of the lake proved to be ideal for growing this luscious fruit.

The Mission Range of mountains were in view nearly all the way north toward the town of Kalispell where the range blends into another group of mountains known as the Flathead Range.

Coming to Kalispell then a short distance north of the lake I was getting very near to my destination. Driving about 17 miles farther to Columbia Falls my map showed me a mountain road of about 50 miles heading northward skirting Glacier Park and the North Fork of the Flathead River which forms the western boundary of Glacier Park or about 60 miles, beginning at the Canadian border. However, when I stopped in Columbia Falls for gas and food and made inquiry about the last 50 miles of my trip I was told the road was closed by rock slides every spring and would not be opened until June 1—this day was April 15!! (1932)

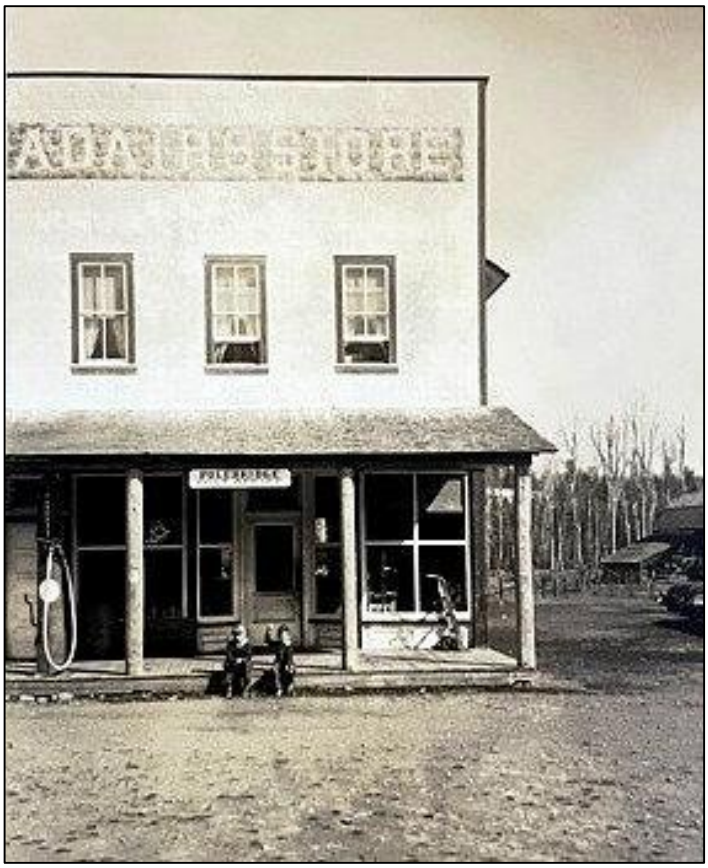
This news just about floored me, after coming all this distance from Lincoln, Nebraska, to find the last 50 miles impassable; however, a ray of hope suddenly appeared. Some old brush rat playing at a poker table in the lobby of the local hotel said the mail carrier was operating on the alternate road which was located inside Glacier Park paralleling the road on the west side of the river which was closed by the slides. However, the road was also near impassable because of late snows and high water. As a matter of fact, the only bridge across the river at Polebridge Ranger Station had been swept away by an ice jam a few months before, so although this road was open after a fashion—to Polebridge Ranger Station in Glacier Park—there was still the matter of how to get across at that point where the bridge had been washed out. Finally, some other old character volunteered the information that a cableway had been installed so you could pull yourself across the river on this cable and maybe take some luggage with you in a sort of hanging basket. But then

you had to leave your car parked at the Ranger Station and there was still over 15 miles to go to get to the ranch which was my destination. Some real complications at the very end of my trip.

It was fortunate that this had been one of the days the mail carrier was making a trip on his twice weekly schedule. Driving a small truck with chains he was about to make his first trip after snow melt and the dirt road was in terrible condition. (During most of the winter the mail was carried by the contractor by sled and horse team and service was often erratic and minimal.)

Since the mail carrier was making his first spring trip with a small truck, I decided to try and follow him in my Model A Roadster to Polebridge Ranger Station. I supposed that he might at least help me out of a bad situation if I got stuck in one of the many mud holes he had told me about. As it turned out my little Ford Roadster took me through in great shape without any help needed.

The Park Ranger at Polebridge was Hugh Buchanan, who was to be my good friend for many years to come. At this point in time he helped me across the river on the cableway and I soon found myself at Adair's Store, a small general store which sold almost anything and as the proprietors would tell you—that if he didn't have it you didn't need it.



Adair's Store in Polebridge, Montana

The upstairs of the store had a group of very bare rooms that were available for an overnight or perhaps longer stay.

Since this was late in the day by now and I had made this terrible trip and then the transfer across the river I was dog tired and couldn't remember when I had last eaten, so I took one of the rooms upstairs and fell into a bunk with a thin pad for a mattress and an old Hudson Bay blanket to cover.

Luckily down in the store a large oil drum heater was going, otherwise it would still have been quite cold on an April night.

There was still snow from the winter laying in the shady parts of the timber everywhere.

After a night of solid sleep I was suddenly awakened by the call, “Daylight in the swamp,” which I learned right then was the call to breakfast at any camp in the north woods. All of a sudden I was famished for food, something I had not experienced in a long time and I dressed, washed in cold water and headed downstairs to where the voice had originated.

The proprietor of the store had two men working for him at the time. They were probably working out their grocery bills from the winter, which I learned was a rather common practice in this area.

The proprietor’s wife was in town visiting relatives and so there were four men for breakfast. The proprietor had made great stacks of hot cakes and also ham, bacon and a lot of fried eggs, a typical north country breakfast with plenty of strong coffee. I learned right then how people who work in the outdoors eat. I was hungry but not prepared for all the food that was pushed toward me at this time. I made the most of it but I’m sure the others knew right away that I was not one of them.

I’ve long since forgotten what I paid for lodging and breakfast—not much really. Since I was now within 15 miles of my destination I made some inquiries about the ranch where I was going and about the people who operated it. The three men each had differing opinions as to what I was getting into. There was some laughter when I mentioned dude ranch. One man insisted it was a goat ranch and that maybe they had two dudes in a season. In short, the opinions of these men did not exactly sound encouraging to me, but I decided to wait and make my own appraisal of the situation.

Since no one was traveling on this road because the south end was closed by slides and the north end was a dead-end road in Canada 22 miles away, my only way to get to the ranch was to start walking the 15 miles. It was a pleasant April day as a day in Montana can be as I started to walk. It was perhaps an hour or so past noon when I arrived at the ranch. The couple had eaten their lunch, they had not been aware of my coming that day. However, the lady of the house set out a lunch for me of homemade bread, canned meat (venison), fried potatoes and jam, and here I made my first mistake, which turned out to be funnier at the time than it was later on when the situation was better understood by me.

To explain—these people, as it turned out, were tight-fisted about money, food or almost anything else and were constantly trying to keep expenses at a minimum. A good system perhaps but they carried it to extremes as we shall see later. But to return to my lunch again, the jam Mrs. B. [Mata Brill] had set out for me was in a sauce dish and was made of apples. I took it to be sauce and hungry as I was, ate the entire dish of jam, thinking it was applesauce, which was just about what it really was.

Mrs. B. said nothing at the time but at the next meal she again set out such a dish and then told me that it was jam. So much for that, but it signaled what was to come.

So now I was finally at my destination, the ranch. All buildings were built of logs simply taken out of the woods, peeled of their bark, cut and fitted into place, a roof of smaller poles and shakes (shingles) split by hand for the roof.

The entire mode of living seemed quite self-sufficient except for food staples such as flour, sugar, etc., and so we shall see the wild meat (venison) formed the main part of the diet.

Mr. B. [Matt Brill] was in the process of building a small cabin of which he already had several to accommodate his guests. Since I had some experience in carpentry, having worked for a contractor on my high school vacations, I had no real problem developing some expertise in this cabin construction, although it's quite different from conventional building construction. Eventually I was to use some of this experience in my own construction business.

Matt and Mata Brill, proprietors of the Kintla Guest Ranch.

Mr. B. owned about 300 acres of riverfront land which was mostly grown to lodge pole pine, a very fine tree for log building construction. He had cleared about 20 acres of good river bottom land on which he raised hay and some oats which when cut green made a very good and nutritious feed for horses in winter. Also as I had been told before arriving he did have a herd of goats and no cattle. Some of the goats he bred and raised young which he butchered when wild meat was scarce and fed it to his dudes. Some of these people thought they were eating wild meat and Mrs. B. the cook would act mysterious about it and never really tell them what it was. The she-goats were milked and actually, if properly and carefully handled, both meat and milk were perfectly good food. However, there was this problem of careful handling of milk and butchering. For my part I never got used to consuming either meat or milk. I've told the little story these many years how it was that once upon a time I used both cream and sugar in my coffee but when I tried some of the goat's milk in my coffee, I was turned off by the aroma that rose from my hot coffee and ever since I have taken my coffee black or with only sugar.

The man had eight or nine horses which was never enough when he had a party of dudes of any size to take on the higher mountain trips, which was his main stock in trade. We had many an argument about this problem and together with other irritating matters arising from time to time, it finally ended in my leaving after working for the man for two seasons and part of a third as well.

Having described the horse herd the dude ranger owned as a motley group of nondescript types, I will speak here of one they called “Spider.” He was a long-legged gelding who had a very nice frame, but because of age and bad teeth he was not assimilating his feed very well and was always poor and appeared to be starving. The ranch owners insisted he had Arabian blood, but no one else believed that.

Anyhow it came to the point where the animal was too weak to carry a rider for any length of time on the trips we were making, so by the time winter was approaching and he would have to be fed oats, the ranch owners decided to dispose of him for coyote bait to some trapper, perhaps me. But Mrs. B. fancying herself as something of a fortune teller, tea leaf reader, palmist, seer and all that other hocus-pocus, told her husband that under no circumstances was he to kill the horse. It’s bad luck, she says, let Walt kill him! From her point of view, it did not matter what happened to me!!

Things like this had a lot to do with my eventually leaving this place.

Well, anyhow I paid no attention to this stupid nonsense and wanting to use the horse carcass for coyote bait, I shot him. The bad luck I experienced was that a couple of bears moved in and ate and dragged away most of the horse before I had a chance to catch more than one coyote. But the old dame at the ranch felt real smug that she had saved herself and her husband from dire disaster. I am not so sure about that because later in that year she started having gall bladder problems which not too many years later put her on a regular sick list and then after an operation she finally passed away, but I certainly would not presume to say where there was cause and effect in this story.

But I’m ahead of my story.

This business of saving leftover food from the tables and putting it in an old icebox which was very poor refrigeration and then when things got moldy they were not thrown out as they should have been but re-cooked and put on the table again—all this caused many a bellyache for everybody, but it never seemed to occur to Mrs. B. what the problem was. She was saving money! So when I finally left this establishment I started eating food that was properly cooked and did not derive from a moldy state. I learned to do my cooking in a short space of time with the help of the local school “marm” whom I was courting at the time and from a few other local women.

I must backtrack here a bit in my story. In my second year at the ranch I had seen a notice of a tax sale of a quarter section on the river farther north from the dude ranch, which I ultimately purchased—the first acquisition of a piece of land in my life. This, too, was to have a profound effect on my future. There was a log cabin on the property, one room, but in fair condition. It did need some roof repairs. So, in the fall of my second year I did roof repairs so the cabin would not suffer deterioration from snow and rain.

It was fortunate that I had done this because in the late fall of the third season when I left the dude ranch, there was but little time for anything except to ready the cabin for winter and get in my food supplies from town.

Earlier during the time of trips with dudes I had occasion to talk to our local Forest Ranger and learned from him that if you were a landowner-tax payer, if you will, you could apply for a job with the Forest Service and be fairly certain of getting work with them.

Since I had talked to the ranger in private he had told me that if at some future time I wanted to change jobs to come see him and he would put my name on a hiring list. He was as good as his word and after leaving the dude ranch and going to see him he had me on his payroll within a

week. Even though it was late in the season it did give me enough income to buy the staples I needed for the coming winter. I was then fortunate in getting some wild meat and some unexpected salt pork and made out very well for my first winter on my own. The diet may have been somewhat monotonous but took me through the winter very well.

I continued to improve my little cabin both inside and out as weather permitted during the winter, besides helping build a cabin for an unfortunate couple. I even went so far as to dig a cellar underneath the cabin to store food which could not be left elsewhere to freeze. Luckily there had been a lot of dead wood left nearby and I had purchased a small wood heater which served me very well through the winter.

Episode: During the first summer and fall working at the dude ranch I had attended several local country dances which were usually held in settlers' residences and were crowded, smoky, sweaty affairs with much drinking of local bootleg liquor; also known as white lightening. At these dances I became acquainted with a young couple about my age [Ralph and Esther Day]. The girl was the daughter of one of the older local homesteaders [Harry Holcomb], a congenial old character and his wife who were good friends to me in later years. The daughter had been married before and had a little girl about 3 or 4 years old from the previous marriage; her husband had died of some disease. Her present husband was a likable sort of bumbling character with big ideas, no money and very little ambition, but since they could live with Mom and Dad who worked hard raising a few cattle and a good big garden, everything was fine for them except that father-in-law was not too happy to support three more people with his meager income and house them as well. So there was friction and finally the young folks decided to go off a little ways (not too far) and build a house for themselves on government land. What this turned out to be was a sad joke and eventually a disaster for them.

The husband scrounged some cull lumber from an early small sawmill and proceeded to build a cabin, ending with a one room "shanty" covered with tar paper, no insulation in the walls, a small tin heater to heat the place. This was with winter coming on with the expectation of temperatures that often dropped to 40 below zero or worse.

What most people didn't know at the time was that the girl was pregnant and likely to have her baby right in the middle of winter in a snowbound situation and any doctor 50 miles away by horse and sled. The results were almost predictable. In that cold cabin the girl had a miscarriage and the child born premature died. The girl very nearly died too. Only because of the efforts of a neighbor lady who was somewhat of a mid-wife did the girl survive the ordeal.

After much talk by a number of people in the neighborhood about this deplorable situation nothing much changed, except the father of the girl helped them to make some improvements on the shack and they went through another winter with somewhat less discomfort. The next year was the year I left the dude ranch and started working for the Forest Service late in the season and the friend who had the tar paper shack had also gotten a job with the Forest Service.

In late fall when we were about to be laid off for the season, the father of the girl, the husband and I got together and discussed the possibility of putting up a substantial though small log building for the couple. The father had a homestead and plenty of trees that would be ideal for building logs for the cabin. He also had a team of horses and offered to let us use the team to bring in the logs to the site. After he designated where we were to cut the trees, he also provided a building site by a trade with a neighbor for a small tract about one quarter mile down the road from his place.

By luck it was a long, late, and fairly mild fall. We cut and pulled in logs like crazy, knowing time was short and winter was on our heels. The girl worked like a real trooper, peeling the logs with a draw knife and also cooking for us. She was happy and determined to get her own house and though small it would be cozy and a good one to keep out extreme cold.

When it came to the actual work of notching and fitting the logs the man admitted he had no experience and it was true. However, since I had helped build several cabins during my two and a half years at the dude ranch I knew what needed to be done, so I managed to do most of the corner notching while the man did other things until we were ready to raise another log. All went rather well but it was slow going and finally when we were at the point of raising roof rafters I had to leave and go do some of my own work which I had neglected for some time. Winter was moving in on me too and I was not nearly ready and was working ten miles away from home at this place. The father-in-law then took off some time from his work and helped the couple get rafters and roof on before the deep snows came.

They moved in before the logs had a chance to season and dry but they were so happy to finally have a house that wasn't a freeze-out situation they forgot the discomfort of damp logs. Another season and the logs would be dry and they then could do whatever interior work they wanted.

Ralph and Esther Day (left) on their property in later years

I have been told that this cabin built in 1934 is still in use, although my friends have passed on and there have been several owners. (Note added 1988) [Now on Ray Hart's place, near the road.]

During the first two years of my time in the North Fork there were regular dances at the various ranches and homesteads, and there was always a good deal of heavy drinking at these dances and parties.

The liquor consumed was almost always provided and sold by local moonshiners even after Prohibition was finally disposed of. As a matter of fact, it was common knowledge that the woods were full of stills, though the area had only been combed through and raided by Federal Agents once with minimal success.

Although some of the people where the dances were held objected to the sale of this moonshine on their property there was really no way to control the situation. There were several men who came to these dances for the sole purpose of selling their rot-gut. I suppose I purchased my share of it and often wondered about the awful taste and the disastrous after-effects, as well. So it wasn't too surprising that when one of the suppliers was raided by the Feds one of the discoveries made when they smashed the tubs of whisky mash was that they found any number of dead pack rats in the mash! Something like that should have stopped purchases from similar places, but I doubt that it really did.

They used to call this stuff Squirrel Whisky—two drinks and you started climbing trees.

One of the very first things that came to my attention when arriving in this country was the general disregard for the law. Also on my first day in the little town of Columbia Falls I noticed a wide open gambling game in progress in the lobby of the small hotel on the main street.

The next thing of special interest was a killing over a woman from New York [Mary Powell] who together with a 15-year-old daughter had come to this area having answered an ad which a local sheepherder [Billy Kruse] had placed in a magazine which catered to that sort of business. He had lived with the two then for a time and then in springtime had gone herding sheep in far-away eastern Montana. When he returned to the North Fork in the fall he found another bachelor [Ed Peterson] had taken over his women. A shootout took place and the sheepherder lost, and although many people felt he had been "bushwhacked" there were no witnesses to the shootout so the survivor was never prosecuted and he then took over the harem. [There's no evidence there was a relationship between Mary and Ed.] Then a group of bachelors and some married men as well built a nice log cabin for this madam and her daughter and together with another transient female or two they set up their red light establishment. [Local gossip—no evidence of this.] I think someone called it Huckleberry Hill. More to the point was another name, "House of Joy."

Mary Powell, nicknamed Madame Queen

Now as time went by there were two more killings, one was over the right to use an old trail which went through one man's property which he closed off and planted a garden across the old trail. Another man whose property was beyond the other's had used the trail for years and continued to

do so only to be shot and killed by the grandson of the property owner. [Frank Fisher was killed on the Harold Mahoney homestead.]

The third killing was over a debt owed by one man and the other man wanting to collect was shot for his pains. All three of these killings took place the first year I was in the country. [Neither Larry Wilson nor I know anything about this one.]

To return once again to the first few months after my arrival in this area. My little Ford Roadster was still at Polebridge Ranger Station on the east side of the river in Glacier Park. After a few months the news came through that the west side road had finally been cleared of rock slides and was open to travel. So the dude rancher and his wife, wanting to make their first trip to town to shop, took me as far as Polebridge and dropped me off. I proceeded to cross the river on the cableway and even though my little car had been sitting dormant for nearly two months she started right up and I turned southward toward town. The road was by now quite dry and had probably even had a grader work on it. At best these dirt roads were not very good.

After an uneventful 45 or 50 miles I was once again in what was casually and loosely known as civilization. I bought some badly needed work clothes, pipe tobacco, cigarettes and sundry other things which I've long since forgotten, then back to the west side road and northward again through the area where the rock slides had been when I first arrived in April.

To describe these two parallel roads, they were at this point in time both one-way roads with turn outs for meeting or passing about every eighth mile. However there were places where it was hundreds of feet down to the river and no real good meeting or passing places. In meeting some other car it meant one or the other must back away until a wider place in the road presented itself and people could squeeze by each other in their cars. At nighttime this was real interesting and adventurous.

When I came to this country I had noticed that at some particularly bad spots some old car bodies could be seen at the very bottom near the river, hundreds of feet down. No one had ever heard of guard rails along roads in this country and I believe to this day there are none.

During the first season on this dude ranch there were many learning periods for me and mistakes were made such as the porcupine and saddle episode or happening. During the early part of the season until about mid-June few people ventured into this country; however, now and then a visitor would show up and often as not on the wrong side of the river. Let me say right here this river which looked quite innocent during most of the year, one could even wade across it if you knew of the shallow places, but during spring run-off which began with snow melt in March-April until about July 4th, it was a dangerous stream and had drowned any number of careless people over the years.

One day when the boss was in town on a shopping trip by himself we heard shouts from the park side of the river, someone wanting to get across to our side. Stranger to me, of course, but it turns out Mrs. B. recognized him as a dude they had at the ranch another year and he had been taken on several pack trips. His eminence was none other than Senator [Thomas] Walsh of Montana, also sometime Attorney General to Franklin Roosevelt. Of course, Madam B. could hardly contain herself and with her husband in town, commanded me to take a boat which looked as unseaworthy as a mud scow to me, she wanted me to row this "thing" they called a boat across the river and bring the Senator over to our side.

Well, once or twice in my life I had rowed a boat in a placid little stream in Nebraska where you couldn't notice any current in the stream at all. So here this dame, knowing full well the danger of this river at near flood stage and also knowing I was a novice with boats at best, still insisted I could do it and practically called me a coward if I did not. So—nobody called me a coward at age 22 so here we go. I got a lot of good advice from madam before I took off with the boat. I think all that accomplished was more confusion in my mind. But I had decided by then that if she was willing to see the Senator drowned how could I refuse to try my best to keep that from happening.

Anyhow it was a scary thing, getting across the river alone went fairly well but once I had the Senator in the boat everything went wrong and the boat began spinning, ending up finally on a bar about a quarter mile from where we should have been. I know the Senator was pale and a bit shaken, though he tried not to show it. Luckily, I did not have to take him back across the river. It turned out his daughter was coming up on our side of the river by car to pick him up—what a relief for me—Franklin Roosevelt could have lost his Attorney General right there!

Senator Walsh had been a widower for some years. After his retirement from public office he then married a rather famous and beautiful Cuban woman—he died shortly thereafter (your guess is as good as mine)!

Another moderately famous person who stayed at the ranch this first season, for me, was Mildred Clemens, a niece of Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain. She was a real character who had an eye for men, no matter what age. She made a fast pass at our local Park Ranger, Andy Fluetsch, a woman hater, and when I kidded him about her moving in on him he started laughing and couldn't stop, but he wouldn't tell me what had happened. Ranger Andy Fluetsch was a real character in his own right, an overseas veteran World War I of the old cavalry, he was tough as nails but had a kind heart with people he liked, and I was fortunate to become one of those.

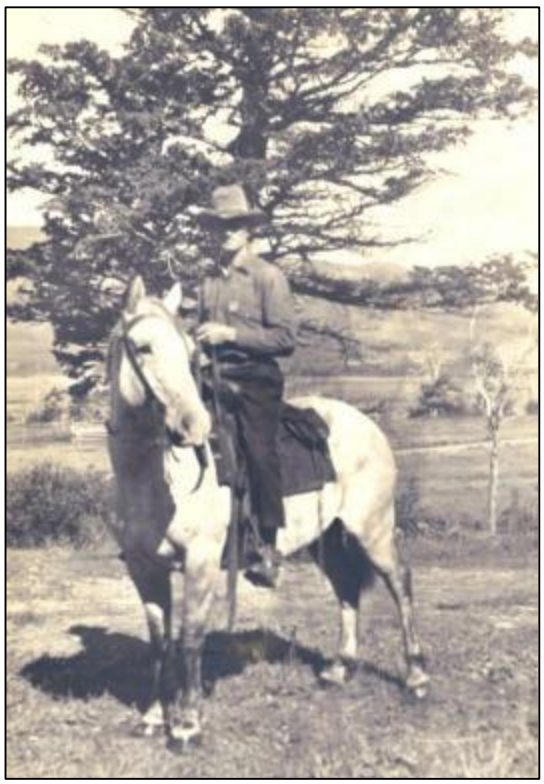
When I arrived to work at the dude ranch I discovered almost at once that there was a feud right here. The Ranger Station where Andy had his headquarters was a mere two miles north or upriver from the dude ranch but on the other side of the river in Glacier Park [Kishenehn Station].

I don't remember just how this feud got started. It pre-dated my coming to the ranch but was going hot and heavy when I landed in the area. The crux of the matter seems to have been that Mr. B., the ranch owner, was trying to have Andy's job in the park terminated through what he presumed to be his connections with the people in Washington, D.C. Andy was just doing his job in trying to prevent Mr. B. from operating in the park without a license to do so. It was a stand-off but an acrimonious one.

When I left the B-Ranch after a loud verbal battle with the owner and his wife, I packed up my belongings and took the hired girl with me and we went to the border Customs House for a visit and to let these people in on what had happened. The Canadian Customs officer and his wife were also my good friends. We then all went by a primitive road down to Andy Fluetsch's cabin in Glacier Park.

When Andy learned we had left the ranch with the season not yet over he was elated, and since he always had a large stock of liquor on hand he set it out in profusion and said, "Let's celebrate." The "Weasel," as he called the dude rancher, had lost all his hired help and would have a helluva time getting any this late in the season. A brother of the Customs Officer's wife quit, too. Anyhow the results of Andy's generosity with his liquor were that we all got properly plastered and spent the entire night telling stories none of us would have thought of telling had we been sober.

We finally all ended up at the Canadian Customs House in the morning and Frances, the Canadian Customs officer's wife, made a large pot of coffee and served up tomato juice as well. It was one of the more raucous parties of the time and it took all of us a few days to get back on level ground again.



Good friend Andy Fluetsch

The first summer of my stay at the dude ranch I became aware of a second feud the owner had with a neighbor about a mile away. This man [Edward Rue] had property that extended to and adjoined property of the dude ranch. In fact, the ranch owner had to cross some of this other man's land to get to his own which was mostly riverfront away from the main road. It was okay and legal for him to travel this old established road through another man's property as it had been laid out some time in the distant past. However, if anyone wanted to make any changes the property owner whose land was involved must be consulted and his permission obtained. Now the dude rancher decided to make some improvements, taking out a curve here and there and working around some potholes, shifting the road here and there and not taking into account that he was doing all this on another man's property. It was really no big deal, but in that country, given the kind of people involved in feuding, almost anything could happen and usually did. So when the dude rancher had finished his little job—and I had helped him—the very next day when the dude rancher drove out to the post office to get his mail he found his new routing of the road blocked off and a sign posted letting him know in no uncertain terms that he had not only trespassed on the other man's property, but that he was liable for damages to his property as well. So that really steamed up the feud with this man. The threats and counter threats got so bad that the dude rancher persuaded me to accompany him on his regular trips to the post office with a loaded rifle in plain sight for the man to ponder.

Note how easy it was to get into real trouble in this country. This was not my fight, but I could have been dragged into it very quickly.

The next thing that happened was the dude rancher had a flat tire and being suspicious he walked back over the road to see what he could find. What he found was that at a place where some tree roots grew across the road just below the surface of the road the other character had driven a whole row of headless nails into the roots and they protruded far enough to puncture a tire but were very hard to see unless you got down right close to the road. Of course, there was no proof as to who put these nails there, so it just became one more chapter in the old feud.

Long before the two roads into this country had been built, there existed trails which ran in many directions. Some originated in the lower valley and headed into Canada and some radiated out from one old Indian trail known as the Yakinikak. This trail which ran east-west had been used since pre-history by Indians and in more recent times by Hudson Bay Company trappers and perhaps also those of the Astoria Company. More recently it had been used by local homesteaders and also by the U.S. Forest Service in the process of building new trails.

One of these trails ran north into Canada also ran very near to the new "House of Joy," or red light place previously described in this narrative. This was also the trail used by me or my boss the dude rancher in bringing in his horses who were nearly always in Canada, thinking perhaps that the grass was greener up there, or thinking to get as far away from the ranch where work awaited them from time to time. Anyhow, whenever I came down this trail bringing in the horse herd and coming by the red light place, it was easy to spot who the patrons of the place were at the moment, and they were not all bachelors. In this sparsely settled country it was as easy to identify the horses at the hitching rack as it was to identify the various pickups parked there.

Getting into random conversation with some of the men later, perhaps at a dance—I knew most of them well by this time—it was real amusing to hear the stories about the reasons for their being at this place. (They had, of course, seen me go by with the horses.)

The Madam's daughter finally left with some stranger. It was said she couldn't stand the solitude and the climate. Other stories had her so diseased she had to get out for medical attention. Of the other women, one was continually pregnant and another was not very attractive so gradually the place went out of business. Small wonder, they had been servicing a 200-man camp of CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] boys that had been established in the area. The Madam herself actually married an old bachelor [Jesse Bemis] who lived in this country and lived with him quite a few years.

Whether she ever had title to the property where she operated was never very clear because in subsequent years a number of people lived in the cabin, perhaps they were only transients or squatters. [Yes, Ed Peterson sold the cabin and five acres to Mary Powell. Actually, Ed Peterson had built the cabin before Mary Powell came west and just agreed to let her live there while Billy Kruse was away.] Anyhow with no one caring for the property it was deteriorating when about 30 years later a friend purchased the property and asked me to estimate the cost of rebuilding the cabin. More of this later in this story.

REBUILDING THE OLD BORDELLO

The original red light district or Bordello which had been established after the killing of the sheepherder who brought the Madam and her daughter into the North Fork was as stated elsewhere abandoned for reasons given. There were then people of the hippie types who occupied the cabin from time to time as they came and passed on, and as what happened to my cabin during the war, they left the place in a shambles.

The sister of my good friend Baird Chrisman [Garnett Crow], purchased the cabin with five acres after a good deal of legal expense regarding former ownership. She then came to me with a request for an estimate to rebuild the cabin inside and out and also to install a permanent concrete foundation which it had never had.

Ed Peterson lake cabin where Billy Kruse was shot, rebuilt by Walt Hammer.

So it was that after about 30 years from the time the cabin had been abandoned I started tearing the building apart, top to bottom, except the shell. Now this was the cabin in which the sheepherder had been shot and bled to death on the kitchen floor. The flooring in the building was a low grade tongue and groove lumber and was so badly torn up and splintered by the many caulked boots of the customers of the Bordello that I decided to tear it all out and start from scratch, because I was going to replace all the floor joists, timbers and sill logs as well, since some were badly rotted.

It was at this point that I came across a curious situation which I will never forget—as I was prying up the old flooring I came across a curious stringy spider web type of deposit on the bottom of some of the floor boards in the kitchen floor area. Sensing something unusual I became curious since I suddenly remembered that it was in the kitchen that the sheepherder had lain and bled to death after being shot. I removed the rest of the flooring in this spot in the kitchen, then with special care and after I had removed it, I turned it all over and laid it together again. It made a perfect pattern of the peculiar stringy deposit as if a person had taken a bucket of thin syrup and poured it on the floor and it had seeped through the cracks of the cheap flooring. The stringy cobweb type of material was obviously the residue of the dead man's blood. After 34 or more years, it still showed what had happened here.

Another strange incident was that when I tore out an old rickety stairway leading to several upstairs rooms, as the dust rose from my activities, there was this faint but unmistakable odor of cheap perfume—also after some 30 years. In its heyday it must have been very potent. One other peculiar incident, when I rebuilt this cabin I took special care to fit everything tight so as to be mouse proof, but during a period when the cabin was not occupied as during the winter season a bat had gotten in somehow. It remained a real mystery and although I checked the cabin carefully afterward I could find no openings and had to assume that someone had at some time or other left a window or door open. Other than that, there was no explanation.

It was in the time frame of 1934 and beyond, very near to the end of my three seasons at the dude ranch, that I met the girl who was to provide a romantic period in my life. She had been hired to teach in the little local school which at that time had between 6 and 8 pupils of various grades. [Tommie Thompson was the teacher from 1934-1936.] It seems that most of the teachers who were hired for this school usually would be boarding and rooming at the Holcomb place, perhaps because the schoolhouse was only about a quarter of a mile away, easy walking distance even in winter, when there was plenty of snow. Some of the children had to come much farther than that.

Schoolhouse where the "schoolmarm" taught.

I met the "schoolmarm" at one of the local dances and although I had never been a very good dancer, we seemed to hit it off right from the start in other ways. She was on the shy side, which made her all the more attractive to me. Could it be that this was to be my lifetime partner? As time went on everything seemed to point in that direction. She was hired again the second year to teach at the little school and we agreed that was great and the romance flourished.

It was about ten miles from my place near the Canadian border down to the Holcomb ranch. The Holcombs were helping to promote our romance and so I was visiting there as often as possible and still keeping improvements going on my place. Holcomb liked to have me come because he too had a lot of improvement to do on his place and I always helped with whatever there was to do and evenings we always had a foursome for card games. So everything was going smoothly and certainly appeared to be heading for eventual matrimony.

As winter moved in on us we had a fair amount of cold weather with mild spells in between the cold, as was often the case in early winter. A week or so before Christmas the Holcombs invited me to come down and spend the Christmas holiday with them and, of course, with the girlfriend.

The snow was not so deep as to prevent my driving down and hoping to be able to drive home again after the holiday. The day before Christmas it started to snow lightly and I should have heeded the warning and gone home with my little roadster, but both the Holcombs and my girlfriend prevailed upon me to stay through Christmas, everyone hoping the snow would stop, but it turned out otherwise. It kept snowing through and well past Christmas and when it finally

stopped the snow was too deep for me to drive my little car through. Knowing very well that a real cold spell would follow this storm, there was the prospect of everything in my cabin freezing solid. With no heat in the cabin my canned supplies, even in my cellar, would probably freeze and spoil. With this situation in mind I finally bid farewell to my hosts and my lady love and started the 10-mile trek for home on foot. I had not brought my snowshoes from home, one more mistake, so I just started walking, wading through the snow. At this point it was not so deep and it was light and fluffy and I had no problem wading through it. However, as I traveled northward the snow got progressively deeper and more difficult to wade through.

Long-time North Fork homesteaders Harry and Lena Holcomb (Mel Ruder photo)

By the time I was only about halfway home the snow depth was very nearly to my hips and the going was slow and more difficult. At about this point an old couple lived near the roadside and I decided to stop and perhaps have a cup of coffee and take a breather. I really needed the break. The people were kind and after talking with them for a while about the five miles I still had ahead of me they convinced me to stay overnight and start again early the next day. I was real glad to do so since I had been quite exhausted this day. After a good night's sleep I started out early again only to find that the snow depth was increasing mile by mile and there were places where I was pushing snow right up to my beltline and the going was very slow and the muscles of my legs and hips were beginning to feel the strain.

The last ½ mile was somewhat downhill or I wonder if I would have made it. As it was with the short winter days, it was dark when I finally reached my cabin, totally exhausted. I stripped off my wet clothes and crawled into my sleeping bag and slept around the clock. When I finally awoke it was daylight, although I didn't even know what day it was until I went up to see my old neighbor several days later. After crawling out of my sleeping bag in a very cold cabin I started a good hot fire in both my heater and cook stove and since I had eaten nothing since I had stopped along the road with the old couple I was famished and especially hungry for some fruit. I had canned a large quantity of blue plums the fall before and I now got a quart jar of these and proceeded to eat the whole quart. They went through my system rather fast, but seemed to fill an urgent need of some kind.

It turned out that I had injured some muscles in my right hip in the ordeal and it was a long time before this improved. As a matter of fact, I have had rheumatic pains in this hip over the years, especially when there are weather changes. As it was with my frozen feet even now at age 79, I find this problem exists.

It was then nearly March before I once again ventured southward to visit my lady love and discovered how worried she had been not having heard from me in nearly two months. The reality was that the post office about eight miles down country was at times like this, about as difficult to reach as the moon. Only when the oil drillers from Canada were traveling with their tractors was the last 8 miles open to travel unless you had a team of horses and sled and there were few of those.

The following year my girlfriend decided she wanted more of a challenge for her teaching abilities and she took a school in Washington state, not far from Spokane. Naturally I did not see her very often after that. However, in the next year, I made a trip to Spokane to have some dental work done and it was then I had a very good visit with her and as it turned out we did not see each other again until after World War II, when we were both married to other people and she had two children 8 and 10 years of age. I guess we had just drifted apart because of the distance involved and I'm not really sure if there was a good reason why this romance did not end in matrimony for us.

Now since I am back in the area where much or most of this narrative takes place, I will try and keep the episodes in a sort of chronological order.

Quite fortunately my encounter with horses was a good one. I have always liked horses and they generally seemed to sense that I was a friend. So we got on very well with a few exceptions. Learning to bridle and saddle was quite simple. The more difficult learning process came when it was time to pack for an extended trip into the mountains with pack animals to accompany the riders. After a lot of practice and false starts learning to throw a diamond hitch on a pack was accomplished and was hard to forget once it was well learned. The bad part was that if a pack on a horse was not secure and perhaps came apart on a mountain trail, scattering the contents and spooking the horse somewhere into the woods, it could be a real headache.

A worse situation was when a dude would ride into and disturb a hornet nest and both rider and horse came under attack by the hornets. This could be a real disaster and you have to see it happen to realize how serious this situation can be. Horses really go wild when stung by hornets and a bucking horse on a narrow mountain trail is a no-win situation for the rider.

Regarding the horses which this dude rancher [Matt Brill] owned, they were a motley group of no specific breed which he had picked up one by one usually as bargains from various sources and there were a variety of temperaments among them. Never having worked with horses before it became an interesting project for me to sort of feel my way with these animals to understand the individual traits and peculiarities of all of them, very much as one might with new acquaintances among people.

For instance, there was a gray gelding who liked oats so much I could always move up to him with a handful of oats and put a bridle on him easily while he was eating the oats. I could then ride him bareback and haze the rest of the herd into the ranch for the work at hand, such as trips into the mountains or just the daily riding by the dudes. Many times bringing the herd in meant quite a chase. Horses get real smart and seem to know why you want to bring them into the ranch. Like many humans they try to avoid work whenever possible.

Most of the time when we would turn them loose at the ranch after a work period they would head up-river immediately for Canada. No doubt, they had long since decided that the grass was longer and greener in Canada and also they were far enough away from the ranch to give us a lot of trouble finding them.

I believe that mention was made elsewhere in this narrative that I had a good relationship with horses on the dude ranch and that may have been surprising because I had no previous experience with horses. However, I had forgotten some of my very early activities with horses and make a correction here.

When I was in the 10- to 14-year age bracket, we were living in central southern Nebraska, a total farming country, and in my summer vacations I did my best to get involved in some kind of farm activity. I was especially fascinated by the big threshing machines and all activities involved with that. There were horses hauling racks with bundles from the fields to the threshing machines, hauling the grain away from the thresher to town; also raking the fields for loose and broken bundles and spilled loose grain stalks.

This raking with two horses was what I aspired to and finally I was given a team and rake. I almost got into serious trouble one time when getting upon the seat of the rake I happened to drop the reins to the horses and off they went at a gallop with me standing on the tongue of the rake with one hand on the rump of each horse as they galloped away with the rake bounding behind. Luckily, they came to a fence and finally stopped. I was a bit shaken but it was experience and after being bawled out by the farmer for being careless I resumed my work with a bit more care. Anyhow after the round robin of threshing was over one of the farmers asked me if I would like to learn to plow with a five-horse team and a two-gang plow. I jumped at the chance and it wasn't long before the farmer had me plowing like a professional with five horses abreast, no small feat for a 12-year old. The most important part was to have the confidence and control of the corner lead horse when making a turn at each of the four corners of the field. Once you had the confidence of your horses you could plow all day with lunches brought out to the field both forenoon and afternoon by a pretty hired girl! What fun! And so I did learn about horses at an early age which helped me in later years at the dude ranch.

It always meant an eight- or nine-mile hike for me with a small bag of oats and a bridle to find the ornery critters and then entice one of them with the oats so I could put a bridle on him and ride bareback to bring the rest of them to the ranch. Often this would take all day.

One early summer day when the river was running high from snow melt, I was on one of these expeditions bringing in the horse herd. Quite often the herd would swim the river even in high water rather than take the Canadian bridge. They never seemed to have any problems even in high water. A horse is generally a good swimmer. I did notice that one of the horses was missing. It was a little mare who looked as though she was part Shetland pony. She was only about two thirds the size of any of the other horses. She also had a streak of comedian in her. When I wanted to catch her she would suddenly gallop away from me and then turn and look at me as though she were laughing at my frustration, then walk slowly up to me and put her muzzle on my chest and take the bridle as much as to say—I was only fooling! She was great for kids to ride since she was gentle and seemed to know she had a special responsibility with them. So she had become a sort of pampered favorite at the ranch. As I noticed she was missing this day as I brought the herd in, I wondered just what might have happened.

At the ranch we decided that the little mare might have strayed away from the herd and would probably come in by herself in due time. So we dismissed the matter for several days and then one day we heard this strange trumpeting and again a kind of screaming of an animal in distress somewhere up river from the ranch. We all listened and the ranch owner finally decided it was a horse in distress. He was right. As we went up river to try and locate the source of the sound we suddenly spotted the little mare locked in against a log jam in the middle of the river. The current was so strong against her that struggle as she might she could not free herself, and of course she was frightened and screaming as I had never heard an animal scream.

Since this log jam was not too far from the ranch the owner and I got his old boat out and tying a rope to it we towed it against the current going upriver, walking along the shore until we were above the log jam where the horse was caught. Then with both of us on oars we brought the boat over to the log jam and tied it on. We then stepped out on the jam which was bobbing and heaving with the tremendous current, with logs coming loose and floating away and more coming down from up river. It was a real tricky situation and there were some logs lodged against the horse holding her in a vice-like grip. The ranch owner and I did some fancy footwork on these bobbing logs and finally managed to break loose those lodged against the horse. Time and again we were on the verge of becoming casualties ourselves, but as some of the logs floated away from the horse we beat her on the rump and gave her a few hard kicks and she made a tremendous lunge and came free to float down river and get out on the bank and collapse. We got back on shore with the boat and went to look her over. She had some abrasions and sore spots, but eventually she came out of it okay. We may have given her some cruel treatment to get her to make a supreme effort, but it probably saved her life.

During the period when I was working at the dude ranch we were running a fence line to enclose a small tract of cleared land. While working with a posthole drill in a somewhat swampy area at about 3-foot depth I came upon a seam of very white clay. I had heard of Kaolin, a very fine white clay which is used to make fine china but did not know if this was in fact what I had discovered. I did not mention it to the rancher and years later when he had sold his place, I planned to go back to get a sample of the clay and have it analyzed. Somehow I never got back to the place and then forgot about it as we too made plans to leave Montana. The place was only three or four miles from our home property.

One of the more aggravating situations, though not dangerous in the same sense, was the ever-present problem of porcupines, which seem to be wherever you travel in the woods and mountains. When you make camp you must be sure to hang saddles and any other leather goods such as shoes, etc., in trees high enough so these critters cannot reach them, although they do at times climb trees, too. These varmints are after salt and any object that has absorbed sweat from either man or animal is their target, often chewing great holes in saddles left out on the ground.

I was to experience such an episode the first trip I made with a group in the high country of Glacier Park. I had left a saddle on the ground as we got busy pitching tents for the camp. During the night we were awakened by this loud chewing sound, somewhat like a sawmill. Leaving the tent with a flashlight we found the critter, but the damage had already been done and was quite severe. The complaining and bitching of my boss was so disgusting, I finally offered to buy him a new saddle even though he had not warned me of this hazard about which I knew nothing up to this time, and I was thoroughly fed up with his bellyaching. He finally shut up and I heard no more about it til we got home and his wife heard about it and then we both got particular hell!

To illustrate the dangers that are always present in handling sharp tools the next two episodes will show examples of life-threatening situations that can occur and the nearest doctor would be 50 miles away over a slow mountain road.

A young and probably inexperienced Park Ranger stationed in what was perhaps the most remote station in Glacier Park was chopping some wood for his cook stove in twilight. He had evidently forgotten about a clothesline nearby, and as he swung his double bitted axe, he hooked the blade over the clothesline behind him and with a full swing in progress the axe came down on his shoulder cutting through his jacket and into his shoulder leaving a deep gash. Since he was a single man there was no one to give him assistance to stop the blood flow. He was about two miles from a ranch and just made it. The ranch people helped bandage his shoulder and took him to town to a doctor. Luckily it was a time of year when roads were open and passable but it was a close call.

Speaking of axes, nearly everyone in the north woods used the double-bitted axe and usually kept at least one bit sharp as a razor. All the more reason to handle with care, as we shall see in the next episode.

At this time I was still working at the dude ranch and among other things learning to handle an axe and how to keep it under control. A sharp double-bitted axe swung out of control could be a danger to anyone in the immediate vicinity.

The dude rancher was building more cabins and helping with the project was an old neighbor [Bart Monahan] who had at one time worked in the copper mines of Butte and Anaconda. He seemed to handle an axe rather well and spoke of years he had spent working in the woods, as well. As we were notching the logs he was working on one end and I on the other, the notching being done with an axe. We were perhaps 20 or 25 feet apart and 4 to 6 feet off the ground, sitting on the last cross log of the building. I just happened to glance up and noticed the man swing his axe at his notch. The axe glanced off the log and out of his grip and came sailing directly at me. I fairly fell off the building to avoid the axe coming at me. The handle did hit me, but the cutting edge went sizzling by harmlessly. The old fellow was some embarrassed but blamed it on the fact that the log was still partly frozen. This might have been true. The old fellow was also a spinner of yarns that were often very amusing though highly improbable. During the winter months I would occasionally stop by his little 10’ x 12’ cabin in which he had a cook stove that also served as heater and he would be sitting at his little table in his long handled underwear playing solitaire. The cabin would be heated to the point of suffocation which did not seem to bother him in the least.

Many years later when the old fellow had passed away the new owner of the property [Baird Chrisman] hired me to tear the little cabin apart and rebuild it since it was deteriorating. I found the inside of the cabin, especially the ceiling shakes, were black as charcoal from the excessive heat in the cabin over the many years. The astonishing thing was that the man didn’t roast his brains in the process.

There were any number of funny little stories told about these old homesteaders who lived the lives of a recluse. Most of these stories have been long forgotten, but now and then one comes to mind.

It seems this old fellow was out hunting deer with another man. He had shot a buck near the river bank, and leaning his gun against a tree he took out his hunting knife and, standing astraddle of the buck, reached down to cut its throat in order to properly bleed him. Evidently the shot had not

hit a vital spot and the buck was more stunned than dead. As the man's knife started cutting the deer's neck he suddenly came alive, and with the knife sent flying and the man on his back holding onto his antlers he headed into the river to shake off his assailant. They rolled over and over in the river and finally the buck shook the man off and started to run, but the man's companion was quick enough to bring the buck down with another shot. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries to the man and the only price to pay was a rather thorough dunking in the river.

The Chrisman family cabin, nearing completion.

At this point in time I should probably explain in a general way about fire season and firefighting in northern Montana. Fire season in this area usually begins about mid-June, sometimes a bit earlier, and extends till about the first week in September. The time element varied a good deal depending on weather, previous winter's snowfall which meant either damp or dry conditions in the forest, then spring and summer rainfall, whether general over the whole area or perhaps erratic and spotty, so that if later on a bad lightning storm went through and dropped some hot strikes in some of the dry areas there was always a possibility of a bad fire even though a lot of the forest area was still damp. As the season progressed the storms were of course unpredictable and often as not set fires in an average fire year that were easily controlled.

However, in a year that started out dry from minimal rainfall and previous winter's snow, there was great danger that any bad electrical storm would set multiple fires. The year, 1936, was such a dry year and as I was stationed on a look-out previously mentioned near Canada [Thoma Lookout], I was aware of smoke and fire at nearly all points of the compass from early June till late September. In Canada just north of my look-out station there were fires burning during this entire period and they were so large that the Canadians did not even attempt to put them out or control them.

Anyone who has never seen one of these large fires cannot imagine the destructive power of this phenomenon. At their worst they are like a tornado on fire gone wild, creating their own draft and

wind which is terrible to hear and the destruction in a short space of time is unimaginable. To have seen such a spectacle of destruction in nature is to never forget it.

During my first year alone after leaving the dude ranch, I was always looking for extra employment to augment my meager income. My job with the Forest Service being seasonal usually meant work from June til October, five months' employment at best. My friend the Canadian Customs Officer told me on one occasion that the oil company that was drilling a well about 12 miles north of the border had a need for cord wood which they used as fuel to fire their boilers, and would I be interested in cutting wood for them in the nearby area of their drilling rig. The next day, getting into my little Model A Ford, I headed north to see the boss man of the oil rig.

I had noted on my way north after entering Canada that there were a couple of tents at the edge of the woods a few miles from the Customs House. Thinking nothing much about that I went on up and attended to my business, but on my way back I suddenly saw two men at the roadside holding up their hands for me to stop, which I did. I then discovered one was a game warden and one a judge. To explain, the Canadian system of enforcing law in these remote areas of Canada—a game warden is accompanied by a judge and anyone who is outside of the law is tried and sentenced on the spot. Penalties are often quite severe for Americans.

Anyhow, the first question for me was: what was I doing in Canada? The next question: did I have any firearms with me? This was the bad one. I had always been in the habit of carrying a rifle in the back of my little roadster even though it was seldom loaded. But just to be an American in Canada with a gun in your car placed you in jeopardy and made you liable for all sorts of prosecution and confiscation. The point was that I should have left my gun at the Customs House with the officer until I got back from my business trip to the oil field. It must have been my lucky day. I remembered that there had been no one at the Customs House as I came through the border. The Customs officer often went fishing when things were dull at this remote post. So when the game warden asked if I had firearms with me I thought surely he would search my car if I said no and then the situation would be worse than if I had told him I had a rifle. Anyhow he took the rifle, told me to wait where I was and he and the judge went over to one of the tents and another man then also emerged, so there were three against me.

They were in conference for what seemed an eternity so I finally just walked over to them and asked just what they would do. I was then asked why I had not left the gun at the Customs House with the Customs Officer. I then began to see some daylight in my dark situation and I told them I would hardly have left my valuable rifle at the outside or porch of the Customs House for someone to steal since the Customs House was closed and locked and no one there.

It then developed that these men had also come through the border somewhat earlier than I had and the Customs Officer had not been there. This was to be my salvation. As it turned out, they could hardly blame me for not leaving my gun when no one was at the Customs House. I must say I was lucky because confiscation of guns and cars was not at all uncommon in such cases. Anyhow the fates decreed that I would survive this one too without problems. This particular game warden had a reputation for being rough on Americans, but he couldn't cope with the fact that his own Customs Officer had been absent from his post. So after a long discussion with his judge, they gave back my gun and turned me loose with a warning not to bring a gun into Canada again. What a relief! I could have lost both my gun and car.

With reference to the oil companies who were drilling in several locations across the border in Canada, I should note that in these Depression years these companies often had a direct impact on

the financial fortunes of local people on the American side of the border. Most of the locals, and that now included me, were usually available for any job that might be offered to them. These oil companies seemed to have unlimited funds to pay for services and were quite generous in other ways. For instance, if they had a machine breakdown or if investor funds were running low at times they would shut down operations and leave the country temporarily. Having large stocks of perishable food on hand, they would often distribute the food to local people. It was at such a time I was about to spend my first winter in my own cabin. My neighbor on the main road adjoining the border [Frank Clute] was a bachelor of some 80 years and the Canadians left a number of large slabs of salt pork and other food items for him and told him to give whatever he could not use to anyone else of his choice. So it happened that he gave me enough salt pork and other food items at the very time that I was short and really grateful to have them.

I should mention here that this old bachelor was a real friend and help to me, a young upstart in this country. He was probably the oldest settler in point of age, as well as in time, as a homesteader in this valley of the North Fork of the Flathead River. Since there was at this time only a trail and no road into my property and cabin he often hauled equipment and grocery supplies to my cabin with a team of horses and a wagon, which he drove through his own property into mine where we adjoined and the going was fairly open and level.

It was years before I managed to build a road of sorts into my property from the main road and it was done mostly by pick and shovel and a quantity of dynamite that the Forest Service considered to be too old and dangerous to use. So they discarded it where the Ranger knew I would pick it up, because officially they could not give it to me. Of course, it was risky to use it, but with extra care and caution, I made very good use of it and accomplished a fair amount of road building. This one I survived, too.

In that timeframe, which was the first year of my bachelorhood existence, living on my newly purchased homestead, I did have some very good friends who helped me over the rough spots. Gradually I became accustomed to living alone and all that meant in a setting 50 miles from a shopping town over a winding primitive road that saw very little maintenance in those early days.

The first winter was especially difficult since I had just moved into this old cabin, which although well built, had been abandoned so long it required a lot of repairs and improvement to make it reasonably livable.

My neighbor to the north whose property was between me and the Canadian border [Frank Clute], who was well over 80 years, had been especially helpful to me. Time and again he had hauled stoves, food supplies and even some lumber for me with a team of horses and wagon across his property to mine since in the early years there was no road into my cabin. This old fellow had been a bachelor all his life and sometime in the 1920s had taken a team of horses and a covered wagon he had built and drove them all the way from western Montana to Arkansas, quite a feat even in those days. Arkansas was the state where he had been born and still had some relatives. This man had been especially helpful to this young tenderfoot of about 25 years and helped me cope with this raw country and with the very basic ways of living. Since it was only half a mile between our cabins I would often visit with him and we would talk until midnight or later and he would always insist I stay overnight.

His was a large old log cabin with several rooms upstairs, while he slept downstairs in the one big main room. Upstairs, he had several rough wooden bunks with thin pads for mattress and some old heavy Hudson Bay blankets for cover. I always slept well even in this primitive situation and

never woke until I would hear that old north country breakfast call, “daylight in the swamp,” and I could smell that wonderful aroma of coffee and bacon or ham frying. The coffee he made was strong enough to bring the dead to life. Then coming down to eat he would have pancakes that overlapped the large plates he had served them on, with heavy syrup or jam to go with the cakes. In those days I could eat like a wolf and the old fellow seemed to enjoy seeing me eat his food with such enthusiasm.

Frank Clute cabin on the river north of Walt Hammer’s cabin near the border.

Although I only remember some of the things we used to talk about, I do remember that some of his stories were pretty salty in the true old western tradition. One might have expected this, of course, since in his younger days he had seen some of the real west in all its colorful aspect.

Since Prohibition had just been cancelled out in the year after I came to the country, there were still many tales around telling of the many moonshiners who had stills somewhere out in the woods. Many of these continued operating after the repeal, since there always seemed to be a market for liquor no matter how bad it was, and there were few job opportunities for making a living since these were the Depression years. I never did ask my neighbor if he was running a still somewhere out in the woods, but it wouldn’t have surprised me too much if he was.

It always amazed me how these old fellows could adapt and get along with whatever was available. For instance, the local schoolmarm had instructed me how to process huckleberries in glass jars and then place them in the oven of my stove to sterilize the fruit and it worked quite well, but I broke some jars by over-heating. When I told my neighbor about this he said I didn’t need to do it that way. He would funnel huckleberries into old whiskey bottles of which he had plenty and then just fill the bottles on up with cold water and cork the bottles. The berries would keep in good shape indefinitely. I never did try this, but again it was a learning experience. Eventually I got a large kettle and could process eight or nine jars of fruit at one time and no special problems.

Then there was another story regarding bachelor resourcefulness. It seems the hunting in this part of the valley was either a feast or a famine, because of the way game moved in and out of the area. So one time or another you might have too much meat on hand and risk spoilage and at another time very little or none at all. When the heavier snows were finally in place and temperatures were at the very least in the freezing range, these old-timers would leave a deer or two hanging in a shed or perhaps an elk or moose.

Now in those days there were these square five-gallon oil and gas cans that were used for many things, after they were emptied, by cutting the tops out of these cans and boiling with soap for a time they were used as cooking vessels by these old homesteaders. Cutting up chunks of meat and adding potatoes, carrots, beets, rutabagas, cabbage or whatever it took to make a big Mulligan Stew. This was cooked up and then set outdoors and overnight would freeze solid. It was then warmed up just enough so that the solid chunk could be removed from the can. The chunk was then buried deep in a snowbank and whenever the people wanted a Mulligan Stew they would take a hatchet or axe and chop off a chunk from the block and thaw it and heat ready to eat. The rest of the frozen block was buried in the snow again till the next meal. Yes, this was before the days of refrigerators in this area, and power lines never did reach this country. The best we could do was install a propane refrigerator in our time

FENCE BUILDING

Elsewhere in this narrative I relate that the Dragon Lady [Madge Cooper, later Madge Terrian] who had purchased my old friend's homestead at the border had reneged on paying the price we had agreed upon for several thousand fence posts I had made for her. So then I kept the posts for my own use and proceeded to lay out a fence line between our two properties. The reason for this was that her stock had systematically grazed down and ruined my hay crop and made it impossible for me to grow a garden. However, I also had another problem to cope with.

To get the picture—consider the fact that these were still the years of the great Depression—in spite of or maybe because of the great Franklin D. Roosevelt—money was a scarce commodity. So I had several thousand fence posts and could cut all the rails I needed on my own property without cost except the labor, but now in order to build the fence I needed several kegs of 30 and 40 penny nails. These were not cheap even in those days and strapped as I was for cash it simply came down to a choice of whether I would buy food or nails. Anyhow in my roamings around the north end of the valley when hunting game or horse hunting when still working at the dude ranch, I had noticed old fallen down fences around some of the older homesteads that had been long abandoned. These fences had probably been built in the very early days of homesteading in this valley, and then as people left for lack of employment or other income, the buildings as well as the fences, gradually fell into ruin and disrepair, rotted and fell apart. This was a common sight, especially in the north end of the valley where my homestead was located. But once again the key to any problem in such a country is resourcefulness of the individual.

I had a fair number of tools since I had once worked as a carpenter and also had helped build log cabins at the dude ranch. So taking a hammer and wrecking bar and a bucket I started at one end of one of these old fences and began pulling nails out of the old posts and rails. In some places these were so rotten I could extract the nails with my fingers, otherwise the hammer and wrecking bar would do the job. So mile after mile of broken down fences yielded the nails I needed to finally build my own fence, even though I had to spend many hours straightening a lot of the nails before I could use them again. The fact that they were very rusty did not matter. Old timers always said rusty nails hold better anyhow.

It was then in the first winter in my own cabin that disaster in an unexpected form almost overtook me. Again I should mention that temperatures in this valley could at times drop to 50 below zero. I knew about this because by now I had spent two winters at the dude ranch, but was caught unawares because I did not have a thermometer. It was another learning experience that was most unpleasant to say the least.

One morning after a very cold clear night I decided to gather up some old dry stumps in the nearby area and bring them to the cabin on a toboggan for firewood. I had put on my snowshoes since there was deep and light snow making it difficult to operate without them. After working for perhaps two hours, I began to feel a numb sensation in my toes and decided to come to the cabin to warm my feet. It was then as I took off boots and socks that I noticed that my toes, especially the large ones, were frozen almost solid. I immediately started the old system of rubbing the toes with snow to thaw them. As they thawed the pain was excruciating and the flesh at various places was white and flabby. It was then I realized real damage had been done.

I managed to get up to Frank Clute's place the next day, and then I found out just how cold it had been the previous day, at least 40 degrees below zero on that morning. Had I known, I would not have been outside.

The old fellow had at some time in his life had similar experiences and he gave me some salve and prescribed other things to heal my toes. It was a close call since if gangrene had set in I would have been a candidate for a trip to town and some toe amputations. However, once again I was a fortunate survivor, although some of my toes are deformed and have never grown a normal toenail since then and when there are weather changes they give me fits with what are known as chilblains.

A friend who worked with the Forest Service as a bulldozer operator went on a hiking trip in mid-winter wearing snowshoes. It was a very cold day and he was out all day. He had this experience of freezing his feet also; however, he was not so fortunate and when he realized what had happened he delayed too long in getting to a doctor. The end result for him was the amputation of both large toes and parts of some others. It really had an adverse effect on his balance as he walked.

BOUNDARY CLEARING – USA-CANADA

The year after I came to the North Fork the federal government had started the project of clearing the Border Slash between the U.S.A. and Canada. This would be 1933. As I understand it this clearing of a 60-foot swath through timber and brush is done every 30 years by both American and Canadian crews, each clearing 30 feet.

During this period I was still working at the dude ranch and a call came late one night that a man had cut his leg badly with his axe and would need someone to take him out of the woods so that he could get to a doctor in town. Since the crew camp was some distance east and away from any existing road, there was no chance to pick the man up with a vehicle, so they called at the ranch for someone to ride in with a horse and bring an extra horse for the injured man to ride out.

I was elected to go up to the camp at night since it was an emergency and pick up the man. I was accustomed to the trail to the border, having brought the horse herd in on it many times in daytime, but riding a woods trail at night is a different and dangerous situation. Tree limbs that you can see and dodge in daylight can hit you across the face or even unhorse you if you can't see them at night. Everything went reasonably well on the trip to the camp, leading the extra horse; but with the wounded man on the horse coming back there were problems. The man was not a horseman and had trouble just staying in the saddle, and with his feet striking brush every now and then I had to stop again and again to check and see if some injury had been done to his leg. It took an exceptionally long time to travel the three or four miles, but we finally made it to the ranch in the early morning hours and then called for a government vehicle to take the man to a doctor in town.

Later after I had left the dude ranch I learned this sort of thing had happened quite often. I believe the slash cutting was finally completed in about another year and a half in this area. It seems that

since this was in the Depression years many of the men hired to cut the trees and brush were not experienced with an axe and had very likely been hired simply because they were unemployed. We had watched some of these men at work and wondered that there were not more casualties.

I will probably never remember some of the many little incidents that were interesting, dangerous and often amusing. Among those were some of the following:

Colts Creek, one of the smaller tributaries of the North Fork of the Flathead River, originated in Canada though it finally made its way to the American side and joined the above river just a few hundred yards north of what I called my original homestead. A very small branch of this creek mostly fed by springs came by my cabin and furnished me with drinking water of the very best kind. It was also the habitat of various water animals—mostly beaver, also muskrat and mink. The creek as it was before the beaver took over was a small thing which you could jump across almost anywhere without difficulty. However, after I took over the property and served notice that I would prosecute poachers, the beaver came to stay and built a whole series of dams up and down the little creek. The results were that there were sizeable ponds the entire length of the creek on my property.

This was a real plus in several ways. The ponds held fish the year around which had not been true of the little creek in its original state. Also the beaver population increased to the point where I could get a legal permit to trap and pelt a certain number each year, giving me some added income. Some of the dams built by the beaver were quite high and caused the flooding of quite a bit of acreage far back into the woods. Among the coniferous trees there were also quite a few aspen and cottonwood, as well as willow bushes. All of these were the kinds which the beaver cut for their food. So the flooded area gave them the opportunity to cut these trees into manageable lengths and then float them down to their lodges which were usually somewhere at the rim of the pond where the water was deep. These lengths of trees were then stored for winter near a lodge and were available for food even though the pond was frozen over with at least a foot of ice.

Naturally the ponds formed by these beaver dams were also quite deep near and just above one of the dams. I was well aware of all this since I had often watched the beaver in the summertime when they were constructing the dams. In spite of that I did a very foolish thing one day.

About March when winter is still very much with us in Montana we often had sudden warm currents of air develop, known as Chinook Winds. If they lasted long enough sometimes the ice on rivers and ponds would get partly melted and would be unsafe to walk across, especially along the shoreline. I had set some traps along the creek for muskrat and mink. Beaver trapping would come later in April. Anyhow with hip boots on, which I always wore during spring trapping season, I was walking along the shore of one of the beaver ponds where the snowpack from the winter was shallow and some dirt was beginning to show from thawing. The ice was beginning to get a bit rubbery and I didn't trust it too much. So wanting to cross the pond, I noticed what appeared to be a small clump of weeds and dirt like a small island. I proceeded to jump across to it only to discover very suddenly that it was only in fact a floating clump of weeds and moss. The next thing I knew I was over my head in water, my hip boots of course were full and I had one devil of a time getting out of this situation. Luckily the temperature was not too low at the time and I was not too far from my cabin. Even so, by the time I had gotten out of the pond and emptied my boots and got back to the cabin I was exhausted and badly chilled. Had I been much farther away from my cabin it could have been a real disaster.

In another situation somewhat similar, I had established a trap line which extended to the foothills of the mountain range to the west, running below the higher range for a distance south and then

turning east again in a wide circle of perhaps 15 miles toward home. This area contained a scattering of fur animals such as marten, coyote, a few Canada lynx and a lot of weasel of several varieties. Along some parts of my trail there were low places that had filled with snow melt during the winter and then frozen over and over again. These pools were shallow but in late winter or early spring when thaws were taking place often had an inch or two of water on top of the ice. Crossing these pools with snowshoes on was not really risky, though not especially good for the snowshoe strings, but on one trip through this part of my trail I caught the tip of one snowshoe on a weed or something frozen in the ice, tripped and fell full length in the puddle of ice water. I was soaked to my skin and thoroughly chilled by the time I unbuckled my snowshoes. I had been on my way out but now all I could do was turn around and head for home, about 1½ miles away. To say the least, the trip was most uncomfortable.

I suppose it should be mentioned here that when the Madam went out of business I purchased her kitchen cook stove. It was in very good condition except that there were three bullet holes in the warming compartment made by a high-powered rifle which figured in the killing of the sheepherder, who had brought the Madam and her daughter to the country in the first place. I was still using this cook stove at the time of my marriage to my Hazel in 1948.

During the early years of my residence in Montana after leaving the dude ranch in 1934 I worked for the U.S. Forest Service at least part of six seasons. As I mentioned earlier, the work consisted mostly of trail and telephone line maintenance, some forest road building where I worked with a dynamite blasting crew of two. We were doing the rock and stump blasting ahead of the bulldozers. This job paid somewhat better than sawyers or swampers who cut the trees and brush out of the right-of-way. I suppose the extra pay was because of the risks involved. Most of the men did not care to work on a dynamite crew.

During the fire season I also manned one of the various lookout stations in my district and at other times was called directly into the fire line to fight forest fires.

During one of my periods of lookout duty I was given the job of installing a set of shutters for the lookout windows which had never been properly fitted or mounted so as to swing on hinges upward to form a sort of canopy to keep the sun out and then to swing down during the off-season and winter. This particular lookout station was not on a tower as were some others I had occupied, nor any other kind of super structure. It was built directly on a pile of rocks which were the extreme apex of the mountains. The drop off on two sides of the mountain were quite precipitous. On the other two sides the drop off was more gradual. The name of the mountain was Tuchuck [now Thoma] near the Canadian border and Frozen Lake.

As I was standing on a makeshift bench and box trying to hold the shutter up to the window to try for a fitting a sudden gust of wind caught the shutter and sent the shutter and me cartwheeling down the mountain for a short distance, luckily on a side of the mountain which was not the most precipitous. However, as shutter and I rolled down the shutter slammed across my face and knocked me out temporarily. When I came to from the shock there was a lot of blood from my nose, otherwise there were mostly bruises on my body here and there.

I had a small pocket mirror in my first aid kit and using it to check damage to my face I noticed that my nose was sort of out of place to one side. Taking some adhesive tape from the kit I managed to tape my nose back as near as possible to its proper position before the swelling took place. According to regulations I should have reported the accident to the District Ranger’s office, but since I knew they would probably call me down from the lookout and I would have a nine-mile

hike to road's end, and then they would send me out to a doctor in town, I decided to wait and see how the healing process would develop. Since lookout season had just begun I knew there would still be several months before my time on the lookout was up which was usually when fire season ended about the first week in September. As it turned out, the nose healed very well and I did not report the incident till I came off the lookout in September. The Forest Ranger gave me plenty of hell for not reporting the accident when it happened, but other than that there really wasn't much he could do about it.

Another season while working at this same lookout station, there had been quite a bit of rain, and when this was the case, the people at headquarters decided the lookout men could do some trail maintenance in their area, since lookout duty was not all that important when the forest was quite damp.

So it was that with my Colt 44-40 strapped on and carrying my axe and short saw with a lunch bag tied to my belt, I was working a trail perhaps a mile or two from the lookout station. Working in an area where a fire had gone through some years past, there were only dead trees with no limbs and new growth not yet very tall. Coming around a blind bend in the trail I found myself almost face to face with an old she grizzly bear, with two half grown cubs directly behind her.

This is a situation which men who work in the north woods constantly talk about. It has happened to some and in one way or another they usually survive though some have been badly mauled and bitten and a few did not make it.

Anyhow at this confrontation I stopped dead still after dropping saw and axe and pulling my Colt from its holster, I trained my gun on the bear but somehow, instinct perhaps, told me not to shoot unless she charged me, and so we stood, she on her hind legs looking ten feet tall and me paralyzed, I suppose waiting to see what would happen. Finally, the cubs started up the mountain behind her and the old she bear finally, giving me one last snort and move in my direction, started after her cubs up the mountain. Needless to say, that was enough for me for one day's activities and I headed back to my lookout station.

One other encounter with grizzly bear, which I had almost forgotten, occurred in the first summer season of my time working at the dude ranch. Among the various settlers in the area who had some stock—horses and/or cattle—there was a lot of competition for the wild hay which grew in patches here and there on both government land and also on old abandoned homesteads. With the long winters for feeding stock, any kind of local hay was in great demand.

So it was that the dude rancher I worked for had taken what was more or less squatter's rights to several small wild hay meadows on an old abandoned homestead about four miles from his ranch, to the north. He and I loaded up all the needed equipment to cut the hay and put it up in stacks. This meant a mowing machine, hay rake and a rack on which we carried all the equipment. We would cut the hay and allow it to sun-dry for a few days and then rake it into piles which we then gathered and put into stacks. Then in early winter we would come back with a rack on a sled and horses, with snow on the road, bring the hay to the ranch.

But to get back to the hay making, the little meadow where we were working had a lower spot at one end and there was a small pool of water remaining from the winter before. In the spring run-off time, all these little meadows were pools of water and would dry out gradually during the summer and the grass would grow in great profusion. This particular meadow had a small beaver dam at one end and therefore there was this small pond.

One day the dude rancher and I had just begun to pick up the hay stacks in the meadow and were pitching the hay into the hayrack, as the horses moved along the rows with the rack. Some noise distracted my attention coming from the vicinity of the little pond. Looking back to my boss I saw him running like mad (silently) away in the other direction and the horses suddenly started running with the rack as well. It took a few seconds before I became aware of the cause for all this activity. Coming down on the run from a small hill beyond the little pond were three grizzly bears, a large old sow and two nearly full-grown cubs at her side. It looked as though they were coming directly for us but as it turned out they were heading for the pool of water to drink and cool off, since it was a rather hot day.

The horses had obviously gotten the scent of the bear and for that reason had taken off with the hayrack. If there is one thing that will spook a horse in this country it is the scent of a bear. It drives them crazy.

We had some trouble catching up with the team and the hayrack, and the three bears finally hearing all the commotion took off for parts unknown which made us feel a lot better too.

During one of the worst fire years experienced in this country, probably 1936, I was again stationed on the lookout known as Thoma. This lookout near the Canadian border was also very near the boundary between two U.S. forests, the Flathead which was where my headquarters was located and then to the west of me was also the Kootenai Forest. A number of my friends and compatriots worked in the Kootenai Forest and some of them I knew only as a voice on my telephone.

During a very hot lightning storm one late afternoon, there were many lightning strikes in a large area of the Kootenai Forest, which I could see very well, but there had not been much activity on my side. Down below me on the Kootenai side about five miles, there was a camp where they kept a fire guard whose job it was to try and put out or check any fire in his general area where he might be sent by his headquarters, and if he needed help to call by phone to his people. As it happened he was chopping some wood for his cook stove as he was about to cook his supper when his axe glanced and he cut his foot rather badly. The storm was past by then but spot fires were popping up all over this man’s district and he had to call in and tell his headquarters he was incapacitated and bleeding badly. Apparently he had a problem trying to bandage the wound.

It just happened that he was at the extreme end of his district and they were so busy with fires elsewhere that they could spare no one to go to the man’s aid. So one of their headquarter men called me and asked how the fire situation was in my district. It seemed to be fairly quiet and I could see no flare-ups in my district. As an emergency measure, they asked me to go down and check on this man since he seemed in danger because of loss of much blood. I checked with my headquarters and they gave me a go signal, so I started down the mountain into unfamiliar territory for five miles, but here was a man in real danger. If he could not stop the blood flow from his wound he could easily faint and then there was a possibility of his bleeding to death.

It was getting dark when I started down the trail and finally in total darkness I found the cabin and the fireguard. I helped re-bandage his foot. He was pretty sick by this time, but when morning came his people had sent a packer up with an extra pack horse to take him out to a doctor. I heard later that he came through it all okay. I took a leisurely hike back to my lookout, getting a good look at some new territory, which I did not see in the dark on my way down the night before.

During the early period of my time as a bachelor living on my own property near the Canadian border, I was constantly on the lookout for any means to increase my income. Among other jobs I worked at was as or axe man for a Canadian land surveyor.

Evidently, Canadians had surveyed this remote part of Canada perhaps more than 50 years before the time when this survey was taking place. During that period of time any number of forest fires had burned through the area and destroyed many or most of the old survey markers. The expertise and accuracy of this surveyor and his lineman was remarkable. He worked from old notes of the original survey and would often go back great distances to a reference point and run out his line with his instruments. Time and again I saw him direct his lineman to a certain point and distance into a shallow swampy area and then tell him to feel around under the water. As often as not, his lineman would come up with the burned off stub of a marker post of which the pointed bottom part looked as fresh and new as though it had been driven just a few days ago, and these had likely been here more than 50 years. It was evident that the fires that had burned through this country over the years had burned off all marker posts to the water level of the swamps at that point in time. It was here that I first learned what accuracy in surveying really meant.

It was while working for this surveyor that I came upon an oddity which seemed unusual to me. In this remote part of Canada, as mentioned, many forest fires had passed through. Even in more recent times Canadians simply allowed fires to burn themselves out and made no attempt to curb or fight them. Oftentimes the fires had been so hot that reforestation by nature was a very slow process, so it happened that a large area where we worked was covered by brush rather than trees. There were many small springs and larger watercourses coming down the mountains and the vegetation along these streams was especially lush and luxuriant. Much of the vegetation was berry bushes. During our lunch hour we picked and ate a lot of raspberries and there were also huckleberries and other kinds. Someone noticed one place where there seemed to be a lot of yellow "unripe" raspberries until someone happened to eat one of these and discovered they were not unripe red berries, but rather a variety of yellow raspberry. None of the crew seemed to have seen these before and I certainly had not, and many years later, whenever I told the story of yellow raspberries I was always met with skepticism. No one I knew had ever heard of them. This was about in 1934-35 and as I write this in 1988 I've just seen a TV show featuring an ad for a new kind of fruit—yellow raspberries. It took a long time!

BOWMAN LAKE SALVAGE

In the year of 1938, my old friend, Andy Fluetsch, Park Ranger at Kishenehn Station was moved to Polebridge Ranger Station and a young new ranger was moved to Kishenehn. Andy also had jurisdiction over the Bowman Lake area, which included some old boat docks and housing near the lake. Park headquarters had directed Andy to tear down and destroy the facilities in any way he saw fit. They had been condemned as unsafe and beyond repair.

There was a lot of good lumber in these buildings so Andy couldn't see himself burning or otherwise destroying all this lumber, so he got in touch with me and asked if I could use the lumber. This good old, well-seasoned milled and planed lumber was a real prize, but there was a problem. According to park regulations Andy could not sell or even give the lumber to any individual. However, Andy was one of those people who didn't believe in bureaucratic regulations when it came to wasting perfectly good material.

Andy knew I had this old TT truck and trailer, so he told me if I wanted the lumber to come on a certain evening with him to Bowman Lake and we would load up the best of the lumber on my

truck-trailer rig and then about midnight, when we were reasonably sure no one would be on the road, I would take the lumber home. This was in the fall after the park was closed for the season.

Now the total trip would be about 28 miles one way from my place near the border, about 20 miles to Polebridge and then 8 miles over a winding up and down roller coaster road from Polebridge in and up to Bowman Lake.

Everything went well getting the lumber loaded at Bowman Lake, and as agreed I started my home trip about midnight. About four miles or halfway to Polebridge on this roller coaster road I was slow on the shift into a lower gear going down a hill and the old gear box jumped into neutral and I lost control. The brakes were not much help and I went careening down a long hill and when I got to the bottom the trailer jackknifed and scattered my lumber all over the landscape. Luckily neither truck or trailer were upset or damaged, but the lumber was a real mess. I had to reload the whole thing in total darkness and it took hours. Finally, getting it all loaded I started out once more and more carefully this time. About 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. I was about 10 miles from home and ran out of gas!! There never was a gas gauge on these old vehicles and I had obviously underestimated what it would take to haul this load. So now I had to walk two or three miles to a homesteader's place to get some gas in an embarrassing situation, because no one was supposed to know what I was doing or where this lumber came from. Anyhow I pledged the homesteader to secrecy and with some gas in my truck tank again headed for home, dog tired and wondering if I had done something stupid. However, I used the lumber in many ways in both my cabin and mink sheds and was grateful to Andy for the opportunity to get the salvaged lumber.

One of the first and most important projects I started on my place near the border was a good-sized garden. Since this was part of the flood plain of the river, it was very good soil, but needed regular watering to grow good crops. Fertilizer, of course, would be an added advantage for good plant growth. At that point in time I lacked the financial means to buy a power pump to use in bringing water from the river to my garden.

There was, however, a small spring creek which ran down a draw where I was building my entry road to the cabin. No matter how dry the summer the little creek seemed to run about the same volume of water. After the creek came down the draw to the lower level where my cabin stood, it turned at right angles and went away from the area where I had plotted my garden, so there was still a distance of perhaps a hundred yards to reach my garden plot with water.

There was a small sawmill operating about 25 miles south in the valley and I procured a lot of cull lumber from the operator for very little money. I then worked the best of it up into a series of flume troughs, sectioned to slide over each other and supported by a series of poles at different heights which I had cut from my property. It worked very well and carried the creek water to my garden in abundance. Later, using the manure from my mink operation I had wonderful success.

After I had been living on my property near the Canadian border for about two years I decided to clear a few acres of land near the cabin. The original homesteader [Henry Nelson] had cleared about five acres, but since the property had been abandoned for about 15 years, a lot of small trees had grown up in this acreage.

The year before I had acquired an old, dilapidated Ford TT Truck whose transmission gear box was a complete wreck. After a six month search I finally located a gearbox replacement. This old truck served me well for the next five years. With a two-wheel trailer I used the truck to haul in all my firewood and I also used it to pull up young trees when clearing land. Whatever I could not

move with the truck I would blast out with dynamite which had been condemned by the road builder of the Forest Service as being too old and therefore too dangerous to use. You may believe I handled it with great care and got the maximum use out of it. It still had plenty of power.

I also cut down a few large old tamarack snags that were still standing from the 1910 fire that had swept northern Idaho and a lot of western Montana. The roots of these old timers could only be removed by heavy charges of dynamite. Having produced about 8 to 10 acres of cleared land I proceeded to buy an old Fordson tractor and a two-share gang plow. Plowing up this virgin soil I proceeded to plant oats which when cut in the green stage made very good winter feed for both horses and cattle. The object was to cut and stack the hay myself and then sell it in the stack to anyone willing to come and get it. Hay of any kind was usually in great demand in this country, probably because there was so little cleared land where it could be grown. And the ranchers were usually too busy with other matters to take time to clear land and never seemed to have enough hay for their winter feed supplies.

THE DRAGON LADY

In the past year my old friend and neighbor who was well into his 80s had sold his ranch to a female retired railroad telegrapher [Madge Cooper, later Madge Terrian] whose reputation as a problem had preceded her. Among other things she had gone through six husbands which seemed to tell something about her, However, she came to me one day and asked if I would take on the job of producing a couple of thousand fence posts for her. She was going to run cattle and said she wanted to fence her hay lands to keep her stock out of them. I agreed to get the posts out for her and we agreed on a price per post.

It took quite a while for me to cut and split the posts but when I was just about finished this female came by and said she would have her hired man come and start hauling the posts away. I asked her for the money for the posts and she then wanted them for two cents per post less than we had agreed on. This really got to me and I simply did not let her have the posts. She made a great display of anger and I knew trouble would not be long in coming. I knew there would need to be a fence to keep this female's cattle out. I proceeded to buy an electric fence system and installed it around my 10-acre hay land tract. During the time when I was still at home I noticed it seemed to work very well, and I was aware that once the cattle bumped into the charged wire they stayed away from it. However, when I came down from my lookout in September I found my fence down and shorted out and my hay crop had been grazed to the ground by my neighbor's cattle.

It was obvious that someone had tampered with my electric fence, but I had been gone for the better part of two months and had no proof. Of course, a fence had to be in place to be effective, and since this was open range country, you had to be responsible for fences on your own property. Since I could not be home through the summer months and keep watch on my electric fence, I decided to build a substantial buck and pole fence using the posts which had been intended for my new neighbor to begin with and which I had refused to sell to her at a lower price.

I began to understand how feuds got started in this country. This female had some notion that everybody should step aside and stay out of her way as she did as pleased her with no regard whatever for anyone else. I now understood that I was to have a battle on my hands with a dirty fighter.

Until the year that I started ranching mink, this female and her hired help tampered with my fence, but once I started staying on my place through the summer all this nonsense ended. However, later

when I went into the military and served the duration of World War II she once again took control of my property and all but wrecked my new pole fences. The only way this matter was finally resolved was when one winter day she was found dead in her cabin from a heart attack.

Madge and Oliver Terrian

DYNAMITE EPISODE

During the first few years of my time spent in the North Fork I came across any number of stories that were fascinating to a newcomer. One of these was about a family that had lived not far from the property Hazel and I eventually developed and where we lived for some 24-25 years.

The story as related to me had occurred several years prior to my arrival in the area.

It seems there was this family with a couple of children and a grandfather. No one seemed to think there was anything unusual about this family except that they were sort of reclusive, as is sometimes the case with mountain people.

There was always some land clearing going on in this valley long before I arrived and still continued through the years when Hazel and I lived there. This particular family was clearing some land by the use of dynamite to blast out the very large tamarack stumps on their property. Tamarack stumps were especially hard to blow out because of deep tap roots, so a lot of dynamite had to be used. As the story goes, there was this homesteader [Frank Wurtz], his father-in-law [Archibald Hanes] and a neighbor digging under and loading the stumps with dynamite. They put a rather heavy charge under one stump because of its size—the story stated that 30 sticks of dynamite were used on this one stump.

Now in this kind of work you cut a long fuse so that you and whoever else is working there will have ample time to get to a safe place protected from flying debris. In this case several stumps had been loaded and would be detonating in succession. So when all was ready each man was supposed to know what to do and where to go to be safe. The fuses were lit and everybody supposedly left the area of the stumps, but the neighbor happened to notice that the grandfather was not anywhere around. Not wanting to go back near the stumps he got up on a slight rise where he could look back and see the area of some of the stumps and to his horror saw the old man sitting on the stump which had been loaded with 30 sticks of dynamite!! He started yelling at the old man who paid no

attention to him, but he was not so desperate as to go and try to get the old man to leave, not knowing when the charge would go off. As he was watching and yelling the charge went off and with 30 sticks of dynamite the stump and man sitting on it disintegrated before his eyes. [The story we've heard before was that Archibald Hanes was helping with construction of that portion of the North Fork Road.]

The whole thing remained a mystery. The son-in-law and his family would never talk about it, so again there was a story legends are made of and no real answers.

I well remember that toward the end of World War I, my father purchased a used Model T Ford from a soldier and both he and I started to learn to drive the monster, the first car in our family. My older brother who was about 15 at the time had already learned to drive from friends at school and he helped Dad and me with the basics. Actually, there wasn't all that much to learn. The one thing I will probably never forget, however, was how often at night the lights would go out for a variety of reasons, usually a broken wire in the light system. There were two little kerosene lamps on each side of the windshield, but usually someone had forgotten to put kerosene in them. So unless you had a flashlight you could be stalled for the rest of the night out on some lonely country road. If there was a moon one person might walk ahead and guide the driver and so move on slowly. In this flat Nebraska country even if you got off the road now and then you were in little danger.

To contrast this with a situation on a mountain road in northwestern Montana, this road was mostly one way with turnouts here and there as described elsewhere in this narrative. In many places it was hundreds of feet down to the river and no guardrails anywhere. So one night when I had been in town on a shopping trip and then had taken my girlfriend to a movie afterward, I had started for home very late. The distance I had to travel was between 65 and 70 miles. No big deal really except that the nature of the road as described made it slow going. It was also a dirt and gravel road—no paving. It was summertime and reasonably warm although nights were usually cool.

It was well after midnight and hardly anyone on the road. I believe one car was met in the first 25 miles. Not long after meeting this car my lights suddenly went out and I came to an abrupt halt. Since I was in an area where the road was particularly narrow and the drop off was hundreds of feet to the river, I found that I did not have a flashlight with me as I should have and decided to sit tight till dawn, or if by chance someone would come along who could help me. But now the longer I sat there the better I could see and finally as a very large moon rose I could see the outline of the road very well. So starting my car I began moving slowly and my vision seemed to improve as I drove. I kept going at a slow pace and finally got home making the last 25 or so miles at a fair speed. The next day I found a broken wire in my light system which I could have easily fixed if I had had a flashlight.

One of the interesting subjects for discussion and argument in this back country was whether the water in the streams was pure and safe to drink. At the time I came to this country there were so few settlers and no commercial operations except one small coal mine which was near the southern part of this valley. So as far as contamination of streams was concerned it was surely minimal and none of the natives seemed to be in any way worried or concerned about it. During all my time in this area I never heard of a case of dysentery or any other ailment that could be traced to bad or contaminated water. Of course, humans are the great contaminators. It appears that even though all sorts of animals and birds are constantly in and around water courses, they do not in fact cause contamination of the water.

One of the more amusing things I remember relative to this subject was some easterners from New York or that general area questioning the wisdom of drinking the water from these streams because, as one dear old lady from back there expressed it, “animals and birds walk and fly through and over the streams” (and as she delicately put it) “they drop things into the water.” Well, one could hardly dispute the point she was making, but nobody living in this area seemed to worry about all that. As a matter of fact, the rangers always insisted that water in streams purifies itself after so many miles, running as it does over rocks and dirt. I’m not sure if there is definite proof of all that but again no one seemed worried about it locally.

EPISODE TO ILLUSTRATE THE FOREGOING

Working for the Forest Service on trail maintenance and improvement most of us knew which trails had plenty of springs and which might have no water for many miles, so if you were on a dry trail you would take along an extra canteen of water.

Working on one of the trails one day I had either forgotten it was one of the dry trails or my calculations as to when I would be past the dry area went wrong, consequently by late afternoon I had found no water and my tongue was beginning to literally stick to my mouth. To say the least, it was a bad situation. However, coming into a little swale or depression between two hills I suddenly saw water in a small pool. It was stagnant, but probably from snow melt from a recent old snowbank on the shade side of a mountain. I threw myself down and drank deeply and greedily until satisfied. It was not the best tasting water, but though stale it was a life saver. Only after taking on all the water I could hold did I look around the area more closely where the pool of water was located. I was somewhat shocked to discover the entire area was covered with sheep manure. It so happened that the year before the Forest Service had issued permits to a sheep company to run their flocks up into and through these mountains during the summer season, and this particular spot had obviously been one of their bedding down places for a sizeable flock. To end this episode, I did not have any bad aftereffects from drinking the water in this stagnant pool with inches of sheep manure on the bottom.

We heard later that the sheepherders had lost so many sheep to grizzly bears and coyotes that the company did not run any sheep in this part of the forest again. Most of us were just as glad about that.

I may as well tell of another incident that relates to the sheep and sheepherders who were driving flocks through the mountains. It appears they were left pretty much on their own for food supplies except for the barest minimum in staples such as sugar, coffee, and flour. They did kill a sheep now and then but then keeping any amount of meat from spoiling was a problem. They also carried rifles and shot deer to augment their supply of meat. Of course, this was illegal but no one seemed to pay any attention.

Anyhow, the dude ranch owner and I were up in these mountains working on a camp site where he would later bring some dudes on a mountain trip by horseback. There was a large flock of sheep nearby with two herders, and early on they did not know we were nearby. Suddenly we heard several shots and then one of the men came running by and said he had shot two deer and would we like to have one of them, but he pointed up the steep side of the mountain where a deer was lodged in a rock crevice several hundred feet up. We could see part of it and it was obviously dead, but getting up to it and getting it down would be quite a feat.

Well, we had not had any fresh meat at the ranch for quite some time, so just as with the boat episode I was being challenged to go up and get that deer, or at least go up and pull the deer out of the crevice and let it roll down to the level where we were. If it went too far it would go over another drop off for hundreds of feet more and would probably end up as mush or hamburger. To go straight up to the deer was impossible, much too steep, so climbing halfway around the mountain to one side I went up where it was not so steep and then coming back above where the deer was lodged, I dropped down carefully into the crevice where the deer lay. I had taken a length of rope with me which I now tied to the deer's legs and then the other end to a small bush, hoping that when I pushed the deer over the side the bush would stop it before it went down the entire mountain side. It almost worked. But when the slack in the rope came out and the rope tightened on the bush, it came out by the roots and deer, rope, bush and all went tumbling down the mountain with a shower of rocks and dirt loosened by the falling deer and bush. The dude rancher who was waiting below very nearly got the whole mess down on him, but managed to scramble away just in time. A few small rocks and dirt did hit him but did no damage.

After I came down from the mountain we dressed the deer out, and since it was by now almost evening we took a chance about any bear being around and laid all the meat out on logs to cool off overnight. In the morning we packed the meat on a packhorse and took off for the ranch about 12 miles away. On the way we ran into a Forest Ranger, who are also deputy game wardens, and this was illegal meat. We stopped to talk a while and were getting nervous and finally we went on and it was only then we noticed that part of our pack was blood soaked through the canvas tarps. Either the ranger didn't notice the blood or if he did he chose to ignore it and we got home safely with our meat. But we really earned that one, even though we did not kill it.

The first winter after leaving the dude ranch I set out a fairly ambitious trap line, running westward along the boundary slash which was 60 feet wide, and although there were many tree stumps, one could travel with greater ease here than in the tangled timber and brush on either the American or Canadian side.

The first leg of my line ran along the border and I set traps just inside the American side for perhaps three to five miles, then just at the base of the higher mountain I turned southward several more miles. Then again turning eastward I cut for home as the crow flies. It was perhaps a roundtrip of approximately 20 miles.

Prices of fur were generally still quite depressed and remained so for several more years. However, in later years I often realized as much or more from my trap line as I did working for the Forest Service during the summer. At that time the Forest Service was not noted for paying high wages.

The animals available for trapping were mink, muskrat, weasel, marten, and coyote. There were also a few lynx, but generally these cats were quite scarce. Beaver were available but only by special permits which were only issued where damage to property could be proven. In later years with permits, I trapped quite a few and at times prices for pelts were quite good.

I had now worked for the Forest Service in various capacities the late season of 1934, then 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938. In 1938 when the forest season came to its end, I decided to try my hand at mink ranching. Not having any large funds to start this project, I decided to buy a good quality breeding stock, even though very expensive. I purchased three females and two beautiful large males. I had built pens for all of them and when they arrived from a ranch in Washington State I was ready for them. They took the 50-mile trip from the depot very well, even though my little roadster was somewhat rough riding. So I was in the mink ranching business.

The food they required was a Purina type dry food similar to the dog or cat food of that time, and then a certain amount of fresh meat was to be added to this mixture and they seemed to thrive very well on it. The particular kind of meat was not important, just so it was fresh. I think I used horse meat, scraps from my wild meat butchering, fish trimmings, and even bear meat. Occasionally when I killed a marauding bear no one seemed to want the meat and I didn't care for it much either, so the mink had a real feast.

When in 1940 the Government called for registration for upcoming army duty, I felt that war for the U.S.A was just around the corner and I would very probably be called since I was single. In the fall of 19401 pelted all my animals when hides were prime. By that time I had something over 40 animals. In a few more years I would have been in business, but with the war coming on it was not to be.

As it turned out my calculations that the U.S might soon be involved in the war were accurate. So after pelting out my animals in the winter of 1940-41 I then applied for a job with the Forest Service for the summer of 1941. I was hired for trail maintenance as usual and then given a lookout station in a different part of the forest than I had before. It was a rather uneventful summer season and in early fall I gathered my personal belongings together and stored them with a neighbor and then took off for Colorado in my old 1933 V-8 Coupe.

My father had finally retired, and my parents had purchased a small and somewhat rundown little house on a very nice street and neighborhood in Ft. Collins, Colorado, not so very far from where I was born in 1909. They had mentioned that the house needed some repairs and improvements. When I arrived in mid-October I found that indeed the little house was badly in need of some re-construction and basic modernization. I was pretty well along with my project by the 7th of December and on this day, of course, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The next day I went to the Air Force recruiting office and tried to enlist. I passed a physical, but had so many bad teeth they evidently decided I was a poor risk for the high standards of the Air Force at the time. The officer in charge suggested I either wait for the draft to pick me up or go into some kind of war effort in civilian life. As it turned out I did attend a welding school from December until March and after passing all my welding tests headed for Portland, OR, and almost immediately got a job welding in the Kaiser Shipyard. However, in a few months' time I was drafted into the Army anyhow and then served in ground communications for the Air Force from May 1942, for the duration of the war and most of that overseas. But that's another story told in another place.

At this point then my life took another sharp turn in another direction from that which I might have planned, and by the time the war was over I had seen countries and sights and done things that would never have come to pass in the normal course of a lifetime.

During that part of my life when I was in military service beginning in May of 1942 until I had been overseas for two years my life was sort of in limbo and personal matters were put on hold so to speak. However, a group of us who had a good record after two years were picked for a furlough of 60 days back to the U.S.A. This developed into an opportunity for a business deal for me that was to have a far-reaching impact on my future and was entirely unexpected.

To explain—coming back from overseas in January, we disembarked on the east coast and were then separated into groups to be routed into those areas from which we had come or where we now wished to go. I chose Denver because my parents were living just north of there at Fort Collins, and I wanted to pay them a visit at the very beginning of my furlough. After a good visit with my parents, I decided to try for Montana even though it was mid-winter and the North Fork in

particular would probably be snowed in. However, since I had any number of friends in Kalispell, I decided it would be worthwhile to make the trip by bus.

Arriving in Kalispell I immediately ran into friends who were also in the military and who for one reason or another were also on leave from their companies. One of these was a former Deputy Game Warden who had issued the first beaver permit to me. He happened to be staying at the same hotel where I had just registered. He was a Captain of Artillery now, Archie A. O'Claire. Then I also found my old friend, former Ranger Andy Fluetsch, who was on furlough from the Aleutians where he was working in the Seabees. A lot of visiting and drinking took place and we found the bars were busy and a lot of uniforms were in evidence. Old times were recounted in detail.

So it was that three of us who were in the military were invited to a dinner at a Ranger's house by the man I had worked for in the Forest Service some years past. During the dinner and visiting the Ranger inquired as to whether I was aware that a certain property I knew about was now up for sale, after a long court session settling an estate. The Ranger knew I had been interested in this property before the war, but it was still in litigation at that time. He told me that the government would likely buy the property unless some private party wanted to bid on it. He expressed no interest in it personally and gave me the address of the heir who lived in California and said I could take it from there. I did not think my chances to get the property were very good, but I decided to try. I sent a telegram to the heir asking for a price. She replied immediately requesting an offer. Since the war was still on and given all the uncertainties of the times I merely took a very low figure from the top of my head and sent it to the heir, not really expecting an acceptance. I was much surprised then when her reply came accepting my offer.

It was now time for me to be thinking of my return journey and I gave all the important facts about this deal to an old lawyer friend and asked him to take care of the legal details and send me the results in due time. This was then the best and most important purchase of my time as resident in the North Fork country.

After the war I came back to trap beaver and other animals on this property for years. Also, after Hazel and I were married we had a good part of the property logged at a time when we had a real need for finances. There was a beautiful stand of large, old virgin timber and logging it really gave our finances a tremendous lift. We also sold some lots on the eastern shore of Tepee Lake and contracted for some log buildings.

Finally, after leaving Montana we made a deal with Concordia College of Moorehead, MN, which gave us an annuity or unitrust for the rest of our lives, so even though our income in Montana was minimal in the long run we came out okay.

The Montana story as I am trying to narrate it will be in two main parts. Number one will be the time from my departure leaving Lincoln, NE, in 1932, until my leaving Montana in 1941 in October to drive to Ft. Collins to visit my parents. The occurrence of Pearl Harbor assault by Japan then altered the entire course of my life as it did for millions of others. I was inducted into the military in May 1942, and then served for the duration mostly overseas.

POST WORLD WAR II

After a long delay in Italy after the European War was over, a large group of us were finally put aboard the *Vulcania*, a ship that had once been of Italian registry and we arrived in the U.S.A. about the first week in October 1945. On the 17th of October I received my discharge papers at Camp Grant, IL. I requested my discharge at this place since it was not so very far from Cedar

Rapids, IA, where my older sister lived who was married to Fred Merritt. I had decided to pay them a visit before going on west.

Upon arriving at my sister's place, I learned that Mother was ill, although no one seemed to know just what her problem was or how serious it might be.

So since I had received word from the military that my nephew, Jim McCoy, was in a hospital in Galesburg, IL, being patched up because of a very serious wound he had received in one of the later campaigns of the war, the Merritts and I decided to go and see Jim and find out just what his condition was. Our visit with Jim was a good one and we met Nancy, Jim's wife, for the first time, a very personable and interesting young lady who was living near the hospital and helping to care for her husband during his period of surgery and rehabilitation. After a good visit the Merritts and I returned to Cedar Rapids, IA, and I headed west for Fort Collins by train.

Arriving home I found Mother in a semi-coma from which she would arouse every now and then and speak and act in a very normal way. The doctor and nurse they had for her seemed to know or understand very little about Mother's malaise. Shortly after I had arrived she asked to see me in her bedroom where she had been bedfast for some time. Her great concern was whether the war was now over and that I would not be obliged to go back overseas. I assured her that I had already been discharged and although I was still in uniform I would soon change to civilian clothes.

Then within the week, on All Saints Day, Mother passed away peacefully.

After Mother's burial, I stayed with Dad several weeks to see how he would adjust himself to his new situation. After a while he seemed to be getting along okay, so I headed west once more for Portland, OR, where I had been inducted into the military in 1942 and had put my car in dead storage for the duration.

Since I had been inducted while I was working as a welder in the Kaiser Shipyard, they were supposed to give back my old job. Of course, the shipyards were on a slowdown basis after the war and they were mostly finishing up old contracts. Working on the deck of an aircraft carrier from mid-November to February was a cold and miserable situation, so I finally decided it was time to take the trail back to Montana.

My good friend, Andy Fluetsch of whom I wrote in the prewar part of this story had been in the Seabees during the war and had returned and purchased a small ranch in the Libby area. I called on him as a matter of old friendship and he inquired as to my plans for the future. I had finally decided to try for some sort of comeback up the North Fork, though I did not have any real definite plans in mind at the time. Andy told me that the road up the North Fork at this time was next to impassable and asked me to stay with him until the road was open to car traffic. Settling down with Andy was an easy matter. We had always been good friends, so for about a month everything went well as we recounted our various war experiences. About mid-March we got the news that the North Fork Road would be open to car traffic at least temporarily. I was anxious to get up to my place and see the condition it was in after more than four years and also to prepare to trap beaver since I had applied for a beaver permit some time before by mail.

I followed the mail carrier into the North Fork. He was driving an Army 4x4 Carrier which was well suited to the mud and snow conditions of the country. My old V-8 Ford did very well through some very difficult situations and I arrived at the Harry Holcomb place with no great problems.

The Holcombs were old homesteaders I have mentioned in previous stories. After discovering that my old cabin near the border had been badly vandalized, I decided to find a base of operations for my beaver trapping nearer to Tepee Lake where most of my activity would center, at least for the time of my spring activities. I asked the Holcombs if they would take me on as a boarder for a couple of months. It seemed agreeable and I moved in with them. The beaver trapping went rather well and some of that is related elsewhere in this story.

After trapping season came to an end in May, I decided to see what could be done about some repair and reconstruction of the old Earl Ryan cabin in order that I might have a working base for trapping another year, and also for the time when I would be building a new cabin on this place. As I probably mentioned elsewhere, I had purchased the Ryan property just before my trip to Fort Collins and then my entry into the military in 1942.

At the time I left Portland to return to Montana, I had heard of vast stores of Army Surplus in Tacoma, WA, with special concessions to ex-service personnel wishing to purchase items. I drove up there from Portland. I found that "red tape" to get anything was so unbelievable, I left in disgust and all I bought was a 300-amp arc welder at a shipyard sale and had it shipped to Montana. This welder and an Army Jeep which I purchased later in Montana were very probably the two most important items which I used during the next 25 years.

During my pre-war years in the North Fork, I had acquired a number of old car frames and power trains and other steel and iron of various kinds. Among other car engines I had kept a 4-cylinder Chevrolet engine which I now coupled to my shipyard arc welder and found I had a very efficient and useful machine. Besides doing custom work for other people, I now had the means to build some needed equipment for myself, such as a trailer for my Jeep to pull in logs of almost any length I would need in my building operations; also to haul rock for my fireplace construction jobs or whatever else needed hauling. I was suddenly in business for myself.

In the summer of 1946 after returning from World War II, I had decided to abandon my old homestead cabin near the Canadian border and start new construction on the place I had purchased in 1941 from Earl Ryan. Ryan was a WW I veteran and had homesteaded this 88 acres which fronted on the North Fork River and Glacier Park. It was a beautiful spot and many people wondered why he would sell it. But it seems he and his wife had many difficulties trying to live here. He was usually far away working as a cook in logging camps or with the Forest Service and had to leave his wife alone with only a German Shepherd dog to protect her. Also the distance from the cabin to the main road was about ¾ mile and the last few hundred yards down a steep hill to the cabin was merely a trail. All material, groceries, etc., had to be carried down this last part of access to the cabin. Ryan probably decided there were too many problems and decided to sell the property to me. He had other property nearer the post office, so he improved that place and moved in there.

The several reasons why I decided to abandon my old homestead cabin near the Canadian border made a lot of sense to me. My old cabin had been occupied by a transient Indian during my wartime absence. He had kept a goat, a dog, and chickens in the cabin with him and the place was a shambles. He had moved out a short time before I came back so I never did see him, but he was well described to me by my neighbors. I was so disgusted with the mess, I decided to abandon it and start new construction on the 88-acre Ryan property. Another advantage of this move was that I would be near the Trail Creek post office and also would have delivery of my mail at a box at my road entry. This was a Star Route. So I would no longer need to drive or hike the eight miles to the Trail Creek post office. In winter that was not all fun.

Earl Ryan cabin where Walt lived while building his own cabin.

Long before I purchased the Ryan property, Ryan had purposely wrecked the roof of his old cabin when he moved away. He did not want anyone using it as mine had been at the border. In order to have a place to live while I started new construction, I decided to reconstruct the roof at least for a temporary purpose.

I made myself comfortable by the time the big snow came and then laid out a trap line in and beyond the Tepee Lake area where I also had purchased a quarter section next to Tepee Lake when I was home on a furlough from overseas in 1944-45, winter. This property had also once belonged to a World War I service man who had homesteaded it.

I managed to buy it after an estate settlement. It was perhaps one of the most important and valuable of my purchases in this country. It had a substantial stand of virgin timber and a sizeable beaver colony. We logged part of the timber and the beaver trapping was very rewarding year after year. It was also a good trapping area for other animals and for hunting as well.

The beaver trapping would begin in the spring about April, but I had laid out a trap line for marten, lynx, mink, and weasel or whatever else was roaming this area. I was doing rather well. It was about mid-winter and I had shot a deer earlier during hunting season and had plenty of meat on hand. As the snows got deeper, I was obliged to use snowshoes on all my trapping trails.

Coming home one late afternoon I was still a mile or more from the main road and about two miles from home when suddenly a large bull moose came directly into my trail. In all my years in this country I had never been charged by a moose, but this fellow seemed determined to give me trouble and challenge me. To shuck off my snowshoes and climb a tree seemed ridiculous to me so I decided to wait and see if he would in fact charge. Obviously, he was bent on a confrontation, so on he came like a locomotive at full steam. By then it was too late to unbuckle snowshoes and climb a tree, so since I always carried a high-powered rifle, I drilled one right in his forehead. He dropped like a rock and here I was with a near ½ ton of meat I did not want. It would be a shame

to leave it to the coyotes and other scavengers. Also, killing a moose without a special permit was illegal. I did not care to have to convince a game warden that I had shot the moose in self-defense. These wardens were inclined to disbelief.

Anyhow, the fall before three young people had moved into what had once been the Trail Creek post office, now moved farther north [Dan & Gerane Block and Clyde "Bud" Block]. The property had been purchased by their parents [Walter & Ethyl Block] who were to come live there the following year. Two brothers, one an ex-service man like myself, was there with his wife and brother. They were from back east somewhere and were the original tenderfeet and very naive. They were, however, nice kids and I had found them pleasant company. They had shot a deer during hunting season, but these three could eat meat like you wouldn't believe. The thought came to me as I wondered what to do about the moose I had killed that these kids might be interested. Since their place was not too far from my home trail, I stopped by and asked if they were interested in butchering and taking the moose out of the woods. Were they ever! They told me later how hard they worked to get it all dressed out and hauled into their place and the girl had process canned a good deal of it.

However, a problem developed. Evidently someone had found out that these young newcomers had a lot of meat and had probably talked in the wrong places. Usually game wardens did not do much snooping in this valley, but that year we had one who was bent on making a reputation for himself [Ross J. Wilson]. He had no evidence, only hearsay, but he paid these young people a visit and while there asked a number of seemingly innocent questions, like whether they had any canned wild meat. Now canned wild meat in general all looks alike once processed and no one could be certain if it was deer, elk, moose, or bear meat, unless analyzed.

The girl, opening a pantry door where they had the canned meat stored, was trying to be matter of fact about it but forgot one thing. She had labeled at least some of the jars as "Moose Meat." Well of course that sealed the case for the game warden. He could hardly do anything but bring charges. Since they were newcomers in the country I think they pleaded ignorance of Montana laws, and perhaps because the older boy was an ex-serviceman just back from overseas some consideration was given them. Although I heard they did have to pay a $300 fine, it could have been a good deal more and very likely they had $300 worth of good eating before this happened. I felt sorry for the kids, but they weathered it okay and never told anyone who had really killed the moose and why. [According to Ross's son, Larry Wilson, there's more to this story.]

In the spring of 1947 I was determined to make the most of my beaver trapping permits. As I remember it, I had permits to take 25 animals and if the price of beaver pelts held up this would translate into $700 to $800. Not too bad for about six weeks of work in those days. It was more than I would make for a full summer season working for the Forest Service. I needed some extra income since I planned construction of a new cabin.

Beaver are usually in semi-hibernation the deep and cold part of the winter. They do not hibernate in the true sense as do bears and some rodents, but after having stored their supply of deciduous tree cuttings and small logs under water near their lodges, they show no evidence of their whereabouts until spring. The lodges have underwater entries so they can get to their stored food without breaking through the ice to come out on the surface. So when looking over a potential trapping territory it is difficult to evaluate in winter. The lodges though easy to spot in summertime, being at least four to six feet higher than the surrounding area, may appear in wintertime as merely clumps of brush or willows under four to six feet of snow. The living/sleeping quarters of the lodge are above water level and are quite dry.

To describe a lodge: during the summer if a new pair or colony of beaver move into a creek, they usually build a dam first. Then when the dam has raised the water level to where they want it and it's stabilized, then they build the lodge along the shore of the pond they have created. The lodge is built of sticks and short lengths of timber from which they have previously eaten the bark, which is their food. The sticks and timbers are ingeniously interlocked and then the entire structure is plastered with mud. Often rocks are also worked into the structure probably for added stability. In the fall and winter this entire structure freezes solid and forms good protection from cold. They do leave some small air holes which they can plug shut from inside if need be. The whole structure looks like an oversized beehive and is almost impenetrable by any predators. We have seen lodges that bears have tried to break open with no success. In any case, if the predator did in fact break into the living quarters the beaver would be long gone underwater anyhow.

If weather warms a bit in March, sometimes a few animals will break out through the ice and wander around in the deep snow and find some tender willows to eat as a change in diet perhaps. This is the time the trapper must be alert and he can estimate where the animals are located later as he starts his trapping operations.

So it was that in early April when warm days were becoming more frequent that I packed about a dozen beaver traps into my packsack, together with material to make several good lunches and coffee, as well as a can to boil the coffee in. Also a small tarp for shelter since I expected to spend the night out. Thus supplied, I snowshoed about three miles into the Tepee Lake area where I owned about 150 acres of timber land with Tepee Creek running down through the middle of the property and the north end adjoining Tepee Lake. The creek and lake areas were the locations of the beaver activity.

After the strenuous three-mile hike I still had time to set my dozen traps, and then wet to the waist and half frozen from working in the icy water I went over to the old tumbledown cabin which the original homesteader had built many years before and was now pretty much in ruin with the exception of a lean-to porch which had survived. I found a dry place and started a good fire to dry my clothes and to make some coffee. There was plenty of fire material. In various sheltered places were shingles "shakes" from the old roof and so after drying my clothes and having some coffee and food I settled down for the night. I had not planned on sleeping in this rather uncomfortable situation and was sitting up smoking my pipe, drinking coffee and keeping the fire going, with the tarp wrapped around me to keep the cold out. However, I was so tired I finally dozed off and must have slept for a couple of hours. As I awoke my fire was low and after building it up again and drinking more coffee I started the routine again until daylight. When daylight finally came I drank more coffee and had a snack from my food supplies.

Deciding then to check the traps, I had set the day before I left my improvised shelter, and it was then I got a real shock. Not more than ten feet from where I had my night's bivouac was the largest fresh grizzly bear track I had ever seen up to that time. Evidently he had come by smelling my food, but my fire must have kept him away, since most animals don't like fire. Anyhow it was another close call and with my third encounter with grizzly bear I was once again a lucky survivor.

I went about checking my trap line then and found I had three beaver in traps. Since I wanted to get home that day I managed to skin out two of the beaver and then carried the third one home in my pack. I had a weary though uneventful trip home and in the next five or six weeks I would repeat this process every few days until I could no longer catch any animals or had filled my permits.

It was in this same general area and beyond higher up the mountain that I had an experience which many folks can relate to especially if they have wandered in the woods in wintertime when skies are overcast and no sun is visible.

I had a trap line in the foothills above my property on Tepee Creek. This line was intended for marten, weasel, and lynx and anything else that might roam this country. I was well acquainted with this part of the country, having worked here off and on during my time with the Forest Service in years past, and this part of the National Forest was adjoining my property.

One of the days when I was going over my trap line, the weather had been somewhat overcast and was threatening snow. It finally began snowing very lightly as I was about to turn back for home and leave the area. I had intended finding my incoming track and then following it on home; however, I could not seem to find my track and so I wandered around quite a bit. Finally I did find a track, but it was going the wrong way. I followed the track for a while and then getting badly confused I started off at right angle to this trail and again came out on a track that did not seem to belong. Finally in desperation, I started back up the mountain where I had been and then finally I came across a marked Forestry trail and from my summer work experience I knew where I was and walked out directly. The snowshoe tracks I had been finding were, of course, my own as I had been wandering in circles. The whole story is proof that when the sun is not in evidence and with snow falling obscuring any landmarks, almost anyone can get lost. We have heard variations of this same situation many times in the north woods country.

After a successful trapping season the winter of 1946-47 while residing in the old Ryan cabin, which I had rebuilt so that it was at least livable for a bachelor, I decided to start construction on a new cabin. As I have mentioned earlier the last few hundred yards of access to the old cabin on the riverfront was by trail which had been an aggravation to the former owner because of the need to transfer everything at road's end to personal pack or packhorse, if available, to bring material, groceries and supplies of all kind down to the cabin on the riverfront.

In order to change all that I went to some large expense to hire a bulldozer to come in and build the last section of road into the place. That completed, I started hauling in logs and it was a pleasure to use the new road and the easy access it provided.

Since this 88-acre property was on two levels, I suppose it might have been easier to build on the upper level which was about 100 feet higher than the riverfront where the old cabin was located and I now proposed to build the new cabin. There was a fantastic view to the mountains across the river in Glacier Park and then there were excellent springs for the best kind of water at this lower level. The fact that there was a chance of flooding at this level did not deter me, perhaps because there was this old cabin which had been here at this lower level and not far from the bank of the river for many years. As a matter of fact, no one seemed to know when it had been built or who built it. It was very old. I very nearly lived to regret my persistence to build here because as I shall relate later we had a bad flood some years hence that could have wiped us out.

Early on after I had returned from the war and overseas and had again tried to establish myself in the North Fork, I was shopping for some groceries at Adair's store, which had a fair stock of groceries and some other items for sale. The owner-operator mentioned to me that he had an old Oldsmobile six-cylinder coupe which some settler had left to pay for a grocery bill and then had left the country. This car had been in storage for a number of years and there was some question as to whether it would even run. I decided to look it over and see if there was any chance it might be useable. Of course, there was no battery in it, so in order to find out if the motor was rust-bound,

I took a crank and turned the motor over a few times. Evidently there still was a film of oil present, so it looked favorable. I then made a deal with Adair, that if I could get it running and it had any power, I would buy it for $50. I then came down from my place with tools, etc., and worked on the car for quite sometime and finally got it going. I tested it for power and found it had a fairly good engine and although it was at least ten years old, it had never been run all that much. So I paid Adair the agreed $50 and drove it home. [Adair had sold the store to Ben and Annette Rover in 1943, but he still had property in the area.]

I was not able to get a license for it since there were no records of ownership available. However, in this back country where I would be using it I didn't really need a license. What I really intended using the car for was to do all my heavy hauling and dragging in logs for my intended construction. It really served me well for a number of years and paid me back many times over for the $50 I had paid for it.

In the spring of 1947 after high water was nearly over I started dragging in logs with the Oldsmobile, now known as my "mule," and started decking the logs to season them out for the upcoming construction. I had also procured a lot of green rough sawed lumber from a small local mill where I had also worked and taken lumber in lieu of wages. This was also decked and stripped so it might season.

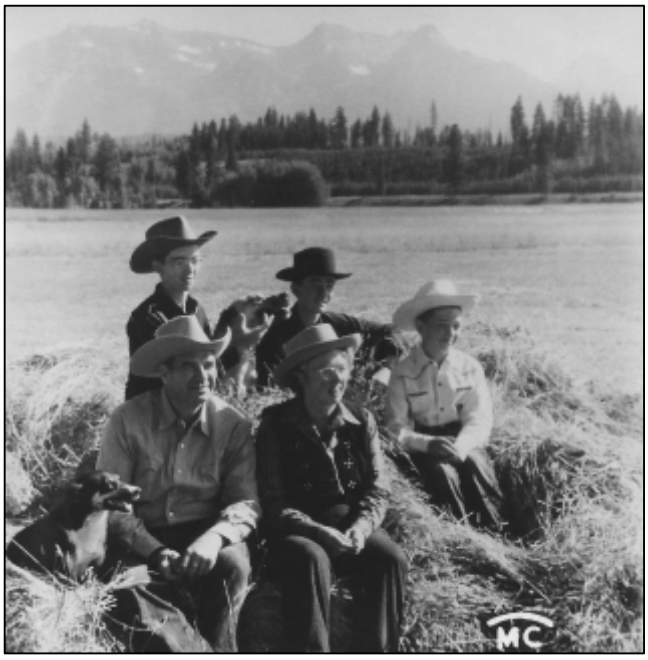
I still had my old V-8 Ford and it served me well for about three more years. I then finally drove it into an inconspicuous spot near my dump ground where it stayed through a flood and many winter snows and was finally discovered by one of Hazel's nephews who had a special trailer to haul it back to Minnesota where they rebuilt it into a beautiful running antique car. That was the end of the long history of this car.

It was then about June that my neighbor who ran a dude ranch in Glacier Park down river about five miles from my place came up to Trail Creek for a meeting with other North Fork residents to set an agenda to discuss various improvements such as better mail service especially in wintertime, also road improvements by the county, snow plowing in winter, better access roads into the surrounding forests where good fishing areas were located. Jack McFarland, the dude rancher and sometime State Game Warden, his wife, three boys and two young ladies who were friends and guests of the McFarlands at the time came over to our side at Trail Creek for the meeting.

The two ladies had at some time in the past worked for McFarland in Helena, Montana, when he was State Warden after both of the girls had spent some time overseas toward the end of the war. They were now both on a visit as guests at the dude ranch. During the above-mentioned meeting, McFarland brought one of the girls over and introduced her to me, since as he said, we had both been in North Africa and would have something in common to relate to and discuss. It was then that I met my future wife, Hazel Monson. We talked quite a lot, of course, since I had spent a tour of duty with the Air Force and she had worked in Tunis with the State Department. I found this girl especially interesting and requested a date since both girls were staying for an indefinite time at the McFarland ranch. This then developed into more than a casual acquaintance since I asked for more dates and we got to know each other quite well.

I did not get much work done on my place during that part of the summer because of the socializing. In September this girl decided she needed to go back to work and she left for Minnesota where most of her family lived and where she had some of her belongings stored. Finally, she went to Phoenix, Arizona, where a married sister lived and she got employment for the upcoming winter.

We were then in correspondence during the winter of 1947-48 and without going into detail about our correspondence of the winter, by spring we had decided to get married.



Jack and Mary McFarland and their sons George, Gordon, and David. They operated the Quarter Circle MC Ranch on Big Prairie in Glacier Park.

My future wife had a group of friends, mostly female, in Helena, Montana, where she had worked in prewar years as I mentioned before. These friends had invited us to come to the capitol of Montana to get married, so we set the date for June 30 and Hazel started from Phoenix, AZ, and visited friends in California and Oregon on her way to Helena. I had the shorter route from the North Fork to Helena, MT. I got to Helena a few days ahead of Hazel, and her friends whom I met for the first time made me most welcome and at home. These girls and the Deputy Director of the Fish and Game Department at the time had set up a nice ceremony at a small Lutheran Church just a short distance from the Main Street of Helena, also known as "Last Chance Gulch." This would become a standing joke in future years about the location of our marriage. It had been cloudy and threatening rain as we entered the church for the ceremony, but afterward as we left the church the sun came out and a nice day followed. There was a reception which one of the girls sponsored and after a lot of food and drinking, we left and found all kinds of tin cans, old shoes and you name it tied to our car.

Arriving at Missoula, we decided to get a motel room and spend the night there, and wouldn't you know, during the night, the toilet got stopped up and started running water all over the place. We had to call a service person with a plunger, and he finally got the toilet operating again. What a deal on your honeymoon night! We considered dressing and going to another motel, but finally decided to stay the night. Next day we drove to Polson at the foot of Flathead Lake, got a motel room and started roaming around in various places taking pictures and seeing places new to us.

Actually, we were killing time. We had been married on the 30th of June and we were not anxious to get back to the North Fork until after the 4th of July. The locals up the North Fork had heard rumors of our wedding. Although we had told no one, there was a leak. As there usually is, and there was, an annual fish fry on the 4th of July and we wanted to avoid getting mixed up in that. It

turned out rough enough when we did get home a few days after the 4th. A local gal who gathered news for the paper in town, Columbia Falls, wrote a notice of what happened. It was on the order of an old-time shivaree. We were kept at our cabin one evening by visiting friends, until all of a sudden a dozen or more cars came boiling down into our place with guns firing and bells of all kinds ringing, and they took over, taking us to a neighbor's place for the evening festivities. Liquor flowed freely and food was everywhere. About daybreak we were finally allowed to go home and took with us a couple who had been married a week before and were also included in the festivities. We heard later that a number of people who had survived the night's activities stayed for a hotcake and ham breakfast—with tomato juice, of course. Dancing had been the main activity.

It was the beginning of my Hazel's life and experiences in the North Fork. I had lived in this area over ten years at this time. Hazel finally spent 24 years with me in this country and adapted to the life with good humor and a determination that was really amazing. She was a wonderful spouse who worked hard to make our marriage a true and working relationship as well as helping her husband in every way possible in his efforts to produce a living from difficult situations in this beautiful land where job opportunities were scarce and the government jobs called for my being away from home at least a week at a time. I bypassed these jobs for the obvious reason that I did not want to leave Hazel alone at home, as many previous people had tried to work out such a situation and had come to grief with it.

After I had returned from the wars in 1946 and then gotten married in 1948, I had not made any attempt to put my fences on my homestead near the border into their original condition. The "Dragon Lady" at the border had successfully kept my fences broken down during the entire period of my absence during my military service. Now that I was back I questioned whether it would be worthwhile to repair the fences, especially since I was very busy with new construction on my new property farther south.

However, I was still taking permits and trapping beaver on the property, so in March-April I would check to see whether the animals were moving and then start trapping. Usually the road had either been snow plowed by March or April or the mail carrier had developed a hard packed trail with his snowmobile, and so the eight-mile hike was not that difficult. Normally I would go up and trap for a few days and then come back home with any pelts I had to stretch and process and go back again with a new food supply. The old cabin, even though a mess, served for overnight lodging and an old tin heater served to warm up my food. Later, after the old cabin went into the river, I still had the use of my old mink shed which was just as comfortable as the old cabin. I had installed an old bunk and pad to sleep on and it all worked out very well.

Probably about the second year after Hazel and I were married we had heard that the "Dragon Lady" at the border had taken on a new transient hired man in the fall. By the time winter was nearly over and this "Wandering Willie" came along, there was competition. This was an old game and had been going on since the time the "Dragon Lady" first came to our valley. So now the latecomer convinced the dame to fire his predecessor and put him in charge. This time the poor sucker who had been squeezed out was angry enough to come to our place and spill his guts about some of the shenanigans that were going on at the "Dragon Lady's" place. The most interesting story to me was a plan they had cooked up to trap the beaver on my property in the area where our two properties adjoined. Since this dame had never bothered to check with me as to where our property line joined I suspected she either did not know where the lines were or worse she probably didn't care, if she intended trespassing in order to trap my beaver.

Since I was convinced that with this dame's twisted mind and mentality of a coyote she might do almost anything, even though property lines had been established long years before, doing anything illegal would not bother her. So since the former hired man told us what was going on up there, I decided it was time to make my move and have a showdown with this dame which was long overdue. After giving Hazel a good briefing as to how to take care of the place at home and fixed her up with all the firewood and kindling she would need for several days and whatever else needed doing, I strapped on my Colt 44-40, knowing full well that the situation I might run into could be hairy, since I had never seen her new "hired man" and did not know what to expect.

I should say at this point that it was the first time I would leave Hazel alone to take care of the place and I wasn't really sure first how long I would be gone but did not believe it would be more than a couple of days.

When I arrived at the upper place I immediately ran smack into the new hired man busily setting beaver traps on my property. It was obvious he and the Dragon Lady had not expected that their little plan would be exposed to us by the former hired man. I then told this character to go along the creek and pull up every trap that was on my property and I followed him to see it was done. At this point he made a great show of the fact that he had only been following orders from the Dragon Lady and that he wasn't responsible. I then told him I would think about that, but in the meantime to go home to his mistress and tell her I was putting up new markers at my property lines, and I didn't want to see him or her or any traps set below that line or I would have the County Sheriff on her tail in no time. Evidently this had the desired effect because when I came back a week later there were no new tracks in the snow on my property.

In the meantime, during my first trip to the upper place I had been gone only two days, but Hazel had managed a problem for herself which quickly turned into a learning experience for her. We were still living in the old cabin and the door had a spring lock that would lock on the inside when the door was closed and a key would be needed to open it again from the outside. It seems Hazel had opened the door to get some firewood from the porch and had allowed the door to slam shut before she had set the catch that would have prevented the door from locking. She was still in her night dress with a thin robe over that. I think panic took over for a while but my Hazel had a good head on her shoulders and calm would prevail. She discovered a hatchet on the woodpile and with that tried to pry the door open—no luck! That man had built a solid door casing that was not easy to crash, so she climbed over a high pile of hardened snow to get to a side window. Not an easy trick, but when she got to the window she managed to pry off a screen and then she could force the window open with the hatchet. All this had taken some time and when she finally did get into the cabin the fire she had started was out and she was thoroughly chilled although the temperature had not been very low. She also mentioned that there were two deer who were often wandering around this time of year. The deer had been watching her with great interest, no doubt wondering what she was doing out there in her nightgown. The panic was probably the worst part of the experience. This had been the first time I had left her alone in wintertime and one can imagine the impact it had on her. I know she told her story many times to friends or relatives who came to visit over the years.

After this happened I took an extra key to the house and hid it in an inconspicuous place where either one of us could get it and unlock the door if something like this happened again. As a matter of fact, our car was parked in a lean-to at the back of the house and I later discovered that a keyring with car keys and house keys was in the ignition switch of the car, but Hazel did not know about

this at the time. If she had known this, there would have been no problem. So it was a learning experience for me too, to make sure there were keys available for any emergency.

Hazel Hammer and Baird Chrisman at the river near the Hammer home at Placer Point.

During the winter of 1947-48 I had told Hazel in my correspondence with her that the new cabin I was working on would not be finished and ready for occupancy in the summer of 1948, but I had hopes that we might move in sometime in 1949. After a good deal of discussion we had decided not to move in until the cabin interior including all fixtures were complete and in place. This also meant completing a water system. During the winter 1947-48 I had also dug a well just at the rear of the cabin, digging down through what was mostly river gravel and came upon a very fine spring running through the ground at about a 12-foot depth. I cemented in a 4-inch steel pipe and this became our water source for the following 24 years. Many people commented that it was the best tasting water they had ever had the privilege to drink.

I then installed a reservoir tank in the attic and a hot water tank connected to the big cooking range in the kitchen, a small though adequate bathroom with lavatory, toilet and bathtub. A kitchen sink with hot and cold water, the same as for the bathtub and lavatory. Some distance away I built a septic tank which served us very well for many years. The plumbing and the entire water system was quite a project considering that everything had to be hauled from town, 50 to 75 miles over a primitive road and during wintertime, material was hard to come by. Finally in February, 1950, the hot water tank was brought in by our local Park Ranger and his wife, Madelyn. They then stayed overnight for card games, food and conversation. They had snowshoed into our place from the main road which was open to traffic and had brought the hot water tank in on a toboggan. This was a good example of good friends and neighbors helping each other, rather than the feuding that was so often in evidence in this country.

Since this particular part of Montana had never experienced any large-scale logging operations and there was a lot of virgin timber available on private land, it developed that a number of small logging contractors were moving in buying timber land and leasing property from which they would cut the timber. We finally decided to have our Tepee Lake property logged, in part at least,

since we had some lean years with minimal income. The logging netted us a fair return but since we were inexperienced at this game we probably did not get the full value of our timber, though it did help us over some rough spots. Anyhow this was in the early 1950s and by 1956 our finances were once again at a low ebb and we left for Phoenix, AZ, to work for whatever time it took to get back on a better financial footing.

In about September or October we packed our bags and left for Arizona and Phoenix. Hazel had worked in Phoenix before our marriage and she got a job almost immediately in the office of a major department store. I was not so fortunate, but during the Christmas rush I got work in the post office and worked there until sometime in January when the job terminated. After a period of job hunting, I managed to get work with an air conditioning company that had just started operations. There were only four of us working at this small operation, but we were quite busy, especially during the hot part of the year. I adapted well enough to this unfamiliar work and eventually was offered the job of foreman of operations, but just about that time I came down with a bad attack of pneumonia and ended up in the hospital. By the time I recuperated and got out of the hospital, Hazel and I had decided this was not the place for us. We had spent about 1½ years in Phoenix and were ready to go back to Montana.

By this time I had become owner of over 500 acres of property in the North Fork in various tracts and there was a prospect of a sale of at least one of the tracts. I had also been approached to do some fireplace and possibly some log building construction. So we came back home and fortunately found everything in order at our place. It had been a rather risky thing to leave our place for that length of time. Not long after our return I became involved in various construction jobs which kept me busy for the next ten years or more, and we also sold some property that enabled us to come out of Montana in winter and explore Arizona.

In the spring of 1954 we had a rather normal high water period on the North Fork River, but up at my old homestead near the Canadian border the river had lifted an ancient log jam and then started cutting a new channel which was headed directly at my old cabin. By the time high water was about over, the river had undercut the bank where my old cabin stood and it toppled over onto the riverbank below and it lay there in several sections until the next year, 1955, and the high water that year picked up the cabin and swept it down river piecemeal. We just happened to see part of it go by our place eight miles down river where we were then living. It was easy to identify the log pieces as the corners had been miter cut as a picture frame would be made, and no other cabin in that country had been built that way.

The period of time after Hazel and I were married in June of 1948, til we left the Montana scene in 1972 had many episodes and events which will be recorded here as I remember them. The time when they took place will probably not be accurate, but not to worry, the mere fact that I can recall them is more important.

Tom and Marie Peterson were our good friends and neighbors, that is to say they lived about four miles from us up a creek drainage which was a tributary of the North Fork River where we lived. I had worked with Tom many times in the pre-World War II period when we both worked for the Forest Service. Tom was an unusual person in that he was seldom seen in anger about anything. We got on very well at all times and were often assigned to the same crew for trail maintenance, telephone line repair, and firefighting. Marie was one of the Price family who had the first post office at Trail Creek. When I came to the country in 1932, it was the point farthest north where mail was delivered, until sometime during World War II when the post office changed hands and

then was finally moved north to Roadsend in the U.S.A. to a ranch at the border, where it has remained since then.

Tom and Marie Price Peterson

Marie Price Peterson and her husband Tom certainly left their mark on this part of Montana. Marie wrote a pamphlet on their experiences. It makes interesting reading. A copy will be in my effects, as well. She named it *Homestead Memories*. She tells about coming to this valley as a single girl and taking up a homestead near her parents' place and together with her father and perhaps a brother building a log cabin on her place. The years she lived there are stated in her booklet. She had been working winters in Portland, Oregon, where she met and married Tom. He came back to this valley with her and together they made what they felt was a good life for themselves.

When Hazel and I were married, Marie took to Hazel like a sister and Tom with his good humor helped ease Hazel's adaptation to the country and its unusual aspects of living. We were often together and enjoyed each other's company. Socializing in this country in wintertime was a sometime thing and depended on weather most of all and then the ability of a person to snowshoe or ski four to six miles, since that was about the average distance between homesteads. Hazel and I snowshoed to the Peterson's a number of times over the years. Part of the trip at least was up the main road for perhaps a mile and a half. Usually this part was easy hiking without the snowshoes since vehicle traffic had been over it, but the Petersons were several miles up a side road which was not plowed in winter. When the snows got real deep in mid-winter and the county did not plow the main road we were definitely snowbound, and of course we expected that to happen every winter.

Tom Peterson eventually became incapacitated because of emphysema and other physical problems, probably caused by too much smoke inhalation when fighting forest fires. Marie took care of him in their remote location year after year in spite of the difficulties involved, even as Tom eventually became bedridden. He finally had a bad attack and had to be removed to town. Luckily it was not wintertime. Even so, he did not survive for very long thereafter. Marie stayed on at the homestead for a time but eventually sold the homestead and moved into Columbia Falls where she purchased a nice small house and got a job cooking at the veterans home.

During the earlier years after Hazel and I were married, we often went on huckleberry picking expeditions with the Petersons. At that time Tom was still getting around rather well. Marie was pretty good with a gun, and if either of us got some game we would usually share it. If it happened to be a large animal such as an elk, it was hard to preserve all the meat unless it was put in a locker in town and this was not always convenient, so sharing made a lot of sense in several ways.

I will relate one of these hunting episodes here because of the unusual circumstances. There was an old established game crossing at the north end of our property coming out of Glacier Park across the river onto our property. It was getting late in the day when I spotted four elk coming across from the Park. There were three cows being followed by a very nice two-year-old bull. I pulled down on the bull just as he got out of the water on our side and he just seemed to flinch a bit and kept right on going into the woods. I thought I had missed but suddenly he came back out of the woods headed for the river again and got right out in the middle and dropped dead. A real dilemma for me. He was lodged against some large rocks in the river but how to get him out would be a real challenge. As small as Hazel was, though she was willing, she could not have been much help to me in this project. I thought of the Petersons right away. Marie was a physically strong person who had been doing man's work for years and I knew I could count on her to be a real help to me in this situation. We drove up to the Petersons. It was hunting season (November) and the roads were still open for car use. I asked if they wanted to join in this unusual project to get this elk out of the river. They were eager to help, although Tom would not be able to do much. They were glad for the chance to get some meat as they had not had any luck hunting by then.

We gathered ropes and other equipment at our place and then walked the short distance from our cabin to the spot where the elk was lodged. By now it was about midnight. We had several lanterns and flashlights and consigned them to Hazel and Tom to keep light on myself and Marie as we struggled with the elk in the river. I had several strong ropes tied together since it was a fair distance out to where the elk was lodged. I had on rubber hip boots and giving one end of the rope to Marie on shore I took the other end and started out toward the elk. The river current made it hard to keep my feet on the slippery rocks, however, I finally got out to the animal. I tied my end of the rope around his antlers. By this time the rope was in the current of the river and Marie was nearly pulled into the river. She held on, however, and then I got a hold of the rope again and pulled on it and gradually the elk came loose from the rocks and floated free in a wide circle and came to shore. Marie held her end on shore very well, but I very nearly got a dunking. I slipped several times and managed to fill my hip boots with icy river water, but we had the situation under control. Dumping the water out of my hip boots, I proceeded to keep them on, and Tom and I dressed out the elk with Marie's help and Hazel holding lanterns for us and we all got back to our cabin about 2:00 a.m. for a well-earned lunch and coffee Everybody was dead tired but happy that there was plenty of meat for everyone. And so this little story came to an end happily!

Among the people who moved into our area not too long after Hazel and I were married were a couple who were friendly and gregarious. We spent many pleasant evenings socializing and playing cards with these two. Now as mentioned elsewhere there was always a lot of hunting going on since most of the people living here depended on wild game for at least part of their meat supply. Both of these people had been reported to be good rifle shots, especially the woman, and she was known to do a bit of bragging about her expertise with a rifle. She may have had reason to regret this one day.

A neighbor who lived a mile or more down river from their place had a team of horses and one of the horses was a buckskin, very similar in color to various kinds of wild game found in this area.

It should also be noted that all of this country was designated as open range country, meaning that stock such as horses and cattle could roam free and if you wanted to keep stock out of your property, you were obliged to fence your land. So quite often during hunting season, and at other times as well, one might run into domestic stock grazing in the woods. Of course, this was a hazard for the stock, but most hunters were aware of this situation and exercised care. Just the same accidents did happen at times.

The woman we have described was out near their cabin and spotted what she thought was a deer. Since they were out of meat, even though it was out of season she got her rifle and came back to where she had seen the animal. She said afterward that she did not get a very good look at the animal since it was amongst some trees. However, she took aim and fired at what she thought was a deer—then disaster! Out of the woods came the neighbor's buckskin horse limping with a bullet shattered leg! One can only imagine how the woman must have felt when the full impact of the situation hit home.

I happened to be at the neighbor's place who owned the horse when the woman came to tell of the disaster. It really was rough on both parties, but I suppose that all of us even though not involved could draw a lesson from such an incident, not to be too hasty to shoot at anything in the woods until we are dead sure we know what it is. The horse had to be destroyed since the leg bone was totally shattered. A high-powered rifle will do just that.

It's quite true that in this part of Montana and elsewhere wherever hunting takes place there are endless stories of livestock of all kinds being shot by gun-happy individuals and often as not they also shoot each other. A story was circulating in this part of Montana when we were there that sounded a bit unreal but could very well have happened.

The story goes that a group of dudes from somewhere back east had come out to Idaho to hunt elk. One of the dudes had killed his elk in a rather remote area and came in and called for a packer to bring out his elk to the roadway. When the packer got to the "elk" he was stunned to find that the dude had shot someone's mule! Oh yes, said the dude to the packer, I wondered about those iron shoes on the elk!! And so goes this story.

Elsewhere in this narrative you have read about the sheepherder who advertised for a live-in partner and a woman and 15-year-old daughter came out from New York to live with him and thereby sealed his eventual doom in a shootout with a competitor later on.

As related elsewhere all this happened just a short time before I arrived in the area. It seems the sheepherder had no known relatives in this country, so eventually the county took over and there was an auction of his property. I remember the auction as one of the first functions I attended in this valley. Since I was at a low point financially at this time I could not buy much of anything. There was a fair collection of guns, some antique and probably quite valuable, but the prices bid were much too high for me. However, I did manage to get an old 45-70 Navy rifle with bolt and some other parts missing. I also bought a red pipestone Indian pipe. I still have these two items.

The first fireplace I built was in our own cabin and served in two important ways, mostly for the living room and then for the entire cabin which included two bedrooms upstairs. On the kitchen side I installed an inlet for a pipe coming from the kitchen stove. Since our cabin was not a large structure, the fireplace together with a large cooking range served us very well.

Many people admired the fireplace and it was attractive, built of native rock selected for color and texture. Fortunately, this valley had a good variety of rock of various colors and textures.

Neighbor Pat Cole standing on the fireplace from the Hammer home, many years later.

During the time Hazel and I were working in Phoenix, we had a number of inquiries about building some fireplaces when we would return to Montana. So it developed that by the time we came back from Arizona I had several jobs of fireplace construction lined up. The first one was for an old friend, Vern Mauritsen, who had just purchased a small cabin camp near Polebridge on our side of the river. The fireplace he wanted was for his main cabin where he and his family lived. It turned out rather well and then his neighbor, Hazen Lawson, who had built several sawed log cabins asked me to build two fireplaces in these cabins, so I was getting into fireplace construction in a big way. The next job was for a lawyer from Jacksonville, IL [Orville and Helen Foreman] who were having an old time log man [Austin Weikert] build a lodge for them and this fireplace would be of unusual construction in that it called for two fireplaces in one massive block of masonry, the largest of the two to face into the lodge, while the other smaller one facing the opposite direction into a bedroom behind the fireplace facing into the lodge. A tremendous amount of cement, rock, sand and rebar went into this job and I had hired the sometime husband of the Dragon Lady [Ollie Terrian] to mix my mortar for me. The masonry of the fireplace was given quite a test long before the cement and mortar was really properly cured or seasoned. One day I came to work and discovered the log man who was still working on the cabin had placed railroad jacks against the masonry of the fireplace in order to shift some logs that had sprung out of place in his building construction. He made some sheepish excuse when I confronted him with the fact that he may well have damaged my rock construction and I informed the owner that I would not be responsible if the masonry was to crack in that area any time in the future.

I might say here that the fireplace showed no visible damage during the period when we were still living in Montana, but now that has been over 16 years ago, it would be interesting to see his fireplace now. [As of 2021, it still looked great.]

Impressive fireplace at the Foreman family cabin

During the time when I was building the above fireplace a friend of the lawyer [Baird Chrisman] came by now and then and watched me work. He was also watching the log construction by the old timer as well. He told me some time later that he had not been impressed with the old timer's log construction. He had seen our cabin and now asked me if I would be interested in doing a large cabin with fireplace for him on his property not so very far away. He had purchased two 160-acre homesteads adjoining each other and had plans to build. I told him that as soon as I completed this job I would discuss his plans with him and the terms on which I would take on his job. This then finally turned out to be the best job I had in this country. The entire job which included cabin, fireplace, water system, sewer system and other details took me about three years to complete. Of course, work season was always short because of long winters but I also had the misfortune to come down with a bad case of pneumonia in August of one year and had to shut down the operation much earlier than usual and spend some time in the hospital and then had a lengthy recuperation.

The interior details, wall cabinets built into the kitchen, a large water storage tank under a bench in one bedroom and clothes closets in the three bedrooms upstairs were all additions to the original plans and, of course, extended the construction time by many days. A bathroom downstairs also required quite a bit of time installing all the required fixtures and the plumbing.

Walt and his good friend Baird Chrisman.

During the last five or six years of our time spent in Montana, we did perhaps come south and spend the winters in Arizona, usually from November until May. This gave us a break from the rather severe winters for which Montana is so famous. The Arizona winters so spoiled us that we finally sold our home place in Montana in 1972 and moved to Arizona permanently.

Park Ranger Hugh Buchanan was the man who had helped me across the North Fork River the April day that I arrived in this country. The pole bridge over the North Fork of the Flathead, north of Polebridge, had been swept away in February of that year (1932) by an ice jam and a cableway had been installed near the remains of the bridge for those who wished to cross over.

Just how long Hugh remained as Ranger at Polebridge, I do not now remember. I believe he was transferred to the east side of Glacier Park and served there for some years. Sometime before Hazel and I were married in 1948, Hugh and his wife, Madelyn, were again transferred to Polebridge Ranger Station and I believe served there until his retirement. Also in that later period we had more contact with the Buchanans than at any previous time. Madelyn and my Hazel became the best of friends and we had many great visits with the Buchanans. It was in one of the earlier years after our marriage that the Buchanans were part of a somewhat amusing little incident I will relate here.

We had a conventional mailbox at our road entry at the main North Fork Road. Since this was a Star Route our mail was delivered at our box by the carrier. For one reason or another I had never gotten around to painting our name on our mailbox, but it didn't seem to matter that much since there were so few people along the route and the carrier knew everybody well. The joke was that the mailbox with no name on it was where the Hammers live. However, one day as I went to pick up our mail I saw the picture of a claw hammer had been painted on our mailbox with black paint. Hazel and I puzzled a long time about who might have done the painting and never did figure it out. Then one day a Junior Ranger, Bruce Miller, who had been working with Hugh Buchanan at Polebridge came to pay us a visit. He told us he was being transferred to another park back east and said he had something to give us before he left. It was a snapshot he had taken of Hugh Buchanan standing back to the camera watching his wife Madelyn painting the hammer on our mailbox. As you can see he had taken the picture without either one of the Buchanans being aware of it, and had not told them until they finally found out from us. A copy of the picture is with this story.

Madelyn and Hugh were wonderful friends and we felt a severe loss when Madelyn was stricken with cancer and passed away. She had been a very special friend to Hazel.

The Junior Ranger mentioned has a separate and special story which will be found elsewhere in this narrative regarding a deer hunt on our property.

During the later years when Hugh and Madelyn Buchanan were stationed at Polebridge, there were a number of Junior Rangers who were assigned to work with Hugh and from time to time they were moved on to other perhaps permanent stations. These young fellows were usually getting needed experience with the older and more seasoned rangers such as Hugh and others of his generation.

One of these young Junior Rangers, we'll call him Bruce, was a likeable young man. Probably a native of some eastern state and after a period of academic study had come west and was now getting practical experience working with Hugh Buchanan in the operational field. We got to know Bruce quite well since he usually came with the Buchanans when they came to visit us. Bruce was the one who took the picture of Madelyn painting the hammer on our mailbox.

One year as hunting season approached we were all visiting and discussing where we would be hunting, young Bruce said he had never hunted much and had never had any luck in previous hunts and wasn't really too keen about going because of the many hunting accidents that occurred every year. Thinking to give him a fair chance we invited him to come up to our place and we would make a drive through the upper part of our river property which sometimes yielded some game. Then on the day agreed he came to our place loaded for bear, that is he had all the needed equipment, high-powered rifle, hunting knife, rope, hunting license, etc.

I then directed him to take a trail through the woods that I had acquainted him with earlier, while I took a trail nearer the river. The general idea was that if I scared up a deer, it would probably run in his direction and he would likely get a shot at it. We had agreed to pace ourselves so that we would cover about the same distance.

As I was at a point upriver where we were about to meet, I heard a shot close by. I waited a while until I was sure there would not be any more shots and then advanced and found Bruce standing over a very nice buck. He was pretty proud and well he might be, and he had cut the buck's throat so as to bleed him properly. We talked a while then and I was waiting to see further action, that is the dressing out process, but Bruce rather reluctantly and with some embarrassment confessed that he had never dressed out an animal and asked if I would do it and he could watch and learn. I did just that wondering all the while what he would have done had he been alone. But then, of course, there is a first time for all of us.

After Hazel and I were married a number of new situations arose which had never been real problems for me in my bachelor days. For instance, no matter where you lived in this country you could always expect an occasional black bear to be snooping around looking for something to eat. Since in times past no one had a refrigerator or even an icebox, an outdoor cooling compartment was about all we had for several years. Naturally if you had something with an odor, such as bacon or fish, you would be inviting a raid from a bear since they seem to be able to smell out anything by way of food from miles away.

Since we were located just across the river from Glacier National Park, the bear situation got progressively worse as more and more people came to spend time in the park. The feeding of bears by tourists was strictly forbidden by signs everywhere, which were usually and generally ignored by the public. Of course, this attitude of the public was what creates all the problems for the settlers across the river outside of the park.

The fact that park personnel did not enforce the regulations was bad enough, but what made matters even worse was that they had vast garbage dumps in the headquarters areas in the park and these dumps attracted both black and grizzly bears. These policies were to please the dudes who wanted to take pictures of bears and were very probably the indirect cause of the death of several young people who were working in the park and were attacked at night by grizzly bears. Of course, these casualties may have been the result of carelessness, but again the root cause would have to be the tolerance of the vast garbage dumps where people could have good photo opportunities.

It's true, however, that those people who visited the park as vacationers and who did not know the true nature of a bear were prone to do some of the most stupid things you can imagine. As for instance the story related by a park ranger friend of mine. A woman with several children stopped where a few black bears were begging for food along the highway. She proceeded to try and place one of her very young children on the back of a black bear in order to get a picture. She was indeed

fortunate that both she and the child were not badly mauled before a ranger came along and stopped the dangerous stupidity.

Hazel and I both knew that ordinarily black bear were not especially dangerous unless you got between them and their cubs, or some other situation that seemed threatening to them. During the first few years of our marriage, we did not have a refrigerator and kept our perishable food in a compartment on the north side of the cabin. It was perhaps a bit primitive, but with the cool nights and the shade during the day the food kept very well.

At this point in time if we had any food such as bacon or fish or anything with an odor we were likely to have a visit by bear. If by chance he got into the food and got away with some of it he would be sure to come back for more and there would be more damage. Of course, I could not allow this to continue indefinitely, so the end result was that the bear was shot and thereafter any bear that came into the vicinity was shot on sight. Of course, according to the Fish and Game Department people all this was illegal. According to them the proper procedure was to notify a deputy Game Warden, produce the evidence of a marauding bear, then if the Warden felt like it he might order a culvert trap set for the bear and if caught they would then take the bear many miles away and clip a tag to its ear and turn it loose. This was in fact an exercise in futility. These varmints had an uncanny ability to find their way back to the place where they were trapped and start their marauding all over again. Being aware of this situation from my years of experience living in this country, I decided to take the matter into my own hands. If there was a marauding bear I simply shot him and hooked to my Jeep by a chain, I dragged him a good distance from our place as far into the deep woods as I could get and left him to the scavengers which included his own "brethren and sisters" since they are cannibalistic and eat their own when dead, as we who have observed them at close quarters well know. As a matter of fact, anything at all the rottener the better will attract them and a bear carcass a day or two in the sun is a very attractive morsel for them. Usually if I went back to the place where I had taken the dead bear in less than a week all that would be left would be some hair.

In my pre-war bachelor days I had only seen an occasional black bear, nor did I have any real problems with them, but after Hazel and I were married and settled into our new cabin, the problems with bears began. First there was the food compartment on the side of the house that was raided a number of times, although the offender was usually shot on second attempt. Then I had planted a large garden and a good part of that was a strawberry patch. This patch provided us with all the berries we could use and was producing so well that we started selling berries by the crate at a good price. The next thing we knew the bears discovered the strawberry patch and started raiding it regularly, even at night when it was next to impossible to shoot them. You can see how cunning these varmints could be. They seemed to realize we could not see them well enough at night in order to shoot them. So it came down to this—that I shot any bear in the vicinity of our cabin no matter what it was doing. In these later years it seemed the bear population had increased quite a lot. The reasons remained unclear; however, we who lived up this valley had good reason to believe that the policy of the people at Glacier Park was at least in part to blame for our bear problems. They would trap their problem bears near the Park headquarters and then transport them 40 or 50 miles into our area and turn them loose. Our local Park Rangers often disagreed with this policy but could do nothing about it, except perhaps to warn us when a new bear was turned loose in our vicinity. The proof of this stupid and deliberate policy was soon to show itself right on our back porch where I kept a garbage can. [Larry Wilson says yes, the occasional bear was brought across the river, but some of the locals then started accusing the park of every bear they encountered, when that was obviously not the case.]

Early one morning Hazel and I were preparing to make a shopping trip to town and while eating breakfast we heard the rattling of our garbage can. I knew in advance what to expect so I got one of my rifles down from the rack and started to the back porch. Sure enough a bear had tipped over the garbage can and when she saw me took off for the woods, but not quite fast enough. I put a slug into her head before she got too far away. It was then in checking her that I discovered the deliberate stupidity of the park people. The bear had not one but two metal tags in her ear which showed me she had been a two-time loser and I was to be her third victim. It did not work out that way and I made my complaints to park headquarters, and a lot of good that did! We were becoming well aware of the policy the park had developed which made our valley the dumping ground of any problem bear they captured near their own headquarters.

The end result for Hazel and me was that we had to be alert at all times for problem bears that might show up at our doorstep. Had I still been a bachelor, I would not have considered it that much of a problem, but Hazel had a real fear of these varmints and she had never learned how to handle a gun and didn't really want to; the mechanics of a gun were something she just didn't grasp. I made an effort to teach her about guns but I soon saw that she might do herself real harm if she got excited and made a mistake handling the gun or trying to shoot a bear.

After a few years of our marriage I started developing my rock mason and log construction contracting business which meant I would usually be away from home, sometimes 5 to 15 miles away and not near a phone. At this time then the bear problems became serious. As I said Hazel had a real fear of these varmints and when one came around when I was away she became real panicky. We did have a telephone connected to the Forest Service line and Hazel could call those people, but it wasn't always possible for anyone to come to her assistance. At one incident a she-bear with two small cubs came up on the front porch and Hazel, not knowing what else to do, started hammering on the door on the inside with the end of a broom handle, trying to scare them away, not realizing that she was permanently marring the door which I had hand-built for our house. I did not blame her, she just wanted to be rid of the pesky bear and I probably would have done the same thing in her place. But this was a good example of what was going on time and again. By the time I came home from work the varmints would be gone only to come back the next day as soon as I was gone back on my job.

We finally decided that Hazel should come with me to my job. It was not a very good situation for her. She could do some bookkeeping and whatever else she could take with her to my job, but she always felt she was not getting anything done at the house, but at least it avoided the panic she felt whenever a bear came around. During this period I killed quite a few bear whenever they showed themselves and there never was an end to that.

Inside Glacier Park the fallacy of park policies was in evidence over and over again. Several young people who were employed in the park became casualties because of ignorance about grizzly bears and their activities and of course because of the forementioned park policies of keeping dumps open just to amuse the dudes and give them photo opportunities. Another stupid incident relating to bears was developed by the Fish and Game Department. A grizzly was captured, tranquilized and a beeper attached to him and then he was turned loose. The idea was to keep track of his movements. What they hadn't expected or counted on was that the grizzly went berserk and started raiding cabins and trying to destroy anything man-made in his path. This was altogether uncharacteristic for a grizzly. Usually they avoided human habitation and were not inclined to the same kind of mischief the blacks were usually into, but in the opinion of many the tampering with the bear's lifestyle, the trapping and tranquilizing and the beeper attached to him caused him to go

berserk, since no one had seen a grizzly go crazy this way. However, this is so often the case where humans tamper with nature and its animal population.

At this point I might mention that in one of the earlier years of my time on my property near the border I killed a black bear in early spring and he had a tremendous layer of fat on his body. I rendered out 45 pounds of excellent cooking fat. Many people will tell you that while a bear is in hibernation he is burning or using the stored fat to carry him through the winter—not so. He usually has most of it on his body as he comes out of hibernation, but then loses it soon thereafter. If the animal is diseased, old or poor going into hibernation, then, of course, he will also be poor and thin when he comes out in spring. The lard or grease, if handled and rendered properly, is tasteless and excellent for any kind of cooking requiring shortening. It is especially good for biscuits, pie crust or in making bread. Many an old brush rat has lived well on a bear kill together with a few staples he would need to buy. As for me I never did care for bear meat, but the lard was as good or better than any grown by a hog.

In other parts of this narrative I have related stories of bears I have killed, because they had been destructive around our dwelling. Usually this was during the summer when the hides were not in prime condition, that is to say they could not be made into a rug because the hair was shedding in summertime.

However, during hunting season in October-November, hides would be prime and now and then if I had a kill at that time someone would usually want a rug. So it happened one November when we still had a food storage compartment on the north side of our cabin, a very large black bear came marauding. He came at night and wrecked the food box and got away with some of the food. We were already in bed so I went downstairs and brought one of my rifles up and set it beside the bed. Since he had been scared away, I knew he would be back, so I opened the sliding window just a crack and went back to bed. Although I went to sleep, Hazel suddenly awakened me because she had heard a noise below us. Our bedroom was on the second floor just above the food compartment. Sure enough even in total darkness I could see this big black blob against the snow on the ground, but not being able to see the sights on my rifle I stuck the gun through the window opening and pointed it at the black blob and pulled the trigger. The bear lunged and tore out through the woods and I supposed I had missed him, so I went back to bed.

Toward early morning I was awakened by some shouting, so I dressed and went outside to see what that was all about. I found several hunters in my yard looking for deer or elk. I had “no trespass” signs all over my property, but when I accosted them they said they had not seen any signs. Since it was still dark when they came in, I showed them the signs then and they left. As I turned to go back to the cabin, I happened to notice something black a little ways back in the woods from the road where I was standing. Going to investigate, I found my big bear very dead. So I had a bit of luck shooting in the dark after all.

I sent this hide to town with our mail carrier and had it made into a rug for a friend. I rolled the carcass onto the ice on the river and Hazel and I had a lot of amusement watching the various animals and birds that came to feed on the bear carcass. Hazel called it our “snack bar.” During the rest of the winter, I shot two coyotes who came to eat and we had all kinds of birds including both golden and bald eagles. The strangest of all was a very large sea gull who came and stayed most of the winter feeding on the fat of the carcass. What this gull was doing so far inland was anybody’s guess.

In the earlier days before my time in this country, the mail route into the North Fork extended only to the John Walsh ranch in Glacier Park and was known as Kintla P.O. As the years went by and more homesteaders came into the North Fork, the route was extended to Polebridge after Ben Hensen built his store on the west side of the river in 1920. Later as the west side road was extended from Polebridge to the Canadian border, another post office was added at Trail Creek about eight miles from Canada. This was the situation when I came to the North Fork in 1932.

This was a Star Route and was contracted to a low bidder for the route. So it was that the contract to carry the mail often became a bone of contention and the low bidder for the contract did not always fulfill his obligation to get the mail through, especially in wintertime when roads became impassible for any ordinary vehicle.

It was not an easy route to service but the fact that the low bidder would simply depend on the county to snowplow the road or he would decide not to make an attempt to get through. As for the contract to which the bids were directed, it specified that the bidder be properly equipped to carry the mail regardless of snow depth or weather conditions.

Some of the early day carriers used horses and sled during the period of deep snows and hoped that the county would get around to one snowplowing at least during the winter so a truck might again be used. As I came to the country this system prevailed and sometimes during the winters of deep snows, it could be weeks or a month or more before a regular twice weekly service was in operation again.

There was much complaining but with so few people along the route and a constant threat of the postal department to remove the route entirely the department was inclined to ignore the complaints.

About the time Hazel and I were married after World War II in 1948 a man who will remain nameless [Ralph Day] bid on the route and said he would do a better job in the operation of the route. He proceeded to buy what was probably the smallest caterpillar type tractor available and fitted it with a small cab and then pulled a small sled coupled to it. The idea seemed to be a good one, but when finally it came to a real test in deep snow, it had many problems. So once again the route was being serviced in a haphazard fashion.

Doc Jack McFarland with his dude ranch over in Glacier Park was especially concerned about getting regular mail service since most of his correspondence with his customers was taking place during the winter period, and he persuaded my Hazel to join him in registering protests to the postal department about the lack of proper service to our area.

My Hazel became deeply involved and being the good letter writer she was, together with Doc McFarland's efforts, they did get the attention of the postal department, but it was a thankless effort by and large since the carrier had relatives and friends along the route to whom regular mail service was not important, and were either apathetic or did in fact support this carrier in his disregard for fulfillment of his contract. The whole matter created a lot of ill-will and bad feeling in the entire community. Finally the matter was more or less resolved when this carrier had some sort of stroke and had to give up the route.

Finally, when new bids came up the carrier equipped himself with what was then called the "Tucker Snow Cat," a vehicle built specifically for travel in deep snow over almost any terrain. This was the beginning of very good service in the area. The first man to operate with this equipment [Lyle

Wyant] was also a war veteran who took his job seriously even though he had a war wound and was partly incapacitated.

The ill feeling in the area however persisted and it was too bad because people who had been good friends no longer were on speaking terms for years. All because one man didn't do the job he had been contracted to do. The route was eventually extended to the Canadian border at the ranch of my old neighbor of pre-war days, now occupied by the dragon lady.

Since income in the North Fork in those early days of our marriage was an intermittent and sometime thing, both Hazel and I took on various jobs to augment our finances. Hazel being the expert accountant-bookkeeper was almost immediately drafted to do the finance and records of the McFarland ranch across the river in Glacier Park. Then Doc McFarland kept me busy too, as long as I had to transport Hazel back and forth. The McFarland Ranch was one of those places where a lot of things seemed to be falling apart at any given time and it seems the specialty I had developed was to deal with anything and everything that could go wrong on a ranch as well as other places.

So in our comings and goings to the ranch by way of Polebridge one day H. Frank Evans cornered me and asked me if I would consider doing a job for him. The job in question would be to raise his old building on jacks and remove the old rotten sill logs and replace them with new logs and then pour a concrete foundation to lower the building on to, for perhaps an additional 50 years of life for the cabin.

This was the old Chance Beebe cabin, quite large and a tricky job, however, at that time in my life I would tackle almost anything. As time went by I would perform this operation on a number of old buildings in the North Fork and so became quite proficient in this operation. During the time that I was working on this project, Evans who taught in a Coeur D'Alene, Idaho College, was in the habit of bringing some of his students out to this place in the North Fork and had them work for him for board and room on what he presumed to call a vacation.

Frank Evans cabin on its new foundation

At about the time Evans had hired me to construct a new foundation for his cabin he had two young people from his college group working for him and his wife Edna. The girl, Bev, worked in the kitchen and did general household chores, while the boy, Bob Steiner, worked with me and helped pour concrete and whatever else there was to do. It soon became clear to me that Bob preferred working with me rather than with Evans. As time went by it seemed to me that this situation was very much like the one I had experienced on the B[rill] ranch in my pre-war time in the North Fork. It was a penny-pinching situation at best and at worst an untenable working situation because of food deficiencies, considering the hard work these young people were required to do.

After finishing my job at the Evans place, I lost track of the two young people, Bev and Bob, however, some years later we heard they had married back in New Jersey where their families lived and after a honeymoon back there they came west again and came to visit us and wanted to rent one of our cabins to finish up their honeymoon. Hazel and I were just packing to leave for Colorado for the winter so we just turned over a key to one of our rental cabins to them and left for Colorado. I guess the kids enjoyed the solitude.

Situated on the lower level of our property within about 50 feet from the riverbank was the location where I had built our new cabin. It was at some risk in case of a flood; however, with a picture window that looked directly up river and into Glacier Park and the mountains of the Continental Divide, it provided us with a beautiful view and also many strange and interesting activities as they developed both on and along the river.

Sometime early on we had acquired a high-powered spotting telescope and found it very useful in checking on the movement of game animals and others that crossed over to our property from Glacier Park across the river. There was this natural game crossing just below the mouth of Kintla Creek in the park and in the years we lived here we saw just about all the different kinds of wild animals crossing here that were found in western Montana. The telescope gave us a good idea as to whether the animal that was crossing to our side was perhaps the kind we wanted for our meat supply.

During the summers of the later years of our residence here on the river we saw many strange and often interesting sights and many strange characters coming down river in boats of all kinds. Sometimes you got the impression that a nudist colony had taken over, going down river. But to relate one rather interesting little episode, a couple of hundred yards upriver there was a bend in the river from the left and then beyond that the river was no long visible, but directly in our sight at the bend of the river as Kintla Creek came into the river from the park side, where the creek joined the river, there was a very nice open sandbar and quite often river boaters would stop here and fish a while. Since there was a deep hole here as well, often some of these river boaters would put up tents and stay a few days if the fishing was good.

About a hundred yards up the little creek by trail there was the main primitive road in the park which was parallel to our road on the west side. Anyhow this spot on the river was well within our view and with our powerful telescope we could see in great detail the activities on the bar. Having been at this spot myself many times to do some fishing I had noted that you could not see any of our buildings looking down river because they were all built in the timber and our picture window looking out through the timber was not visible to the naked eye. So with our telescope on the dining table just below our picture window we had a full sweep view of everything that went on up river.

One day we noticed two men come down river in a rubber raft “boat.” They stopped at the little bar and spent some time fishing and after a while they put up a tent and seemed prepared to stay a

while. After a few hours either Hazel or I happened to look and there were three people on the bar. The third party seemed to be a rather young-looking girl. Then there was some drinking and hilarity as well. Suddenly the girl was running around in the nude and every now and then one of the men would pick up the girl and disappear into the woods. This little Garden of Eden drama went on for several days. Then one day there were fond goodbyes and the girl started hiking up the trail into the park and was gone. It was then I knew for the first time just where she had come from and that this certainly must have been a pre-arranged rendezvous of some precision. The men packed their tent and other gear into their boat and came on down river. One could almost see the surprise on their faces when they saw our cabin and people around within easy sight of their little rendezvous. We often wondered how well all this must have been planned, the meeting place 50 miles back in the boondocks and the timing, most intriguing. And, of course, they never would suspect there was anyone in the woods with a telescope.

At other times we had seen entire families or perhaps just groups of people come down the river in rubber rafts or whatever, all of them in the nude. One got the impression that these people thought they were the only ones on this river. Even though it was a rather primitive country, quite a few people were usually to be seen coming down in all kinds of boats in the summer season.

In the year or so after we returned from our year and a half working in Phoenix, AZ, Hazel seemed to develop some problems with her digestive system. It came on rather gradually, but got progressively worse and did not respond to treatment. Doctors we visited in Kalispell did not seem to help the situation. We finally went to a doctor in nearby Whitefish, MT, who had been highly recommended to us. He treated Hazel for thyroid problems and during the period of her treatment it was discovered that this doctor was a drug addict. Needless to say, we dropped him immediately. We were then directed to a group of doctors in a clinic in Missoula, MT. Here we were told that Hazel had no thyroid problem and now two doctors at this clinic diagnosed Hazel's problem as ileitis, which was the problem our President Eisenhower was operated on for. These doctors assured us there was no known cure for this problem except surgery. We had a second and third opinion about this and then decided there probably was no choice.

So in the late fall of 1959, we rented an apartment in Kalispell and moved down from the North Fork for the winter. They made appointments for Hazel to enter a hospital in Missoula and prepare for surgery on January 30, 1960. We left Kalispell for Missoula and Hazel entered the hospital the next day. There were many preliminary tests, etc., and then Hazel was finally prepared for surgery. It was then that we were suddenly advised that her surgeon had the flu and could not operate! It was a terrible letdown for Hazel since, of course, she was mentally prepared for the ordeal. And now the whole thing was thrown into my lap as to whether to have an associate of our surgeon do the operation or to wait for recovery of our surgeon from the flu. Seldom have I been forced to make a decision under such circumstances. Finally, after lengthy discussions with Hazel and the other doctors, we decided to wait until Hazel's surgeon got over the flu and could operate.

The surgery was complex. They told us they removed about six feet of the small intestine and perhaps half of the large intestine as well, both being badly abscessed. It took Hazel a long time to get over all this and there were some lingering aftereffects which were to bother her for years to come. However, for the next 25 years she got along reasonably well with the shortened digestive system, but when it flared again in 1985, it was eventually to cause cardiac arrest and her death in 1987.

Because of the many unexpected expenses we had this 1959-60 winter, I applied for the job of census taker in the spring of 1960. This job was to take me over a good part of Flathead County and involve encounters with many barking and also vicious dogs, though I was never bitten.

THE GREAT MONTANA FLOOD – 1964

The winter of 1963-64 did not seem especially different than many other winters we had experienced in the North Fork. But subsequent weather and climate conditions brought about a situation that spelled disaster and chaos for a good part of northwestern Montana, and the North Fork was not spared.

It was a time when I was forcefully reminded that I had taken a gambler's chance in building our new cabin on the lower level of our property which was in fact an old flood plain of our river. It was said that the flood we now had was a once in a hundred year occurrence. However that might have been calculated, it was our misfortune to be living in that period of time when records were to be made and the hundred year flood was a reality regardless of statistics. This applied to many rivers and creeks in northwest Montana, not just our North Fork of the Flathead. The weather pattern had been quite similar in the entire northwest Montana area. Consequently, the disasters that occurred were duplicated in many places and the differences were only in magnitude.

To relate what happened in our local area: The early part of spring had been rather cool and snow melt both in mountains and the flats had been slow and intermittent. According to the snow gauges that were placed and read in the usual locations it would be a slow runoff, probably extended beyond the usual time of the end of high water which was usually around the 4th of July. April and most of May were rather cool. This meant that the high country was not affected much at all. So by the last week in May there was still a heavy layer of snow in the higher mountains that had not even started to melt.

Now suddenly the weather took a radical change. The weather turned warmer and warm rains began to fall. Instead of the usual routine of warm days and cool nights which kept control of snow melt, we now had warm rainy days and warm rainy nights. For a short period this was good. The snow started moving off the flats as well as the mountains, but now this pattern was to continue and become a regular daily and nightly feature without let up. It was almost as though the sorcerer's apprentice was at work. Every morning we woke to the same situation, always hoping that this would be the day that the rains would end or at least slacken, but for some time yet this was not to be. Now as the first of June approached the lower flats were bare of any snow, but the river was now quite high and rising daily without let-up. There was now concern by the weather people that if this pattern continued there was indeed flood danger. Little did they realize the extent of the disaster to come.

To relate our situation first of all, all of our buildings were on the river flood plain and none were more than about 10 feet above low water level. The oldest cabin which I had not built was at the southern end of our building area and was perhaps lower than the other buildings. Also it was probably no more than 20 feet from the edge of the riverbank and since this old cabin had probably been here for at least 50 years I presumed that the location of our new cabin 50 or 60 feet away from the river would be adequate. As it turned out this did not really matter.

Out in the center of our backyard, about halfway between the old cabin and our new one, I had constructed a small shed-type building which housed our gas-electric power plant, which furnished light and power to all of our cabins. The power plant was mounted on a concrete base with four

large bolts. Now as the river rose and kept rising on the 7th of June by afternoon it was lapping at the top of the riverbank and here and there making small channels into our yard. This was a final signal for us and Hazel said later she had to urge me to get going because now it was obvious we would have to leave. So while Hazel watched, I started unbolting the light plant, wanting to move it into the old cabin where I hoped it would be high and dry (a misplaced hope). As I worked to remove the bolts on the plant, Hazel stood by and I'm sure was suppressing panic. After I finished and moved the plant to the old cabin, I asked Hazel to stand at the edge of our yard where the river was moving and I took her picture. I know she thought I was slightly "nuts," but we have a record here that no one can dispute. This then was our famous last act before we packed a few things in a packsack and started wading water up to our waist with Hazel behind me hanging onto my belt. We crossed an area where the river had already about cut us off and arrived at the base of our hill where the road rose and went up to the upper level. And so it was that we left our place, lock, stock and barrel, to the elements, wondering if we would ever see any of our buildings and vehicles again.

After eating some steak and bread Hazel had brought along we spent a sleepless night in an old pack rat-infested cabin that we owned on another property. We could hear the river about one half mile away roaring and thundering as we had never heard it before in any previous high water period. After listening to this unearthly voice all night, when morning came we ventured back to the top of the hill overlooking our property and building area fully expecting to see the river plain swept clean of all cabins and vehicles. But praise the Lord! The first thing we saw was the little powerhouse shed and the old cabin. The other buildings, including our cabin, were screened from our view by timber, but we had to assume they were okay, since the two structures we could see had been the most vulnerable. And so it was when we finally could return, there was damage everywhere, but no buildings were lost and fortunately the flood had gotten into only a couple of our cabins.

The river now seemed to have reached its high point and as we could see had already receded from its peak a little overnight and would now lower itself day by day. As we finally were able to return to our cabin we found debris and sludge in two of our rental cabins, but fortunately it had not entered our residential cabin, though it was within inches of the floor level.

1964 flood damage to the pole bridge over the North Fork River.

The slippery mess and drift left behind defied description and actually took a year or more to completely wash away. But we were very lucky when we compared all this to what we were now hearing by radio about the many other areas of northwestern Montana. On the Middle Fork River south of Glacier Park the Great Northern Railroad had a washout that was so extensive the estimate was that to rebuild the trackage in this area would be a bigger job and more expensive than the original construction of the railroad. The main highway No. 2, which was along this railroad bed in many places, would also take months in the rebuilding. The town of Columbia Falls, our nearest town, was completely flooded in a good part of town that was in lower areas. The damage was in the millions.

Over on the east side of Glacier Park on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, where creeks went wild, there was some loss of life, but actually there was remarkably little loss of lives when compared to the magnitude of the disaster.

There were both County and Park work crews stationed at Polebridge to try and save the pole bridge over the river, but once again one end of the bridge was undercut and swept away. It was two years before the County and Park people could agree as to who was to finance the repair job.

We have often wondered why a good concrete and steel bridge was not built here long ago. They finally did build a good concrete bridge 20 miles farther south at Scoville Corner which led into the Park. The local summer people and others have consistently blocked any efforts to improve roads and bridges in the North Fork and I believe this attitude prevails to this day.

FURUKAWA FAMILY

In that period of time when we were operating a small cabin rental business as well as my log construction and stone masonry business, we had a great variety of customers. Among these were a couple of Japanese American brothers, one of whom had a wife and two little girls; the other man was single. The wife and children were quite shy. Both men had served in WW II with distinction in the famous Japanese American Battalion which was the most decorated unit of WW II in the European theatre where I also served. I had heard of this group a number of times while I was still overseas and they really put a lot of fear in the German troops. Some of their relatives had been involved in the deportation to internment camps from the west coast to inland areas. These were very friendly people and being on common ground regarding wartime service, we often had discussions regarding the war and everything related to it. The older brother who was a surgeon was very bitter about the deportation of relatives to internment camps, while they were fighting for this country and doing it very well. One could easily see how they would feel.

The older of the brothers who had the family said they were so pleased with the accommodations at our place they wanted to know if there was land they could purchase and then have a cabin like the one they were renting built for them. Since I did have some land available at the time near Tepee Lake about three miles away, I took them to look at it. As it turned out they ended up buying a lot from us and contracting for a cabin to be built, the exact duplicate of the cabin they had rented at our place on the river. The cabin was to have a complete modern system—water, sewer and power plant, such as we had at our place.

Since Tepee Lake water was okay for most purposes it would serve them well, but the doctor wanted a well, mostly for drinking water. So we contacted a well driller and although no one had ever drilled a water well in this area, the well driller thought there was a good chance of getting water so near a lake. But it was a chancy thing and by the time the driller got down 85 feet the new

owner called it off and decided to use the lake water instead. These well drilling jobs are always very expensive, and when they don't produce water, are always a great disappointment.

Cabin Walt built for the Furukawa family on Tepee Lake.

PACK RAT OR TRADE RAT

Stories about the pack rat, or trade rat as he is known in some parts of the country, are rather common and often of a strange or comic nature. This secretive little varmint has been the cause of some destruction as well.

This compulsion to take and carry bright colored or shiny objects like pieces of glass and tinfoil great distances and deposit them in their nests is a well-known habit. As I remember it when I was a boy, that as for the trade object which he would leave after taking what he wanted, as often as not, it would be a chunk of horse manure, or as we kids used to call them "road apples."

At the time when I purchased the 160 acres of land that had been an old homestead on Tepee Lake, I discovered an old trapper's cabin in a remote corner of the property. No one living in the area at that time knew anything about it or who might have built it. It could indeed have dated back to the old Hudson Bay Company era whose trappers had covered this country as far back as the Lewis & Clark era. Anyhow the brush and trees had grown up so dense around the little cabin that it was by pure chance that I discovered it. The cabin was very small with a mere crawl-in opening and more the size of a doghouse, obviously intended for staying just overnight or in a storm. However, the little shack was so full of debris that pack rats carry and store that no way could anyone have entered it.

In this place miles from any human habitation, these little animals had carried in whatever was available to build their immense nest. This one consisted mostly of small tree branches, pinecones, some small rocks, some larger than a golf ball, some horse manure, and by probing into the pile there were some glass shards and pottery pieces, harness buckles and right on top of this immense pile lay an old stained and weathered corn cob pipe. Again, I repeat, there was no human habitation either ancient (Indian) or recent, within miles, which makes one wonder just how far these animals will carry anything they fancy.

On an old abandoned homestead near some property I had purchased was an old barn with a loft and up in the loft pack rats had piled cow chips, dirt clods, weeds of all kinds, pinecones and horse manure, as well as broken glass and tin cans. This pile was almost six feet high and I decided to pull it apart and see what was inside. In the center was a nest, well padded with hair and fur of some animal they had probably found dead somewhere, and the nest was so lined and insulated that they were perfectly comfortable even in the extreme cold winters of this country, where 50 degrees below zero was not uncommon. Here in Arizona where these animals are also found they have been known to build nests in auto engines and chew the wiring, causing very expensive car repair jobs.

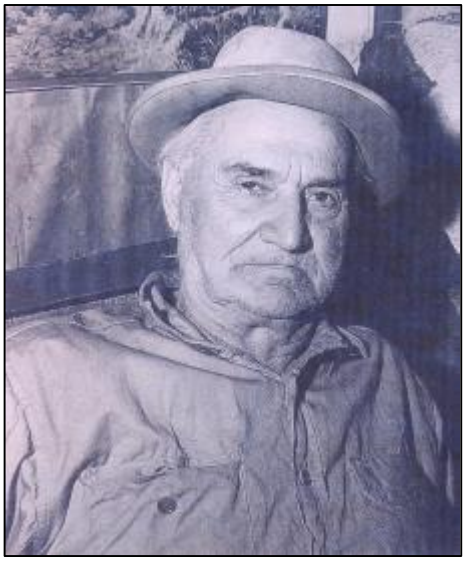
In the fall of 1970, Hazel and I had decided we would like a change in location for our winter vacation, so we drove over to Yuma, AZ. It so happened that Al and Lucille Brygger had settled in Yuma and had suggested we might like it there. Al was a former banker, millionaire, developer, Hazel had worked for in previous years and we had enjoyed Al and Lucille's company at our place in Montana when they visited us.

Hazel and I roamed around Yuma for a while looking at various apartments and were fortunate in getting one that was entirely new and had a swimming pool almost at our doorstep. Al called almost immediately after we were settled in and asked if I would be interested in some work during our winter stay. What he referred to was concerning one of his clients who had been financed by Al to set up an extensive citrus orchard development, but his problem had to do with a very expensive house that he had built, but when the contractors left many things in the house started coming apart or probably weren't properly constructed in the first place; such as doors and windows that did not fit or close properly, plumbing that did not function properly, fixtures that came loose and fell out, and so on ad infinitum.

I told the man Hazel and I were really on our winter vacation, but if he didn't mind my style or methods of working I would take on the job. I explained to the man that I would work on the days when Hazel and I did not have plans to go sightseeing or visiting or whatever else we may have planned. If that was agreeable to him we would get along okay. Hazel and I always enjoyed roaming around in new country and areas and we did not want to be tied down too much with this job. It all seemed to be agreeable and worked out very well, although there was so much work to do that I knew early on that I would never be able to complete all of it.

The family was a very interesting combination of English, American, and Spanish. The man had been a pilot in the American Air Force and his wife was Spanish. I think there were ten or more children, some of whom were already away from home in schools or working. It was a very nice family and the lady of the house was a most gracious person and gave me complete freedom of the house as though I were one of the family.

The one story in this country, which was related to me by others, has probably haunted me the most. It was the legend of Charlie Wise, the Canadian trapper, and the tragedy that he suffered some years before I came to this country. Originally, Charlie was a U.S. citizen. The story goes that he came from the Pennsylvania Dutch country as a young man. He did speak with a rather thick accent. In time he had married and had a homestead just west of the Polebridge store. Then he and his wife had a little girl. Details about the wife and child were always somewhat sketchy. Evidently, Charlie's wife was a rather shy person who was not too well known even by near neighbors.



Charlie Wise in later years (Mel Ruder photo)

As the story goes one day the little girl picked up a rather large button, and as children so often do put it in her mouth and sucked it into her windpipe. Of course, choking took place and the story does not tell what efforts may have been made to dislodge the button. The Heimlich maneuver no doubt was not known in those days. It appeared that the windpipe was not entirely obstructed and the little girl was getting some air, but with great difficulty.

This had happened in wintertime when roads were snowbound and no vehicle could get out. So Charlie took the girl in a pack on his back and with snowshoes headed for town 45 miles away. He did make it to town but here the story becomes somewhat confused in detail. The little girl either died on the train to Spokane or after they got her to a hospital. The fact remained that after all the effort to save the girl, she did die.

The other part of the story concerns the mother, who apparently had a cold or she might have walked out with Charlie and the girl, but as the story continues she then developed pneumonia and eventually she also died. This double tragedy had such a devastating effect on Charlie that he abandoned his house and went north into Canada and wasn't seen for a very long time. When a few people finally saw him again, they said he had turned into a bitter recluse and after a time he sold his homestead in the U.S. and became a Canadian citizen. He was then seen only seldom for years except at one time of year when he came out to sell his furs, since he had become a trapper in Canada. At that time, it was said he usually went on a roaring drunk that would last for days, then he would go back to his wilderness for another year.

When I came to this country, Charlie had evidently mellowed some, and when I got to know him he seemed to be a kindly quiet person easy to talk to. He had a team of horses and a dog, half German Shepherd, half wolf, and when he built a cabin for himself in Canada, he had a separate part of his cabin marked off for his horses in the same building. It was a crude lean-to of immense large logs and as he told everyone, the horses and dog helped keep his cabin warm in wintertime. Since my original cabin was a mere ½ mile from the Canadian border, I saw Charlie now and then when he would visit nearby neighbors. The Canadian Customs Officer, Jim Sinclair, and his wife often had him as a visitor; also the old man, Frank Clute, whose homestead was directly at the border and who had helped me a lot the first few years of my life in this country. I remember very well at times when I was visiting Frank, Charlie would come by and the three of us would sit up

and talk into the small hours of the morning. It was a great experience for me to hear all these tales as a newcomer to the country. As I knew him at this time he was living the most basic of lives, perhaps as some of his Indian friends might live.

As the years went by when I was in the country, Charlie seemed to mellow somewhat and he was even seen at the local dances occasionally, though I never saw him dance. However, it seems he never got the drinking under control. At the dances where liquor flowed freely he would often end up somewhere in a corner or a back room dead drunk and fast asleep.

The story also goes that he had a rather good education and was something of a construction engineer. He did bid on a contract to build the first bridge across the North Fork River just across the border in Canada and hired most of his laborers from the local people. He also built a section of the north end of the North Fork Road to the Canadian border. In those days there were no bulldozers available and all the work was done by horses to move dirt and rocks. Charlie was well liked by everyone and finished his bridge and road in record time.

I believe this bridge, or at least part of it, is still in use at this time. It was repaired several times because of flood damage and I remember doing some of this repair work together with the Customs Officer, Jim Sinclair, who was also my friend.

Bridge at the border Charlie Wise built under contract

My contacts with Charlie became more and more infrequent as he got older, but he was always friendly and in a sense he was sort of a back woods philosopher, and my Hazel was to remember him well because at our shivaree he singled her out while he was still sober. Since he had heard that she was a city girl, he told her she would get lonely when her man had to be away working and said she should sit by the river and listen to it and it would comfort her in her loneliness.

Hazel told me later in our lives in this country that it had indeed been quite true as Charlie had said it would be.

As the night of our shivaree and dance wore on toward dawn, Charlie was missing and much later we found him in the back of someone's pickup dead drunk and out like a light. As for the river, it did have a voice and if you listened, you could understand what Charlie was talking about.

Charlie died in the later years of our time in this country. As I remember they buried him near his old habitat where he surely had wanted to be. A kindly man who had suffered a devastating tragedy.

And speaking of emergencies that can occur in such a remote country as this North Fork country when you live 50 miles from the nearest town or doctor, you are taking a calculated risk that if an emergency occurs that you could be up against a life-threatening situation you might not be able to cope with. The following incident will illustrate what I mean.

Hazel and I had a common practice of using cough drops or some kind of lozenges to alleviate sore throat or the symptoms of a common cold. So it was that as we went to bed one night during the winter, Hazel had apparently placed a cough drop in her mouth and before it had dissolved she had fallen asleep. Evidently I was also asleep but was suddenly awakened by a violent struggle in progress beside me. Not knowing what was happening I called to Hazel to find out what the problem was and received no reply except for a kind of gasping gurgle. I then became very alarmed and came fully awake and got a light and noticed right away that Hazel seemed to be in some kind of spasm and convulsions, but could not talk. She did gesture to me and pointed to a box of cough drops on the dresser.

Suddenly and then only did I realize what had taken place. She had evidently sucked the cough drop into her windpipe and was gasping for air. I had no way of knowing just how serious the situation was and Hazel could not speak. In those days the Heimlich maneuver was unheard of, but I had remembered that people would slap a person on the back to dislodge food stuck in the throat or esophagus. So not knowing what else to do I gave Hazel a sharp slap on the back and the offending cough drop popped out. What a relief! You can bet we both pledged never to put a cough drop in our mouths at bedtime.

This incident haunted me for years because it pointed up the fact that our existence in this remote country could be a very fragile thing, and, yes indeed, we both believed in a guardian angel!

This incident also reminded me of the time when I was about six years old and they removed my tonsils and adenoids. For many weeks after the operation, I had a sore throat and did a lot of coughing at night. Mother would never allow me to take a cough drop in my mouth at bedtime, but I remember to this day that she would place a Smith Brothers black cough drop in a half glass of water where it would dissolve and I would sip this water whenever a coughing spell would start. How wonderfully intelligent and compassionate our dear Mother was.

BLACK WOLVES

Long before I ever had any thoughts about going west, I always enjoyed reading outdoor magazines as a boy in Nebraska. I was fascinated by stories about the unusual in the wild west

One of these stories was about a Canadian hunter and trapper who had come upon a pack of wolves in the wilds of British Columbia, but the strange part of it was that they were all coal black. These animals were a matter of legend. Now and then for many years in the past a story would surface about a single animal that was seen and reported to be black. Many people discounted these stories as imagination, gray wolves and even an occasional white animal, but black? probably a figment of someone's imagination!

When I became a resident of northwestern Montana which, of course, is adjacent to British Columbia, I made inquiry of some old timers in the area, especially Charlie Wise. Charlie had a dog who was, as he claimed, a cross between a German Shepherd and a wolf. A print of this dog is included in this narrative and it's hard to tell which animal he favors, but he was definitely coal black, and I had no reason to doubt the word of Charlie Wise, who had a good reputation for veracity in that country. Among other things, he insisted that these were Siberian Wolves, which had come across the Bering Straits in prehistoric times and he may have been right.

To get to the point of my story, one early morning Hazel and I were preparing to make a shopping trip to Kalispell and while eating breakfast at the table just under our picture window, I happened to see some movement on the far bar at the bend of the river. It was impossible to tell exactly what it was with the naked eye, so moving my telescope into position I soon saw what had seemed to be a young black bear was actually a black wolf and he was coming down the bar toward our cabin.

My excitement ran high and forgetting the rest of my breakfast, I reached for one of my rifles and headed upriver on one of my trails inside the woods. Since the wolf was traveling in the open along the bar, I could get a glimpse of him now and then as he approached. I hoped for a shot once he got close enough, but suddenly I saw him turn and start streaking away in the direction from which he had come. I got in several shots before he was out of range, but all that accomplished was to speed him on his way. It was not my lucky day and I could only guess that he had gotten my wind and decided to leave the country.

Some years later an out-of-state hunter shot one of these animals, so that finally verified the legend of the black wolves.

VISITORS

In those years after Hazel and I were married in June 1948, we had any number of friends and relatives come to visit us. I like to think that they enjoyed our company, but I am also aware that the Montana country had a certain allure which probably brought some of them back year after year.

Among those who came most often were Vi and Budd Nordquist, who to the best of my reckoning came 15 different summers. Budd had this obsession with catching large Dolly Varden trout and wrestling them out of the river. Budd was within a month or so of my age and we enjoyed each other's company and got along first rate as a couple of brothers might. We had many great visits with these two people and went on huckleberry picking expeditions, grouse hunts, and exploring trips with them.

Another family who came quite regularly were the Paul E. Ryan family, Paul and Jean and their three little girls. The girls found our river front especially enticing and would play all day long beside the river, building all sorts of things and usually getting good and wet. As they got a bit older the idea of doing some fishing as their parents were doing became more interesting to them and I do believe that they caught some of the native trout. Hazel and I marveled at how these girls grew from year to year and by the time we left Montana and moved to Arizona they were into their teens.

Kathy eventually married Aaron Wilson and they came to visit us in Arizona, just a year or so before Hazel passed away. Paul E. Ryan was Hazel's nephew whose entire working career was with Boeing Aircraft. Just recently (1989) Kathy came to visit with her two-year-old son. She and her husband had come down from Tacoma, WA, where they live to visit Aaron's sister and family

in Phoenix. So, her sister-in-law brought Kathy and her boy as well as one of her youngsters down to my place for a visit. And a very pleasant visit it was. I was some impressed by the way the two girls were in control of the youngsters, because as someone has said at the age of two years they are often like handling a sack of snakes. Anyhow Kathy and I went through my photo albums which brought many pleasant memories of the past to mind.

Then there were Corliss and Marian Rasmussen. Corliss, who liked to be known as Corky, was a sometime hunting companion for me when the grouse season was on, and we had a great time chasing down these elusive birds, but we usually managed to shoot enough of them for the girls to cook up a good feast, and then a lot of good conversation afterward. Corky was one of about five pastors who served the Columbia Falls Lutheran Church in the years after World War II. These good people were also among those who regularly invited us to lunch after church services, knowing that we had driven 50 miles over a primitive mountain road to come to church. These were very kind people and the very best of friends.

During that period when I was courting Hazel, we had discussed a good many things as any couple would. Among these Hazel had expressed a wish and hope to have a piano. Coming to live in an isolated setting she felt a piano could contribute much to her peace of mind and alleviate loneliness. And she was a very good pianist. So after our marriage we started looking around for a used instrument, as a new one would have been out of reach for us. We had so many other things to buy that our finances would be stretched to buy a used piano. We checked with various places in Kalispell and Missoula and probably some other towns where instruments were sold. We were taking our time looking around for a possible bargain, but we found nothing we could afford.

On a return trip from visiting my dad in Fort Collins we happened to stop at Three Forks, Montana, for lunch and also to see if my old friend Dave Andrews was still Postmaster there. It turned out they had moved away some years before. As we were about to leave this rather small town I happened to spot a small second hand store down the street, and I told Hazel if she wanted to wait in the car I would check the store and see if by chance they might have a piano. When I entered the store, it was so full of all kinds of second-hand items, mostly furniture, that I could hardly walk around in the place. I asked the proprietor if by chance he had a piano. He allowed as how he thought there was one way in the back of his store behind a lot of used furniture. He moved a few things and there was the piano, a very dark varnished upright probably from the early decades of this century. It had many cigarette burns and liquor glass ring marks and deep scratches in the finish. It certainly looked like a piano that had spent its latter days in a bordello or at least in a honky-tonk of some kind. In this part of Montana that would not have been unusual.

My main concern was about two things: whether it had a good tone and whether the body of the instrument was solid hardwood. There was no visible trademark, so it was hard to guess what sort of quality the piano may have had. I noticed by close checking that the frame was indeed hardwood and no veneer on the body. Satisfied with that I went to get Hazel so she could check out the tone quality and mechanism of the keys and pedals. She felt that it had probably been a well-built instrument of good quality. As to the interior mechanism one could only guess. We asked the man for a price and he gave us a very reasonable figure. Then we asked him if he would crate it and ship it out to us, to our nearest town Columbia Falls, a distance of about 300 miles. The man agreed to do this for an additional $25.00, which was very fair.

In due time the piano arrived in Columbia Falls and we had our mail carrier bring it on up to our place with his truck. The following winter I spent all my spare time stripping the old black varnish from the piano and sanding out most of the defects, scratches and cigarette burn marks in the wood

and then giving the wood a seal coat of natural color varnish. We also had it tuned twice in the next 20 years in Montana but have not had it tuned since we moved to Arizona. The tone is still remarkable, good even after these many years. Since my Hazel passed away I have not had the urge to have it tuned. During the time when I was refinishing the piano I discovered the name Kimbal inside, so it did turn out to be a well-known brand.

THE SHARP PAINTING

After I had become interested in doing some oil painting, I was especially attracted to the western artists such as Russell and Remington. Since Russell had worked to a great extent in western Montana, he was perhaps of special interest to me.

The urge to paint was probably stimulated by the fact that my mother was a very good amateur painter in the watercolor media, and also pastel and charcoal. Most of her work was handed down to daughters and granddaughters, but I was fortunate to get some of her work also.

When the opportunity presented itself, I managed to visit some galleries and museums where western art was on display and I was interested in particular in the paintings of both Remington and Russell. Thus it came to the point where I attempted copies of several Russell paintings.

I might also say that my interest in this art form may have had its beginning during World War II. Our unit was stationed in Tripoli, Libya, during the summer of 1943 and after General Rommel was chased out of this area, there were a lot of Italians left behind who had been part of the Italian dictator Mussolini's project to colonize Libya. Some of these people were artists and were trying to eke out a living in small shops and along the streets of Tripoli. I purchased several small watercolors and charcoal etchings at one of these places and still have them on my wall. Another item of interest on this wall is a charcoal etching of the famous World War I air ace Baron Richthofen. This particular etching was done by my mother at my special request and was the last piece of artwork she did before she passed away. My grandniece, Vicki Schwartz, requested this etching and I've promised it to her before I leave this earth.

In the course of my roaming around looking for artwork, I did not rule out second-hand furniture stores and also stores that sold all kinds of second-hand items. In our shopping town of Kalispell in Montana, there were several used furniture and second-hand stores which I frequented whenever we came to town. To me these places were always fascinating and frequently I purchased some very useable items that would have been too expensive for me if purchased new. I believe that over a certain period of time I purchased four or five used wood burning kitchen stoves to be used in our house and our rental cabins. Tools of various kinds were often the best buys in these places, if you knew how to pick them. I had been looking for a heavy-duty electric drill and found one in one of these shops. The problem was a defective trigger switch which did not activate the drill as it should have. Because of this defect, I purchased the drill dirt cheap. It turned out to be a good buy since I finally repaired the switch and still have the drill in use after perhaps 25 years.

However, while I was in this second-hand store I noticed the man had some old paintings in various cheap looking frames. Always interested in old paintings, one of these appealed to me for some vague reason and I purchased it for about $5.00. The frame was very old and coming apart, so I discarded that and decided to make a new frame some time. I put the little painting, 18" x 12" with some of my paintings and art items and promptly forgot about it.

I suppose many people have thought of finding a lost Russell or Remington or some other famous artist's work, but, of course, that never happens except in "stories." I noticed the name signed at

the left bottom of this painting as J.H. Sharp, and it meant nothing to me. I presumed it was some amateur like myself whose work had struck my fancy, because it depicted a night or twilight scene along a small river with a cove of trees and a group of Indian tepees along the shore. I suppose it seemed unusual to me because it was a night-time scene which are not too common.

After a few years from that time we sold our home place in Montana and moved to Green Valley, and some years after we were settled in Arizona, I happened to be leafing through some western magazine and noticed an article about an eastern art collector and it mentioned the various artists whose work he had been collecting. Among the most prominent of these were Russell, Remington and a number of others of western fame and then the name, J.H. Sharp, came up. This name, Sharp, seemed to ring a distant bell for me, though it took a while to sink in and register in my mind. Then suddenly it surfaced. This was the name signed to the little painting I had purchased in the second-hand shop some years past when we were still living in Montana.

So now the search began. In all the confusion of our move from Montana to Arizona, many items were misplaced and some lost. After an intensive search, I finally found the little painting. I wrote to the art collector back east asking for an opinion and he wrote and suggested I send him a photo of the painting which I did and he then said he believed it was probably authentic and that if it was, it would be worth quite a bit.

I then decided to do some research in depth and contacted a number of museums and galleries and discovered some small paintings of similar size as the one I had which were Sharp paintings and had been sold quite a few years ago for more than $8,000.

Among other projects, this man, Sharp, had been commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution to paint over 200 of the Indians that had taken part in the Custer battle in Montana in 1876. Aside from that I discovered there were many other paintings he had done which had been purchased by museums of art and so would not be for sale again. It was an exciting search.

At about this time when I was offering the painting to various art galleries and collectors, my old friend for whom I had built a log lodge in Montana with fireplace and interior design, asked me about the painting, as I had just mentioned it to him once. I did not know till then that as a hobby he collected art on a small scale. When he saw a photo of the painting he promptly purchased it at my price and we were both well pleased with the deal.

THE CELLO STORY

At about the time I was 12 years of age we were living in south central Nebraska about 30 miles from the town of Hastings. Since I was the last child in the family I was at this time the only child left at home. My parents who were both good musicians seemed to think I should learn to play the old treadle organ that we had. My mother whose music education in Germany had included most of the keyboard instruments such as piano, harpsichord and pipe organ as well, did not have the time to give me lessons, so Dad attempted to teach me the treadle organ. He was giving lessons to several local girls as well and tried to include me in his group. Needless to say, it did not work. I was not about to be pushed to the organ for whatever reason and, of course, Dad finally got disgusted with my lack of interest and gave up on me.

There had been a quartet of local amateurs playing at some church functions which we had attended and the cello player had really caught my fancy. Since my father played violin I thought I could surely learn to play a cello. Several years went by and I had heard through a relative of the cello player that he had broken his instrument and so could no longer play. With the persistence of a 12-

year-old I prevailed upon my parents to take me to see the man and find out if I could buy the broken instrument. My dad didn't think much of the idea, but I persisted or perhaps the better word was pestered Dad until he finally took me to see the cello player, who lived some half dozen miles away. I don't remember the details except the price I paid for the broken instrument. It was $5 and came out of my own personal savings. So I had a broken instrument—what next? Hastings was the nearest town of any size and we made inquiries about a musical instrument repair shop and found one in this town. When we brought the cello into the shop the man took one look at the cello and you could tell that he didn't think much about the chance of repairing the instrument. However, he told me to come back in about a month as he was very busy. The man had given me an estimate about the cost of repairs and it was a shock to me since it was about three times the price I had paid for the cello, but now I wanted it more than ever. While waiting for the repair I sent for an instruction book for cello and some rosin for my bow. When I finally got the instrument back from the repair shop I attacked the instruction book with such energy I'm sure I surprised my parents quite a lot, and now after a few months I was able to play along with Mother playing the old treadle organ. I was really enjoying it all and then got some blank music sheets and with Mother's help I copied my part for cello from the many pieces of music my mother had, some of which she had brought from Germany. Having taken a deep and definite interest in this instrument I enjoyed playing together with Mother and she was pleased to see that my interest was positive.

At about the time I was 14, we moved from Nebraska to South Dakota and during my summer vacations I worked for a carpenter-contractor, who hired high school boys and gave them the chance to learn the carpenter's trade. I worked two summers for this man and then I had an unfortunate altercation with one of the other boys on the crew and we were both fired, but the two summers I had learning the carpenter's trade served me well in later years. I might say here that I still have several of the tools I purchased for my use when I was 14-15 years old.

Now since I had already dropped out of school at the beginning of my senior year, I begged my parents to let me go to Omaha or Lincoln where my sisters were living. Since they were married I supposed their husbands might help me get a job. With many misgivings, my parents finally agreed to let me go, and so the cello, which I had not played very much after we had moved to South Dakota, was left behind.

After several false starts in both Lincoln and Omaha, I was finally hired by a photo engraving company in Lincoln where my brother-in-law was also employed as foreman. Without going into detail, I served a five-year apprenticeship at this place only to find that the environment and the use of the chemicals involved was so damaging to my health that I was ordered out by doctors.

My subsequent move to Montana is recorded elsewhere in this narrative. My parents had moved once again and were now about 90 miles north of Bismarck in North Dakota. I managed to route my trip so as to pay them a visit on my way to Montana. I discovered then that in the move they had made, my cello had once again suffered damage and Dad was discouraged trying to keep it from complete destruction. So he told me to take it along to Montana, which I did, wrapped in an old overcoat and it still suffered some more damage. Then in succeeding years it lay in the attic of my old homestead cabin near the Canadian border. The mice got into the body through the openings and filled the body solidly with debris. When World War II came on I stored it with a neighbor for the duration and it got water soaked from a leaky roof. Then after the war I once again stored it in the attic of our new cabin for another 25 years, always thinking to get time to repair it myself—which never happened! Finally, when we were moving from Montana to Arizona, the moving van had taken most everything and Hazel and I were loading our car with odds and ends.

Here were the pieces of the old cello and I was about to throw them on the burn pile of rubbish, but at the last minute, I saw a small space at the top of the load in our car and took it along to Arizona! I think Hazel was amused, but she did not object.

And again, our house in Arizona has an attic and that's where the pieces of cello came to rest, still waiting for someone to do something about it. After several years I had established a small shop in our house in an addition and as usual had a fair number of tools and equipment available. It was about then I had the misfortune to contract the local malaise known as Valley Fever, an insidious disease, caused by a desert fungus, not usually well known or diagnosed, but usually affecting newcomers to Arizona in the desert areas. I believe mine was a mild case, although it certainly sapped all my energy and I was told by doctors that about all one could do was get plenty of rest and good food and be given some antibiotics. It was in this state of mind that I decided to see if there really was anything I could do with the broken-down cello. I took it completely apart and very slowly and carefully carved out a complete new neck, from the very hard local pecan wood, also a new finger board which had been split. Then getting the very best glue available, I made special clamps and put it all back together. Testing it for tone and resonance, I found it surprisingly good. I was really surprised as I had expected nothing much, having done the job more as an exercise in therapy for me during my illness. It had served me well. By the time I had finished the job, I was fairly well over my attack of Valley Fever.

Now I intended learning to play the instrument all over again since it sounded so well. I got a new instruction book and new strings and an expensive new bow and then disaster! In all the years that had gone by since I was 14 with all the injuries I had to my hands and fingers in my stone mason and construction jobs, I did not realize how stiff and inflexible my fingers had become. I could no longer do the fingering required to play. So the age difference from 14 to about 75 took its toll and the cello waits for some younger person with musical talent to take it where I reluctantly left off.

THE APACHE PAINTING

During the last years of our residence in Montana, we had purchased a large lot in the Lakeside-Showlow area on the Mogollon Rim in Arizona. Hazel's sister and brother-in-law lived here since Budd was employed at the local R.E.A Corporation. The lot we purchased was just one lot away from the residence of Budd and Vi.

The lot we purchased had a small sort of summer cabin on it, but it had no foundation and lacked any insulation in the walls. In fact, it was little better than a place to camp out in during the summer. After we purchased it, I spent the better part of one winter working to improve it so that we, or anyone else, could live comfortably in the house in the wintertime. We had been told that the winters here were very mild, so we assumed it was a good place for us to spend the winters when we came down from Montana.

The first few winters were pleasant, but we finally experienced a mixed bag of weather and one winter we had 30 inches of snow in one storm, and more later, so a good part of the winter was rather miserable. We decided this wasn't for us and we put the place up for rent, and we went further south to the Tucson and Yuma areas to spend our winters. During those winters we had spent in the Lakeside area, we got acquainted with an entire new group of people and among these was an elderly couple who had worked on the Apache Indian Reservation at East Fork, Fort Apache. The woman had worked as a sort of assistant to the nurse at the school and her husband had been employed as general handyman.

They were now retired and living on Social Security and a small pension in the Lakeside vicinity. We visited with them off and on and enjoyed their company. They were very German. He especially had a broad accent since he had come from the old country and had an interesting background.

About this time I had been doing some oil painting and the woman had seen some of my amateur efforts. One day when we were visiting at their place, she said she had something she wanted to show me. It turned out to be a rather colorful but definitely amateurish painting on a piece of cardboard of the puberty ceremony for Indian girls. Our friend said it had been painted by one of the Apache Indian boys at the Reservation School and he had offered to sell it to her for a few dollars. She said she believed he just wanted some money to buy some booze, but she gave him the money and then the more she looked at the painting and absorbed the full meaning of it she said it bothered her in the realization that this was really a pagan ritual. So she had hid the painting away somewhere but she wanted me to see it. I was struck by the color combinations and the well depicted ceremony in a primitive sort of way, which was generally not witnessed by white people.

Anyhow the woman liked some of my paintings and offered to give me the Indian painting if I would paint a vase filled with flowers for her. This then became our little trade off and I took the Apache painting mounted it in a simple frame, and when we eventually moved to Green Valley I hung the painting in our bedroom where it has been ever since. It has caused quite a bit of comment over the years from many different people and though I would not classify it as a slick professional painting, I think it has quite an impact as real primitive artwork of a young person who managed to show what he was seeing in a very realistic way.

I would suggest that whoever comes into possession of this painting should not treat it as junk since as a primitive original it may well be quite valuable. Sometimes certain Indians who have made it big in jewelry and other crafts will pay high prices for something done by one of their own people. There is an Indian signature on the painting.

TWO EASY WAYS TO GET YOURSELF KILLED!

In my years spent in Montana the amount of wood which I cut and hauled for stoves and fireplace must be astronomical. Nearly everywhere in the northern part of our valley there were the evidence and aftereffects of the 1910 and also 1929 fires. The 1910 fire in particular was most devastating, both burning a lot of timber. There were many stands of very large Tamarack trees which were not badly burned but were scorched enough to be fire killed. Having a large root system and especially a deep tap root, they did not rot and fall as other trees usually did. So it was, that great stands of these big trees were still standing when I came to Montana in 1932, and I believe, where not cut or disturbed, there are even now many of these still in evidence. There were many on the first property which I purchased near the Canadian border. Since these trees had been dead over 20 years at that time they were well dried out or as they were designated, stump seasoned timber. They were excellent firewood and burned with a very hot fire. These trees varied from three to four feet in diameter at the base and were easily 80 to 100 feet tall, some more than that. The nature of this species was that it usually had a very clean trunk with a cluster of branches near the top. After the trees were fire killed the branches remaining became very brittle and dry, and windy weather, etc. gradually broke many of these limbs off and you would find a collection of them at the base of any Tamarack tree. Marie Peterson in her narrative about the North Fork relates that she often picked up a lot of these branches which were called “squaw” wood (easy to get) and easy to break up into stove wood lengths by merely hitting over the edge of a block of wood.

I cut down many of these large dead trees for firewood and also made many fence posts by splitting the large trunks into size and lengths suitable for that purpose. Also during my time in this country, I made thousands of hand split “shakes” or shingles from these trees.

I want to note here that anyone who now works in the woods and for some time in the past wears a hard hat, but no one wore those hats when first I came to Montana. So it was that time and again when I attacked one of these tall dead trees with saw and axe, the vibration would cause a limb or two to break off perhaps 50 to 100 feet up the tree and come crashing down beside me. The fact that even a small branch falling that distance could easily have brained me never occurred to me, proving one of two things, I either had a guardian angel or just a lot of undeserved dumb luck.

The other situation of great danger which was mostly ignored by people was working on control of a forest fire. The best time to get control of a fire was usually at night, and this was all the more dangerous. Inside the fire line, there were very often trees burning at the roots, since the volatile pitch was concentrated in the roots of a tree. The fire would be very hot and burn off the roots and unnoticed, silently, the tree would fall, crashing down on an unsuspecting worker. We saw this happen on the very first fire we worked on. A hard hat would not have saved this man—another learning experience. These situations were both called “widow makers.”

At the time of my first property purchase in the North Fork in 1933, the property consisted of about 160 acres and there was a small but well-built cabin on the property. The original homesteader, whose name was Henry Nelson, had been a carpenter by trade and had come from Norway. Obviously, he had been a skilled carpenter as the workmanship on the cabin clearly showed.

At the time of my purchase of the property, I entered the cabin by way of a window that had been broken out and then boarded over. As mentioned, the date I took over the property was 1933 and when I entered the cabin I found a calendar on the wall for the year 1918. I assumed that might have been the year the homesteader left the property, and as I had learned earlier he had gone to the west coast for employment. I eventually contacted the owner because I wanted to purchase the property and it was delinquent in taxes. He mentioned a number of items he had left in the cabin, but I only found an old weatherbeaten trunk that he had brought from Norway and it contained a few wood working tools and some old clothes. Anything else had obviously been stolen during a break-in during the 15 years the cabin had been abandoned.

When I left the dude ranch in 1934 and moved into the cabin there were no shelves, cupboards or even boxes to store my food supplies, so the only thing available was the old trunk. By fastening it to the wall on its side I used it as a temporary kitchen cabinet. It worked very well and kept mice out of my dry foods until I had the time and materials to build some permanent wall cabinets. Then the trunk came down off the wall and was used for clothes storage.

As World War II approached for the U.S.A. I prepared to leave Montana and visit my parents who were now living in Fort Collins, Colo., and I would eventually enter the military in 1942. I had packed the trunk with miscellaneous items and stored the trunk in an old barn at the neighbor’s place where it remained for the duration of the war.

After the war, when Mother had passed away and Hazel and I had been married, Dad wanted to enter a retirement home, so we purchased his place in Ft. Collins and spent a winter making improvements on the place to make it more saleable. When we came down from Montana we had packed the old trunk and had it sent by freight to Ft. Collins. We had packed it with a variety of

things we would need through the coming winter, then the following spring we shipped it back to Montana. By that time the old trunk was getting a bit shaky and was starting to come apart.

When we finally sold out in Montana and were ready to move to Arizona and our new home, we again had need of many boxes and also trunks, but this old trunk needed some extensive repairs if it was to be used once more. I reinforced it with a one-half inch plywood lining and we were once again using it in our final move from Montana to Arizona.

After we were somewhat settled in Arizona and I had once again established a workshop, we were in need of various items of furniture. Among other things we wanted a coffee table, and after some repairs on the old trunk with a new top for it and a coat of paint and varnish, it became a very useful item and has been in use as a corner catch-all table ever since and certainly has an authentic antique look.

SALE OF CABINS – End of an Era

In the early summer of 1972, after lengthy negotiations, we finally sold our river front property—Placer Point—to a group of professional people from Texas and Phoenix, AZ. There were mostly doctors and lawyers involved and the payout extended over the next several years. In the meantime we moved to Green Valley, AZ, and settled in at 121 El Naranjo. After some years the group we had sold to decided the property had served their purposes and they, in turn, sold it to the government. The Forest Service then decided to place the five cabins on the property up for bid.

Of the five cabins, I had built four. The older cabin, which had been wrecked when I purchased the place, had been occupied by Earl Ryan and wife for some years and was then abandoned. Ryan had also cut the roof timbers when he left so that with a collapsed roof no one could use the cabin. When I bought the property I repaired the roof so I could live there while I was constructing a new cabin.

No one seemed to know who had built this cabin or how old it was. There was no foundation under it, and the lower logs were gradually rotting away. I looked upon it only as a temporary convenience until I built a better cabin. However, all the cabins were sold, including this one, and were moved from the property.

None of these log buildings could be moved in one piece. They all had to be taken apart log by log and hauled away and then rebuilt the same way elsewhere.

Our main, or resident cabin, was purchased by a party from the Whitefish Lake area, and the man wrote to me wanting a detailed account about the building. He stated that as a historical matter he intended affixing a plaque on the building at its new site and wanted all the information available about it, and he was to furnish me with pictures of the cabin at the new site.

The cabin we had named the “Homesteader”—one of our rental cabins—was purchased by a friend who moved it to an eight-acre tract near our former mailbox, which we had sold to him some years before we left Montana [David and Patti Hegland]. He did add an upper level to the cabin and changed its appearance quite a bit. He was well satisfied with the results.

The largest of all the cabins, the one on the upper level with a fantastic view toward the mountains in the park, as well as those in Canada, was purchased and moved just a few miles to the south near old Ford Ranger Station and rebuilt. This was the cabin my old friend, Baird Chrisman, wanted very much, but in placing his bid he sent in his personal check which was the wrong procedure, and even though his bid was high, it was rejected. He said he could have kicked himself

for the mistake. As of now I don't know who purchased the two smaller cabins. Perhaps before I end this history I may know.

Hammer guest cabin moved to the Hegland property on the North Fork Road

In that time frame, from June 30, 1948, when Hazel and I were married, till we left Montana in 1973, after selling our home place in 1972, we had quite a few visitors as well as paying guests who rented the three cabins we had available for that purpose. However, I will recall only Hazel's and my relatives here who came to visit us.

Since Hazel came from a large family, eight girls and three boys, it naturally followed that there were more visitors from her side than there were from mine. But we enjoyed them all. It was also true that some of Hazel's relatives came more often because they probably felt Hazel had taken on a difficult situation, marrying me and living in a rather primitive environment; and since she had been a city gal they felt she might have needed moral support from her family. To a degree this may have been true, but my Hazel adapted herself remarkably well and had a great determination to make everything work out in the best way possible.

As for my relatives, there were few who managed the trip and visit partly because our family was not a large one, and also most of them had much farther to come for a visit. However, Lois and Leo who raised five children did come out with three children once and would probably have come more often after the children grew up, but by then we had sold out and left Montana. So we did have Margaret, Barb, and John who was the youngest come with their parents just once. I think John was perhaps 10 or 11 at the time. I'm sure it was an unusual experience for all of them because they had lived most of their lives in flat Kansas country, with none of the wildlife we had in Montana.

My younger sister, Maria, (Lois' mother) never did manage a trip out our way, and even today I wonder why this was so. Maybe she just wasn't as adventuresome as her daughter. Some years before Lois and Leo and the family came, my older sister, Margaret, and her husband, Fred, with their two girls came out. The two girls were Marge, 14 or 15, and Linda perhaps 10 or l2. It happened that Hazel's sister Vi and her husband Budd Nordquist were there at the same time and

my brother-in-law, being the fisherman that he was, kept us well supplied with fish to eat and also showing Fred, my brother-in-law on my side, how to catch the big trout, which we smoked.

I also provided a bit of excitement for everyone by killing a bear early one morning. The bear had been raiding our strawberry patch and I had been waiting for a chance to dispose of him. I think the two girls felt I was rather cruel in disposing of the bear, but I explained to them that our strawberry patch was part of our living and income which I needed to protect.

Regarding Hazel's relatives, as I recall, sister Cleo from New York was probably the first one to visit us in 1949 and then Hazel's mother came and stayed with us a while. After that, sister Olive and her husband, Paul Ryan, came and they enjoyed their visit so much they came another year and convinced son, Paul Gene, to come with his family and meet at our place. After they had been at our place once they too liked it so well they came year after year. Their three little girls had a ball playing along the shore of our river all day long, never being bored. These three were to become my favorites of Hazel's family and even today when they write they always recall the fun they had playing on our gravel bar in Montana. The family lives in Bellerive, WA, and Paul Gene has been employed by Boeing Aircraft for most of his adult life. Their girls' names were Ann, Kathy, and Nancy.

Then there were Dale and Judy Monson. Dale was one of Hazel's nephews, and when he married Judy they came and spent part of their honeymoon at our place in one of our rental cabins. They also discovered my old V-8 Ford Coupe rusting away in my garbage dump and thought they could rebuild it, so I gave it to them; and together with Dad Stewart Monson, they brought out a trailer and loaded the old Ford on it and took it back to Minnesota where they took it all apart and rebuilt it from ground up. They sent us a picture of it some years later and you could see they had done a magnificent job on the Ford. Will probably never know how many hours they spent on the Ford, but we have a picture of the completed job and it was like new. Then there were Ethel and Ordway Sevennes, their two boys and Ord's mother. Ord's mother distinguished herself by asking Hazel how she ever managed to get to live in such an out-of-the-way place. I don't know what answer she got to that question.

I think Ordway and the boys did not have much luck fishing since it was late in the season, so they were not too enthused about it at all. Then there was Hazel's brother, Martin, and wife Georgia. They met us in Columbia Falls one day as we were coming back from a trip to Colorado. The weather was bad, stormy and rainy and the road up the North Fork was in terrible condition. Of course, Hazel and I were used to that, but our visitors were scared as we came the 50 miles northward at a slow pace. It was dark when we finally got near our place and had to go through one of the worst mud holes on the trip. I was in the lead and got through just barely and looking back I saw that Hazel's brother and wife were stalled in the mud hole, so pulling aside I walked back and after some tugging, pulling, and pushing we got him out too. We then had no further trouble, but our guests were some shaken and wondered if the trip had been worthwhile. After a few days they felt better about it all.

Hazel's younger brother, Chester, also came later with his three children. His wife had passed away. His children were teenagers and enjoyed the place a lot but poor Chester, seeing a rock up high in a cut bank, tried to climb up to it and fell hurting his ankle rather badly, so they had to leave sooner than they expected to get him to a doctor for his ankle

Then there was my nephew, Jim McCoy, and his wife, Nancy. After he was released from the hospital in Galesburg, IL (El Paso, TX), where they had patched his war wounds they decided to

pay us a visit. Jim was still in a rehabilitation period, but he was doing well. Since he had lost so much muscle on his rump, he needed a pillow to sit on in order to drive a car, but he was doing well and the time they spent with us was real recuperation for Jim, fishing and picking huckleberries and sawing firewood. We took it easy and I'm sure Jim and Nancy both enjoyed it all and relaxed from the several years of hospitalization Jim had gone through with Nancy in attendance.

Budd and Vi Nordquist probably spent more time with us than any of the relatives. Vi was another of Hazel's older sisters and she and her husband spent 15 summer vacations at our place. Budd was a dedicated fisherman. The kind who feel it as an addiction and the feel of a 10- or 15-pound bull trout on the end of his line was a thrill beyond compare for this nutty fishing brother-in-law of mine. Watching him, fighting and bringing to shore one of these big trout was a show I always enjoyed watching and I suppose he had much the same feeling watching me do it, too. It was a thrill and is one of the things that I will probably never forget.

Budd also left this imperfect place some years ago, as did my Hazel just a while back, and I visualize them both recounting the many happenings and fishing stories and huckleberry expeditions we went on and having a lot of laughs, too.

ROOF RAFTERS

In that period of time which was the fall of 1947 and the winter and early spring of 1948, I was very busy building the new cabin, which I had promised Hazel I would have for us the following summer. It did not get completed as planned for the simple reason that I had not counted on all the details that were to be done once the main structure was finished. We had decided not to move in until all fixtures, cabinets, etc., were in place. The plumbing alone was quite a project calling for pipes from the well just at the rear of the cabin underground deep enough to avoid freezing, a separate compartment for the well pump and engine to pump the water into a storage tank in the upper level of the cabin, cabinets wherever there was a little extra room—details, details.

Since I was always working alone on most of my construction jobs, I was at times caught in a dilemma by not having someone at hand for a critical job that really required two people. This produced a little story which Hazel took pleasure in relating to our relatives, friends, and visitors alike. It had to do with the raising of the roof rafters for the cabin. A print will show the rafters just after they were raised into place. The reader should visualize these rafters laying down on an extended scaffold at the center of the building; the two upper points nailed together and then a rope attached at the point and the rope running up to a pulley on a pole higher than the peak of the roof, the idea being to pull the two rafters up to an upright position where they would then be nailed into place. The problem was that I did not have enough weight to counterbalance the rafters and pull them into position. To improvise, I looked over my scrap iron pile, which I had accumulated over the years, and found a three-foot section of railroad iron which would weigh 75 to 100 lbs. I took it to the cabin and up on the scaffold and tied it to the rope that would pull the rafters up, and so together with my weight as I jumped off the building with the added weight of the iron, I brought the rafters up and into place.

In years to come, after I had acquired an Army Jeep, I used a cable running down to the Jeep to do the same job but with greater ease and no special problems.

During the time when I was building what Baird Chrisman called his "castle on the hill," I used the Jeep and cable to raise all the logs and the rafters as well. My Jeep was probably the one best

investment I ever made for handling almost any job involving construction, from bringing the logs in with the Jeep and trailer at times 10 miles from my construction site to raising the logs as the building job progressed.

THE GOLDEN MANTLED SQUIRREL

I suppose a volume could be written about these little characters who seem to have a natural affection for humans and often behave as though they wanted to be part of the family. The first encounter I had with these was on trips into the higher mountain country in Glacier Park and then later during the years when I was working for the Forest Service west of Glacier Park.

Usually by the time we had pitched our tents and set up our camps these little rascals would be around getting chummy with people with an eye toward getting some food. Of course, one got the impression that they had developed this know-how and affinity for humans and human food because of previous contacts with the human element. However, on various occasions, we proved that this was not necessarily true. There were times when we ventured into very remote areas where it was unlikely that anyone had ventured before and still the same characteristics of this little animal prevailed.

A pine squirrel had to be coaxed to come and take food from humans by contrast. A chipmunk, although a gutsy little character, was skittish when near humans and would run off at any slight movement. Rabbits, gophers, wild cats, skunks, and various other varmints will usually avoid contact with humans and, if approached in a careless way by humans, are almost certain to bite.

I've been bitten by a muskrat, a rabbit, a gopher, a wild mink, and any number of times by my ranch mink who never seemed to be really domesticated; also by some other animals and birds, and I'll include a horse who was eating a cut-up apple out of my hand and probably thought my hand was part of the apple.

Anyhow, the first time I really had a chance to get acquainted with these Golden Mantled Squirrels, as we called them, was on summer lookout duty for the Forest Service. They seemed to frequent the higher mountains and at that time I had not seen them at lower elevations anywhere, especially not along the river where I would eventually build my cabin.

On the first forest lookout I was in charge of near the border with Canada, I had scarcely moved into my lookout station when I saw several of these colorful fellows scampering around and almost immediately when I left the door to my station open one or more of them would be in the building. Of course, these particular animals had previous experience with humans and their food. They would eat almost anything in the way of the rations provided by the Forest Service. However, I discovered that they did have some preferences. They were especially fond of doughnuts and also hotcakes, or even just the hot cake batter uncooked. If you put out one doughnut one of them would grab it and run away somewhere and hide it to eat later. So I tied a doughnut with a string and hung it high enough in my doorway so they had to jump high to get at it. This was great sport and at times there were as many as three of them hanging on the doughnut and each other trying to eat the doughnut and fighting each other all the while.

When making hotcakes for my breakfast I would usually have some batter left in the bowl. Setting it out in the yard, there would be an immediate scramble. Two or three of them would jump into the bowl and again a fight would develop and by the time the batter had been consumed a good lot of it was plastered all over them and it would take a week or more for them to rub it off. A person serving at this lonely job of lookout could think of a lot of things for amusement and with these

little fellows around there was endless entertainment. Watching all this buffoonery was like watching a bunch of clowns at a circus. There never was an end to their stunts and tricks.

Years later, just after Hazel and I were married, one of these squirrels showed up at our place. I had never seen one at this lower elevation during my pre-war years in this country so it seemed an unusual occurrence. This little fellow entertained us during the summer and he behaved as though he had always lived there. They go into hibernation rather early, about September, and then show up again in late April or May. The following summer he was alone again for a time, but then all of a sudden there was another one and we hoped it meant a pairing so there might be a new generation. Sure enough, the next season there were young ones and from then on there were squirrels here, there, and everywhere.

Since we operated a cabin camp for fishermen and hunters we would often leave children at the place and they would never tire of playing with these friendly little fellows. They seemed to like children especially and would climb all over them to get a peanut or some other food they liked. They were not inclined to bite either. In the many years when they were around there was only one incident where a child was slightly bitten, and the child had been teasing the squirrel with food and then taking it away. The squirrel finally became exasperated bit a finger, but it was not serious and it also taught the child a lesson.

BIRDS

The birds in our area were many: bald eagles, hawks of various kinds, ravens, magpies, nuthatches, who were always going down a tree trunk rather than up as most birds would, so I labeled him our upside-down bird. Then we had woodpeckers of various kinds. The one most spectacular, the Pileated, we called our turkey he was so large. A variety of hummingbirds, the names of which I cannot now recall. I almost missed the golden eagle, then there were three types of jay, the Steller's, the Gray or Canada Jay, and the Clark's Nutcracker. Usually there were two kinds of chickadees, the Black Cap and the Mountain, but now and then there was also another invader. Hazel could call these little birds by imitating their chirp. It was amazing when we were far from home perhaps picking berries, Hazel would start a call and soon there would be a number of these little guys around to see who was doing the calling and they would answer.

One of the more interesting birds of this area was the water ouzel, a small slate gray bird somewhat smaller than a robin that has the unusual capability of a bird to swim or fly under water where it gathered most of its food, such as small fish, hellgramites and rock worms, a bug or worm which builds a housing around itself made of very small pebbles cemented together with a mucous that the worm projects. This worm in particular was a favorite food of the ouzel. The nest of these birds was hard to find and usually built in an inconspicuous place with the entry hole often at the bottom. Built of mud and sticks, it usually looked like part of the surrounding area. In mid-winter with temperatures in the 30-40 below zero range, this spry little bird skips in and out of the icy water between ice floes, singing a merry little song and seemingly enjoying himself immensely.

Of the three types of jay, the Gray Jay was the most common and was locally also called camp robber, although there was always a dispute whether the local name camp robber applied to the Gray Jay or the Clark's Nutcracker. Perhaps it was fair for both of them.

I will speak here about the Gray Jay who was around our house area more than the others, and if you went on a camping trip as soon as you had your tent up and started cooking you could bet your bottom dollar a Gray Jay would light somewhere nearby looking for some food. If you had left

some food out unguarded, sooner or later he would be carrying some of it away. He was rather gregarious like the golden mantled squirrel, but of course food was the purpose of his visit. As with the squirrel at the lookout these birds were ever present, so I wanted to see if I could tempt them to take food from my hand. After many trials I finally managed to get a few of the birds to do just that. After a while all I needed to do was step out of my door with food in my hand and the bird would fly down and either eat it clutching my finger or carry the food away if I released it.

After the war when Hazel and I were married I tried the same method at home. Finally, I got one to come and feed on my hand and when she had young she brought them and taught them to do the same. Then during the summer when we had quite a few visitors, most of the people would try to feed them and it was interesting to see how the birds would take food from some people but not from others and they made this distinction.

One day some of Hazel's relatives were visiting us and among them was a girl of perhaps eight or nine years. She wanted to feed the birds, so Hazel showed her how to hold the food out and be very quiet and steady and the bird would come and eat. The bird came down, but the girl did a very foolish thing; she tried to close her hand on the bird's legs and catch it. Well, the bird was too fast for her and got away, but it so scared the bird that she would not even come and sit on my hand anymore, and so ended what had been an interesting and meaningful little interchange between bird and human. It was too bad because the people who came to visit always enjoyed the little show the birds would put on.

OTTERS

The otter was probably as amusing in his way as any of the animals. In the middle of winter they would find a rather steep bank of snow above the river and since they are a very agile water animal they would make slides in the snow from the highest part of the snow bank down to the river. After coming out of the water soaking wet they would go down these slides, and of course as cold as it was the water from their bodies would freeze on their slide making it very slippery. They would then, sometimes in groups of three to five, spend an entire day just sliding down these slides into the water, having a great time. We watched them from our picture window through our telescope.

THE BALD EAGLE AND THE OSPREY

In nearly 40 years I spent in this North Fork country I've seen all kinds of fishermen and their methods, but I believe none of them can really compare to the bald eagle and the osprey, also known locally as the fish hawk. Of course, these two have very individual methods and are fascinating to watch. For quite a few years there was a bald eagle's nest near the confluence of Kintla Creek and the North Fork River directly north of our cabin. It was not visible to the naked eye from our picture window, but when focusing our telescope in that direction we could see it very well. Since the parent birds raised their young year after year at this nest, it naturally followed that they fished the river just in the area near our cabin. It was spectacular to see these majestic birds come sweeping down and while in full flight dip talons into the water and come up with a good-sized trout.

To the south a short distance from our mailbox, I discovered an osprey nest, locally called a fish hawk. This bird probably does its fishing in a more spectacular way than the eagle, crashing headlong into the water to get his fish and seldom does he miss. However, at that point in time when we had both the bald eagle and the osprey fishing in the same area right in good view of our cabin, we saw some real competition and at times one had to wonder if the osprey would survive.

Since the osprey was a much smaller bird than the eagle he had to depend on his speed and maneuverability to get and keep his fish. Time and again we saw the osprey catch a fish, but then loaded as he was, if the eagle was nearby he was likely to lose his fish. The eagle would pursue the burdened osprey so close that often as not the osprey would drop his fish and then the eagle would pick it out of the air before it hit the water—a real robber baron!

JOHN AND HARRIET WALSH

I will probably never get this narrative completed because more episodes keep coming to my mind. This one is a must because it was one of the more amusing stories.

John and Harriet Walsh were old-time homesteaders in the Glacier Park area. These people, as many others had, homesteaded east of the North Fork River at a time when Glacier Park had not yet been created.

Harriet and John Walsh at their cabin on Big Prairie.

Anyhow, they had acquired the first post office in the North Fork which went by the name of Kintla, probably from the name of twin lakes farther north. The Walshes kept some milk cows and a team of horses. Harriet made and sold butter both locally and probably in town, as well, and she was known to be very generous with her buttermilk to any passerby. Altogether a couple of very pleasant people. However, there was an amusing side to this couple and the story went something like this.

Apparently, John was not of the over-ambitious type and his farm over the years had accumulated an excess of horse manure to the point where the horses had difficulty getting in and out of the barn door. Rather than clean the manure out of his barn, John simply cut out a few logs higher at the bam door and allowed the manure to continue to accumulate.

Story number two—nearly all buildings in this primitive area were built of logs, and as you can see from some of the pictures enclosed in this narrative, the ends of the logs were often extended beyond the notch and either cut off with axe or saw, sometimes at random lengths depending as often as not on the whim of the builder. As previously mentioned, John was not an over-ambitious

person, and he was a procrastinator as well. When getting up his winter's wood supply, it was said he nearly always came short of wood before winter was over. So time and again Harriet would run out of firewood when cooking a meal for company. Embarrassed, she would call to John to rustle up some wood. John, being out of wood, was known to go to his barn and saw off some of the log ends as mentioned above and all this did not embarrass him in the least. And even so John was a likeable person. I know John well, and also his younger brother, Richard or Dick, who was our Flathead County Sheriff for some years.

In the second year I spent in this country, 1933, I had purchased a quarter section homestead near the Canadian border and began looking around the area bordering this property. There were other homesteads just like the one I had purchased which had been long since abandoned, probably because the owner had discovered that there were very few opportunities to make a living. Even so there was evidence of a lot of hard work. Log cabins had been built and most were quite well constructed, although probably most were bachelor quarters and not intended for families or even a woman.

There were a few women in this country and some had come and gone for various reasons. Those that stayed with their husbands in this lonely land in those years before I came and even later were a special breed, you may be sure, and were in a very real sense a remnant of the old pioneer women of yesteryear. I place my Hazel in that category, for she did indeed adapt herself to a life that she found entirely new and strange. Yet in the 25 years that she spent in this country with me, she kept a good spirit and made life livable for both of us in a raw land.

One could not help but admire the dedication of these women to the cause of their husbands, who worked hard and accomplished their goals with mixed success. From the many abandoned homesteads, one could only gather that there was much melancholy despair as one homestead after another was abandoned, in what was probably sad disappointment.

In my roaming around some of these abandoned homesteads, I came upon an old weather-beaten homemade sign in the shape of an arrow, nailed to a tree. Some letters had been burned into the wood and were barely legible which said, "Calgary—200 miles," and the sign pointed due north quite correctly, but there was no road through the mountains to Calgary, not even a trail. One had to wonder, was this just a nostalgic hope for a trip to the big city or was it just a joke?

There were stories passed around in this country of outlaws who had been run out of Texas and had come here for refuge, and of course there was no way of knowing who some of these people were and what sort of past they really had. And, of course, a smart person was not about to inquire.

Again, there was a couple who came to live in this country from somewhere in the Midwest, perhaps Chicago. The man was a professional cook and worked for the Forest Service. It meant he was away from home most of the summer season with the exception of occasional weekends. The woman was quite strikingly good-looking and it was quite evident that she used cosmetics to good advantage. Probably because of this, she did not seem to have many friends among the other women in the country. I had met both of these people early on and had marveled at the woman and how she kept her good looks and a certain note of refinement that was in evidence, as well. One could not help but speculate as to what might have brought these people out here in the first place.

I knew these people before World War II, and as time passed and we neared the time when a number of us joined the armed forces these people left the area, but before they left they offered to sell their homestead to me. I purchased it and then shortly left the country myself and was not

to come back until the war was over and I had served for the duration, as stated elsewhere in this narrative. I then abandoned my original property purchase near the border and moved the eight miles farther south to this property where I eventually built the home cabin Hazel and I lived in for 25 years.

As has always been the habit with people living in a backwoods country everyone had a place to dump their garbage, and it was usually in an out-of-the-way place in heavy brush or in a gully usually some distance from the cabin or living area. After I returned from the war I decided to build on this property and in my roaming around discovered the dump these people had used. Being a collector of old bottles, I dug into the dump and made an interesting discovery. Aside from tin cans which had contained various food items, there were perhaps more whiskey and other liquor bottles than anything else, except that there were also a large number of expensive milk glass jars that had contained expensive cosmetics. One hesitates to speculate whether the woman had perhaps given up on the cosmetics and taken up alcohol, having felt abandoned a good part of the year by her husband. And so in one way or another people leave part of a history of a lifestyle not always apparent on the surface. They had moved to California as I later heard and had both died out there.

Then there was the old fellow who had a homestead quite some distance from the main road [Frank Fisher]. There was only a trail from his cabin out to the road and he would walk out and then hitch a ride to the store about six or seven miles away. It was said that he was strange, and though I only met him once, my guess would have been that he might have been a retarded person but everyone said he was perfectly harmless and a good worker. Now the trail he used had been long established and so he had a perfect legal right to use it; however, it also went through another man's property [Harold Mahoney] before it ended at the main road. As was so often the problem in these back country places, there had been a dispute of some kind and the man nearest the main road had warned the retarded man not to use the trail through his land, and he had planted a garden there as well. Again the results here were predictable. The retarded man continued to use the trail through the other man's garden and was shot dead. As usual in this sort of situation, there were no witnesses and no relatives showed up to claim the man's body, so the county took over and soon the whole incident was forgotten.

Another item of interest I came across in a small shed near a cabin of a small property I had purchased, was a sizeable collection of electric light fixtures, wiring and light bulbs. What these people had intended doing with all this electric paraphernalia in a country that was 50 miles from the nearest power line—probably another dream that never materialized.

Most of the people in the area used gas or kerosene lamps, but I decided to experiment with a small gas-electric light plant and found it very efficient. Then after installing a wind generator as well, I think I started a revolution in power for light and other electrical purposes. The wind power unit shows on one of the pictures of my original homestead cabin in this narrative.

One of the strange little stories, which I had forgotten, was recently brought to my mind by one of my grandnieces, who with her parents had visited us in Montana. She was a teenager at the time and I suppose because of the bizarre nature of the story she remembered it well.

The story goes that one of the characters who had at one time lived with the Dragon Lady, who gave me so many problems in my pre-war years at the border, had shot a black bear which he had treed and the bear had settled into a crotch in the tree and lodged there. The fellow, not wanting the hide since it was in mid-summer when hides were of no value, left the bear where it was and

coming by much later in the summer noticed that it had not been disturbed by animal or bird scavengers and had apparently merely dried up and was locked in the crotch of the tree. It became an object of curiosity for people visiting in the area and many pictures were taken of it. Just lately I heard that a niece had taken a picture of the bear and I had not been aware of this, so perhaps I may yet get photographic evidence. [Larry Wilson says that Ollie Terrian shot the bear at Mud Lake.]

THE MONTANA WILD ROSE

At the time Hazel and I made what turned out to be our last trip to Montana and the site of our former home on the North Fork, it occurred to me that it would be nice to have some permanent memento of our former place. The wild roses of the area had always been so fragrant and common, we scarcely noticed them when we were living there.

There were some unusual plants of the wild rose variety growing alongside our old honeymoon cabin. These plants produced a dwarf wild rose no larger than a quarter and had large clusters of very fragrant blooms. Also, the plants did not have any thorns, as did the larger variety. We have never seen such a variety before nor since and concluded that it must have been a mutation of some kind in nature. So, as we were visiting the caretakers of our former property, I asked if they would mind if I took a small piece of root from one of these plants. They readily agreed to my request, so I took a piece about the size of a cigarette and placed it in a small plastic bag with some wet moss and tossed it in our car. It was several weeks before we were on our way home again and I had almost forgotten the rose cutting. I do not now know if there were any regulations about bringing these plants into Arizona. In any case when we came into Arizona by way of Hoover Dam, there was no one at the border checking station, so I will never be certain if it was illegal.

I planted the rose cutting and it took to the Arizona climate very well. I have had large clusters of the little rose growing around my birdbath in the back yard, which incidentally is an Indian metote that Hazel and I found in the Dos Cabese area near Wilcox on an artifact hunting trip with Walt and Betty Zumallen, our good friends from that area.

OUR TELEPHONE

In those years beginning with September 1934, until 1941, pre-World War II, I had worked for the Forest Service, U.S., in 1934-35-36-37 and 1938. At the end of the 1938 season I then purchased five Yukon Mink breeding stock and started mink ranching on a small scale. This stock was choice and very expensive, so three female and two male were all I could afford. After about two years in 1940, I realized that it was merely a matter of time until the U.S.A. would be in a war, so I decided to pelt out my entire stock, about 40 animals by then, in the winter of 1940-41, while the hides were prime. Then in the spring of 1941, I again applied for a job with the Forest Service. Forest Ranger Frank Foltz, for whom I had worked in previous years, was still at Big Creek headquarters and promptly hired me once again.

After working the 1941 season, I stored my possessions with neighbors and decided to pay a visit to my parents who had purchased a small house in Ft. Collins, Colorado, and retired. They had told me that the house was in need of some repairs and modernization, so for several months I worked at that project. I had just about completed what my parents had wanted me to do when December 7 came along and as everyone knows that was the day Japan attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor. For the next 4 years, the world was in turmoil and my life changed dramatically. I was working as a welder in the shipyards in Portland, Oregon, but was called by the Montana draft

board and inducted into the military in May of 1942 and served most of the next three years overseas in Air Force Communications. I was discharged in the fall of 1945 and returned to the U.S.A. in October. I would now try to pick up and put back together what my life might have been.

The story of my return to Montana and the North Fork and what followed is noted elsewhere in this saga, but the purpose of these few extra paragraphs was to recognize and give credit to those Park and Forest Rangers for whom I had worked and associated with and who with few exceptions were my friends.

After my return from the war, my former employer, Ranger Frank Foltz, had retired and the new Ranger was John Castles, also an ex-service man. He proceeded to offer me the Alternate Ranger job with him at Big Creek. However, I declined since I had no wish to work for the government again, for my own reasons.

Anyhow John and Jo Castles were married just a short time after Hazel and I were married and we became good friends. Proof of that was what now took place. John knew that it would not be easy for my Hazel to adapt to life in this lonely country with so few contacts. John and Jo were on a regular phone line to town and the outside world which was, of course, important to both of them. In the past, a phone line had been established from Big Creek headquarters northward to Ford Station, a work center, and then finally up to Trail Creek Road and then two miles up Trail Creek to Tom and Marie Peterson's place, where it ended. As I was now establishing a new residence within ¾ of a mile from the main road where the phone line existed, there still was the question about whether the Forest Service would allow me to connect to their line. Beyond that I did not have the finances to buy the wire needed.

Discussing the matter with John Castles, not only did he agree to allow us to connect to the Forest Service line, but he told me there were several old abandoned phone lines that were once routed to lookouts but no longer activated, and gave me permission to pull out whatever amount of line I needed. Although these lines merely followed trails in the woods, the near ends had once been connected at the main road line, so going back along a line about ¾ mile, I cut the line and then hooking on to the line with my V-8 Ford I easily pulled out the ¾ mile of wire needed, installing the line then from the main road to our house. It was our lifeline and we were most grateful to John Castles who provided the means for it. Hazel was now assured of an outside contact which could be most important especially in case of an emergency, as well as a social contact with other women during the long winters.

TRIVIA

BEAR MEAT DINNER

One of the amusing little stories that came to my mind recently was about the Canadian Customs Officer stationed at the nearby border. He has been mentioned in other part of this narrative—Jim and Frances Sinclair were my good friends. We visited each other frequently in the early years of my life near the border. In the wintertime when the river was frozen over, the distance from the Customs House to my cabin was less than a mile by crossing the river. After I built a road into my property, it was perhaps 1½ miles by the road, so we were in fact neighbors in that sparsely settled north end of our valley.

One afternoon of a winter's day the Sinclairs had snowshoed down and we had played some cards and visited, so I asked them to stay for supper. Sometime during an earlier visit Frances had told me that Jim did not like bear meat and wouldn't eat it under any circumstances. Jim was part

Kootenai Indian, and I thought it somewhat unusual about the bear meat since he had been raised in this country and most all of his people ate any and all of the wild game of the area.

Anyhow, usually I had a fair supply of canned wild meat on hand stored in my cellar, but this year hunting had not been good and when I went to the cellar to get a jar of meat I discovered that all I had was some canned bear meat. Now I didn't care for bear meat myself, but I had killed a yearling and the meat was tender, so I had processed the best parts as I would have any other wild meat. It was perfectly good food, but some people just didn't like it. Now wild meat, as I've mentioned elsewhere, once it is processed and canned all looks the same, and I would challenge anyone to distinguish one from another after it is processed.

Since I had no choice, seeing I was out of other meat, I took a jar of the bear meat from my cellar and cooked it making a nice brown gravy for potatoes and other vegetables and called my friends to supper. I guess everyone was hungry, because all the food disappeared. I ate some, as well. Frances was a sharp gal and was aware of some difference—whatever! After the meal, she asked me what kind of meat we had and that she thought it was moose meat. By then I thought I might as well confess to them that I was out of other meat and had served them bear meat! Jim took it rather well, sort of stolidly as an Indian might, but Frances never stopped kidding Jim about not knowing he was eating bear meat and enjoying it.

VOICES OF THE RIVER

In this narrative I have related a number of stories about Charlie Wise, the old Canadian trapper who suffered the double tragedy of losing both wife and small child sometime before I came to this country. It had been Charlie who had singled out my Hazel at a party or dance early on after we were married and told her about the voices of the river; and how they might comfort her in her loneliness which he knew would come in this raw and wild back country.

Upon reflection about this, I know he was right. Charlie had gone to one of the wildest parts of British Columbia and become a recluse after his tragedy and one could easily imagine him sitting by the river and trying to come to grips with his pain and frustration. Since I had lived near the same river for some nine years near the border, I had always been aware of its voices, but had never expressed it as Charlie had.

Now after World War II, I had moved about eight miles farther south but still on the same river. I was once again aware of the voices, but they were somewhat different. It occurred to me then that five or six more creeks had entered the river between my two places and so the voices were somewhat more varied and with a broader scope. When speaking to anyone of things such as this, it was important to know if that person would be receptive to your story or they might think you had a loose board in your attic, or a similar problem.

There are three forks of the main Flathead River and speaking to anyone living on one of these rivers the same impression is in evidence as to the voices. The only difference is in effect for all of them. As the rivers rise and fall during spring runoff or after rainfall, the voices change as though a master hand were at a keyboard.

So, if you had lived along the river as Hazel and I had for so many years, there was always a notable void when you moved away. Often it was difficult to define, but it always came back to one thing, you were no longer hearing the voices of the river.

OTHER VOICES

Since the time when Charlie Wise called my Hazel's attention to the voice of our river, which flowed so near to our cabin, it occurred to me that there were a number of voices in this wilderness that we missed at the time of our leaving the north country. From time to time these voices come back to me, even though as I write I have been gone from this raw and lonely land for nearly 20 years.

Other voices that in retrospect are unforgettable and haunt me at times. I will describe as I remember them. During the clear and moonlit nights of mid-winter the temperature often dropped to as much as 50 below zero. At that point one began wondering if the winter's wood supply would last overnight, with both a large kitchen range and the fireplace going full blast. It was barely possible to keep the extreme cold from moving in with you. The phenomenon which then followed was the crackling of trees in the forest caused by the freezing of the sap. This sound became increasingly louder as the temperature dropped. Then finally as the temperature came down to an extreme low point the logs in our cabin, although seasoned and dry, also began to crack and pop. At that point you were aware that the low point in the temperature had probably been reached. The noise was often so loud it sounded very much like rifle or pistol shots. The first time I heard this it seemed certain that the logs in the building were split from end to end, but when normal temperature returned, there was no evidence of damage.

In my old homestead cabin near the Canadian border, which had been built some 15 years before I occupied it, during the first winter I became aware of this strange happening.

I had built a makeshift bunk against the north wall of the cabin on which I had a pad and a sleeping bag. During the first real cold night, I had apparently rolled against the log wall and my head must have been very close to one of the logs. I was suddenly and rudely awakened by what sounded like a rifle shot and for a while I felt certain that someone had indeed fired a shot at me. When more of these noises followed I then became aware of what this was all about.

Other sounds in the wild country were the howling of a coyote and the far-off answers of his compatriots, and mixed in with this might be the deep throaty howl of a timber wolf.

Then there was the scream of a cougar, and this sound could really send some chills running down the spine.

The bugling of a bull elk was another sound that took some getting used to, but once heard was never forgotten.

There was also the crackling of the Aurora Borealis and the beautiful fireworks display with that.

There were any number of owls that serenaded us. One of these we were told was the rain owl. We were never certain as to what variety this owl really was, but he would sit in a tree nearby and hoot most of the night and sure enough the next day it would rain.

Other sounds heard occasionally were the distant rumble or thunder of an avalanche in the mountains of the Continental Divide, perhaps about eight miles to the east. The ground would shake sometimes as though there had been an earthquake. Another startling sound would be the crash of a large mature tree whose time had come. This might happen in the dead of night when there was no wind whatever.

Since we were 50 miles from the nearest railroad, we never heard a train whistle. I do remember when I was working for the Forest Service as a fire lookout within about 30 miles of the railroad, if the wind was in the right direction, occasionally a faint train whistle could be heard—a very lonely and haunting sound.

FREE FOOD

During that first winter on what I called my Border Homestead, I had a few surprises that had to do with a tenderfoot living by himself in this raw environment. The fact that there was an old-timer of some 80 years living nearby was a real plus. He, more than anybody or anything, helped me through that first winter which could easily have been my last as well.

A lack of adequate funds to buy food and other needs certainly gave me a number of lessons in how to conserve what food and clothes and other materials to the utmost which I did have. Actually, my food supply was nearly adequate, but it was to say the least, monotonous. Hunting had not been good early on and so I had very little meat except some salt pork my neighbor had given me; and since the trout in this country nearly all migrate back to Flathead Lake in the winter, the fishing possibilities were negligible except for a possible whitefish run in February.

I was aware that in some of the small creeks such as the one running through my property there were some brook trout, a small fish which was never more than 12 inches long and usually 6 inches on the average. These fish did not migrate to the lake in wintertime as did the other species. In the summer they could usually be caught on a trout fly or other small bait, but in winter when most of the small streams were frozen over it was next to impossible to catch any of them. Besides who wanted to stand around in 20-30 degree below zero cold to catch a small trout.

My whole story leads up to what now happened.

Since I required a regular daily water supply at the cabin I would chop a hole in the ice in the little creek flowing near my cabin and dip the water out with a small pan into a bucket. There was a small spring at the place where I had chopped the hole in the ice, and if it wasn't extremely cold this spot would stay open because of the moving spring water.

After I had been established at the cabin for a certain time and deep winter had set in, one day as I went to the spring water hole, I discovered three or four six-inch brook trout lying on the ice beside the hole frozen solid. This sort of thing continued most of the winter. No one was ever able to explain to me why these fish would jump out like that, but I did not worry about the why of it. I had small trout with my potatoes and beans for most of the winter.

BEARS AND EARTHQUAKES

During the early part of my time in the North Fork, as I've mentioned in other stories, money was hard to come by. We were after all in the deep Depression period of the early thirties. So, whenever an opportunity presented itself to make a few dollars I would take on whatever the job might be.

It happened that one of the older settlers and his son-in-law had taken on a contract to complete a log building someone had started but had abandoned because of some altercation with the owner. Neither the old man and his son-in-law had any experience in log construction, and since I had helped build several log buildings when I worked at the dude ranch, they came to me for help. Obviously, they had taken on more than they could handle. Although I still had a lot of work to do on my own cabin, I decided to help them and earn some much-needed cash as well. The people we

were working for were a retired school principal and his wife who had been a teacher from eastern Montana.

There was a small rickety old log building on the property that became our base for the period of construction. It was barely livable but at least the roof didn't leak. Although it was fall and no snow as yet, there were rains and the weather was rather dismal. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible and took turns with the cooking and dishes. Like most people in those days, especially in the North Fork, we had no refrigeration for our food, but we had a makeshift screened box on the north side of the building that served as a food cabinet to keep our perishables. And as so often happened in this country, a bear smelling food came marauding and made off with most of our food several times. We did not want to kill the bear since his hide would not have been prime, but we were going to protect our food. So, stringing a number of tin cans on wires, we hung them near the food box. The bear always came at night and so the rattle of the cans would alert us and we could go out and give the bear a blast with a shotgun to bum his rear end. However, in spite of that he would keep coming back. One night the tin cans rattled and the old man went out with the shotgun to give the bear the usual treatment, but there was no bear! It was then that one of us noticed that our lantern hanging from the ceiling was swaying back and forth, at the same time we had heard the tin cans clattering.

We all thought that uncommonly strange until we went home on the weekend and heard on the radio that there had been an earthquake in southern Montana hundreds of miles away. Although it had been only a mild quake, it had been felt in our area and of course the swaying lantern in our cabin was the result as well as the tins cans clattering.

SOURDOUGH

Among the amusing stories that keep coming back to me now and then was the one about the sourdough jars most of the natives in this country kept.

This starter was used for making sourdough bread as well as sourdough hot cakes. Some of these people took better care of their sourdough jar than their children—if they had any. The temperature of this starter had to be kept at a certain level or it would not function properly. We knew a number of women who were experts at all this but there were also old bachelors who scoffed at that and proclaimed to all who would listen that only a man knew how to handle and take care of sourdough. One of these old bachelors had a sourdough jar whose contents were indeed potent. I was not witness to this story, but several people swore it was true—as follows.

When this old brush rat had made a batch of hot cakes and there were some left over uneaten, instead of throwing them out to the birds or rodents, he would toss them back into the sourdough starter and the mix was so potent that in a short time the cakes would be absorbed and disappear as though they had been thrown into a vat of acid. No waste here, but one can't help but wonder whether the color of the batter did not gradually turn rather dark, but then again among these tough old characters that would be of little concern for them.

As far as I was concerned it always seemed too much bother and trouble to keep a sourdough jar, so I settled for baking powder biscuits and hot cakes. The old brush rats sniffed at this as food unfit to eat and when pressed for reasons for that kind of thinking would tell you that baking powder food was too gaseous and hard on underwear—draw your own conclusions!

My old neighbor and friend to the north [Frank Clute] had a unique way of making what he called sourdough "gods." He always had a 100-pound sack of flour in a corner of his kitchen-living room.

The top was open and when he wanted to make a batch of biscuits, he would make a depression in the flour in the sack and pour in enough of the sourdough starter to make a thick dough which he formed into biscuits and baked. They were very good, however, nearly all the log cabins in this country had mice running around and often as not they would be in the sack of flour. I noticed that the old fellow was careful to pick any mice "seeds" he might see out of the flour, but at times I'm sure he missed some—again, no one worried about that.

For me, baking bread was no problem and I used yeast on a regular basis. Some of the women in the country who ate my bread said it was as good or better than the bread they baked. I considered those real compliments.

CHARLIE WISE

Another story about Charlie Wise, which came to my mind recently, had been long forgotten as no doubt many stories about Charlie had been. Elsewhere in this narrative I have told about the tragedy in Charlie's life in losing both his wife and little girl and other stories. This story relates to his activities after the tragedy when he moved to Canada and became a recluse trapper.

He had a very large territory to cover in Canada and, of course, would be carrying any number of heavy steel traps in his pack, probably also a rifle, but sometimes he did in fact carry no rifle. He also never carried any supplies of food. When asked about that, he said he set out a trap line and then the following day, coming back over that part of his trap line, he would have some animal and then would roast or cook whatever it was he had caught in his traps, after skinning the animal, of course. This might be a marten of the weasel family, a beaver or muskrat or even a lynx or bobcat, both of the cat family. So, he had in fact reverted to the Indian way of living. Since there were often Kootenai Indians also trapping in that general area, Charlie had taken on their lifestyle when it came to survival in the great outdoors. Food to him was whatever was available regardless of what animal it happened to be. He was quoted as saying that when I catch something then I eat!

If you are squeamish about bloody stories, etc., don't read this.

In those years when there seemed to be a lot of coyotes around and they were running in packs killing deer on the frozen river, I managed to kill quite a few. Hides were bringing a fair price. Running in packs they would chase the deer out on to the ice and since the deer could not maintain footing the coyote would close in and get the deer to fall and then hamstring them and eventually kill the deer. It was a gruesome spectacle to watch since the coyotes were often eating on the deer even before it was dead. Since one of the old cabins we lived in for a time was right along the bank of the river, I had devised a small loophole beside a window in order to use it as a rifle port, so I could shoot out toward the river from inside the cabin. Many a coyote chased his last deer on the ice out there. One day my aim was not the best and I just clipped the belly of a coyote, and since it was not a mortal wound he ran off with his entrails dragging out on the ice. Not wanting the animal to suffer needlessly, I left the cabin to find him and kill him. He had left the ice and was along the shore with his entrails entangled in some bushes. The strange part and hard to believe, he was chewing on his entrails as he would have if he were chewing on a deer. I had never seen this sort of thing before and quickly shot him.

RANGERS: PARK AND FOREST SERVICE

The Rangers who were involved in our lives in one way or another are listed here, both Forest Service and Park Rangers. Hazel and I were well aware of the impact some of these people had directly or indirectly on some of the things that happened in this community.

First and foremost were Hugh Buchanan and his most gracious and outgoing wife, Madelyn. Hugh was the first Park Ranger I met as I came into the North Fork by way of the inside or park road to Polebridge, since the west side road in 1932 was closed by rock slides at that time, April 15. Madelyn was without a doubt my Hazel's best friend in this lonely country and was a great help to Hazel in getting adapted to life as it was in the North Fork.

Junior Ranger Bruce Miller was stationed with Hugh at Polebridge for a time in postwar years and he was a likeable young single man with a pleasant disposition and good sense of humor.

Then there was Andy Fluetsch. You will read much about him in this story. A rough and ready World War I Cavalry Officer who knew horses so well one had to believe he could hold conversations with them. If he was your friend, he would go all the way to prove it, if necessary, but if he had reason to be your enemy, you could have a real problem on your hands. He liked good liquor and kept a large stock on hand, though he was not a heavy drinker or an alcoholic. He was generous with it when gathered with friends. When I came into the country, Andy was stationed at Kishenehn, the northern most outpost on the west side in Glacier Park, about two miles up river from the dude ranch where I worked.

Andy was eventually transferred to Polebridge Ranger Station after Hugh Buchanan was moved to the east side of Glacier Park. The park then stationed a young ranger whose name I have forgotten at Kishenehn Station. I then heard through the "grapevine" that he had been told by the dude ranch people just after I left that place that I was trapping beaver in Glacier Park. From a high benchland on our side of the river I could see him patrolling in the worst weather and with my binoculars I could see him checking out every little pond and water course for traps I had supposedly set over there. I know he never found any, but they sure had him running his tail off.

Then there was Dave Stimson who replaced Andy at Polebridge during and after World War II and Andy went into the Seabees in the war in Alaska. Finally Hugh and Madelyn were returned to Polebridge where Hugh served until his retirement, and sadly Madelyn passed away a victim of cancer. We got to know a few headquarters people, too, but knew them mostly for the fact that they kept pushing problem bears, captured near headquarters, up into our area, cynically stating that the North Fork people would take care of the bear.

We probably had more contact with the U.S. Forest Rangers than the Park people, mainly because we lived directly in the forest areas and often our properties bordered on U.S. Forest land. So there were mutual concerns.

My first direct contact with a Forest Ranger came about while I was still working at the dude ranch. We were making pack trips with dudes into the back country on the forest side of the North Fork and often as not would meet some of the Forest Service people on trails and in areas where maintenance was being done. Meeting and talking with the current Ranger several times, I had inquired about the chances of getting a job with the Forest Service. He smiled knowingly because by now I was aware of the reputation the dude rancher had with many local people. The Ranger said that if I ever wanted to make a change to come and see him. As it turned out, it wasn't long before I did just that and he was as good as his word and gave me a job. This was Ranger Jack Lillevig, who also became a good friend and hired me in several successive years. His alternate was Harold Cusick, a local North Fork boy who was one of the easiest people to get along with I had the privilege of knowing. He and his wife Caroline were good dancers and were seen often at the local hoedowns and shindigs.

Then there was Ralph Thayer who came from back east as a youngster and worked his way up in the Forest Service, but did not have the minimal education to pass examinations for the Ranger job. He was Alternate Ranger during his working lifetime and he did in effect train any number of young men in the Ranger job. An even-tempered easy-going man, no one ever had anything but good to say about him. Ralph did a lot of survey work for me on the various tracts of land I gradually acquired. We were the best of friends.

Ralph Thayer as a young man.

Frank Foltz, who followed Lillevig as ranger, was mentioned elsewhere in this narrative as the man who informed me of the availability of the Tepee Lake (Lewis) property which I then purchased when I was on furlough from overseas during World War II. So I have him to thank for this bit of luck. It was the most valuable of the five properties I finally owned in the North Fork.

John Castles followed Frank Foltz directly after the War and I've written elsewhere how he made it possible to get a phone line into our place. This was a great kindness on his part, and he was a fine friend. However, he was not with us too long. His war record and his expertise took him back to headquarters back east and we didn't see him again.

Then there was Arnold Dillard, a pleasant man who was easy to get along with. It was he who gave me permission to dismantle and remove the old Marie Peterson homestead cabin which property had been traded by the Petersons for a more desirable 30 acres up the Trail Creek road a few miles. I rebuilt this cabin on our place, added a porch to it and a new roof. It served us well as a rental cabin for guests and visitors.

After World War II and I was back in the North Fork country, I had started to build a new cabin and was busy thereafter at construction of both log buildings and rock fireplaces, as well, for new people who were coming into the country. I pursued these two activities until we sold out in 1972 and retired to Arizona.

Getting back to Rangers, as it is in most walks of life, one finds a few bad apples everywhere. After Arnold Dillard was transferred away, we had a succession of young inexperienced men who

did not last too long in the area and then finally a fellow by name of Hank Hayes, a self-proclaimed expert on environment issues, totally on the impractical side, but determined to put his theories into practice. Hazel crossed swords with him several times and he didn't make sense to me. All this was rather amusing, although he was dead serious. After all the arguments and shouting were over and the dust settled, he had made enough enemies and was sent back to Alaska where he had originally come from. It seems most of the people in the North Fork heaved a sigh of relief to see him go.

One other person I must include in my story was Clark Hamor. We were always taken to be relatives because our last names were pronounced the same, but spelled differently. When we first met it was by telephone. Clark was dispatcher over in the Kootenai Forest just to the west of our Flathead district, but the phone line from my lookout ran to his headquarters, so we often talked and it was several years before we actually met. Although he was from another forest, he was authorized to send me to lightning strike fires if they appeared within reasonable range of my lookout. He did in fact send me to several fires over the years. After we finally met, Clark and his wife, Lenore, became our good friends and seemed to enjoy coming over and renting one of our cabins just to fish and visit with us after his retirement. Hazel also considered Lenore as her good friend. They had a nice home in Libby, Montana, a valley farther west from our country. We visited each other any number of times until we finally moved to Arizona.

AN EVENT AT KINTLA LAKE

A recent item in the *Hungry Horse News* referring back to 1950 caught my eye and reminded me of the story which was very much in the news that year. This was two years after Hazel and I were married and I had by now forgotten the incident. The item in the paper brought back some details in my mind which I will relate.

A group of people who were also at the Kintla Lake parking area told Park people that the three men had been doing some heavy drinking and there were some loud arguments before they got into the boat and left the shore. Beyond that no one thought much about it until a few days later when their car was found abandoned at the parking area.

The cause of death of the three men was a matter of conjecture at the time and it is not known if there was any evidence of foul play. However, as the item states, two of the men were never found and it was presumed they drowned and probably sank into the deeper parts of the lake where the water temperature is known to be extremely cold and a body would remain there indefinitely. The reasoning being that in warmer water temperature a corpse usually forms gases and then rises to the surface. An attempt was then made to drag for the bodies of the missing men, but it was without success. The Park authorities then decided to place a wire netting across the outlet from the lake, Kintla Creek, which after a few miles emptied into the North Fork River.

Kintla Creek coming from the lake empties into the North Fork of the Flathead just a short distance from the property where Hazel and I lived for more than 20 years and at the time this incident took place we were still using river water for our drinking supply. Needless to say, we were not too keen about drinking water that had been in contact with dead bodies, but in a short time I had a complete water system installed which drew its water from a very fine cold spring on our property.

Since Hazel and I sold our property and left the North Fork in 1972, we never did hear whether these bodies ever surfaced. I do know that in the 22 years indicated no one ever solved this mystery

nor did any bodies show up in the net placed in the outlet to Kintla Lake. We did hear that lines were dropped in the lake and the water depth in some places was 400 feet or more.

OF FALSE TEETH AND MICE

In a letter I received recently, one of my friends asked me if I was glad to be living in Arizona rather than Montana where the temperatures sometimes dropped to 40 below zero or even lower in the winter. I agreed that having spent nearly 40 years in this beautiful but cold winter country I was glad that I might end my days in a more kindly climate.

It did bring to mind a little story, which like so many, I had nearly forgotten.

My old neighbor on the border who was about 80 years old at the time [Frank Clute] told the story on himself so I know it to be true. It goes like this. He had a set of false teeth and, as many people, had the habit of taking them out at night and placing them in a glass of water. With temperatures ranging in the 40 below area, in a winter's night the cold often penetrated the interior even of a log cabin, and the glass with the teeth had been near a window which made it more exposed to cold. When my friend got up in the morning, not only were his teeth frozen in the glass of water, but evidently a mouse, probably smelling food particles on the teeth, had jumped into the glass and drowned. So here he had his teeth and mouse frozen in a solid clump of ice. I should mention here that nearly all log cabins had mice running around and no one seemed to mind.

RHUBARB AND OUTHOUSES

Roaming around the North Fork area in the early thirties was in many ways a melancholy exercise, since there were far more abandoned homesteads than those that were inhabited and kept in reasonably good repair.

Those that were permanently abandoned could easily be identified by the condition of the fences and buildings. On a quarter section south of mine near the Canadian border, a man had planted what I estimated to be about a dozen fruit trees of various kinds. I could not identify them all but I recognized several apple and plum trees. They were pitifully stunted probably not being frost hardy, they froze down to the snow level year after year and then barely survived to grow a few inches the following year. It's unlikely anybody harvested any fruit from these small, stunted trees. Actually, this country had some very fine native fruit, choke cherry, serviceberry, high bush cranberry and last and best of all several varieties of huckleberry. In a good season many people from the lower valleys came into our hills and mountains to pick huckleberries commercially and usually they brought a good price.

I mention all this to point up a little story as follows. The earliest homesteaders apparently tried many different kinds of plants by way of experiment to see what would grow and produce well in this severe climate. Some of us roaming around the old homesteads came across a rather amusing phenomenon—rhubarb. Apparently, it grew and prospered very well in this climate, but the amusing part was a discovery about the location where it had been planted. Of course, every one of these old homesteads had among its buildings a small outhouse. We discovered that a number of these old settlers had planted the rhubarb right at the back of the outhouse. The fantastic part of this was the size of the rhubarb stalks. I do not exaggerate when I say some of the stalks were six feet tall and as thick as your arm at the wrist. Most of these homesteads had been abandoned for many years. The roots, of course, never died and continued to grow year after year.

My personal experience with rhubarb in my garden was nothing to compare with the above, although it did grow well enough.

What I did discover was that strawberries grew and produced very well in this climate, and even though our patch was not very large, it produced enough berries year after year, so that we had plenty for ourselves and even started selling them by the crate to Park and Forest Service people, as well as other local residents and summer visitors. The only drawback was that bears discovered our patch and thereafter it was a battle to preserve our garden. This war continued as long as we lived in the North Fork and had a garden, and I dare not say how many bears paid the price for raiding my strawberry patch.

Note: I know the Chinese people fertilized their gardens with what was called "night soil." This would no doubt relate directly to the wonderful growth of the rhubarb behind the outhouses on the old homesteads.

DEAD MOOSE IN A BEAVER POND

Having spent nearly 40 years in this area in which all kinds of wildlife is in evidence all around, as in any primitive or at least semi-primitive environment, I often became aware of how wild animals and birds have their own way of coping with problems and disasters.

After the spring high water periods in the creeks and rivers from the winter snow melt, it was quite common to see drowned animals hung up in the many log jams in the river. The story elsewhere in this narrative about the little mare caught in a log jam illustrates this very well. Now and then we would see deer or elk caught this way and some survived through terrific struggles and some did not. We did save the little mare, but it was risky business.

Another story of how wild animals take care of or cope with problems was illustrated in a fascinating way for me. I have described the property we owned on Tepee Lake and Tepee Creek in other stories. It was my favorite trapping area for various kinds of animals, but mostly for beaver. The general area surrounding our property was U.S. Forest Service land and the property was frequented by animals large and small. From grizzly bear and moose, deer, coyote and on down to the smaller fur-bearing animals, including, of course, the ever-present beaver.

During one hunting season someone had shot a moose on our Tepee property. I never did find out who the party was or whether it was by legal permit or otherwise. Anyhow it was a very large bull moose and he had dropped dead in the middle of one of the beaver (created) ponds along Tepee Creek. Whoever killed the animal either got "spooked" because it may have been an illegal kill or they just didn't think it worthwhile to try and salvage the animal lodged as it was in hip deep water. In that position it could not have been dressed out properly to begin with. A minor effort had been made to tear out the dam that controlled this pond and thereby give better access to the animal, but this attempt had obviously failed. So the moose was abandoned to scavengers. However, once the scavengers had worked it down to water level, it was just one big stinking mess. At that point I wondered what the beaver were doing who lived in a lodge not so far away in another part of the pond. Beaver are not carnivores, so would not be interested in eating any of the moose meat. However, the fact that this mess was attracting all kinds of meat-eating animals from bear, coyote, cats as well as eagles and other birds was probably a potential problem for the beaver, too.

Looking over the situation one day I decided to try and break a hole in the beaver dam and see if I could drain the pond at least in part to a lower level so the carcass might be disposed of sooner by

scavengers. I had very little luck. Beaver dams are usually so constructed that nothing short of an earthquake or dynamite will break them, so I finally gave up and waited to see what would happen.

About a week later I went back up to have a look and lo and behold the beaver had cut a hole through their dam and drained the pond down to the rather small flow of the creek and now the scavengers were really working on the moose carcass. In another week when I came again there was nothing much left, but a few bones and a lot of hair. The beaver had now left this particular area and through the following summer there was no evidence of their presence. However, by late fall when the moose carcass was nearly obliterated except for a few bones, the beaver came back and patched up the hole in the dam and the water was rising and would soon cover all that was left of the remains of the moose.

And so ended an episode in the wild caused by man, but which the animals coped with in a miraculous way. Our property on Tepee Creek was approximately three miles from our home place.

Since beaver have played such an important part in our country and also in my personal life I thought it fair enough to give them special attention in my narratives.

In the old days of the Hudson Bay Company and also the Astoria Company, both white trappers and Indians were busily engaged in trapping this animal, and beaver pelts were a medium of exchange. The above companies had a practice of grub staking trappers to go out and work areas of the country so as to bring in as much fur as possible. In good years, fortunes were made.

However, by the end of the 19th Century the beaver had been so depleted that many states enacted laws prohibiting the trapping of beaver. This then was the situation at the time I arrived in Montana in 1932. Since these were the bad times of the Great Depression, there were quite a few people, especially in the more remote areas, who were trapping illegally and selling the poached beaver hides to fur buyers who were paying about half or less of the value of the fur.

In spite of all this the beaver colonies were making a comeback, and when I purchased my first abandoned homestead I found several colonies of beaver in the creeks on my property. An old timer who had his homestead between my place and the Canadian border told me that the place I had purchased was repeatedly trapped by poachers in the 15 years since the original homesteader had abandoned the place. After several years of ownership of this property, I had discouraged any further poaching and thereafter had full control of the situation.

I was working for the U.S. Forest Service at this time as a fire guard and lookout, but the season was so short and pay was minimal, so I was looking for other sources of income. Although no beaver trapping permits had been issued in this area, I decided to explore the possibilities in getting a permit. Discussing the matter with the local Game Warden, I was told that if I could prove the flooding by the beaver in the building of their dams was damaging my property, I could apply for a permit to take as many beaver as the Game Warden would allow. I told the Game Warden that I knew (as he did) that poaching was going on in many places and that I was not interested in getting into that because of the risks and I was also obliged to sell the hides at whatever the buyer wanted to pay. This seemed a dead-end street to me, so I asked the Game Warden for a legal permit. He, of course, had the authority to determine how many animals I could trap and sell. He was good enough to ask me how many animals I thought I should have a permit to trap. Having no idea whatever he might have in mind I said, “How about 40 beaver?” He started to laugh and then told me that if he turned in a request for 40 beaver to his headquarters in Helena they would most

certainly investigate him and what he was up to. Anyhow we both had a good laugh and I ended up with a permit for 15 beaver and a Game Warden friend.

When World War II was over, I returned from overseas and went out to Portland, Oregon, to pick up my V-8 Ford which I had put into dead storage for the duration in 1942. Driving back to Montana in February, I found the North Fork Road impassable to a passenger car, so I stayed with a friend in the lower valley until the North Fork Road was open to traffic. In the meantime, I had applied for a beaver trapping permit and since I had established a good relationship with the Fish and Game Department in pre-war years, I had no problem getting a sizeable permit to take beaver. Also I had purchased a new property on Tepee Lake, which I discovered had a large colony of beaver in creek and lake. So I now had one more property from which to draw income from trapping beaver and other animals as well.

Since I could not use my old cabin as it had been vandalized during the war and was too far from my new Tepee property where I would be doing most of my trapping this season (1946), I asked to stay with the Holcombs, who were old timers in the area, paying them board and room, of course, while I trapped and stayed with them till the season was over. Prices of beaver pelts were high in the post-war period and I did rather well in the six weeks of the season. Later in the summer, I started to repair the old Ryan cabin which had also been vandalized before I purchased the property and then moved into the cabin before the following winter. This cabin was very old, but served me well with a new roof

Aside from the fact that the trapping of beaver and selling the pelts was an important part of the economy for many parts of the country, I have written for the most part of the Pacific Northwest and western Montana in particular. Because of the many streams, rivers, creeks, and lakes there were probably more beaver per square mile than anywhere else. And the lush appearance of the land was in large measure the product and result of the beavers' activity. In fact, the beaver should probably be classified as a hydraulic engineer.

Over the near 40 years we spent in Montana we watched with a great deal of interest how this little animal would change the environment where he operated.

Coming into an area where there was a creek where there had been beaver many years before but which had been completely trapped out and the old beaver dams had then been carried away by the successive spring high water, the newcomers set to work building new dams. Perhaps the area had also been burned over as in the 1910 fire, so the new growth was then mostly willow, alder, and aspen. All of these are favorite beaver food. By the building of the new dams the area far back in the woods was flooded, giving access to the food the beaver were after. Of course, in the process the soil which may have been quite sterile and unproductive was now being covered with debris from trees and also animal matter and the soil began to grow grasses and also trees, and this, of course, is how wetlands develop and fish and birds move in.

In 1910 the western part of Montana and a good deal of northern Idaho had been devastated by one of the most disastrous and widespread forest fires in the history of the northwest. When I came to this area in Montana in 1932, there was after 22 years still a good deal of evidence of this disaster. Actually, many of the very large old Tamarack trees that were fire killed were still standing when we left the area in 1972. They had been an excellent source of firewood for us in 40 years.

One of the strange results of this fire was how it had burned not only through forest but also through swampland and was so hot and dry at the time that it set fire to the semi-dry swamps and swampy

meadows. Some of these also contained peat below the surface which also caught fire and sometimes continued to burn right through a winter beneath the snow. These swampy areas had evidently supported large colonies of beaver in the pre-1910 period. However, there must have been many beaver who died in the fire and when I came to this area there were no remnants of beaver lodges whatsoever. Obviously they had all been destroyed by the fire. However, the resourceful animals had dug in deep, and where the peat had burned out large cavities they had established new underground dens. We found any number of these, and the animals had stored water from rain and snow in these caverns which were now like cisterns full of water. In due time grasses and brush grew and eventually small trees emerged and the beaver were again in business.

At the time of the Great Depression of the 1930s and when I arrived in Montana in 1932, there was a considerable traffic in illegal fur and heads for mounting. It was illegal to kill mountain goat, sheep, moose, and some other animals. There were always fur buyers and taxidermists who would buy illegal fur and animal skins and heads which when mounted were in good demand by eastern people who were unable to get a legal trophy and so were willing to pay a high price for one that was illegal. It should be said that most of the illegal traffic seemed to operate without any visible opposition by legal authority. Perhaps it was because of the difficult times when everyone was trying to make a buck, whether by legal means or otherwise. And, of course, those dealers in these illegal furs and heads were making big bucks with very little risk.

One name which just about everyone knew and who seemed to be above the laws would purchase anything legal or illegal and was known to grub stake down-and-outers to go hunt illegal animals and his promise was to purchase whatever they brought in. This man died shortly after I came to the area and in talking to some of his suppliers I was told that he had never run afoul of the law. This seemed incredible, but again it was probably a sign of the times and of how things were done in this remnant of the old west in Montana.

RAIN OWL

I am once again reminded of incidents of long ago. When we were still living in Montana, there was an owl in the area that the old-timers, including Indians, called the Rain Owl. It seems some of these birds lived in our adjacent woods, although I can’t remember ever seeing one of them. We did hear them on occasion at night. These birds were certainly reliable weather predictors. Often one could be heard nearby with the three-note hoot usually around the midnight hour. The expectation was that there would be rain or snowstorms within several days to a week. And it hardly ever failed. It was as good or better than any weather reports we would get by radio, especially for our somewhat isolated part of western Montana.

Perhaps you can imagine my surprise and shock then, after living in Green Valley, Arizona, for some 20 years that this past early May 1992, I was awakened about midnight by that old familiar sound, and you could not mistake it for anything else. It was the same three-note owl hoot we had listened to in Montana for so many years. Not being fully awake for a few moments I thought I was back in Montana. The bird seemed to be sitting high in my palm tree right close to the house, and kept me awake for several hours, listening to the hooting. The thought came to me then, wouldn’t it be funny if he was predicting rain in the month of May, since May and June in this part of Arizona are the driest months of the year. However, in less than a week after the owl’s appearance and his serenade, we had several very nice and most welcome showers.

I have told this little story to some of my friends here in Green Valley and they sort of smile in a way that makes me think they believe I am the teller of tall tales!! So be it!

In the 20 years I have lived in Green Valley, Arizona, I have never heard this owl until now. There are some great horned owls here, quite scarce, and also the pygmy owl, but whether this owl we called the Rain Owl also lives here no one has been able to tell me. As far as I know there are no other owls who have that kind of a call.

Sequel to the foregoing story —

A year has gone by and we are once again in the month of May (1993), the 18th day to be exact. The weather has been mild and warm though not oppressive. We have not had a rain in a month or more. Of course, this is not the rainy season. There have been many heavy cloud build-ups but they are not rain clouds, and the weather reporters do not speak of any storm threats or rain predictions.

During the early afternoon of this 18th day there have been several dark clouds showing, but they have all dissipated into nothingness. After going to bed and sleeping fitfully for several hours, I was suddenly awakened about midnight by that old familiar Rain Owl hoot that I described in the foregoing story. For this past year, I had not heard this owl, although we went through the monsoon season with many rainstorms.

I had in fact concluded that the one appearance in May 1992, of the owl was an unusual and perhaps a one-time happening. However, just for the record I marked May 18 on the calendar as the night the owl was heard once again. The weather then stayed warm day by day and no real weather change was taking place, typical dry pleasant May weather and no rain in sight. Five days went by and I had almost forgotten the owl when on the afternoon of the fifth day (Sunday) there was a small build-up of clouds over the Santa Rita Mountains to the east of Green Valley. It didn't look like much of anything at first, but it started to grow and an east wind came up starting to carry some advance clouds toward Green Valley. I had stepped outside to look over the situation when I heard a distant rumble of thunder. I had just stepped back into the house when a brilliant flash of lightning struck in the neighborhood and the storm was on. There was a hard wind, much lightning and thunder and a good hard rain, which lashed back and forth for about 1½ hours. The air was fresh and washed clean when it was all over and checking my rain gauge I found somewhat more than ½ inch had fallen, a very nice and welcome rain at a time of year when it does not usually rain at all.

And so the Rain Owl was right again, and I can't help but wonder why did he come to my home to tell me?

APPENDIX A

WALT HAMMER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

MENTIONED IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Helped build a few guest cabins at Kintla Guest Ranch with owner Matt Brill

Fixed up the cabin on the property he purchased near the border

Built a cabin for Ralph & Esther Day close to her parents, the Holcombs

Rebuilt the Bart Monahan cabin for Baird and Esther Chrisman

Built a new, large cabin for the Chrismans

Built the fireplace in Vern Mauritsen's main cabin at Glacier Wilderness Cabins

Built two fireplaces for Hazen Lawson, in the main cabin and at Square Peg North

Built the fireplace for Dan and Laura Deck's cabin

Built the large, dual-room fireplace for the Orville and Helen Foreman cabin

Raised the Frank Evans cabin (former Beebe cabin) and put a concrete foundation under it

Did maintenance work for the McFarland Quarter Circle MC Ranch

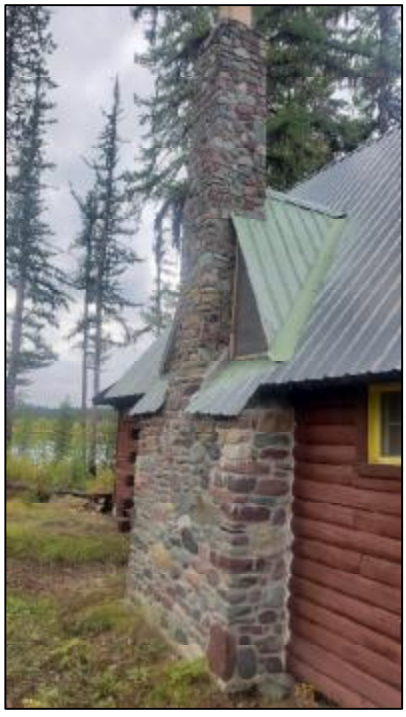
Built the residential cabin and three guests cabins at Placer Point. One of the guest cabins was a former Marie Peterson cabin that he moved and rebuilt on his place.

Rebuilt the Mary Powell cabin on Mud Lake for Garnett Crow

Built cabin on Tepee Lake for the Furukawa family

Did some repair work on the bridge at the Canadian border that Charlie Wise built

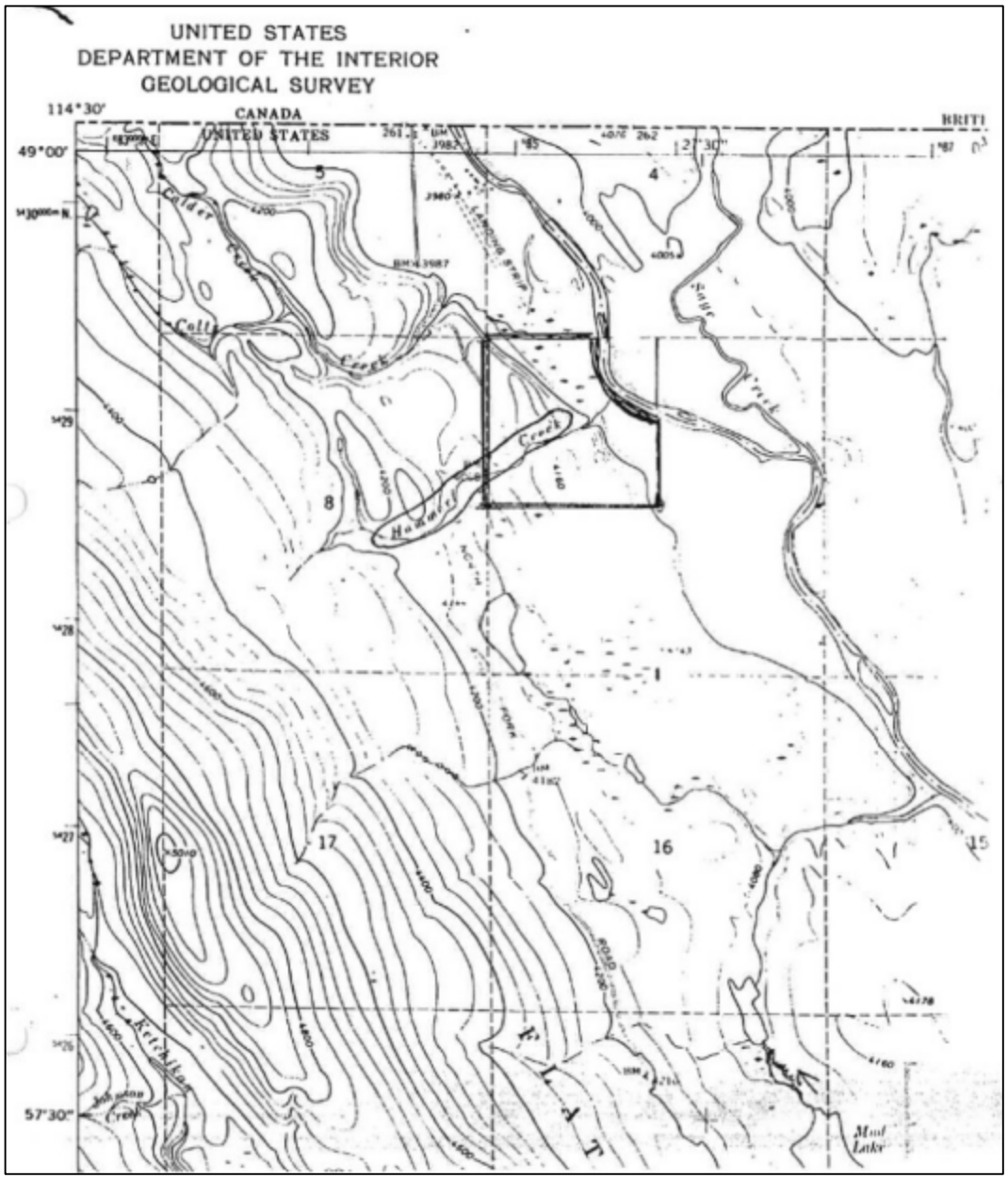
Performed maintenance projects for landlord in Arizona



Chimney that Walt built for Olaf Borge's cabin on Tepee Lake in 1952.

APPENDIX B

MAP SHOWING WALT'S FIRST LAND PURCHASE IN THE NORTH FORK



This property was later sold to former Glacier Park rangers George and Dorothy Walter.

APPENDIX C

1993 WALT HAMMER LETTER TO CARROLL FAMILY

12/10/93

Dear Carrolls one & all—

This holiday season I am going to dig into past history again with a collage which depicts some of my life and times long past, numbered one thru six. I will describe what you are seeing.

No. 1 The first bridge built across the North Fork of the Flathead River into Glacier Park about the year 1914, a true "pole bridge" from which we have the name of a small settlement and post office on the west side of the river. This was and still is the only entry to Glacier Park in the northwest corner of the park.

In 1932 when I came to Montana this bridge had been swept away by an ice jam and was not rebuilt until two years later. In later years it was washed out and swept away time and again and always rebuilt by local people with supervision of old log experts.

In 1988 a fire swept thru this area and the bridge was burned out as well. So although a number of local people objected they finally built a steel and concrete bridge which should be a permanent fixture.

No. 2 The cabin on a homestead (160 acres) I purchased in 1933 in which I eventually spent 7½ years as a trapper while working for the Forest Service as a fireguard. What you see on the wall of the cabin are beaver hides. The trapping I did offered a good part of my living in those days. The wind machine on the roof was my electric power, the first in the area.

No. 3 After my time in the military in World War II I came back to Montana to find my cabin vandalized. So I started building a new cabin 8 miles farther south on another piece of property I had purchased. Within a couple of years, the river changed course and undercut the bank where the old cabin stood and it toppled into the river and was washed away. Good thing I had moved!

No. 4 After World War II and Hazel and I had been married a few years, some friends from another Montana valley had come to visit with a snowcat. Hazel and I borrowed it for a spin around the area.

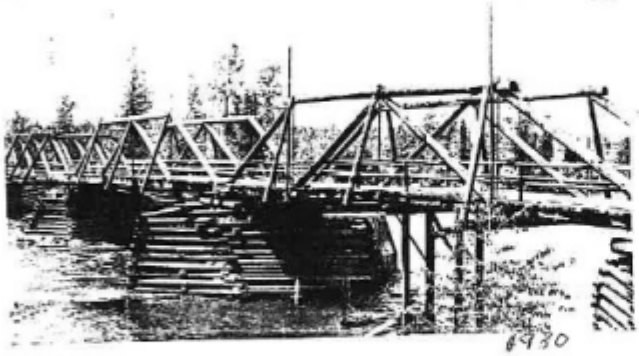
No. 5 An old "steed" I used to ride when I worked on a dude ranch. I finally purchased him and made coyote bait out of him, but some bear ate most of him and dragged the rest away.

No. 6 The local school teacher, myself and my little Model A Ford which I drove to Montana from Lincoln, Nebraska. The school "marm" taught me most of what I needed to know to do my own cooking as a bachelor. She was a very nice person and we were going to marry but the war and other things came along and ended all that. I met Hazel 12 years later.

[See photos on next page]

NORTHWESTERN MONTANA
NOSTALGIA -.

(1)



1930

(2)

1936

(3)

1950

(4)

1954

(5)

1933

(6)

1944

INDEX