

## INTERVIEW WITH RAY HART

May 17, 2020

Lois: I've got so many questions for you. Oh, my goodness.

Ray: Well, I've been thinking about Cal and Dottie Oien. I'm trying to recover so many things. I loved both of them. We were very close, as we were with Ted Ross. The people who bought the Mercantile after the Oiens—Bob and Betty Olson—they were fairly cold people. They were distant. The store was never the same after Ted and Cal and Dottie. The Olsons also bought the place down on Hay Creek. As far as I know, they never came to the Hall.<sup>1</sup> They owned the store, and they were not very accommodating.

In those days, everybody who lived up here got everything from the store. I remember Harry and Lena Holcomb, my neighbors right up here, I would say to Harry, "How in the hell did you get down to the store in the winter?" Because the road was impassable. In fact, there wasn't a road—it was just a wide track. He said, "Oh, we just waited until the river froze, then we'd hook up a team to a big wagon that was on a sled, and we'd go down and get a couple of barrels of flour and cured meats and that sort of thing, and haul them back up." He said, "Otherwise, you don't need to go to town."

Ted didn't do this, but Cal and Dottie did. If the store didn't have something—and they had a lot more back then than they do now, like they had the big wheels of cheese from the Ronan Creamery and their slicer—but they went to town every two weeks, and you could just give them a list and they'd pick up whatever you needed.

Lois: What kind of vehicle did they have?

Ray: They had a big pickup with an enclosed rear end. And Fred Boss, of course, who was the mail carrier, would take tires to town and pick up things for you. They'd just charge what they paid for things.

Lois: How old were the Oiens when they came here?

Ray: Well, of indeterminable age. Cal was a one-eyed person. He had a glass eye—I think it was his left eye. So, he'd look at you very intently with his one eye.

Lois: Do you know what he did for a living before he came here?

Ray: I don't.

Lois: Or where they came from?

Ray: Not only did I know them and adore them, but I knew Cal's nephew David Oien [actually, he was Cal's cousin]. They lived in Conrad, Montana. They were of Norwegian immigrant stock. I don't know when the first Oien came, but I met the grandparents and

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<sup>1</sup>Not necessarily true. The Olsons were members of the North Fork Improvement Association for many years. For balance, see oral history interview with Bob Olson, August 28, 2018.

the parents of David. Cal's father and Dave's grandfather were still living. Whether they were the immigrants, I don't know. The grandparent that I met must have been 80, both he and his wife.

I know all this because Dave went to the University of Montana, and he was among my first [religious studies] majors. I knew him and his sweetheart, and I performed their wedding. Fern and I went to their wedding in Conrad. Of course, these kids were hippies, with long hair and blue jeans and flannel shirts and went to class in the same clothes that they wore on the farm. They had a 250-acre farm, which was the homestead. Conrad is east of the mountains, but not very far, and it's way north of Great Falls.

Lois: It seems like a lot of North Fork people went to Conrad for medical care, for one reason or another, in the old days.

Ray: Well, it was a kind of center. For example, Molly Shepherd, both sides of her family are nobility. On her father's side, she was English. She was a Churchill. Tom Churchill was living in Conrad then. It seems the people would go first to Helena, and then for some reason they'd go to Conrad.

Lois: Even Bill Adair took his first wife, Jessie, to Conrad for treatment.

Ray: Well, the Conrad National Bank was founded there. Tom Churchill went to Conrad first and then to Kalispell, and there he was one of the first county commissioners. On Molly's maternal side, she was Spanish. She's a fifteenth generation Californian. The family name was Arguelles. The Arguelles Peninsula at Santa Barbara is named for her family, as is another peninsula just south of San Francisco.

Lois: So, it was Cal's mother and father who had the homestead in Conrad, who were in their 80s? If so, Cal may have been in his late 50s or early 60s?

Ray: Could have been. I would say what we now think of as middle-aged. 50s seems young to me now.

Lois: Did they keep the store open year-round?

Ray: Yes. In fact, they had posted hours and they were always there. But you could go up at any hour and honk. They lived upstairs.

Lois: They weren't over in the old Adair homestead cabin?

Ray: No.

Lois: Was there anyone in that cabin at the time? Do you know if the Rovers lived in that cabin when they owned the store?

Ray: The Rover cabin is separate.

Lois: Further down the river, yes. He built that later, after he sold the store to the Rosses and Annette died.

Did both Cal and Dottie work the store? Did they have employees?

Ray: I don't think they had a single employee. There was always coffee on, on the pot-bellied stove. But nothing like the bakery today.

Lois: Of course, Ted Ross kept all that land south of the Merc and subdivided it to create the town of Polebridge, after they sold the store.

Ray: I think Ted had a few cabins for rent, didn't he?

Lois: Yes, there were three rental cabins. When he subdivided "the meadow," he gave four of the lots to his kids. Wally Nolan and his wife got what is now the North Fork Hostel. Bob Ross and his wife had the lot at the end of Rainbow Drive. The other daughter had the one at the end of Skyline, and the other son had one at the end of River Road. They each got a double lot at the end of each street. And people tell me that Ted drilled the wells on each property for them when he sold them, with a drill bit, then he'd drop a stick of dynamite down the hole.

Ray: Loyd Sondreson used to blow wells like that. He did the one down at Ford Schoolhouse.

Lois: Tell me about Cal and Dottie personality-wise. What were they like?

Ray: I was just talking to my wife Fern before you came and reminiscing. She said, "Don't forget to tell her about our grizzly experience with them."

This would have been after 1967, which was when we bought this place. We were in the old [Ralph and Esther Day] cabin, which is now my kitchen. It was about 3:00 in the morning, and I heard someone screaming up the road, blowing his horn like crazy. Bob and Micki Funk and their girls were down at their place, and they had a VW camper that they always parked in the front yard. The girls had been floating the river in big inner tubes that day, and they had just thrown them out in front of the cabin when they came in for supper, then they all went to bed. They heard a loud popping noise, and Bob got up and looked out. There was a huge grizzly out there, just having a ball, slashing and popping those tubes. Fortunately, he didn't go outside until the grizzly went on to another place on the property, then he drove the VW up to the door and got Micki and the girls into it, and they came blaring up here to wake up me and Fern and the boys.

He said, "What do we do? We don't have a gun." I said, "Hell, let's all just go down to Cal and Dottie's. He's got all kinds of guns." So, that's what we did. By then it was 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning, Bob honking all the way up the road leading into the store. A coal lamp lit up in the upstairs. Cal came down in his shirttail, wanting to what in the hell was going on.

Bob said, "I don't know what to do, Cal. You've got guns. Let's go up and shoot that grizzly." Cal said, "Oh, I've got a better idea. Let's have a drink." He got out a bottle of Jim Beam and put some clothes on. We all went in the store, stoked up the fire, and sat around and drank. Cal would look at his watch. He knew what he was doing. He said, "Let's have another drink."

Lois: Did he have pop for the kids?

Ray: I think the kids had gone to sleep in the car. We sat there for two or three hours, and it was just dawn. Then Cal said, "Let's go up and check things out." And, of course, what he was doing was just waiting until the bear had gone away. It was the really smart thing to do. That's the clearest memory I have of close contact with Cal and Dottie.

Lois: Do you know if they had any children?

Ray: I don't think they ever had children. None to my knowledge.

Lois: But they obviously had family in Montana, if he was from the Conrad area.

Ray: I know nothing about her side of the family. I don't know what her maiden name was. She was a very dear person.

Lois: Were they short, tall?

Ray: Cal was sort of short. Not over 5 feet, I'd say. I don't think he was. He was kind of a runt. He held his head a certain kind of way. I think it was because of his eye.

Lois: Do you know how he lost his eye?

Ray: I don't know how he lost it.

Lois: Was he in the service during the war, do you think?

Ray: I don't know a thing. What I would love to do sometime, with you or you and Bill if you're willing, would be to drive over to Conrad. It's not very far from here.

Lois: I can check the phone directory and see if there are still any Oiens there. I did check on Facebook, and there is like an Oien page where Oien family members can belong, but that could be from all over the country. But there are still quite a few Oiens out there. You know, another person who is still around is Gerane Block. Dan is gone, but Gerane is still living. She's in an assisted living place in Dillon. She's in her 90s, and the staff said she has good days and bad days.

Ray: Yes, Dan taught at the state college there. They lived up near Trail Creek.

Lois: I was going to try to talk Larry Wilson into driving down with me for a visit.

Ray: I know that Dave Oien is still in Conrad.

Lois: Okay, I'll look him up.

Ray: Here's a book that I'll lend you titled *Lentil Underground*. The star character in that book is Dave Oien. It's written by Liz Carlisle. She worked for Senator Jon Tester. She's a Montana girl, but she wound up in Washington.

Lois: Poor girl. When was this published? Oh, I see that it's recent—2015.

Ray: She actually resigned when she got interested in lentils and took a PhD at Berkeley and then wrote this book.

Lois: They grow a lot of good lentils in Montana.

Ray: Well, Dave Oien established the lentil industry in this state. He always was a smart kid and hard worker. He was a tall guy. He was 6 feet, slim, slender, hair down to his ass.

Lois: How old would he be these days?

Ray: When I taught him, I was in my late 20s, and I would say he was 17 or 18, so he's getting up there. But he must be very active, because he went home and, of course, his ancestors, these old Norwegians, had always planted nothing but wheat or oats or occasionally some flax seed. Everything oriented to the breweries or to food. He talked his parents into letting him put a small acreage—10 or 20 acres—into lentils, and he gradually expanded, and he got other growers interested, including Senator Tester. And now [Governor Steve] Bullock. When they grew these things, there was no market for them. The reason he was doing it was that he wanted to do imaginative, scientifically-based agriculture, and he wanted something that would, while taking nutrients out of the soil, put more back into the soil. That means a legume. If I ever get my meadow cleared, I'm going to plant lentils down there, because it puts nitrogen back into the soil.

Then they had to create a market. David was, as we say, a ballsy guy. He called up the fanciest grocery store in the country, Whole Foods, and talked them into buying his lentils. That's what the book is about.

Lois: Well, maybe he'll have pictures of the Oiens. I wonder if Cal and Dottie were at his wedding, for instance.

Ray: I can't believe that they were not. I don't remember myself, because Fern and I were just gaga over these Norwegians who still speak very broken English.

Lois: Norway has a pretty short growing season, just like we do. Okay, I'll see if I can find Dave.

Ray: Anyway, it would be a lot of fun to go over there and meet those kids. I can't remember Dave's wife's name. I think it was Anna, or something like that. I'm sure they have kids. But, he was always single-minded. He mentions in there that when this author met him, he asked her if she knew Joseph Brown. Well, I'm the one who brought Joseph Brown to the University of Montana, where she went to school, too. Joseph Epes Brown was famous for lots of things. He's the person who developed the study of American Indian religions. He had two passions: the religions of the Plains Indians and Islam. He taught in Morocco. So, his two totem animals were, for the Indians the American bison, and for the Muslims, Arabian horses. He was from a distinguished academic family with lots of money, because his ancestors founded the banking firm of Brown-Harriman. Joseph Brown's father was a distinguished professor of English and provost at Princeton.

Lois: Howard Harrod was into that, too, wasn't he?

Ray: Yes, he was, and I got Howard to the University of Montana at the same time that I got Joseph there. Joseph was at the University of Indiana, and Howard was at Vanderbilt, where I was before I came out here. Howard had his interest in the Blackfeet.

Lois: Did Howard and Annemarie live in Missoula?

Ray: They did when he was teaching there. He didn't give up his position at Vanderbilt, but when he would have a year's leave or something, he always came to Missoula.

Lois: The only other person I've met who said they knew the Oiens was Linda Pittman. She said they liked to play cards. I don't know which game they played, but she and Carl would get together with them. I know pinochle was big down at that end of the valley. My other question was, they only owned the store for two years, from 1967 to 1969. What happened after that? Did they stay in the area? Linda said they might have been in Columbia Falls. The reason I ask is that when I look at the membership roster for the North Fork Improvement Association, I see that Cal was a member in 1967. Dottie was a member in 1968. But then they were both members in 1971. They had since sold the store to the Olsons, so I don't know if they stayed in the area and still came up occasionally, or what.

Ray: I have no memory, Lois.

Lois: Someone told me that they held back five acres when they sold the store, just past the saloon. When Ben Rover gave a section of his land to his ex-wife, Mabel Teskey, and she passed the land down to her son, the Oiens' five acres was landlocked and they took Teskey to court to get access to their property, a right-of-way. But there is no structure on that land today, and I don't know that there ever was. If they held out that five acres, then maybe they did still plan to come up after they sold the store. I don't know why they sold the store, whether they just got tired of it or for some other reason. [It turns they were involved in an accident and Dottie was badly injured. She didn't feel up to running the store after that.]

Ray: I didn't realize that they owned it for such a brief period.

Lois: Bob Olson talks about the fact that Cal really didn't get into running the post office.

Ray: No, I remember that was a constant irritation. But that was the only sure cash production of the store, what he got paid as the postmaster.

Lois: Yes, and he actually was a federal employee. As was Bob Olson. It wasn't until Karen Feather bought the place that it became a contract operation. Bob Olson says that after he took over, the postal inspector came up to inspect the post office and that it was in disarray. Cal hadn't kept the regulations up to date in the book, and all that.

Ray: I have no doubt about that.

Lois: He said he and Betty were real hospitable to the inspector and invited him to stay to dinner. After that, he didn't give them a hard time. Bob got everything back the way it was supposed to be.

Ray: After that, it was just a contract with the delivery person. Well, I'm sorry I don't know a thing about them. That's another reason I'd like to see Dave. He certainly will know what happened to them and whether they're still alive.

Lois: Did they like to fish? Or hunt, or float the river? Did they go hiking?

Ray: I don't remember seeing him with a fishing rod or using a gun hunting. [Dottie, in a later phone interview, said that Cal liked to hunt and fish. That was the primary reason they came to the North Fork.]

Lois: But they came to the Hall for some of the activities?

Ray: Yes, they came to the Hall.

Lois: Cal was the acting postmaster starting in July 1967. He became the official postmaster in December 1967, and he resigned his commission in June 1969. Dave Walter, when he was with the Montana Historical Society, somehow got hold of a bunch of postal records and made a list of all the people who were the official postmasters at Polebridge. Boy, I wish I had known Dave.

Ray: Dave Walter was a marvelous person. His sister is still living. She owns the old homestead.

Lois: His sister, or one of his daughters? I know his widow, Marcella, is still living. He had three daughters, Emily and Amanda and one other.

Ray: Emily is the one I know.

Lois: I just found some photos of Emily's wedding. Bonnie Hankey, John Frederick's sister, brought me an envelope full of pictures of John performing a wedding. But nobody knew who the people were. I kept asking around, and finally Bonny Ogle said, "I think maybe that's Emily Walter. Didn't she marry some guy from South America or somewhere?"

Ray: Yes, she married a Spaniard.

Lois: I copied the pictures and emailed them to Amanda. She said, "Oh yes, that's Sergio. They were married for 10 years, but then they divorced, and it's still a bone of contention."

Ray: Sergio worked for me for several summers. And I baptized her children.

Lois: He's not the famous soccer player, is he, Sergio Romero?

Ray: I don't think so. He's a professor of sociology in Oregon or California. Yes, they're divorced now. I think she's still working on her doctorate. That's a very smart family. Dave's father George was dean of Lawrence College in Wisconsin. They were wonderful people.

Lois: I think all three girls have a copy of the diary that George Walter kept. He had big, round handwriting. I would love to see it and extract anything that has to do with their property or building the cabin or their time as rangers at Bowman Lake.

Ray: Emily may have access to that.

Lois: I think Marcella made copies for all three girls. I've been working on this for two years now, trying to get together with Amanda when she and her family come up. But she has

five children, and she and her husband are both teachers. They meet themselves coming and going.

Ray: Speaking of unfinished business, I have an email from Stephanie Funk and I have to reply to it. It's not about the tape that we want, but I think we will get it. I think we have to insist that we get it, because she's the only Funk left.

Lois: Absolutely. Arne Boveng is a sound engineer. He said, "You get me the tape, and I'll digitize it for you."

Ray: I'll put that on my list. I don't know whether there will be any revelations in it, but we'll know what's in it.

Lois: We'll have the voices of those old homesteaders who he interviewed.

Ray: Yes, that's very important.

Lois: Do you have any feel for who the Oiens became good friends with? Who were their buds in the community? There wasn't really anybody in Polebridge yet.

Ray: I really don't. I just want to know what happened to them. And I think Dave is our best chance.

Lois: And any pictures of them. I want to do the little booklet on the history of the Mercantile, and there's just a blank for the period where the Oiens are, because I haven't been able to gather any information on them.

Ray: Why don't we try doing a Google search on Dave in Conrad, Montana. He's more or less a famous person now, after this book.

Lois: I'll do that. And I'll read the book. Larry Wilson said that Cal had the idea to have a huge power plant and to generate power for the whole Polebridge townsite, but that he thinks the one Cal bought was a used light plant, and it didn't work very well, and nobody else was willing to buy into the idea.

Ray: Yes, I had forgotten about that. Loyd Sondreson spent endless hours working on that machine. It was huge. I don't think the building is still there that was built to house it. They had to get it in place and build around it. It was as big as this area here. We called it the Chinese Monster. I think it was made in China. I don't know how many hundred tons the thing weighed. It would have illuminated Columbia Falls.

Lois: Was it a diesel?

Ray: Yes, it was diesel. It was a huge piece of equipment. I don't know whether Cal bought it or how he got it, whether somebody gave it to him, or how they moved it and got it up here. You could hardly find a truck that would hold it, I wouldn't think. Anyway, somehow they got it up here and built a building around it. Loyd, who could fix anything if it could be fixed, couldn't fix it. So, finally they all gave up. I don't know whether it was disassembled and hauled away for junk, or what happened to it.

Lois: I wonder how he generated power for the store. This was the late 1960s, so generators were in vogue.

Ray: I think he just had a small gas generator. There was nothing solar then, of course. Mostly they used coal oil lamps. That's what Ted Ross did.

Lois: And the Oiens lived upstairs, you said?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: Well, you know, Ted Ross is the one who built the addition off the south side of the building. It was there until 1982, when Karen owned it and the foundation was really getting iffy. She hired Ron Wilhelm and somebody else to tear off the addition and replace the sill logs and improve the foundation.

Ray: Yes.

Lois: The Merc is getting a new roof this week, you know. And they've repainted the whole building.

Ray: Is it an asphalt roof or shingles?

Lois: They're just putting another metal roof on it. Very shiny.

Ray: That's a good thing.

Lois: It will surprise me if he doesn't put solar panels up there. He's got more than a hundred of them already.

Ray: Will Hammerquist came to see me one time. I don't know whether I've told you this story. He had been out to Portland to visit his grandfather, who was 99 years old then. When his grandfather asked him where he was living, he said Polebridge, Montana. And his grandfather said, "Do you know Ray Hart?" Will said, "No, but I've heard of him. He's been around the North Fork awhile." His grandfather said, "You go meet him."

I asked him, "Who's your grandfather." He told me his name, and I said, "My God, he wrote *The Tribes of Yahweh*." He's a great Old Testament scholar, a Marxist, who taught at New York Theological Seminary. I was at Drew University as my first job after graduating from Yale. Anyway, his grandfather is a very famous man. So, Will came to see me and wanted to tell me that story. It's a really small world.

But he wanted me to support him when we were talking about Bob and Micki Funk's place, the old schoolhouse. Will wanted to know if I would support his trying to move the schoolhouse down to the store. I said that no, I wouldn't.

Lois: Yes, it would lose all of its continuity if you took it out of context.

Ray: And I haven't seen him since.

Lois: They're busier than one-armed paper hangers down there. It's a chicken and egg thing. He has the bakery, so people come, and then there are so many people coming that he has

to respond to the demand. His wife Katerina says that they bake 500 huckleberry bear claws every day, plus the cinnamon rolls and the sticky buns and the breads and rolls. It's quite an operation.

Do you have any idea, when the Funks bought the three-sided carriage house that was down at Polebridge, and they were going to turn it into an extension of their cabin as a living room, you said that was in the late 1980s near the end of their time here. Who would have owned the store at that time? Karen Feather owned it until 1987, when she sold it to Chrys Landrigan, and Chrys had it until 1994 when she sold to Dan and Deb Kaufman. Who did Funk buy that structure from?

Ray: I don't know. It was down at the Merc. I think it was used as a garage or wood shed.

Lois: I'll ask Karen about that.

Ray: Karen is still down by Coram?

Lois: Yes.

Ray: The last time I was down there was for the memorial for Jerry DeSanto.

Lois: Talking about your property here, which you bought from Ralph and Esther Day, I see that Ralph died in 1966. You said that the cabin that is now your kitchen, you thought had been built in 1914.

Ray: I don't know where I got that date, but I think that's right.

Lois: Esther's parents, the Holcombs, got married in 1905. I have their wedding picture. They came here in 1909, I think. They built the cabin that's closer to the river. This was their land, too, but I'm wondering when this cabin was built and who it was built for. Esther didn't get married to her first husband, Lynn Chapman, until 1926. They were only married about two years when he died. They had a little daughter, Nonie. Then she married Ralph Day.

You mentioned that when Ralph was dying and was in the hospital, that Baird Chrisman went to see him. Ralph wanted to get some money from him, and he insisted on transferring some of this land to Baird. I'm wondering roughly when that was and where Bud Holcomb comes into the picture, because I know Bud wanted to come back up here, too.

Ray: That was considerably later. Bud wanted to get out of here. That's why he didn't take any interest in Harry and Lena leaving him anything. But afterwards, Bud was a painter in the valley. When Baird put the south 20 or 40—I think it was 40—on the market, then Bud bought it.

Lois: That's the area south of you here?

Ray: Yes. He didn't keep it very long. Eventually, it sold to someone else, and it has been through a succession of owners.

Lois: So, it wasn't this piece that he bought?

Ray: Oh, no. It was that piece. Ralph and Esther inherited the south half of half of a quarter section, 80 acres. I bought 40 acres and Baird had owned the south 40. The problem with that land is that you can't get potable water up there.

Lois: Could they get it from the creek somehow?

Ray: They got a trickle of water by drilling a well, but it wasn't really enough to satisfy people. You'd have to drill a well down to the river level. And I told you the story—I don't know whether it was told to me by Harry and Lena or Ross Wilson or who it was—but Ralph told Esther one day that if she would marry Ralph he would give her the 80 acres, to keep her from marrying Walter Hammer.

Lois: So, Walt found Hazel eventually. Where was their place? I know they had rental cabins.

Ray: It's where Kintla Creek comes into the North Fork River. It's down by Hammer's Rock. There's a big rock out in the river that was a menace for all rafters. It's north of here. As the crow flies, it's not very far. The only way to get down to it is to go in at the top of Wurtz Hill, on the road that goes down to the river. That's where Phil and Lynn Jones have their place. The road that goes past their place goes down to the river. It used to be open. That's where Walt and Hazel lived, and they were anti-social people.

Lois: Yes, I've heard that.

Ray: They were strange people. He was German, and she had spent her life working in the State Department, believe it or not.

Lois: She was always writing letters to the editor in the paper, I know.

Ray: Yes. They were always pissed off about something.

Lois: So, the fellow that you guys bought from, Buzz . . .

Ray: Buzz was the bad guy from California, and the other guy was from Oregon. He was really a nice guy. He was just interested in horses. Buzz was a heavy drinker, and I've told you that story.

Lois: They had bought from the Holcombs directly?

Ray: I can't be certain of that.

Lois: I know that Harry and Lena moved to town eventually, as they got older.

Ray: I assume so, but you can trace that at the Plat Room.

Lois: Do you remember what year you bought Funk out? You bought the place together, but then you bought his share?

Ray: In 1967.

Lois: Can you remember who it was who bought Ralph Thayer's place and then subdivided the heck out of it?

Ray: That was Johnny Mathison.

Lois: Yes, you're right. I remember now. What a mess that's made, too.

Ray: I think I told you, I tried to buy it. Ralph said he'd think about it, and then he told me he was going to sell it to Johnny, because Johnny was from an old family up here and he would never sell it. He wasn't in the grave before Johnny had subdivided it and sold it in 20-acre pieces.

Lois: What do you remember about Tom Reynolds? Did you know him very well?

Ray: Well, I know the legend. I think he was English.

Lois: Yes, he was. And he played the oboe. He actually played in the London Symphony.

Ray: He was in many ways a gentleman. He worked for the Forest Service. I don't know how that happened. He always kept a tuxedo. He showed up with gloves and a white scarf and a Prince Albert coat. And you came to his place on written invitation. I have nothing but very fond memories of him. I saw him at the Hall several times. He would come for State occasions.

Lois: He didn't get out much toward the end.

Ray: He didn't. He was a very private person. I should think if anybody would have pictures it would be Don Sullivan.

Lois: When did the Sondresons build their A-frame down on Sondreson Meadow? I know they lived in the Top Hat house before that.

Ray: I don't think I can recover a reliable date. I remember when we did the barn raising down there.

Lois: And that barn is now Diane Boyd's cabin up on Trail Creek. She moved it up there.

Ray: I guess the Forest Service owned it.

Lois: Yes, and they didn't want it. What happened to their A-frame when the Forest Service took over the property? I wonder if someone moved it out of there. [Yes, a couple from Coram bought and moved it.]

Ray: There's nothing there now but a fireplace or something. That A-frame was a nice structure.

Lois: Loyd built it out of lumber that he had milled himself?

Ray: Yes. The Forest Service has done some of the dumbest things. Take the Hammer place. The only thing that's left—and Walt Hammer built marvelous fireplaces—is their

fireplace. That was my favorite fishing place. And I used to be able to drive right down there, but the Forest Service has blocked all of that off.

Lois: Rachel Potter says that Walt Hammer built the cabin they have now on Tepee Lake.

Ray: He built a lot of places.

Lois: Did he own that land at one time?

Ray: You know, that was a thriving community when we came here. The old Lutheran pastor whose church was in Great Falls or somewhere east of the mountains, he and his wife summered up here. They had a beautiful little place there. I asked him one day, "What are huckleberries?" Of course, I was from Texas and had no idea. He said, "Come in." They had two big wash basins full of huckleberries. They were cooking them. He gave me two or three quarts.

Lois: Was that the Borges?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: The sons still come up. I've met Kurt, but not the others.

Ray: I'm glad to know there are remnants.

Lois: Did people swim in the lake? Did they take boats out on it?

Ray: I don't know why, you know, because it's a funny lake. You don't eat the fish, because they're infected in some way or other. And there are zillions of leeches. Lee Secrest goes up there and catches a bunch of leeches, which he uses for bait.

Lois: And the Tepee Creek doesn't feed it. The stream is separate from the lake. And how did Tepee Creek get its name? I've been asking around but don't have an answer.

Ray: I think the lake and the creek are connected, but what they're connected by is an impenetrable mass of beaver dams.

Lois: Someone said that they wanted to drain the lake, so they cleared a path so that the lake could drain into the creek, but that didn't last long because the beavers came and dammed it up. The lake will rise and fall, but I'm told that it's spring-fed.

Ray: There are springs all up in that country. The lake seemed to be a gathering place for families. On this end, I know Barbara Klemnow and her father and I used to walk back into that area and fish the little streams and the beaver ponds. That's the only way I know about it.

Lois: You've told me at various times that you have Ralph Thayer's bear claws and some of George Rockwell's fly tying stuff and some old school desks and ink wells. Did you ever buy any leather or other items from the Wurtzes? I know they used to make slippers and gloves.

Ray: I don't have a thing from the Wurtzes.

Lois: I think Larry does.

Ray: In fact, I can scarcely remember them. Lena and Harry Holcomb made a great impression. Frank and Ella Wurtz—Frank was said to be an Indian, and he was said to be very mean to Ella. She controlled him only by . . .

Lois: Here's a picture of Ralph and Esther Day in front of the big gate that used to be on their driveway. Was that gate still there when you bought the place?

Ray: I don't remember that picture. I have two or three postcards that I found in the attic of this place, addressed to Ralph and Esther Day, Belton, Montana.

Lois: Yes, that's how the mail came in the old days. What I'm thinking is that eventually we're going to get the schoolhouse restored, and they'll be looking for donations of items to put in there to recreate the school. So, if you have things that you think you might want to donate one day, if you could make a list of what you have and where it is, in case you or I aren't around then.

Ray: When my kids go through, all personal property will be at their disposition. And when they find things, I'll let them know that you're the historian and anything that might be of potential interest to people or to the school, for them to let you know.

Lois: I definitely want to get a blackboard, because they always talk about how that one wall of the school was the blackboard, and how the teacher had her desk at the back of the room by the windows. Then we'll need some desks. I think Duke Hoiland has a couple of desks, too.

Here's another picture of Ralph and Esther.

Ray: Esther lived to a really advanced age. She was 90-something.

Lois: If you're willing, I wanted to have you walk me through the structures here on your property. When they were built and who built them. Ed Neneman was over the other day. He said that the structure that has the two wings, with the greenhouse, that Ron Wilhelm had built that one.

Ray: Yes. By himself.

Lois: Did he really? But the old homestead cabin was over closer to the driveway, or where was it located originally? You told me once that there were some lilac bushes.

Ray: Yes, the lilac bushes are to the right of the aspen down there. This property had a bedroom built on the back in what was actually a cold room. It was a fairly long structure. You can see those bushes down there. This building and built-ons were nested in there and stretched toward the old garage, which is the building with the metal roof down there. It actually filled most of the space out to the garden. They were all connected.

Lois: So the building that's still out there by the road, with the slanted roof, what was that?

Ray: That was a barn. One of my students came up and raised the barn one story. That's why it's a two-story structure. It was a living unit, but I used it as my office. That's where I wrote my first two books. We call it UMI cabin. That was short for Unfinished Man and the Imagination, which was my first big book, which I wrote there. So the boys called it UMI cabin.

Lois: My gosh. When was that?

Ray: The character pictured on the back of the book is how I looked then.

Lois: [Looking at book] 1968.

Ray: And this is my latest. And there's the old fart that I am now.

Lois: This is when you were in Boston?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: Well, well, well. Do you have copies of your books donated to the little library at the Hall?

Ray: Yes, if you want copies I'll bring them down for the Hall.

Lois: Yes, they should be there. I have two books that I've written, but they're Air Force history, and they're not very related, I'm afraid. Not many people want to know about Wright-Patterson AFB or the history of Air Force civil engineering.

Ray: Were you connected to the armed services?

Lois: Yes, I worked as a civilian historian for the Air Force for 25 years. That's how I made my living. I was at Wright-Patterson for 12 years, then I went to Germany for 4 years at Ramstein. Then they sent me to Florida and I was at Tyndall AFB for 9 years.

Ray: Do you read and speak German?

Lois: I tried my best. Part of the problem was that I was with Americans all day.

Ray: I just got the happy news that this book is going to be translated into Italian, and some of my other work on Meister Eckhart, who was a great Christian mystic in the Middle Ages, has been translated into French. I'm working now with a scholar to translate my first book, *The Unfinished Man and the Imagination*, into German.

Lois: That's a task.

Ray: Strangely, my books sell better abroad than here. I think it's because there's more serious scholarship there.

Lois: Do you have pictures of the original cabin when it was in place on the property.

Ray: Yes, I have a drawing by Barbara McCloud, one of my long-term tenants down there. They live in Bozeman now, but they lived in there. He's an author.

Lois: It would be good to document the history of this property. I know it's in your family's heads, but whoever buys the property eventually will want to know all that, I'm sure. How did it come to be like it is?

Ray: [Looking at framed drawing on the wall by the kitchen] This I think is the best representation. This was a bedroom, and that was basically a woodshed or a bunkhouse. And that's the old garage, which is still standing. It's a pencil drawing.

Here is a photograph that shows one end of the building. These trees are still there. And that is a painting by my maternal grandmother, bless her heart. It's the only thing that survived. This is a piece of celluloid, and she made her own paints out of berries and clays, and she made her own brushes with horse hair. That's in Oklahoma.

Lois: Who put this house together for you, and when was that?

Ray: This was built by Denny Frye, bless his heart. He had good design sense. This is structures that we brought in here, log by log. We took everything apart, and he put everything back together again. He did all the metal work and wood work and everything.

Lois: That's some real artisanship.

Ray: [Showing large photo of the Ford Schoolhouse, as it was originally. Lois borrowed to have it scanned. Micki Funk had it hanging in the schoolhouse when they lived there.]

I promised Micki that I would give this to her daughter Stephanie, so I can't donate it to the project.

Lois: This is perfect. The Forest Service archeologist will be happy.

Did the Day cabin sit over there until you built here?

Ray: Yes, it was taken apart. It was just sitting on rocks. It's amazing—there wasn't a bad log in it.

Lois: Then you have a garage with an apartment above it. Ed said that he and Rob Fisher and Keith Longtin built that.

Ray: That's correct.

Lois: Do you know roughly when that was?

Ray: It's inscribed in the apron as you enter the building. I think it was in 1996 or thereabouts.

Lois: I know Ed wasn't in the North Fork until after 1980 or so. You know, he was an extra in the movie "Heaven's Gate." He was living in Kalispell at the time.

Ray: I can tell you many stories about "Heaven's Gate." I had a chance to be rich. My ne'er-do-well brother was in theater at the University of California in Los Angeles. He was a sound man for the Rat Pack, where he got involved in drugs and everything else. He was hired by "Heaven's Gate" to teach Kris Kristopherson how to ride, who had never sat on a horse. David had to teach him how to ride. He'd get a saddle and strap it on the top of a

Jeep. He started out that way. Then Kris didn't know how to waltz, so David taught him to waltz. It's a long story. It's a great shame that the movie flopped. I think if it could be re-edited and leave a lot of crap out . . .

In the final scene, where the cabin is blown up, they wanted to lease or buy my old cabin. I said, "You're going to blow my cabin up? No, you're not." They had no pride. For months, there were semi trailer trucks coming up the road, bringing gourmand food for the crew and so on. It was flown out from LA every day.

Lois: Where were they filming at the time?

Ray: Cimino bought a section of land at Red Meadow, next to Wernicks overlooking the river. The movie company bought it, and Cimino got it as part of his pay. They drilled all those deep wells, because they had to flood it because there's a scene in which the horses are stumbling around in mud. It was unbelievable. They spent hundreds of millions of dollars on that movie.

Lois: Ed Langton owns some of that land now?

Ray: I think so.

Lois: And Murland Searight had some of it?

Ray: Yes. It's prime real estate for idiots to own.

Lois: But there's still one little piece down by the river that's in Cimino's name. The county database shows it in some woman's name now, but the address is the same one Cimino had in New York City. It's part of his estate or has been inherited. It's a little tiny piece.

Ray: It was a saga up here. It was a long period of time.

Lois: So, how much were they willing to give you for your cabin?

Ray: It was some mind-boggling figure. I don't remember the details. But when I found out they were going to blow it up, I said to hell with it.

Lois: I know you've had an interest in buying up some of the older structures on the North Fork and preserving them.

Ray: Yes, I try to save every old building that I can. They would have just fallen down.

Lois: You have a garage that Ed says Jeremy Genstler built.

Ray: Yes, I'd forgotten about them. They lived in Veggieville.

Lois: Down on Red Meadow East.

Ray: They were good kids.

Lois: Karen Feather called that Saturday Street, or something like that. And the cabin that Don [Marvel] lives in, is that the one that came down from the border?

Ray: Denny Frey built the shop and also built Don's place. He took it apart. That building and the Frank Fisher barn were down at the entrance to Polebridge on Frank Evans' place. The barn was on the left as you turn in, and Gypsy, the border customs house, was south of Frank's cabin.

Lois: That must have been before the 1988 Red Bench fire.

Ray: Right.

Lois: Because Frank killed himself in 1982.

Ray: I'm trying to think. This place was finished only about four or five years ago. But we took those buildings down and brought them up here and stacked them up, so I can't tell you exactly when I removed them.

Lois: Did you buy them from Frank or from his family.

Ray: I bought them from his family, Bud and April and Floyd.

Lois: What all got done to the border cabin? Did you put additions on it or fix it up?

Ray: Yes, where you enter there was kind of a sloped porch. We just took that off and destroyed it. The front porch, which is now facing the road, that was all restored. We did have to do some work on the second floor, because Frank hadn't put in windows or anything, so the interior was weathered. But we just cleaned the logs. They were in good shape.

Lois: The story I heard from Bud and April was that Frank moved it down to his place with the idea of creating a dance studio for Ginny [Tcheng], for yoga or dance or whatever she was going to do.

Ray: Yes. Well, bless her heart. She was my student at Montana after they largely parted. I've told you the story of the end of that. It was really tragic.

Lois: You have a pond out here. Did you create that?

Ray: Yes, that was dug by Doug Siderius, who was marvelous human being.

Lois: And you stocked it with fish?

Ray: Yes.

Lois: What kind of fish did you put in there?

Ray: The only kind you can, native west slope cutthroat. Fish can't get in, and fish can't get out. And it's not a fish farm—I don't feed my fish. There is an entrance stream where the females can go up and lay their eggs, and then the males come up and fertilize them. I did introduce fresh water shrimp, so the larger ones—anything above 12 inches—the meat is going to look like a salmon, because the color of the trout depends on what it eats. So, I know I've still got fresh water shrimp in there, because they're all salmon-fleshed.

Lois: You said you have a spring box. Where is your water source?

Ray: Ron Wilhelm found a little seep up the hill on the mountain behind, and he developed a spring, which flows 70 gallons a minute, 24 hours a day. That's our water supply, and I pay the Forest Service \$70 a year, or something like that. Of course, I could take water out of Esther Creek, which runs through my property.

Lois: Where is that?

Ray: That's the creek that's on the north end of the property. It also feeds my pond.

Lois: I assume that's named for Esther Holcomb Day.

Ray: The old locals all call it Esther Creek. It doesn't have a name on the plat map.

Lois: When did Don Marvel start working for you? How long has he worked for you?

Ray: He moved here about ten years ago, but he had done work for me. He had a repair business in Kalispell for 20 or 25 years. He lived out on Lake McGregor and raised his family out there. Don promised to take me over to fish for lake trout, but we haven't gotten over there yet. I doubt if we will.

Lois: There are so many people there now in the summer. The kids catch lots of crayfish.

Ray: I think there are landlocked salmon in there, too.

Lois: Who came first, Don or his son Matt? Was Matt already up here with Teckla Putnam?

Ray: I knew about Don before I met Matt. I can't tell you for sure. Don used to come over to work on my stoves, because he can repair anything.

Lois: It's nice to have somebody like that.

Ray: He's rebuilding my old hunt-and-peck typewriter. I love them. They're so much better than the computer. I used to type 90 words a minute on a manual typewriter, and I've got all the typewriters I've ever owned, including my old Royal from when I went to college.

Lois: How much land have you lost to the river over the years?

Ray: About three and a half acres.

Lois: Are they still talking about moving the road?

Ray: Yes, they're going to move it. They're not moving it enough, and I'm going to insist that they move it way back so it won't happen again.

Lois: And they really need to put some riprap or something in there, and down by the school, too, to impede the erosion.

Ray: The river is coming this way, and it's going to get the schoolhouse. I've watched it for a long time. The schoolhouse ought to be moved, and I think it ought to go down by the Hall.

Lois: Yes, that's been mentioned as a possibility. Not that they have a lot of parking already. When we have the Interlocal or a big event, people are parking up and down the road.

Ray: I'm mourning the loss of the North Fork News. I don't blame Patti. She kept it afloat for 10 years, and she was a terrific editor. They're just not going to be here enough, I guess.

Lois: Do you follow North Fork Classifieds in Facebook, the group that Angie Agnew set up?

Ray: No, I don't. I do have things to sell from time to time, and I'd like for them to stay up here.

Lois: That's a good place to do it. And in terms of news, between what Bill does with gravel.org and what he does with the NFLA and NFPA websites, he tries to post anything relevant there. And he does the website for the North Fork Trails Association. He's gotten himself in hip-deep, I'm afraid.

When Andrew Scrimgeour was here, I went back and went through all of Frank Evans' columns in the *Hungry Horse News*. Any time there was mention of the Funks or the Harts I pulled it out. Did I send a copy of that to you? You'll enjoy it. He makes fun of your garden every spring, about how you're trying to plant too early and it's too muddy.

Ray: Yes, he liked to poke fun.

Lois: What else would you like to talk to me about?

Ray: You scan that book on lentils, and you may get ideas. I think you'll find it an interesting read.

Lois: Well, I'll hunt down Dave Oien, if he's still around and maybe we'll make a little jaunt over to Conrad. That would be fun.

[Looking at his piano] Do you play the piano?

Ray: There's a story connected with it, but I won't bore you with it now. But yes, I desperately wanted to play the piano. But we were dirt poor, and we didn't have a piano. When I would come home from school, I would stop at the church and practice on the piano. I was taking lessons, one about every two weeks, and the only way I had to pay for them was to steal my mama's eggs. I'd take two or three out of the day's hatch and put them aside. When I got two or three dozen, I'd take them up to the little grocery store and sell them. That's how I paid my teacher, who played the piano at the church.

Well, one day one of my smart sisters came into the house and was really excited. She said, "Mama, I found a secret nest," so I was apprehended and my parents had a little talk and decided that if I really wanted to learn to play the piano that much they would find some way to pay for it. That's when I lost interest. I bought this Steinway for my son Bracken, because he was musically inclined.

Lois: Where is he these days? What does he do?

Ray: He's living in Arizona now, near Tucson but north and west. It's divine country. They had bought a condo in San Antonio, where they lived five or six years and that got boring. Bracken's love is the northwest and the southwest. Arizona, Idaho, Oregon, and so on. He's spent his life working in the woods, as a tree planter and doing research contracts for the Forest Service and on private lands. He and his wife have retired. She was a very successful businesswoman. She owned Sleeping Child Hot Springs here in Montana, down by Hamilton. It's a wonderful box canyon with hot springs and swimming pools and living quarters and food service. But it was just too much for her to handle, so she sold it. Anyway, they have retired, and Morgan and Patti have retired.

Lois: Do they have children?

Ray: No, neither couple has any children. The women were both professionals and they chose not to have kids. That pisses me off, because I don't have anyone to spoil and ruin their old age.

Well, it's about time for the news.

Lois: Sure. I didn't mean to keep you for so long. But thanks for all your help.