

History of Kintla Ranch in Larry Wilson's May 31, 2017 Hungry Horse News column



In mid-April, during spring break, I made a final trip to Arizona to visit my 99-year-old mother. She was terminally ill and passed away on May 8 after a great run. She lived in her own home, played bingo regularly, and was still driving until she fell ill on January 10.

I had not planned on writing about it until I was informed by Lois Walker that my mother Louise Wilson and Gerayne Block were the only surviving charter members of the North Fork Improvement Association.

My folks purchased the Kintla Guest Ranch from Matt Brill in 1947 and my mother became the de facto general manager. My dad, Ross Wilson, was working full time as the District 1 Supervisor of Montana Fish and Game and was only present on his days off.

As a result, my mother supervised the employees — usually five or six, acted as hostess for 20 or so guests, and made a weekly trip to Belton or Columbia Falls for groceries and other supplies. She and Ruth Sondreson were the fastest drivers on the North Fork Road, as they both fed big breakfasts to guests or workers, jumped in their vehicles, and raced to town in order to prepare dinner for 20 people or more.

Humorous aspect of this was listening as my mother ordered the groceries on the telephone the day before so her order would be ready for quick pickup the next day. In those days, most North Forkers were on either the Park or Forest Service phone line. This consisted of crank phones with voices carried on #9 wire, which called for a lot of repetition and occasionally spelling out words - **try spelling "spaghetti" over the phone.**

In addition to working 60-80 hours a week, both of my parents were involved as officers in the NFIA. They worked for community issues and, most of all, enjoyed the special events, which until 1984 alternated between Kintla Ranch and McFarlands Quarter Circle MC. Two of my favorite memories about those were watching my folks teach **everyone the "cotton-eyed Joe," and watching Dan and Gerayne dancing.**

After Kintla Ranch was sold to Pete Widener, my mother was an infrequent North Fork visitor, except to visit at my cabin. I have neat photos of her riding my snowmobile when she was 70.

A few years ago I asked her how she felt about the North Fork, and she was quick to remember Edna Evans and her good friend Ethyl Black. Next was her memory of the long hours at Kintla Ranch and not much privacy.

I realized that her North Fork experience was mostly work-related, while mine has been recreational.

I suspect my mother was more like the homesteaders but I am like the current residents. What do you think?

Larry Wilson's North Fork Views appears weekly in the Hungry Horse News